RIDE LIKE A GIRL:

A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF

WOMEN IN THE RODEO

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Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
December, 2021

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Just being in the position to express my gratitude is overwhelming. I especially want to thank Dr. Lucy Bailey for showing me that rodeo could be a research topic. I do not have the correct words for how honored I am that you believed in me when I was at my lowest.

Next to my writing group: Jessica, Shelly, Lynn and Brian. The four of you gave the best feedback. A special shout out to Jessica for all the zoom calls that forced us both to be accountable.

The women who participated in this study are whom I owe the most thanks. In 2015, I decided I wanted to be a cowgirl and that whimsical moment changed my life. The world needs more cowgirls and cowboys.

No cowgirl is complete without her horses; Rascal Holidoc, Rocket Holidoc, and Elkanahs Faith are the three amazing horses I am privileged to ride. Rascal was there at the beginning, Rocket taught me to win, and Faith is my future.

Last but surely not least, I am thankful for my family: Tyler, Harrison, Scarlet, Joyce, and Calvin. They stood back and watched me achieve what they expected of me all along. Jason, you've always been there, believing in me, pushing me, the silent support when I thought I couldn't.

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Date of Degree: DECEMBER 2021

Title of Study: RIDE LIKE A GIRL: A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF WOMEN IN THE RODEO
Major Field: EDUCATION

Abstract: The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry was to "re-present" women's rodeo stories, illustrating and unpacking the meaning they narrated from within the masculinized arena. Ten cowgirls, 6 White and 4 Native American/First Nation, were engaged through in-depth interviews and three participated in photo elicitation. They compete in barrel racing, breakaway roping, saddle bronc riding, and raised bucking bulls. I present the cowgirls' storied experiences using a narrative inquiry approach modeled after Clandinin and Connelly's (2000). I drew from feminist theory, social capital, and thematic analysis to make meaning of the narratives that I and the participants co-created. An all-encompassing theme of Learning the Ropes emerged through data analysis focusing on how the participants narrate their nonformal and informal learning experiences in the rodeo, the techniques they used to navigate the masculinized arena, how they resisted hegemonic rodeo norms, and their learning throughout these processes. Women described the importance of their identities as cowgirls, their family involvement in the rodeo, and their hard work to excel in rodeo. Their experiences legitimize their place in the arena. This study evolved from its beginning emphasis on the rodeo's masculine and patriarchal characteristics to find women's experiences of agency, freedom, and joy in rodeo. This study contributes to the limited scholarship on women in the rodeo, how women create a sense belonging in a traditionally masculine sport, and women's learning within and about rodeo.

Keywords: rodeo, cowgirls, narrative inquiry, feminism, learning

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rodeo is a sport, a lifestyle, and a business. It is also a thoroughly masculinist and racialized endeavor (Ford, 2020; Forsyth & Thompson, 2007; Joudrey, 2016; Martin et al., 2014; Parkinson, 2020; Patton & Schedlock, 2012; Penrose, 2003). As a sport, rodeo pits cowboys and cowgirls against livestock in the arena. Competitors try to stay on bucking stock for a minimum of eight seconds, ride the fastest around three barrels, throw down a running steer, or rope a running calf in the shortest time. Rodeo is one expression of cowboys' and cowgirls' way of life. Rodeo also has a nostalgic association with the mythos of the American cowboy on the Western frontier.

In the business realm, rodeos make money for the committees who host the events, rodeo associations, and the cowboys/cowgirls who place (win) in the contests. Rodeo is expensive; competitors must pay to enter, acquire expensive equipment to compete, and use resources to maintain a performance horse. Entry fees for rodeos can vary from $60 per event to $120 or even more. Only at the very elite levels, with the help of sponsors, can any cowboy/girl make a living at rodeoing. Rodeo is popular. People love to compete, and spectators line the stands to watch the drama unfold. From the grand entry (where all the cowboys/girls parade through the arena) to the last bucking bull, the

pageantry of rodeo thrills its audience. From small towns to big cities, rodeo has cultivated a following that associates rodeo events with the taming of the West.

The diverse business of rodeo includes small local open rodeos, as well as large national productions. In 2020, the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) sanctioned rodeos in forty-one states and co-sanctioned events in Canada and Mexico (PRCA, 2020). In 2019, the total number of rodeos sanctioned by the PRCA was 732 with 1,846 performances (PRCA, 2020, p. 3). As of 2020, the PRCA reported the number of members (which requires a payment to the association) was 4,661 with an additional 1,689 permit holders who were working to become full members (PRCA, 2020). In Oklahoma, a cowboy/girl can compete in the PRCA, International Professional Rodeo Association (IPRA), Cowboys Regional Rodeo Association (CRRA), and American Cowboys Rodeo Association (ACRA) to name a few. Rodeo contestants are not limited to participating in these main associations. Rodeo associations also exist for Indigenous and African American peoples. For example, only Native Americans can participate in the Indians National Finals Rodeo (INFR), and only African Americans can compete in the Bill Picket Invitational Rodeo (BPIR). Rodeo associations for people of color thus reflect the rodeo norm as "White." Some rodeos are not sanctioned by any association and are open to any competitor.

The Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo (BPIR) is named after famed African American cowboy Bill Pickett. Bill Pickett is credited with inventing the event of steer wrestling, often called bulldogging. The BPIR exists to educate everyone about the history associated with Black cowboys as well as creating opportunities for families to embrace the cowboy culture (Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo, n.d.). The BPIR began in 1984 when Lu Vason, realizing that Black cowboys did not have an arena in which organizations would show case their

talents, organized a nationwide tour (Bill Picket Rodeo, n.d.). Vason's passion for the rodeo is twofold: he strives to run a successful business and realizes that "rodeo is educational; I'm trying to promote the culture of the Black west" (Bill Picket Rodeo, n.d.). The BPIR functions as a site of learning, allowing Black cowboys a space to model Western history outside of the hegemonic White norms. Unlike traditionally "White" rodeos, in the BPIR, women have one additional opportunity to compete, which is ladies' steer undecorating. Steer undecorating requires the cowgirl to ride next to a steer and remove a ribbon from the shoulders of the steer. Although not all Black rodeos are part of the BPIR, they represent the most well-known of the Black rodeo associations. Most all-Black rodeos are open to any cowboy or cowgirl, but some invitational rodeos allow only Black participants.

There are also gendered dimensions to the culture of rodeo, in its professional organizations, in participating in the sport, and in earning money from participation. More men compete than women at all levels. Reflecting the masculine characteristics of rodeo culture, rodeos only allow women to participate in select rodeo events and, therefore, have fewer opportunities than their male counterparts to win money. Sponsorships allow companies to brand individuals with their logo and provide participants a way to fund the many miles they must travel to compete.

The PRCA represents the elite cowboys, while cowgirls are members of the Women's Professional Rodeo Association (WPRA). The women who compete at the NFR belong to the WPRA, which evolved from the very first union for professional female athletes (Mohoney, n.d.). In terms of rodeo payouts, during the 2020 rodeo season, PRCA-sanctioned rodeos paid out a total of $52,017,998 to winning cowboys (PRCA, 2020). In 2018, the pay out of the National Finals Rodeo (NFR) in December of 2018 was $8,800,000 (PRCA, 2018).

Yet, barrel racing is the only event in which women participate at the NFR, so of that $8,800,000, cowgirls could win only 1/8 of the payout, or $1,100,000. Of the major events at rodeos only two allow female participants: barrel racing and breakaway roping. The NFR that takes place in Las Vegas every December restricts cowgirls to barrel racing and does not recognize breakaway roping as a sanctioned event. In 2020, the Wrangler National Finals Breakaway Roping, an all-female event, was held for the first time in conjunction with the NFR, crowning the first ever world champion breakaway roper (Wrangler Network, 2020). Although breakaway roping is open to young men and older men at open rodeos, only women can compete at the professional level. Breakaway roping allows young men to learn how to compete and senior men to continue to compete when physical limitations deny them access to tie-down roping. Cowgirls were excited for breakaway roping to emerge at the national level and hope to rope one day at the NFR. The WPRA insists on equal pay for performance, but cowgirls' limited access to events means they are less likely to make a living at rodeo.

Informal and Nonformal Education

Rodeo is also a site of both nonformal and informal education, learning, and teaching, which relates directly to the field of social foundations. In this section, I will define some of the terms needed to discuss how informal education functions in the rodeo. Scholars refer to informal education as unplanned, spontaneous, and often used to teach appropriate behavior, attitudes, and norms for a culture (Bell, n.d.). In comparison, formal education is associated with planned curriculum and takes place in schools. Informal education takes place in a variety of settings but is not consciously planned; according to Jeffs and Smith (2005), "it simply occurs" (p. 8). Informal education occurred before mass schooling, and "was part of

family, work, and social life" (Jeffs & Smith, 2005, p. 10). In contrast, nonformal education has some sort of organizational framework but takes place outside of a formal learning environment (Council of Europe, n.d.). Some rodeo organizational spaces, like round up clubs, often provide such structured non-formal opportunities for cowboys and cowgirls to actively orient themselves and develop the skills needed to succeed in competition; an example of these opportunities would be clinic to teach the skills needed for specific events in the rodeo. In contrast, informal learning occurs in our daily lives, for cowgirls this could occur within their family culture or the spaces of ranching and farm life.

Many rules and norms shape the culture of rodeo, socializing both cowboys and cowgirls into this gendered sport and lifestyle. Children's rodeos are one key site of informal education and learning. In Adams' (2016) oral history study of the convergence of three cultures in the Southwest American borderlands, he found that all three of the area's cultural groups participated in rodeo, even though most ranch owners were White. In Adams' (2016) description, rodeo is a ritualized performance that pits man versus beast within an arena stylized to emphasize national pride but "the sport is essentially a paean to the frontier or more precisely, the cowboy heritage" (p. 318). Ranch work and rodeo reflect one type of informal education and learning because they teach young cowboys and cowgirls how to care for livestock, about responsibility, and about the importance of cooperation (Adams, 2016). Children learn through these daily experiences. Cowboys and cowgirls often learn rodeo skills through an intergenerational system where elders possess and pass on the needed knowledge base to ensure the continuation of the sport (Adams, 2016).

Importantly for my study, through informal practices, cowgirls also learn to accept assigned places in the rodeo arena which they must navigate in varied ways. Rodeo activities

socialize cowgirls to accept the dominant patriarchal expectations of gendered norms in the arena and, by doing so, to consent to the creation of and adherence to the existing hegemony. Society teaches women to accept gendered rules through many unwritten modalities, Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2001) listed different types of influences on young women including, but not limited to, their families, peers, and teachers. He states that

> girls internalize, in the form of schemes of perception and appreciation not readily accessible to consciousness, the principles of the dominant vision which lead them to find the social order, such as it is, normal or even natural and in a sense to anticipate their destiny, refusing the courses or careers from which they are anyways excluded and rushing towards those for which they are in any case destined. (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 95)

In rodeo, women experience this internalization of expected gendered roles through selection into barrel racing and breakaway roping instead of pushing to compete in sections of the rodeo reserved for cowboys (for example: the rough stock events). Although several women in my study do participate in rough stock events, other women participate in the events available through accepting social rules their parents, educational settings, workplace, or other organizations teach them (Bourdieu, 2001). Patriarchy is a system in which women (and others gendered feminine) submit often unknowingly. Within my study, family was the major contributor to the socialization of women into the rodeo. Rodeo is a patriarchal system dominated by male competitors, stock providers, rodeo announcers, and rodeo committees; cowgirls follow masculinist cultural norms that deny them equal access to all aspects of rodeo events. But cowgirls continue to compete in the rodeo.

Despite patriarchal systems and masculinist norms, women from all backgrounds and activities resist or speak back; cowgirls are not an exception and find a place for themselves in the rodeo. Importantly they persist in participating in rodeo events and culture. Cowgirls are tough, resilient, and competitive; they stretch dominant constructions of womanhood. Cowgirls, like other women participating in sports, also resist hegemonic norms through continuing to compete in a male dominated sport and value their participation in rodeo. They navigate the arena in varied ways. I argue, as do others (Ford, 2020, Patton & Schedlock, 2012, Weninger & Dallaire, 2017 a & b), that women are agents in the arena and compete because they love the sport, culture, and lifestyle associated with rodeo. Additionally, as I show in this study, they have learned to compete in the rodeo through a cyclic process embedded in the construction of their family identity. Few scholars have conducted research on women's experiences and learning in the patriarchal, masculinist space of contemporary rodeo. My study contributes to this area of research.

The History of the Rodeo and the Whitewashed West

In what follows, I detail key aspects of the history of the rodeo to highlight the evolution of the sport, the placement of women within the arena, and how gender/race shapes the structure of the rodeo. These components help situate my study's investigation into the ways women experience the rodeo, including how they negotiate the male dominance that characterizes the sport. Rodeo, like most sporting events, has evolved over time. Rodeo, as we know it today, did not exist until the 1800s. The exact date of the first formal rodeo is unknown, but the first rodeo to offer prizes was in Pecos, Texas in 1883 (Mohoney, n.d.; Weaver, n.d.). The first rodeo to charge admission was in Prescott, Arizona in 1888 (Mohoney, n.d.; Weaver, n.d.). I first address the history of the sport examining the

Whitewashing of the American West rodeo, referring to the erasing of minorities and women in the history of rodeo that focuses on the achievements of White cowboys. Within this section, I also explain how men and women of color have been involved in the sport. Additionally, I address how the historical narrative of the rodeo excludes women and minorities from both the historical accounts and actual participation in the arena. Women have a long history of participation in both ranching and rodeo. Following this historical overview, I discuss my problem statement, methodology, research questions, and my subjectivity within the study.

One important aspect to understanding the history of rodeo in the United States and women's place within it is to explore how White hegemonic masculinity and White washing of the history of the sport plays into the creation of the idealized cowboy that became popularized through the media in Western movies and images. Rodeo has a racialized, masculinist, and sexualized history that is marked by exclusions. Although White cowboys are the dominant image of the American West, varied ethnicities contributed to Western frontier cultures and the creation of rodeo (Ford, 2020; Moore, 2010). Popular culture, as expressed through movies and literature, continues to portray the hegemonic White, straight, masculinized cowboy that shapes the conception of the American cowboy both historically and today. These forces also shape our understanding of how cowgirls navigate the arena and gendered dimensions of their participation in the sport relevant to this study.

Rodeo is an extension of the Western lifestyle—even a sanctification of a way of life (Adams, 2016). Adams (2016) stated "one cannot conceive the popularity of the sport without the westering experience and its iconic symbol—the cowboy" (p. 330). This is a masculinized image and mythos. The American cowboy represents a fabricated folklore hero

steeped in machismo, individualist honor, and charismatic authority (Stoeltje, 2012, p. 65). In this view, the cowboy "tamed" the West and protected the women at home (Adams, 2016; Patton & Schedlock, 2012).

Racialized Aspects of Rodeo

Yet, rodeo's real history reflects more diversity than is often highlighted. Rodeo traces its origins to the Spanish cattle ranchers of southern California, the Plains Indians, and the fiestas of the Mexican *vaqueros* (cowboys) (Barris, 2006; Dyck, 1996; Ford, 2020; LeCompte, 1985; Weaver, n.d.). Historically, the American West was a place for disenfranchised groups—from any ethnic origin—to relocate to forge a living. However, the Western movie's stereotypes contributed to corrupting the original egalitarian message with crude depictions of minorities and women (Kim et al., 2017). The term, rodeo, is derived from the Spanish verb "rodear," to go around (Barris, 2006, n.p.). This word is, in turn, derived from the Latin "rotare," to turn (Barris, 2006, n.p.). The skills cowboys used in cattle roundups, roping and bronc riding, are in turn important for gathering cattle and taming the horses needed for daily ranch activities (LeCompte, 1985; Mohoney, n.d.; Weaver, n.d.). Spanish cowboys laid the groundwork for modern rodeo while gathering stray cows, branding calves, and taming wild horses used for ranch work (LeCompte, 1985; Mohoney, n.d.).

According to LeCompte (1985), who conducted an early historical study of women's involvement in the rodeo, few acknowledge that modern rodeo shares events with the charrería that was popular in California and Texas in the nineteenth century. The charrería is a stylized Mexican rodeo that evolved from contests between rival ranches in Mexico, Texas, and California (LeCompte, 1985). The core events of rodeo, centered on roping and horses,

evolved from the cattle economy of the West (Adams, 2016) and the practical applications needed for daily life (Ford, 2020). Rodeo's earliest events such as steer roping, bronc riding, and horseracing evolved from skills cowboys and cowgirls needed on the ranch (Ford, 2020).

Rodeo narratives present its heritage in terms of idealized White cowboys and glosses over diverse people's historical contributions to contemporary rodeo and the participation of minority groups and women in the sport. Eradicating knowledge of American Indians' contributions to rodeo in historical accounts is a good example of the White cowboy's dominance in rodeo history. For example, Dyck (1996), in his history of ancient Indian traditions, credits Native American Plains Indians with the inception of the rodeo, beginning with the re-introduction of horses by the Spanish during the 1600s and early 1700s. Plains Indians quickly adapted their bison hunting skills to include the use of horses, acquiring the skills needed to capture, break, and train horses (Dyck, 1996). Many rodeo events exhibit these same skills. Plains Indians exhibited skills that equaled or surpassed the skills of cowboys, but Wild West Shows often presented Native Americans as novelties instead of equals (Dyck, 1996).

Although historical narratives of the rodeo acknowledge Native participation, scholars generally describe it as ancillary to expressions based on EuroAmerican ranching culture (Dyck, 1996). Adams (2016) offered one explanation for the lack of Native participation in rodeo in the region he studied. In his oral history of the borderlands in Magdalena, New Mexico, Adams (2016) discussed the development of rodeo from ranch roots, realizing that White families were the owners of most ranches in the Southwest borderland. The disparity in ownership of ranches contributed to White contestants being the majority in local rodeos even though Whites were a cultural minority in the area; owning

ranches meant that White individuals had the time, money, and resources to compete (Adams, 2016). Specifically, the North American Plains Indians' traditions from the late 1600s and early 1700s contributed to rodeo practices; for example, large fairs and pow wows offered rodeos as feature attractions, and many reservations had their own rodeo facilities (Dyck, 1996). A few of the Native traditions that translated to rodeo participation included bison hunting, herding, and sporting skills, and horse handling skills from which such current rodeo events as bronc riding, the grand entry, and horse races have emerged (Dyck, 1996).

Some Native Americans view participation in All-Indian rodeos as a reminder of a historical nomadic past, as well as a path to maintaining a relationship with nature and animals (Ford, 2020). Creating Native spaces to compete allows Native American Cowboys and Cowgirls to rewrite the historical narrative of rodeo and find diverse ways to compete. The Indian National Finals Rodeo (INFR) began in 1976 when several different Indian Rodeo Associations from both the United States and Canada united (INFR.org, n.d.). The INFR is the oldest and largest all-Indian association that sanctions over 700 rodeos per year (INFR.org, n.d.). Once many tribes were forcibly relocated to reservations, they adopted a more patriarchal system instead of the traditional matriarchal system common among some tribes historically. According to Ford (2020), these changes allowed and encouraged Native women to ride but simultaneously denied their recognition and equal standing in the rodeo and everyday life.

The formation of the all-Indian rodeo circuit in 1976 provides an avenue for some Native cowboys to understand their identities outside of a singular and hierarchical culture (Penrose, 2003). To preserve their Indian cowboy identities, a fundamental requirement was "the exclusion of non-Indian participants from Indian rodeos and the retreat to Indian

reserves, the only places that Indians call their own" (Penrose, 2003, p. 702). Indians created these all-Indian rodeos as safe spaces to explore their identities, allowing Indian cowboys to then claim their place within other rodeos. All-Indian rodeos provide cultural spaces where Indians can have their identities reaffirmed against the dominant discourse of American White patriarchy that defines the rodeo (Penrose, 2003). Although Indian cowboys existed alongside White cowboys, Patton and Schedlock (2012) contend that this idealistic representation of the White contestant is not emblematic of rodeo's true history but has come to overshadow Indian cowboys' prominence and substantial contributions, both early and throughout the development of rodeo. Ford (2020) states that by participating in race- and/or group-specific rodeos, minority competitors are demonstrating "that the rodeo belongs to more than White, heterosexual, masculine men" (p. 11). Despite this history of White masculine hegemony that has excluded and separated groups of people in rodeo, rodeo should belong to all the individuals who participate in it and watch it. Cowgirls in this study would agree and narrated stories about how they belonged in the rodeo.

Rodeo and Hegemonic Masculinity

In this section, I discuss of the concepts of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987) and masculine domination (Bourdieu, 2001) as part of rodeo. This discussion illuminates the masculine gendered ways of the rodeo arena to situate my feminist narrative study on women's experiences within them. Organizations, like rodeo associations and committees, perpetuate cultural norms that create limiting environments for women. Instead of celebrating "the gritty determination that informed generations of ranch women, who, in addition to managing household and raising children, braved the elements to make a ranch or homestead a going concern," rodeo has evolved into a male dominated space that embraces the myth of

the Western cowboy in control (Adams, 2016, p. 238-9). Women participate and compete in the rodeo but cannot participate in all events. Hegemony in relation to sports is "the condition in which groups, in this case, men in sports, wield authority over other groups through imposition, manipulation, and consent" (Hannon et al., 2009, p. 676).

Although hegemony relates to power in society, it does not mean total cultural dominance or even the elimination of resistance but "an ongoing, fluid and fluctuating process of negotiation, contestation and struggle, a 'war of position' which involves the subordination of a particular group (or groups) by a dominant force in society" (Price & Parker, 2003, p. 110). In terms of the rodeo, hegemonic power means that women and minorities continually struggle for a position within the arena; women navigate and create inclusive spaces. Additionally, women created spaces within the arena, enjoy participation, and finding meaning in rodeo participation. The all Black, All-Indian rodeos, women's rodeo association, gay rodeos, and other minority rodeo experiences were created to function as alternative spaces to perform cowboy identities (Ford, 2020). The rodeo, in this way, is a microcosm of the hegemony enacted in society. These groups do not necessarily accept the current *status quo*; rather, they continue to negotiate for more access within the arena, enjoy competing, and accept the rodeo it as it is. Hegemonic power is a dynamic process that changes with time as society itself changes.

Women's Inclusion in Rodeo

In the beginning of organized rodeo, women had greater access to the rodeo arena than they do today. In what Ford (2020) called the "Golden Age" of rodeo, organizers did not relegate women to the sidelines but allowed them to compete in the main attractions alongside the cowboys. The transition of rodeo from sport to professional sport in the early to

mid-twentieth century marks the emergence of larger monetary prizes and the relegation of women into lesser roles (Ford, 2020). The creation of barrel racing by the WPRA, in 1931, gave women a way to compete and excel within the arena (Leduc Black Gold Pro Rodeo & Exhibition, n.d.). After World War II, rodeo guidelines and norms resulted in cowgirls' slow assignment to the sidelines and curtailing of their participation. Women participated in varied events in early rodeos. For example, in 1913, Tillie Baldwin, considered the first female rodeo star, put on steer wrestling exhibitions (Leduc Black Gold Pro Rodeo & Exhibition, n.d.). In the 19th century, women competed in rough stock and timed events such as saddle bronc riding (the riding of bucking horses) (Leduc Black Gold Pro Rodeo & Exhibition, n.d.). In 1929, a saddle bronc rider who was also a cowgirl named Bonnie McCaroll died at the famed Pendleton Rodeo in Oregon (Ford, 2020; Leduc Black Gold Pro Rodeo & Exhibition, n.d.). A bucking horse dragged McCaroll to death, and the entire crowd watched the spectacle, helpless to save her (Leduc Black Gold Pro Rodeo & Exhibition, n.d.). McCaroll's death constituted a turning point in including women in rodeo as many rodeos dropped women contestants soon afterwards (Ford, 2020; Leduc Black Gold Pro Rodeo & Exhibition, n.d.).

Ford (2020) points out that the professionalization and unionization of rodeo events during the 1920s and 1930s contributed to the exclusion of women when unions barred them from membership and shifted women into more ornamental instead of performance roles. As mentioned earlier, the introduction of barrel racing by the WPRA in 1931 functioned as an alternate way for cowgirls to participate in the rodeo (Leduc Black Gold Pro Rodeo & Exhibition, n.d.). The promoters of the Stamford Cowboy Reunion promoted barrel racing as a "special safer events for females" (Leduc Black Gold Pro Rodeo & Exhibition, n.d.). In

1942, in Gene Autry's rodeo, a rodeo that had a monopoly on major rodeos, organizers instituted a ban on female competitors that finalized the relegation of women to the sidelines of the arena (Parkinson, 2020).

Rodeo Queens

Competing in barrel racing or breakaway roping are not the only ways women are involved with a rodeo lifestyle. The rodeo queen is also an important role for women to fill. Queens represent the rodeo at a variety of functions, traditionally promote events, and sell tickets. The first recorded rodeo queen was in Lewiston, Idaho, in 1935 (Burbick, 2007). The first competition focused on the horsemanship skills of local women (Burbick, 2007). Women's participation as rodeo queens initially required demonstrating their abilities on a horse, but the requirements have changed with the times. Now rodeo organizers require queens to adhere to guidelines in dress, behavior, and public image; the rodeo queens' primary responsibility is to represent the association as part horsewoman, part ambassador, and part beauty queen—but not rodeo *contestants*.

Because rodeos do not require queens to compete, they do not have to have any experience with roping or barrel racing. Rodeo committees often encourage ornamental participation in the rodeo by their queens; this participation often occurs in the form of herding steers and calves from the arena after the "real" events are completed (Ford, 2020). Burbick (2007) pointed out that many rodeo boards picked queens who displayed White, middle-class attributes to represent their rodeos and fulfill a narrative of White Americana, the expansion of the Wild West, and, in turn, patriotism. Individual identity of the rodeo queens matters less to rodeo committees and audience members than the pattern of White, upper to middle-class women representing the rodeo.

Like any other beauty pageant (Tice, 2012), the emphasis on women's beauty in the role of rodeo queen, not riding ability, is complicit with dominant patriarchal narratives and norms (Burbick, 2007). Although some rodeo queens come from ranching families, winning a crown is more of a beauty contest and certainly relies less on the ability to ride a horse. Rodeo queens are not always cowgirls, but they can be. If a cowgirl becomes a rodeo queen, this identity obfuscates her competitive talents as a cowgirl during her yearlong reign. Rodeo queens, in contrast to female rodeo participants, appear for the crowd's viewing pleasure, reflecting the patriarchal dominance of the rodeo.

We know that over time women have won a spur in the arena, but cowboys outnumber cowgirls in the events in which organizers *allow them* to participate. Women continue to compete in the rodeo and enjoy the process. The WPRA is one way that women carve out more space in the rodeo arena. Currently the WPRA has championships in all-round, breakaway roping, heading, heeling, and tie-down roping that are "women only" events and occur at women only rodeos. The PRCA awards barrel racing championships. Although the WPRA has officially phased out rough stock events, technically women can enter those events. However, few do, recognizing cultural norms (Toy, 2012). Women's ability to compete remains restricted to particular events. For example, at the NFR, of the 120 athletes qualified to enter, only fifteen were women— approximately 12.5% of the competitors (PRCA, 2018). Organizers encourage cowgirls, not cowboys, to compete for rodeo queen, a general hostess of the rodeo; organizers use the rodeo queen role for publicity purposes and representing the rodeo committee. Rodeo committees place an emphasis on "beauty," not skill, and use rodeo queens' beauty to sell a man's sport (Burbick, 2007).

Although rodeo is a sport saturated in masculine domination and hegemonic masculinity, women continue to compete and thrive in the arena. Women have a long history of rodeo participation (Burbick, 2007; Ford, 2020; Patton and Schedlock, 2012; Penrose, 2003). Women in this study, and others, have narrated their love for the rodeo, the family connection it strengthens, the concept of hard work to gain legitimacy, bonds with horses, and the joy they achieve through participation. Cowgirls create meaningful spaces for themselves and others in the rodeo. I discuss this in Chapter 7.

Much of the developed scholarship on rodeo has focused on the history of rodeo. For example, Burbick (2007) focused on the evolution of rodeo queens, who are set apart from contestants during the period of their reign. In contrast, Weninger and Dallaire (2017 a & b) focused on Canadian barrel racers. Ford (2020) examined how minority groups, African Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, Native Hawaiians, and the LGBT+ communities, used resistance to claim their identities as cowboys by emphasizing their cultural contributions to America's past and rodeos future. My research considers cowgirls' experiences in the rodeo. To which types of nonformal and informal education are cowgirls exposed through their participation in the rodeo? What stories do cowgirls narrate about their experiences in the arena? How do cowgirls learn and in turn teach others? How do cowgirls navigate the masculinize arena?

Problem Statement and Puzzle

The history of this masculinized sport and the restricted roles of women within the rodeo leads to the problem statement from which this study emerged. Little research has been conducted on women's experiences in contemporary rodeo or the role of rodeo as a site of informal education. Literature about women in the rodeo has focused on the historical

context of rodeo, history of the rodeo queens, and the gendered experiences of Canadian barrel racers (Burbick, 2007; Ford, 2020; Patton & Schedlock, 2012; Weninger, & Dallaire, 2017 a & b). Scholars have published limited work on women's learning experiences in relation to the arena (Weninger & Dallaire, 2017b; Forsyth & Thompson, 2007). It is important to know the types of learning that women who choose to participate in rodeo experience. Women in the rodeo experience both informal and nonformal learning opportunities that begin with their families and focus on learning the skills needed to compete in the rodeo. Exploring these concepts helps expand our knowledge about the diversity of cowgirls' learning experiences in a masculinized space.

My study is also based on a research puzzle. Narrative inquiry research, as discussed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), begins with a research puzzle that develops from a sense of wonder. In contrast to a research problem that expects solutions and clear boundaries, a research puzzle entails "more of a sense of a search, a 're-search,' a searching again" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124). Instead of focusing only on a defined problem, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) believe that "narrative inquiry characteristically begins with the researcher's autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the *research puzzle*" (p. 41). In other work, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) expressed that "a narrative inquirer's first consideration is essentially an act of imagination. She or he must imagine the chosen topic, along with possible participants, as existing in an ever shifting space" (p. 481).

My research puzzle came from my considerations of the rodeos' rules and culture. I wondered what rodeo would be like if everyone entered the arena with equal opportunities to compete. I began thinking about why cowgirls continue to compete in the male-dominated rodeo and why I continued to compete in the limited events open to women? What drives us

to participate? What does rodeo offer the women who compete? What does it offer me? What educational experiences do women narrate in the stories they tell about the rodeo? Why do these strong, vibrant women not protest louder about the inequity they find in the arena? As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stipulated, my puzzles changed as my research progressed; I found my puzzle evolving "day to day and week to week" (p. 73). Each interview, each narrative shifted my puzzle as the long work of a dissertation unfolded.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to "re-present" my participants' rodeo stories, illustrating and unpacking the meaning they narrated from within the masculinized arena. I bring awareness both to women's experiences in rodeo from their perspectives and to the power dimensions that rodeo women negotiate to straddle in their saddles. By identifying gendered components of their experiences in the racialized and gendered sport of rodeo, my research addressed what types of informal learning experiences are narrated by cowgirls.

Inquiry Questions

1. What is the storied reality of cowgirls who perform in the predominantly White, male rodeo arena?
2. How do women navigate the masculinized arena of rodeo?
3. What do cowgirls learn in the arena?

Overview of Methodology

I selected a narrative inquiry approach to examine women's experiences and learning in the rodeo arena. This approach allowed me to document "the stuff that happens among real people in the real world in their own words, from their own perspectives, and within their own contexts" (Patton, 2015, p. 12). In addition, a narrative approach allowed me to explore

learning in the rodeo arena. The inquiry considers education not at the individual level "but, rather, within organizational, community, religious, political, and economic systems" (Patton, 2015, p. 8). This study delved into rodeo culture and cowgirls' stories about their rodeo experiences, including an emphasis on their learning as they were growing up and participating in a rodeo arena—what I am framing as a space of nonformal and informal education. Interviews with and observations of cowgirls, as well as select photo elicitation with three narrators, brought to light cowgirls' experiences and learning within and around the arena. Examining cowgirls' experiences in today's rodeo culture requires listening to the stories of individuals to understand their experiences.

Constructionism is the epistemology that grounded my narrative study. Crotty (1998) explained that constructionism stipulates "that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (p. 43). Crotty (1998) goes one to say that constructionism

> is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context. (p. 32)

It is my opinion that the narratives of cowgirls emerge from their interactions with the arena and others within it. As a researcher, I listened to the stories of my participants and focused on how their experiences influenced their interpretations just as my own experiences influence my interpretations. Crotty (1998) emphasized, within this researcher worldview, "*all* meaningful reality, precisely as meaningful reality, is socially constructed" (p. 55). Using a constructionist epistemology, I approached understanding cowgirls' experiences

through their narratives about their social interactions with each other, cowboys, and through their rodeo participation.

Using a feminist theoretical perspective, I situated my study and my research approach in the history of racial and gender inequities in the patriarchal, hegemonic institution, and culture of rodeo. Crotty (1998) stated that "critical forms of research [including feminist research] call current ideology into question, and initiate action, in the cause of social justice" (p. 157). In this sense, as noted earlier in my introduction, rodeo is not a gender or race neutral sport and research processes are not either. Rodeo is positioned within power relations of Whiteness and masculinity with implications for the women who participate and the lessons they learn while competing. Despite the masculinization of the rodeo, women have agency in the arena, enjoy competing, and make a difference. Cowgirls have diverse experiences in the arena and thrive through competition. These assumptions guide my approach to my study. Some feminist approaches, such as radical feminism, suggest that "the oppression of women is the oldest, most profound and most widespread oppression of all" (Crotty, 1998, p. 164). A feminist theoretical approach requires that I am aware of how I represent others, an awareness of power differentials between participants and myself, and strive to create friendly relationships between participants and myself to help lessen the effects of the power differentials (Doucet & Mauthner, 2007). A narrative approach, in my research, can be used to focus on stories that are told by, for, and about women in the rodeo with the opportunity to develop diverse interpersonal and reciprocal relationships between participants and me. The focus on co-creation, representation, and interpretation of women's stories adds to the feminist approach of my study. Emphasizing

women's stories and situating my study within power differentials and inequities in the rodeo required a critical gendered lens; thus, a feminist perspective was best suited for my work.

Narrative Inquiry Methodology

Narratives exist in many forms. Researchers use them in a variety of ways within different disciplines. Riessman (2008) described narratives as "composed for particular audiences at moments in history […] draw [ing] on taken-for-granted discourses and values circulating in a particular culture" (p. 3). Narrative is relative to our placement in culture (Bochner, 2014). Clandinin and Murphy (2009) position narrative research in the realm of representation of experience: "lives are lived, told, retold, and relived in storied ways on storied landscapes" (p. 598). Although each of these descriptions of narrative inquiry fit this project, I choose to follow the process that Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe. I began with focusing on "experience as expressed in lived and told stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 40). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that "narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical. Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines" (p. 121). This is true for my study also.

I am a cowgirl, I live in the arena, and I have shared experiences with my participants. My own experiences within this environment influenced the creation of this project and helped me position myself as a researcher in the arena. I learned about rodeo in ways unexplainable through other methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Cowgirls are not univocal. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stressed that as researchers struggle to represent participants' voices it is important to recognize that "we are all characters with multiple plotlines who speak from within these multiple plotlines" (p. 147). Cowgirls see the world

from many viewpoints. As a researcher, I endeavored to capture all the variety they revealed to me.

In writing narratives, there is a collaboration among all the characters in the story and the researcher (Bochner, 2014). The researcher's goal to co-construct meaning with the participant is a fundamental requirement with narrative inquiry; a narrative researcher is not the sole owner of the narratives told; rather, agency and power reside as well with the participants who share their stories with us (Yardley, 2008). As a cowgirl, I have privileged access to recording cowgirls' experiences due to my emic positioning within the group under study. Insider knowledge both strengthened and presented barriers to my project. I discussed these in the reflexivity section located in Chapter III.

I have observed rodeos for years, as I have competed in them since 2015. Before I conducted interviews for this study I attended and observed several rodeos with a different eye, I wanted to be more mindful of the atmosphere, how cowgirls and cowboys were situated in the arena, and how rodeo announcers addressed both crowd and participants. Additionally, I collected artifacts from association websites. These observations and artifacts allowed me to orient myself in the current business of rodeo. I conducted interviews with ten participants that lasted a minimum of one hour each. I contacted each participant after completing transcription to explore follow up questions. Additionally, I asked each participant to supply photographs for consideration that exemplified what being a cowgirl meant to them; not all women felt comfortable supplying photographs. All ten women interviewed, (four Native American, six White), were current competitors with a wide range of experiences in the arena. The cowgirls' events were barrel racing, break away roping, saddle bronc riding, and bucking bulls.

Subjectivity Statement

I am a woman, I am Cherokee, and I am a barrel racer. I have sat on the sidelines and watched my fellow, female competitors marginalized by both sexes as pseudo-athletes simply because they sit on a horse and run around barrels. I have listened to cowboys marginalizing my skill while praising my horse for taking care of me. Being a woman in a hyper-masculinized field is difficult. However, realizing that society has created folklore that does not align with historical facts to justify that marginalization makes it more difficult to face. This topic is not simply a research topic for me; it is how I live my life. I am a woman in the male dominated field of STEM. I have also been spending my spare time on horseback, training and riding horses in rodeos since 2015. I am not a product of a rodeo family; I learned the unwritten rules of the arena later in life. Although I struggle with the hegemonic masculinity inherent to the arena, I acknowledge the lessons of strength and independence that I have learned from rodeo competition. Like the women in my study, I enjoy rodeo and want to excel in it. Rodeo has made me stronger and taught me about the freedom found on horseback. I acknowledge my passion for this sport and its influence on my research process; in fact, my passion for rodeo drove my research. As I noted above, "narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical. Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 121). Not all cowgirls view the world and the arena as I do.

To consider my positionality during both the collection and analyzing of the data, I employed reflexive techniques. The techniques I used included writing memos and peer debriefing. I used those techniques to be as Patton (2015) describes: "attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and economic origins of one's own

perspective and voice as well as the perspective and voices of those one interviews and those to whom one reports" (Patton, 2015, p. 70). Reflexivity allowed me to be aware of my positionality and to focus on the voices of my participants. In narrative inquiry, these relationships are fundamentally important. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) believe that narrative inquiry is a study of experiences and relationships are the key to what narrative inquirers do. I discuss this further in Chapter III.

Significance

As this introductory chapter has discussed, the rodeo has a strong association with a masculinist and White history of American West folklore that hides some of its multicultural roots. Current viewpoints have created an exclusionary arena; women have been socialized to accept limited roles instead of unrestricted access to all rodeo events. Yet, as my study shows, women enjoy the rodeo and continue to participate in it. They experience rodeo as a place of learning and growth. Exploring women's experiences in rodeo from a feminist perspective is important given the historical realities of women's lives in the actual American West. The stories told by women in the rodeo will extend scholarship on how women navigate many male dominated spaces—not just the rodeo. Many sports and other activities take place in environments where men outnumber women. Understanding how women learn to excel in the rodeo may relate to how women can excel in other areas. As numerous scholars have noted (Burbick, 2007; Moore, 2010; Patton & Schedlock, 2012), the American West required men and women to work side by side to survive. Women participated in physical work different from that required in middle-class sitting rooms. Women in the West were out working fields, roping cows, and participating in ranch life so that their families could survive, yet patriarchal and masculinist rodeo guidelines and norms have historically

denied women the ability to compete solely on expectations that are socially constructed, determined by cowgirls' biological sex. Women participated next to the men in their lives, doing the same work regardless of gender. However, the rodeo has relegated women to one of three places: the sidelines watching others compete, as an ornamental rodeo queen, or competing in barrel racing or breakaway roping. Yet, women continue to compete, thrive, and enjoy those events.

This study is significant in contributing to research, practice, and theory, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter VIII. In terms of research, much research surrounding women in the rodeo is of a historical nature (e.g. Burbick, 2007; Ford, 2020; Patton & Schedlock, 2012; Toy, 2012). Other research focuses on women in contemporary rodeo (Compton, 2018; Dashper, 2012, 2016; Le Coney & Trodd, 2009; Plymoth, 2012; Weninger & Dallaire, 2017 a & b). Weninger and Dallaire (2017 a & b) are interested in Canadian women who barrel race in contemporary rodeos, a key event in which women participate. Dashper (2012, 2016) and Plymoth (2012) examine how contemporary women perform gender in equestrian sports. Compton (2018) and Le Coney and Trodd (2009) studied the workings of gay rodeo in the United States. In comparison, this study focuses on the lived experiences of diverse women currently competing in the rodeo to help understand how cowgirls experience the sport. This study is immersed in the current, expanding rodeo arena.

This study also examines rodeo as a sport and space of informal education which expands this area of scholarship. Women learn about the rodeo before they enter the arena, while they compete, and outside of competition. Bush (2016) studied women surfers and how they learned to enact their surfing identities. Surfing is another male dominated sport; Bush (2016) found that women enact their learned identities differently than male surfers. Heath

(1983) studied how the informal learning practices of two different communities socialized children to the cultural expectations needed to thrive within their communities. Fordham (1993) detailed how young Black female students developed identities that allowed them to succeed in a White man's world. Heath (1983) and Fordham (1993) provide examples of how young people learn to function in culture by adopting traits that are expected by those in control. Although research has examined informal education and learning within various locations outside of school, researchers have not yet examined the motives, experiences, and learning of modern women in the rodeo. My research adds to this ongoing conversation.

In terms of practice, this study contributes a view of rodeo as an informal learning environment and a look at gendered ways that women negotiate male dominated spaces. Studying ways that women successfully navigate the rodeo arena can be adapted and applied to situations in education where women experience marginalization and underrepresentation but continue to find meaning in their activities. Women in the rodeo often negotiate male dominated arenas using a variety of techniques. Women in this study shared, through their stories, the influence of early family support on their participation in rodeo. I observed that informal educational opportunities within family structures were narrated as a common thread between participants. In Chapter II I will address the literature concern scholarship in areas that relate to women in rodeo, other gendered sports, and various topics that relate to my study. In Table 1, I introduce you to some common rodeo terminology; beginning your journey into the arena. So saddle up and enjoy the ride!

Table 1

If It's Your First Rodeo (Terminology for City Slickers)

Term or Phrase	Definition
Added Money	The money donated to the rodeo committee by the sponsors of the rodeo to attract contestants
Average	Contestant's points are combined from all go-rounds, and the contestant with the highest total points wins the average
Barrier	The rope stretched across the front of the box that the contestant's horse comes out of for the timed events (for example the roping and steer wrestling). The stock is allowed a head start and the barrier ensures that they get it.
Bill Pickett Invitational Rodeo (BPIR)	All black rodeo named after legendary black cowboy Bill Pickett. Formed in 1984 by Lu Vason.
Box	The area a horse and rider back into before they make a roping or steer wrestling run.
Bulldogger	Steer wrestler
Cloverleaf	The shape of the barrel pattern. Consisting of one right turn and two left; or one left turn followed by two rights.
Flagman	The official who signals the end of timing in timed events
Hazer	Cowboy who rides on the opposite side of the steer in the steer wrestling and prevents the steer from escape the steer wrestler
Hooey	Also known as a half-hitch; the rope used by calf ropers to secure a calf's feet
INFR (Indian National Finals Rodeo)	All Indian rodeo formed in 1976. All cowgirls/cowboys are required to show proof of Native American heritage by showing a CDIB (certification of Indian Blood) card issued by the federal government
IPRA	International Professional Rodeo Association
NFR	National Finals Rodeo; the finals for the PRCA held in Las Vegas every December

No Time	The contestant has been disqualified from the event for either breaking the pattern in barrel racing or not catching the stock properly in the timed events
PRCA	Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association
Stock contractor	The person or organization that provides all the livestock used in the timed events: steers, calves, bulls, broncs, etc.
Run	The act a barrel racer does in competing in the rodeo. Going around all three barrels and running her horse back out of the arena
"The book"	'The book' is a monthly magazine that is released by rodeo associations that list each rodeo, which events are being offered, and how much added money is available.
Fancy Tack	Refers to blinged out horse tack (headstalls and breast collars) that barrel racers often put on their horses
Finished Horse	Any horse that has finished its training and is ready to compete
Trick Rider	Any individual that performs during the rodeo by doing acrobatic tricks on horses

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the research relating to my inquiry questions:

1. What is the storied reality of cowgirls who perform in the predominantly White, male rodeo arena?
2. How do women navigate the masculinized arena of rodeo?
3. What do cowgirls learn in the arena?

My literature review begins with a broad discussion of scholarship focused on the rodeo to allow for a greater understanding of how rodeo functions in culture and to understand research conducted on rodeo across various fields. I introduced some of these cultural components in the opening chapter. Scholarship concerning the rodeo conveys how others are approaching the broad topic of rodeo, the findings from their research, and the role of women within the arena. After discussing the scholarship that centers on the rodeo, I examine the broader topic of gender and sport. Although these sections are not specific to rodeo, they cover the broad world of sport to explore how gender and race function within the culture of sport. Women navigate male dominated spaces in many sports. Finally, I discuss the function of nonformal and informal education within the

arena, as well as my guiding assumption that hegemonic masculinity shapes the rodeo. A conclusion offers how this study differs from others and what I bring to the arena of scholarship.

Scholarship on Cultures of Rodeo

This review of literature provides an overview of scholarship relevant to my study on rodeo. Research on rodeo covers many aspects of health and human science areas that focus on quantitative research and social science and historical work rooted in qualitative paradigms. There is a significant body of scholarship in rodeo that focus on training, risk factors, injuries, and the animals used in the arena (e.g. Meyers & Laurent, 2010). This scholarship represents fields such as Health and Human Development, Kinesiology, and Animal Science. However, these fields are not aligned with research in the fields of social science and humanities most relevant to my narrative work, so I did not include them in my review of scholarship. In the following paragraphs I will cover a range of broad to detailed topics to highlight the work most relevant to my research.

Historical Scholarship

Substantial scholarship has focused on the history of rodeo. These areas include the evolution of rodeo (Fredriksson, 1985; Lawrence, 1982; Stoeltje, 1989, 1993, 2012; Wooden & Ehringer, 1996), history of the cattle industry (Moore, 2010) and representations of the rodeo cowboy (Pearson & Haney, 1999; Roth, 2016). Mahoney (2004), for example, wrote a comprehensive history of the evolution of college rodeo. Mahoney's (2004) work covers the journey of college rodeo from its first days on campus in 1920 until the national championships of 2003. Mahoney's (2004) work allows readers to compare rodeo to other sports and activities held on college campuses, exploring both

the similarities and differences. Mahoney (2004) focused on both the cowboys and cowgirls who created and competed in college rodeo programs.

Many authors focused on all encompassing histories of the evolution of the sport including discussion of cowboys and cowgirls that excelled in the arena (Fredriksson, 1985; Lawrence, 1982; Wooden & Ehringer, 1996). Kelm (2011) studied the history of rodeo in Western Canada exploring how rodeo functions as a 'contact zone' bringing together individuals of different social hierarchies. Thomas (2014) examined the history of the rodeo, focusing on Montana's cowgirls, but she included Calgary Stampede in Canada. She emphasized the contributions of women in the arena and how early cowgirls were the first professional women athletes (Thomas, 2014). Thomas's (2014) contribution to rodeo literature is a historical tracing of women from Montana who competed professionally in rodeo. Thomas's (2014) work illuminated the challenges that women faced competing, as well as how women navigated the masculine world of rodeo.

Another significant study on the history of rodeo focused on diverse participants, emphasizing gender, race, and how identity places into rodeo competition (Ford 2020). Ford (2020) explored how minorities, including African Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, Native Hawaiians, and the members of the LGBT+ community, who are largely unseen in modern rodeo, have 'made it their own'. Ford's (2020) work focuses on diverse racial and outsider groups that have made a difference in the sport of rodeo. Her study's focus on race, gender, and resistance is relevant to my work. Ford's (2020) work is a comparative analysis of Mexican American, Hawaiian, Black, Native American, and Gay rodeos to examine how marginalized cultural groups "view themselves in the history of the American West, and therefore, in the history and

development of the United States more broadly" (p. 2). Ford (2020) additionally highlights women's placement within each rodeo "to tell a broader story about rodeo, sport, identity and inclusion, and American history" (p. 7). Ford's (2020) work in *Rodeo as Refuge, Rodeo as Rebellion* is aligned with my study examining women's roles in rodeo. Yet Ford (2020), using museum archives, focused on themes of identity, sport, race, and gender within minority rodeos, and I am adding a qualitative study of the cowgirls' own narratives.

Similarly, Moore (2010), who, like Ford (2020), does a historical analysis of masculinity and race shaping the American West, examined the differences in masculinity exhibited between working and middle-class men on the Texas frontier. Moore (2010) discussed how cowboys defined their masculinity differently than the cattle ranchers for whom they worked. Moore (2010) characterized cowboys as outsiders because they did not exhibit middle class masculinity like the cattle ranchers who hired them. Patton and Schedlock (2012) explored how gender, race, and other identity issues complicated the historical narrative of the West that defines rodeo. I explore each of the previous works and more in this chapter. Discussing the contributions of these authors begins to illuminate the variations of culture within the rodeo.

Competing is not the only way scholarship represents women's roles in the rodeo. Some scholarship focuses on women's unique placement in the rodeo arena. For example, Burbick (2007) and Laegreid (2006) focused on the evolution of rodeo queens, who are set apart from contestants during the period of their reign. Although both Burbick (2007) and Laegreid (2006) focus on women involved in rodeos as queens, my work focuses women who either are currently competing or previously competed in the

rodeo. Competitors, rodeo committees, and fans do not consider rodeo queens as competitors in the arena and rodeo queens rarely are discussed, compared to, or interact in the arena with women who compete.

Minority Rodeos

Researchers have focused on some of the racialized history of rodeos (Dyck, 1996; Ford, 2020; Joudrey, 2016; Kelm, 2007; Patton & Schedlock 2012; Penrose, 2003). As an anthropologist, Dyck (1996) focused on the culture of Native American people and the correspondence with skills needed to tame and hunt with horses and current rodeo events. Dyck (1996) compared current rodeo practices to the skills needed by Native Americans for survival on the frontier instead of accepting the historical depiction of White culture in the creation of rodeo. Dyck (1996) suggested that Native Americans, specifically tribes located on the plains, contributed substantially to the skills used in rodeo and deserve recognition in rodeo's history. As a historian, Joudrey (2016) examined historical artifacts to report on how images circulated by the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede during the 20th century represented Canadian First Nations people. Media materials from the Calgary exhibition and stampede focused on the bodies of the Native performers, branding Native bodies with colonial ideas that placed them in the past, unmodernized, showcased as artifacts (Joudrey, 2016).

Penrose (2003) discussed how some used rodeo to define the cowboy versus Indian dichotomy and therefore deny legitimacy to Native American/First Nations rodeo performers. Penrose's (2003) research focused on the socially constructed dichotomy of cowboy and Indian through active observation, informal contacts, and historical documents at the Glenbow Archives in Calgary. Penrose (2003) explained that the

creation of all-Indian rodeos allowed Native American competitors a place to be both cowboy and Indian without experiencing the contradiction that existed in mainstream culture. Similarly, Ford (2020) stated that one of the reasons for the creation of Native American rodeos was to ensure that Native cowboys were able to compete without experiencing discrimination. For example, White rodeos in the 1910s and 1920s often separated contestants not only by gender but also by race; when separation did not occur, they often presented Native contestants with substandard stock (Ford, 2020; Kelm, 2007). This points to a long history of discrimination in the rodeo. It also relates to current rodeos as Native cowboys and girls often prefer separate spaces to compete.

This section connects to my study by exploring minority placements in the arena. Of the rodeo research focusing on women, only Ford (2020) had areas that focused on Native American women's experiences in the arena. None of the articles in my review focused on diverse women's experiences (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007; LeCompte, 1990, 1993; Patton & Schedlock, 2012; Stoeltje, 1988; Thomas, 2014; Toy, 2012; Weninger & Dallaire, 2017a, b). Of all the literature, only Weninger and Dallaire (2017 a & b) even alluded to women's informal learning processes in rodeo. I interviewed four Native American women. I hoped to add to the scholarship in this area but my participants did not address these issues. Understanding how Native American women experience the rodeo could expand understanding of how gender and race functions in the arena.

Critical Scholarship: Rodeo Behind Bars

Scholarship in this section takes a critical look at rodeos held at prisons. These articles that focus on the prison rodeo system highlight, from a critical perspective, the Whiteness of audience members and the portrayal of Black inmates that competed for

their viewing pleasure. Research conducted on rodeo has also focused on prison rodeos (Diaz, 2019; Gillespie, 2018; Martin et al., 2014; Roth, 2016). Researchers highlight the undercurrent of racial exploitation that occurred during rodeos at prisons when mostly Black cowboys performed for the amusement of White spectators and prison officials. (Diaz, 2019; Gillespie, 2018; Martin et al., 2014, Roth, 2016). Several state prison systems hosted prison rodeos, including Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma, among others; most of these rodeos are no longer active. The exception is the rodeo at Angola that is still held twice yearly.

Prison rodeos operate differently than other rodeos due to their locations and contestants. According to Martin et al. (2014), prison rodeos have two functions: to make money to finance programs not covered by state funding and to act as a showcase of the rehabilitation of prisoners who participate. Diaz (2019) explained that although some events originated from the skills needed for ranch work, "other events at the Prison Rodeo served no practical purpose and mocked prisoners by design" (p. 157).

Roth (2016) examined archival materials to piece together his account of the prison rodeo held in Huntsville, Texas. Roth (2016) studied not only the history of the Texas Prison Rodeo but also the history of the prison system in Texas. His work related the relationship among the prison, the local town of Huntsville and the rodeo (Roth, 2016). Roth (2016) highlighted that the prison rodeo started during the Great Depression as a way to increase funding for prison programs. Diaz (2019) presented an article highlighting Mexican American lives in Texas prisons. Gillespie (2018) and Martin et al. (2014) conducted research on the Angola rodeo that is currently still in operation, so they studied past rodeo events, as well as attended rodeo performances.

Gillespie (2018) and Martin et al. (2014) both found that prison rodeos in Texas and Louisiana were integrated, featuring both White and Black cowboys, and drew large crowds of spectators. Martin et al. (2014) argued that these events became a type of "prison tourism" that allowed White spectators predominantly to view Black inmates from behind protective fencing. Martin et al. (2014) argues that individuals who paid to watch these Black cowboys did so for the entertainment inherent to the rodeo, as well as the thrill of surrounding themselves with criminals. The authors argued that prison tourism allowed attendees to participate in White voyeurism of Black bodies (Martin et al., 2014; Roth, 2016).

Martin et al. (2014) and Roth (2016) each argue that although the convicts had the opportunity to win prize money and the money raised from ticket and souvenir sales went to rehabilitation programs at individual prisons, these prison rodeos continued exploiting convicts, particularly Black convicts, and reflected and perpetuated the White privilege deeply entrenched in society outside prison walls. Diaz (2019) disagreed and found the prison rodeos to be one of the only places available for prisoners to earn self-respect and prestige through competition as they "momentarily erased the stigma that marked prisoners as plainly as the stripes they often wore" (p. 157). Martin et al. (2014) described the racism of the events, arguing that the rodeo announcer portrayed the Black bodies of the convict cowboys, in many of the events, as bumbling and objects of physical violence. Portraying Black cowboys in negative light while holding up the White iconic cowboy in comparison is one way that the arena is racist. The scholarship highlights how these prison rodeos marginalized the Black cowboy by portraying him as a person of ridicule in need of redemption while the White cowboy is ideal (Martin et al., 2014; Roth,

2016). Martin et al. (2014) stated that the racial distribution of people in prisons created a situation where the convict cowboys are often Black and therefore these rodeos showcase "one of the last 'acceptable' ways to make fun of Black people" (p. 74). According to these scholars, convict cowboys are a "contradiction"; the convict symbolizes the degraded individual who needs rehabilitation while the cowboy is an icon associated with "Westward expansion", individualism, and "imperialism" who invites emulation (Martin et al., 2014, p. 74).

From a critical "White racial frame" perspective, this work of scholarship emphasizes that prison rodeos existed to frame the convict cowboy as another animal within the arena that a mostly White audience would view (Martin et al., 2014). According to Martin et al. (2014) a White racial frame reflects a critical stance that allows researchers "to explicate and understand the nature of Whiteness" (p. 63). At prison rodeos, space is marked not by invisible fences but by actual physical cages and dress (prison uniforms). Lines between inmates and spectators were fuzzy in other instances; for some inmates could mingle with spectators through the selling of mementos and tickets (Martin et al., 2014; Roth, 2016).

Critical scholarship has also focused on the exploitation of Black inmates during the rodeos at Angola prison. The rodeo in Angola, held at a Louisiana prison, reinforces the notions of criminalization and incarceration of people of color due to the ethnic makeup of the prison population (Gillespie, 2018). Gillespie (2018), a geography scholar, takes a de-anthropocentric and decolonial approach to examine the injustice of the penal rodeo system. Anthropocentrism is the belief that humans alone possess intrinsic value, and that society is human centered (Gillespie, 2018). Gillespie's (2018) approach is

critical of the placement of animals as subservient; instead, his work recognizes that humans are also animals. Like Martin et al.'s (2014) study also centered on the rodeo in Angola, Gillespie (2018) discussed how Black criminality is placed on display as entertainment for individuals attending the rodeo. Although Angola's population is overwhelmingly Black men, more White-identified people participate in the rodeo (Gillespie, 2018). Even through more White men compete than Black, announcer's commentary emphasized that the Black cowboys exist has both source of entertainment and ridicule (Gillespie, 2018). Gillespie (2018) stated that "these logics of racialisation, animalisation and anthropocentrism are deeply intertwined and, importantly, produced by notions of whiteness-as-humanness on the part of the audience and the staff (MC, professional cowboys, warden, and correctional officers) orchestrating this event" (p. 1276). The commentary adds the element of ridicule felt by Black prisoners and experienced by audience members. Gillespie (2018) also makes comparisons between the black convict cowboy and the animals used the rodeo; she states that "animals are enrolled in the rodeo performance—as 'wild' creatures to be dominated, tamed and subordinated—as simultaneously valuable and disposable bodies" (p. 1285). Gillespie (2018) makes comparisons between the treatment of the incarcerated cowboys and the animals used in the rodeo.

Gillespie (2018) used a critical lens to discuss funds generated by the rodeo program. Prison administrators use funds from the prison rodeo to support programs that are not funded by the state and prisoners view participation as "a source of pride, privilege and glory" (Gillespie, 2018, p. 1281). Through participation, prisoners gain the attributes of the cowboy including the symbolism of US patriotism, honor, and a type of

rugged masculinity (Gillespie, 2018). But at the end of the rodeo, prisoners returned to their cells, and the White audience members returned to the outside. This attention to race in this scholarship about rodeo connects to my study by highlighting the assumption of Whiteness inherent to rodeos and rodeo participants. Examining the scholarship on rodeos held inside prison walls helps consider the cultural meanings associated with the rodeo. This discussion should also include how rodeo culture portrays White masculinity and what racial and gendered roadblocks are presented to competitors who do not fit into the model of the hegemonic White cowboy. This discussion also extends the thinking about masculine dominance to animals used in the rodeo. Additionally, the dichotomy between prisoner and cowboy highlights a contrast between the imprisoned individual and the free cowboy; the cowboy symbolizes freedom in historical context.

Gay Rodeo

Another example of gendered experience in the rodeo, also discussed in Chapter I, is the Gay rodeo associations. Ford (2018) discussed the evolution of gay rodeo in the United States as a place where gay men embrace a type of hyper-masculinity. Members of the first gay rodeo organization were seeking an organization that offered "gay men an alternate way to be gay men" (Ford, 2018, p. 44). Although gay rodeos still embrace the camp subculture through inclusions of drag queen contests and the wild drag race, it is still "committed to the idea of the masculine male athlete as the ideal competitor and as the ideal man" (Ford, 2018, p. 51). Ford (2018) detailed how the gay rodeo is a place for gays and lesbians to compete while escaping the discrimination experienced at mainstream rodeos and in a broader society, a place for the competitors to be "both masculine and gay" (p. 42).

Le Coney and Trodd (2009) examined how varied individuals created counter-hegemonic spaces for queer, gay, and transgender cowboys to explore their identities within the rodeo. Gender is socially constructed, and queer, gay, and transgender cowboys have struggled to find ways to negotiate the cultural definition of cowboys' rugged masculinity. The formation of the International Gay Rodeo Association (IGRA) as an event created a space where a larger audience might experience a different kind of cowboy from the traditional macho male and find a safe space to explore their own identity, much like the all-Indian rodeos (Capous-Desyllas & Johnson-Rhodes, 2018; Compton, 2018; Le Coney & Trodd, 2009). Additionally, the IGRA functions as a space where cowboys and cowgirls have "the freedom to express oneself and one's identities, often through performance" (Capous-Desyllas & Johnson-Rhodes, 2018, p. 454). The first "gay" rodeo was held in 1976 and was a fundraiser for Muscular Dystrophy Association (Compton, 2018).

Breaking down the barriers that normative society imposes on gender classifications in the safe space that gay rodeos provide is fundamental for gay cowboys struggling to find alternate ways to rationalize their performance against the straight hegemonic masculine cowboy accepted by society (Capous-Desyllas & Johnson-Rhodes, 2018; Compton, 2018). Gay rodeos are not simply a place for competition but also a safe space to form and resist normative identities. Gay rodeos create a space where queer, gay, and transgender cowboys/cowgirls can safely explore their own emerging identities as a rodeo contestant. Gay rodeo spaces differ from mainstream rodeo experiences. Gay rodeos also create spaces where individuals besides heterosexual White males can navigate the rodeo comfortably. This discussion of gay rodeos corresponds to my study

by expanding understanding of how individuals can resist hegemony in the arena. Additionally, gay rodeo spaces bring to the forefront the need for alternative spaces within rodeo norms.

Consumerism and Advertisement

Scholarship has also highlighted concerns about rodeos sponsorship by the tobacco industry with an emphasis placed on smokeless products (Ling et al., 2010). This relates to my study because it provides another example of how rodeo culture primarily emphasizes White male cowboys. Advertising companies place cowboys first in the hierarchy of the rodeo (Ling et al., 2010). Tobacco companies have used various promotions and sponsorships to influence an increase in product use and sales that is directly related to their efforts at the rodeo (Ling et al., 2010). Internal documents show that tobacco companies are focusing their efforts on young, rural males with low socioeconomic status and rodeo sponsorship is a major component to the tobacco industry's advertisement plans (Ling et al., 2010). By using the rodeo as a place to advertise through the icon of the rugged White cowboy, the tobacco industry continues to frame the White cowboy as the representative of the rodeo and continues the perpetuation of the masculinized arena.

Rodeo and the trade shows that often accompany them are big business. Corporate sponsors have developed relationships with rodeo associations that have distributed more money throughout the sport---not just to the cowboys but to livestock contractors, announcers, novelty acts like the rodeo clowns, etc. (Pearson & Haney, 1999). Peñaloza (2001) examined consumers' cultural production processes while attending a major stock show and rodeo. Consumers recreated cultural meanings

associated with the American West through interactions with animals, exhibits, livestock sales, and various types of entertainment (Peñaloza, 2001). Pearson and Haney (1999) found that although rodeo meets all the aspects of a sport it also is seen to epitomize "American values, mores, and lifestyle" (p. 308). Scholarship in this section is relevant to my study because it highlights how advertising at rodeos and trade shows supports the production of the White, rugged cowboy as the face of the rodeo. Advertisement dollars are not simply about representation but also about commodification; companies seek to mobilize the image of the cowboy to sell their products. Companies have invested money in creating the image of the White, rugged cowboy, with rare images of cowgirls (Ling et al., 2010; Pearson & Haney, 1999).

Gender and Women Within the Rodeo

Scholarship addressing women's roles in the rodeo and gender in the arena has shown that women experience the rodeo differently than male contributors (Butler & Charles, 2012; Dashper, 2016; Hedenborg, 2015; Meah, 2014; Weninger & Dallaire, 2017 a & b). My research examines how women's experiences, navigations, and learning with the arena and therefore any scholarship that details how gender is enacted in rodeo is relevant. Meah (2014) claims that the social interactions that take place within a space define its significance as well as the subjectivity and agency of those within that space. Cowgirls define themselves and others through the interactions within the space of the arena; it is more than cowboy hats and sparkle. Every contestant at the rodeo is defined by not only the time he/she spends in the arena but by a combination of time and effort that it takes to prepare both rider and horse to compete. Weninger and Dallaire (2017b) found that the time spent training horses is a fundamental part of the process involved within the creation of a legitimate barrel racer. In addition, a woman's alleged affinity

towards nurturing, a gendered aptitude, is often the key to acceptance within the arena (Butler & Charles, 2012; Dashper, 2016). Dashper (2016) stipulates that "caring and nurturing are commonly believed to be feminine skills, things which women have a 'natural' capacity for" (p. 261). Defining the gendered space within the arena is more than one moment; it is the summation of preparation and societal expectations. Cowgirls must navigate between socially constructed gendered spaces and self-constructed identities to achieve social acceptance within the arena. Simply allowing women to compete in all events does not address the gendered inequities that operate at the less visible level, nor change the perceptions of gatekeepers who see male competitors as more dedicated than women (Dashper, 2012).

Hedenborg (2015) completed a comparative perspective of gender and sport within the equine sector to understand the gendered order within equine sports. Women who work within the equestrian culture often adhere to hegemony by complying with the rules defined by the dominant culture, never expecting that they will compete fully with men. The informal, unwritten rules are often more difficult to overcome than the formal barriers set up by governing bodies associated with equestrian sport (Hedenborg, 2015). Butler (2013) found that the symbolic violence associated with the racing field, or female jockeys relating "to the doxa of the field which defines women as weaker than men and as unsuitable bodily material to be jockeys unless they have the economic, social and cultural capital that meant they could ride as amateurs" (p. 1320), worked to deny women equal access.

Dashper (2012) found that some women in the equestrian field highlight socially constructed feminine traits to reduce perceived differences between their abilities and

cultural norms. Adelman and Becker (2013) found that others within rodeo culture used constant references to women's looks and nurturing attitudes as a type of control to ensure that female contestants understand that male approval is dependent on the cowgirls fulfilling certain gendered roles. Oftentimes, women confront the perception that equine sports are too hazardous for them to participate in safely (Hedenborg, 2015). This technique is used to curtail female participation in equine sport, as well as other activities (Hedenborg, 2015).

Scholarship by Weninger and Dallaire (2017a) and Butler and Charles (2012) examine how cowgirls exhibit nonconformity to gendered norms and expectations associated with hetero-femininity differently than most female athletes. Cowgirl rodeo contestants are not typically associated with lesbianism as are other sportswomen who engage in what are typically characterized as masculine sports (Weninger & Dallaire, 2017a). As Weninger and Dallaire (2017a) argue, resistance to cultural expectations is associated with labels of excessive heterosexuality because

> heterosexuality is so engrained that deviant manifestations of femininity, for women in rodeo, were not related to lesbianism as the case may be for other sportswomen engaged in masculine sports. Rather, deviance was associated with excessive heterosexuality (p. 1083).

Compared to other competitors in the rodeo, barrel racers often exhibit excessive femininity through the following outlets: extensions in their hair, fake lashes, sparkly clothing and earrings worn during competition. Weninger and Dallaire (2017a) offer insight into how Canadian barrel racers view legitimate participation in rodeo. As I reviewed this scholarship, I found a way to examine how my participants may see their

own participation in the sport. Value is placed on the preserving ideals of femininity while caring for horses (Butler & Charles, 2012; Weninger & Dallaire, 2017a). A woman in the rodeo must be physically strong enough to take care of her horse, but still fit into gendered norms and expectations associated with hereto-femininity, the normative expectations attributed to a heterosexual woman.

Stoeltje (1988) details the roles of hostess and cowgirl sponsors in The Cowboy Reunion, a four-day celebration held in Texas. Although Stoeltje's (1988) research focused on one specific rodeo, comparisons can be made for all rodeos. Stoeltje (1988) uses the separation of women into two semiotic forms, hostess and cowgirl, to represent both the community as a whole and the greater concept of gender. A semiotic form as used by Stoeltje (1988) views the hostess as a representative of "the community as a whole and simultaneously signifies the concept of female" (p. 221). Stoeltje (1998) argues that the hostess is a middle-aged married woman who acts as a surrogate matron for the celebration: hosting events, leading the parade, and representing the all-male committee that picked her. The cowgirls, in comparison, engage in a more active form of self-representation through competing in the rodeo (Stoeltje, 1988). The barrel racer/cowgirl has taken the previously male defined role of sponsor and transformed it into a type of self-representation while the hostess remains defined by discourse of the male committee that selects her (Stoeltje, 1988).

Other research highlights how women act as a support system for men who compete in the rodeo. Women offer different forms of support that can be categorized into three areas: fans, wives, and groupies (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007). The American cowboy is associated with a stylized myth; a lone rugged man riding the range with his

trusted horse. A professional cowboy, who makes a living through competing in the rodeo, requires many areas of support (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007). Women who function as fans of the rodeo are created through extensive socialization, connections to their family, or lifestyle preferences; They support cowboys due to their love of the sport and enjoyment of rodeo culture (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007). These women, fans of the rodeo, see rodeo as a sport mostly for men accepting norms that bar women from competing even though there are few explicit rules that exclude them (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007). Women accept limited access due to informal cultural understanding instead of formal rules.

Buckle bunnies are the groupies of rodeo. Gauthier and Forsyth (2000) define buckle bunnies as the "dedicated fans who are enthralled by the rodeo subculture and its participants" (p. 362). Buckle bunnies are both accepted and rejected by rodeo culture (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007). Some cowboys appreciate the amenities that buckle bunnies can supply, a clean place to sleep, food, money, and/or sexual favors, after being on the rodeo road for an extended time (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007). Other cowboys and women associated with the rodeo see buckle bunnies as a type of non-normative social identity (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007). The bunny-cowboy relationship has value for the cowboys but devalues bunnies by assigning negative stereotypes while legitimizing the culturally accepted role of wife/helpmate (Forsyth & Thompson, 2007). Buckle bunnies are labeled as deviant due to their unaccepted social actions of having sex with married men, public sex, multiple sexual partners, even though they support rodeo culture and have created another role for women in the rodeo (Gauthier & Forsyth, 2000). Although

some within the sport of rodeo appreciate buckle bunnies, for a female competitor being labeled as such would carry negative social connotations.

LeCompte's (1993) work, *Cowgirls of the Rodeo: Pioneer Professional Athletes,* dives into the history of women's participation in professional rodeo. LeCompte (1993) discusses that although almost all the women raised on a ranch exhibit the skills needed to rodeo, riding and roping, only a few possess "the exceptional skills required for a professional rodeo career" (p. 2). LeCompte's (1993) qualitative research included interviews that she conducted with 607 women who had professional careers in the rodeo—218 competed for more than three years. Cowgirls were the pioneer of female professional athletes; cowgirls belonged to the first professional and longest lasting sport association for women that began the process of advocating for reintegration of rodeo (LeCompte, 1993; 1990). Research participants in my study do not have rodeo as their only career but continue to have other forms of employment. However, each participant does belong to at least one professional rodeo association.

The Way a Cowgirl "Looks": Dressing and Acting "Appropriately"

Another area of research concerning women in the rodeo focuses on women's dress. Research has shown that cowgirls often use the wearing of specific clothing such as western shirts and cowboy hats to define themselves within the arena (Patton & Schedlock, 2012; Weninger & Dallaire, 2017a). Cowgirls' clothing choices are not universal (Patton & Schedlock, 2012; Weninger & Dallaire, 2017a). The expectations associated with cowgirls' presence within the arena vary greatly, these expectations are dependent on the cowgirls' goals and who is observing them. Patton and Schedlock (2012) point out that cowgirls in general "are 'blinged out' enough to make even the most

ostentatious rapper proud," using clothing to express an over-the-top heterosexuality (p. 1). Bling refers to an excessive display of femininity on both the cowgirl's clothing, through decorations and/or jewelry, and any tack placed on her horse. Contrastingly, rodeo norms require Canadian "legitimate" barrel racers to adhere to specific dress codes and exhibit discipline with horsemanship and horse care; all Canadian rodeos require Western dress code as do United States rodeos (Weninger & Dallaire, 2017a). This Western dress "consist[s] of a cowboy hat, cowboy boots, jeans and a long-sleeved collared shirt with cuffs" (Weninger & Dallaire, 2017a, p. 1085).

> Weninger and Dallaire (2017a) found that the women they interviewed claimed that 'real' barrel racers were disciplined in ways that set them apart from other cowgirls, whether groupies, other barrel racers or rodeo queens, through dividing practices such as upholding moral expectations at rodeo parties, wearing plain rodeo attire and dedication to horse care and skilled riding (p. 1081).

Canadian barrel racers conform to normative ideas about gender to ensure that their gender goes unquestioned while not striving to stand out through their sexuality, but through their discipline to the sport and their hard work (Weninger & Dallaire, 2017a). Weninger and Dallaire (2017a) also stipulate that legitimate cowgirls must resist overly emphasizing their sexuality because that may lead to being labeled a "buckle bunny" or not "legitimate." This relates to my research as I interview women who also have various views on what it means to be a cowgirl.

"Dress codes" for athletes do not only occur at rodeos but are enacted in other sports also which I will address in the following paragraphs. One of the ways that society creates gendered norms and spaces is through required uniforms or dress codes. Abiding

by, and not resisting, these dress codes ensure certain symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1998), which at the same time serves to objectify and sexualize women athletes. Bourdieu (1998) defines symbolic capital as "any property (any form of capital whether physical, economic, cultural or social) when it is perceived by social agents endowed with categories of perception which causes them to know it and to recognize it, to give it value" (p. 47). These dress codes separate participants not only along gendered lines but also to hypersexualize women, thereby distracting spectators from their skill but supporting their presence in the rodeo.

In beach volleyball, for example, women athletes are required to wear tight, small uniforms that cover less body area than their male counterparts do (Sailors et al., 2012). The difference in uniforms for male and female athletes leads to the objectification and intense sexualization of the female athletes (Sailors et al., 2012). Sailors et al. (2012) found that "media representations of women's beach volleyball focus on 'taut, bronzed flesh' and reassured audiences that there will be plenty of it on display; a parallel discourse attempts to 'soften' the aggressively sexual image, by emphasizing the stereotypical female role of mother" (p. 471). Fans and the media traditionally place female athletes into two categories: sex object or mother, neither of which focuses on their athletic ability (Sailors et al., 2012). By placing female athletes in these limited categories, society ensures the propagation of traditional values.

The Relationship Between the Cowgirl and Her Horse

Another area of research concerning women in the rodeo focuses on women's relationships with horses. Scholarship in this section compares gendered experiences of women in the rodeo (Weninger & Dallaire, 2017b) and equestrian sports (Plymoth, 2012)

although some differences occur between these two disciplines, both explore the relationship between women and their horses. Weninger and Dallaire (2017b) explained that both the cowgirl and her horse must acquire muscle memory and physical stamina to compete at high levels. In an interview study, Canadian barrel racers considered their horses to be the athletes and themselves the trainers (Weninger & Dallaire, 2017b). Therefore, the cowgirl considers the training and maintaining of the horse's athleticism a skill of primary importance (Weninger & Dallaire, 2017b). This study emphasizes that the relationship between a woman and her horse is unique and personal (Weninger & Dallaire, 2017b). Plymoth (2012) stipulates that the relationship between a woman and her horse is caring and emotional; this definition emphasizes an important legitimizing factor for the feminization of equestrian sport.

Understanding how a cowgirl and horse bond and work together is one way to understand how a cowgirl explores the space within the arena. Within the arena, a cowgirl is never alone as she always competes with her horse. The relationship between a woman and her horse creates a unique bond that is fundamental in any conversation about rodeo. Cowgirls refer to "the team aspect" of barrel racing, as they compete in unison with their horses; barrel racers emphasize "the horse's autonomy, showcase the barrel racers' respect for their mounts" (Weninger and Dallaire, 2017b, p. 10). Having confidence in themselves and remaining calm to help calm their horses are both aspects of the competition (Weninger & Dallaire, 2017b). In Weninger and Dallaire's (2017b) study, their participants, Canadian barrel racers, shared that establishing a connection between horse and rider was as important as the talents of both the horse and the rider (Weninger & Dallaire, 2017b). The relationship between a cowgirl and her horse is more

than just riding; it is the bond established during practices and care that enables a cowgirl and a horse to be successful. Similarly, some participants in my study mentioned their bond with their horses during our interactions.

Scholarship on Gender and Sport

This section of my literature review focuses on the scholarship surrounding the discussion of gender in sport. This relates to my study as rodeo is a sport and although research exists on rodeo examining how gender functions in other sports can open new areas of interest. Sports participation is often based on what members of a given culture have defined as socially acceptable for a specific gender (Hannon et al., 2009). As I begin my conversation, through scholarship, I must begin with a short discussion on the social construction of masculinity and femininity. Hawkesworth (2006) posits that masculinity and femininity are both cultural constructs of sexed bodies based on perceived differences between sexes that operate on multiple fields. An individual can exhibit multiple types of masculinity and/or femininity depending on their positioning in both time and space, therefore it may be more appropriate to speak of masculinities and femininities to understand its multiple forms (Carr, 2017; Connell, 1987).

Norms in Gendered Sports

Women traditionally participate in sports that emphasize grace and accuracy (Hannon et. al, 2009; Yip, 2018). In contrast, men dominate in sports that often require bodily contact, strength, and aggression to be successful (Hannon et. al, 2009; Yip, 2018). Anderson (2012) and Hannon et al. (2009) found that gendered performance in sport tends to depend heavily on a hegemonic social context, often regulating females to a more passive role on the sidelines while males participate more aggressively

(Anderson, 2012; Hannon et. al, 2009). Gender appropriateness for a sport, which is defined within the hegemonic social context, can be determined by how much a sport requires an athlete to challenge the social construct of gender through participation in it. Traditionally sports considered acceptable for female athletes emphasized individual competitions, such as gymnastics and figure skating, rather than team events. Sports deemed acceptable for women in accordance with gender stereotypes "tended to be individual activities that emphasized aesthetics, were pleasing to watch, involved accuracy but not strength, and did not involve bodily contact" (Hannon et. al, 2009, p. 677). This research corresponds to attitudes in the rodeo arena. Cowboys compete in more aggressive events.

Concepts that divide sports into the binary of male versus female participation create an invisible set of boundaries for individual athletes to cross, if they choose a sport that doesn't conform to gendered social norms. These boundaries contribute to the labeling of male as dominant and female as subordinate creating hegemonic masculinity (Yip, 2018). Connell (1987) defined hegemonic masculinity as a dominant form of masculinity which "is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women" (p. 183). Connell (1987) goes on to stipulate the hegemonic man is defined by a single fact, "the global dominance of men over women" (p. 183). By labeling certain sports as feminine, or even gender-neutral, society is implying that female athletes who choose to participate in only feminine or gender-neutral sports are "normal" and that becoming a "deviant" would imply participation in sports outside gendered norms. For example, some might label women competing in boxing as deviant in some respects (Yip, 2018).

Trolan (2013) argues that many have used the idea of woman as biologically and physically weaker than men extensively to justify the exclusion of women from certain sports and even to state that women who prefer those more "masculine" sports are promoting unfeminine traits. As is true of rodeo, men often monopolize the resources in sport, and the continued ideal that sport requires abilities that women do not possess has ensured that female participation remains low (Mierzwinski et al., 2014). Women in combat sports, such as boxing and mixed martial arts, have also fought against a medical discourse that argued that women needed to protect their bodies from violence to ensure reproductive capacity and fought against the perception revolving around perceived feminine ideals of passivity and weakness (Mierzwinski et al., 2014). One of Mierzwinski et al.'s (2014) participants stated, "that outside MMA she attempts to look, 'more girly…I think I make more effort to be more feminine…I need to remind people that I am a girl" (p. 80). To avoid deviating from the heterosexual and cisgendered norm, female athletes may feel compelled to highlight their heterosexuality off the court. Within the rodeo, barrel racers also often embrace excessive cisgendered markers of heterosexuality through clothing and other external methods; therefore, this topic corresponds to events in the rodeo. I addressed the topic of dress in sport earlier within this review of literature and discussed how some Canadian barrel racers found that certain dress codes define legitimacy within the arena (Weninger & Dallaire, 2017a).

The hyper-masculinity of surfing, as defined by pop culture through movies, books, and other types of media, has created an atmosphere where women are often isolated in the lineup (Bush, 2016; Waitt, 2008). Although the rules associated with surfing are not fixed, transparent, or defined, experiences teach these rules to those

involved with the sport, both male and female (Waitt, 2008). Bush (2016) found that women surfing with women alone experienced the lineup differently and found "that surfing with women is a very different experience than surfing alone or with other men; it is much more conversational and complementary" (p. 303). Bush (2016) illustrated that women often experience the rules associated with surfing differently than men and therefore create different types of gendered places among the waves.

Bush (2016) draws attention to how female surfers define their identities differently than male surfers. Bush (2016) found that male surfers focus on skill level while female surfers use commitment to the sport as a deciding factor. Both Bush (2016) and Plymoth (2012) found that men seem to measure surfing abilities based on performance. Alternately, "femininity" within sport of surfing is constructed based on community as women are understood as different from their male counterparts (Plymoth, 2012). Female surfers believed men automatically perceived them as less skilled surfers simply because they were female (Bush, 2016).

Racialized Spaces Within Sport

As discussed earlier in this chapter, minority rodeos exist that allow individuals spaces to be cowboy and also belong to a minority group. This section relates to my study as it examines racial segregation that occurs in sport which is applicable to rodeo arenas. U.S. sports are segregated, in that such sports as tennis, rodeos, hockey, and rugby reflect predominantly White athletes while such sports as basketball, football, and track have predominantly athletes of color. Azzarito et al. (2017) addressed how Whiteness influences ethnic-minority young peoples' self-image construction when their body types do not match normative images of success and physical fitness. A visual discourse about

a sport that includes an absence of diversity tells viewers that ethnic-minority bodies are not part of the world of fitness and therefore do not matter (Azzarito et al., 2017). The absence of diversity helps reinforce Whiteness norms and White male power.

Media representations of White, fit, bodies create an "ideal" through exclusion of bodies of color. In this way, ethnic-minority youth are forced "to see (or not to see) themselves through the colonizer's eye, working implicitly to devalue 'other' bodies while maintaining systems of privilege and oppression untouched at the macro level as well as at the micro level of individual experience" (Azzarito et al., 2017, p. 655). When Title IX was passed to address female equity in higher education with one area of concern being participation in sport, many hoped that African American females would benefit from increased offerings. However, increased offerings in sport at both the high school and collegiate levels instead included sports that drew more participants from White, middle-class groups of women because most of the sports added required individual monetary investments that often excluded minority participation (Pickett et al., 2012). The added expense insured that minority athletes still experienced an absence of representation on the field.

Scholarship on Informal Education

Another area of scholarship that connects to my study is nonformal and informal education and learning. I examined how cowgirls learned the unwritten rules of the arena and what factors contributed to their passion for the sport. It is important to understand the concept of informal learning which connects directly to the field of social foundations and my study. Social foundations is concerned with the relationships between all types of education, including informal, and society as a whole; this includes asking critical

questions about how education functions in society. Several definitions of informal learning exist. As mentioned in Chapter I, informal education is unplanned, spontaneous, and often used to teach appropriate behavior, attitudes, and norms for a culture (Bell, n.d.). Non-formal learning takes place in structured programs, outside of the school system that are designed to teach young people skills needed to fit into society (Council of Europe, n.d.). Non-formal programs need to be voluntary, accessible, and learner centered (Council of Europe, n.d.). In contrast, Marsick and Watkins (2011) define informal learning in terms of incidental learning, the "byproduct of some other activity, such as a task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction, sensing the organizational culture, trial-and-error experimentation, or even formal learning" (p. 25). Similarly, in my study, women learn the unwritten rules of the arena through families and rodeo practice without attending a formalized learning institution.

Rehm and Notten (2016) offer a definition for informal learning which includes three distinct types: implicit, reactive, and deliberative learning. Implicit learning occurs in an incidental manner without awareness of the process (Rehm & Notten, 2016). During reactive learning individuals are aware of the process, but learning occurs within a specific context while the participant is completing a given act (Rehm & Notten, 2016). Deliberative learning is different from the other two types in that the learner is aware that it is taking place and has sought out the experience (Rehm & Notten, 2016). Lastly, nonformal learning in the rodeo is events like clinics held at arenas, lessons in roping between friends, or individuals taking the time and effort to better their own skills through practice. Women in the rodeo learn implicit lessons through the expectations of

rodeo associations, announcers, spectators, and other rodeo contestants. Cowgirls learn the unwritten rules of the arena through emulation, competition, and trial-and-error.

Informal learning can take place anywhere, and the person, space, or experience that socializes one's behavior becomes the teacher. La Belle (1981) asserts "informal education is associated with either socialization in kin-based societies, in which the family is the dominant institution or the sort of education involving basic attitudes and values that occurs within the family in all societies" (p. 314). Many women in my study discuss learning rodeo etiquette from parents and other family members. This type of socialization directly relates to my study and I will return to it in Chapter VII.

Although family influence is a major type of informal education not all informal education is limited to the family's socialization. Informal learning is not passive; women and men do not simply receive the dominant culture's understandings and expectations, rather it is "an interactive process in which people negotiate meanings and identities" (Cain, 2002, p. 67). Cain (2002) adds that within informal learning settings (such as households), inequities exist as in formal learning environments (such as schools), especially along lines of gender and race, affecting experiences and outcomes.

Children are highly influenced by their parents regarding gender appropriate participation in sport, and parents are many times unaware of their influence and how detrimental it may be (Boiche et al., 2014). Both parents and the hegemonic culture that surrounds them transmit values and beliefs regarding gender that can be detrimental to girls' sports choices (Boiche et al., 2014). Beki and Gal (2013) found that a family tradition of participation in a sport, regardless of gender, could increase a child's participation when participating in both boxing and gymnastics because "the love of sport

was present in the families of all the interviewees, almost like a tradition" (p. 11). Parental opinions that dismiss the value of girls' participation in sports certainly may lead to decreased sports participation of young girls which leads to fewer women participating as adults. This relates to my study through the words of my participants. My participants often mentioned the influence of their parents regarding choices within the arena.

Socialization is a type of informal learning as it is learning how to behave in society. For children learning the unwritten rules of sports one of the main socialization factors is having parents interested in those sports as it increases the probability that children will participate in sport (Downward et al., 2014; Gustafson & Rhodes, 2006; Hayoz et al., 2019; Knight, 2019). Parents influence their children's participation in sport in several ways (Knight, 2019). MacPhail and Kirk (2006) postulated that parents influence their children's socialization and participation in sport through the introduction of a given sport. Children learn about sport involvement through their parents' previous participation. This is particularly relevant to my study as several of my participants come from a rodeo family tradition and in turn pass it on to their children.

Strandbu et al. (2020) use a quantitative approach to explore 'family sport culture' in the socialization of teenagers in sport. They define family sport culture as "a family culture with a strong affinity for sports, and it is relationship to youths' participation in club-organised sport" (Strandbu et al., 2020, p.931). Strandbu et al.'s (2020) major focus was on the importance of family sport culture during the teenage years. Lenartowicz (2016), while studying the socialization of Polish children in sports, found that family tradition was important. Children's involvement in sport often centered on parents' past practices and preferences. Although both studies focused on mainstream sports, their

findings relate to my study. The announcer at the beginning of each rodeo stresses rodeo family tradition, and my participants often mentioned their family history with rodeo or other equine activities.

Huang et al. (2019), through a quantitative study, found that the effects of friends and family on women's participation in sport are both significant and positive. The encouragement of both family and friends increases the participation of women in sports (Huang et al., 2019). Danioni et al. (2017) found that parental involvement is a significant predictor of children's sport value acceptance. Furthermore, Danioni et al. (2017) suggested that the quality of interaction between parents and children is key to the transmission of sport values; praise, understanding, and pressure to succeed are ways that parents can influence their children in sports. This factor seems more important than previous parental involvement in the sport. This relates to my study because of my participants' parental involvement in their rodeo journeys (see Chapter VII and VIII).

Most of the articles about socialization into sport discuss traditional sports and do not touch on rodeo, but Kiewra and Witte (2018) do highlight rodeo with one of their four participants. Kiewra and Witte (2018) used a qualitative approach to examine why four Nebraskan teens succeeded at sports, including rodeo. They found that parents play a pivotal role in four aspects of their children's talent development (Kiewra & Witte, 2018). Kiewra and Witte (2018) explored how parents influenced their children's success through: (1) introduction of the sport, (2) arranging appropriate coaching, (3) managerial and financial duties, and (4) supplying motivation and fostering a work ethic by expecting and modeling high achievement. They went on to suggest that parents should display their passions and talents to their children to foster interest and excellence in a

given sport (Kiewra & Witte, 2018, p. 177). This is relevant to my study as many of my participants openly discussed how their parents influenced their decision to rodeo.

Of the scholarship on rodeo, only a few articles address informal learning practices. Forsyth and Thompson (2007) do suggest that women's placement in barrel racing when they are technically free to enter other events is "more the result of informal social organization than formal exclusionary practices" (p. 401). Women learn that barrel racing is the appropriate event for them to enter. Additionally, Forsyth and Thompson (2007) found that ideas of heritage and tradition were considered by their participants as the reasons for the way the rodeo functions today. Forsyth and Thompson's (2007) work is deeply relevant to my study as several of my participants talked about heritage and tradition in rodeo. It is not unusual to hear those words expressed at the beginning of all rodeos by the announcer that narrates the predictable patterns of rodeo.

Another study that alludes to informal learning in reference to the rodeo is Adams (2016). Adams (2016), part of a larger study on race, class, and gender in the Southwest borderland region of the United States, discussed the sport of children's rodeo and how it combined the notions of play and work to teach contestants about their Western heritage. Adams (2016) explains what rodeo teaches young children in the rural area of Magdalena, New Mexico. Children's rodeo teaches work responsibilities, values and character traits, the value of family support, and gendered norms (Adams, 2016). Adams (2016) explains that "rodeo sanctifies a way of life still lived and honored by households that speckle the plains and high country of the West, a way of life where the past and present converge in the image of a young roper" (p. 330). Adams' (2016) work is relevant to my study as many of my participants learned rodeo traditions from their

family; they grew up in the rodeo. My participants often discussed tradition, skills learned from parents, and how hard work was needed to tend to rodeo livestock which I discuss more in Chapters VII and VIII.

Conclusion

The studies reviewed in this literature review provide an understanding of the scholarship and concepts concerning the hegemonic factors affecting women and other marginalized groups in sports and specifically in the rodeo arena. Sports, in general, are racialized and gendered spaces. Although scholars have noted that the rodeo itself is a particularly gendered, racialized, and sexualized sport's space where White masculinity is celebrated and promoted, rodeo arenas exist where non-normative ideals can be explored and enacted.

In contrast to Patton and Schedlock's historical work, *Gender, Whiteness, and Power in the Rodeo Breaking Away from the Ties of Sexism and Racism*, this study will focus on the contemporary stories of cowgirls in the rodeo, referencing the history of rodeo for contextual purposes only. This study will fill a gap by bringing to light the cowgirls' experiences in the rodeo. This study will contribute to contemporary knowledge about cowgirls, specifically in understanding how they negotiate the arena.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter reviews the epistemology, feminist theoretical perspective, narrative inquiry methodology, and methods of my research. My research revolves around cowgirls and their experiences regarding the gendered rodeo arena. In this chapter, I will discuss my problem statement/puzzle, inquiry questions, the rationale for using narrative inquiry, a constructionist epistemology, and a feminist theoretical perspective. I will also discuss the methodology of narrative inquiry. I will describe methods used to collect data, as well as the analytic process. I will also discuss my reflexivity, analysis process, writing choices for sharing my meaning making, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study.

Problem Statement/Puzzle

The history of this masculinized sport and the restricted roles of women within the rodeo leads me to the problem statement from which this study emerged. Little research has been conducted on women's experiences in contemporary rodeo or the role of rodeo as a form of informal education. Literature about women in the rodeo has focused on the historical context of rodeo, history of the rodeo queens, and specifically

Canadian barrel racers (Burbick, 2007; Patton & Schedlock, 2012; Weninger & Dallaire, 2017 a & b). Scholars have published minimal work on informal education of women in relation to the arena (Forsyth and Thompson, 2007; Weninger & Dallaire, 2017b). It is important to know about the types of informal education that lead women to the rodeo and that women experience within it. Exploring these concepts will help us expand our knowledge about the diversity of learning experiences and the gendered experiences of cowgirls. This knowledge will help us unpack the myth of the White, masculine cowboy while understanding how cowgirls navigate riding through the male dominated arena.

My study is also based on a research puzzle. Narrative inquiry research as discussed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) begins with a research puzzle that develops from a sense of wonder. They believe that "narrative inquiry characteristically begins with the researcher's autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the *research puzzle*" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 41). In contrast to a research problem that has the expectation of solutions and clear boundaries, a research puzzle entails "more of a sense of a search, a 're-search,' a searching again" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124). Instead of focusing on a defined problem, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) allow for the continued exploration and reformulation that accompanies narrative inquiry. My research puzzle came from my considerations of rodeos' rules and culture. As I began spending more time at rodeos, I found myself asking fellow competitors and my friends a series of what I call "why" questions. Why don't both women and men enter this event? Why doesn't equality exist within the arena? Why is it done THIS way? What do women learn while competing in the rodeo? I wondered what rodeo would be like if everyone entered the arena with equal opportunities to compete.

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) expressed that "a narrative inquirer's first consideration is essentially an act of imagination. She or he must imagine the chosen topic, along with possible participants, as existing in an ever shifting space" (p. 481). I began thinking about why cowgirls continue to compete in the rodeo and why I continued to compete. What drives them to compete in the limited events open to them? What does rodeo offer the women who compete? What does it offer me? Why do these strong, vibrant women not protest louder about the inequity they find in the arena? What do women learn about gender and navigation techniques that allows them to thrive in the arena? Like Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stipulated, my puzzles changed as my research progressed, I found my puzzle evolving "day to day and week to week" (p. 73). Each interview, each narrative, shifted my puzzle as the long work of a dissertation unfolded.

Little research is conducted on women's experiences in the male-dominated and masculinist arena of rodeo. Further, little research with the exceptions of Adams (2016) and Forsyth and Thompson (2007) focuses on the arena as an educational space. What do women learn about rodeo as they are socialized into it, and what do they learn within it? My research touches on this area of concern as many of my participants discuss how their family influenced their rodeo education.

Purpose

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to "re-present" my participants' rodeo stories, illustrating and unpacking the meaning in the masculinized arena they narrated. I bring awareness both to women's experiences in rodeo from their perspectives and to the power dimensions that rodeo women negotiate to straddle in their saddles. By

identifying gendered components of their experiences in the masculinized sport of rodeo, my research illuminated ways cowgirls either address or do not acknowledge the inequities they experienced both inside and outside the arena, including gaining complete access to all rodeo competitions. Additionally, my research highlights areas of informal learning that take place within the sport of rodeo.

Inquiry Questions

1. What is the storied reality of cowgirls who perform in the predominantly White, male rodeo arena?
2. How do women navigate the masculinized arena of rodeo?
3. What do cowgirls learn in the arena?

Epistemology: Constructionism

My research question and my perception of the world fit within constructionist epistemology, for meanings only emerge "when consciousness engages with them" (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). As humans engage with their reality(ies), they produce definitions and social constructions associated with those realities to create knowledge. I used constructionism as an orientation to conduct my research and to understand the meanings cowgirls constructed through their social interactions when competing in the arena. I examined the multiple realities cowgirls created while considering the context of each participants' story, recognizing that different experiences lead to different interpretations. Those differences are not "merely quaint viewpoints that throw the 'true' or 'valid' interpretation into clearer relief" (Crotty, 1998, p. 47). Instead of pursuing one "truth," I considered all viewpoints having validity and worth. Thus, "different ways of viewing the world, shape different ways of researching the world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 66).

Theoretical Perspective

I have applied a feminist theoretical perspective because masculine hegemonic tendencies are deeply rooted in historical rodeo cultural traditions (Burbick, 2007; Ford, 2020; Kim et al., 2017; Parkinson, 2020; Patton & Schedlock, 2012; Toy, 2012). Traditional gender roles are part of the historical, patriarchal past that has shaped current rodeo culture (Burbick, 2007; Ford, 2020; Kim et al., 2017; Parkinson, 2020; Patton & Schedlock, 2012; Toy, 2012). Crotty (1998) states that a feminist theoretical perspective calls "current ideology into question, and initiate action, in the case of social justice" (p. 157). My study is situated on gender and power within the rodeo arena. My theoretical perspective informs my methodology and the way I carry out my study. The purpose of this study was not to generalize cowgirl experiences but to "re-present" my participants' rodeo stories, illustrating and unpacking the meaning they narrated about the masculinized arena.

For example, why are women relegated to only specific events? Why are there rodeo queens and princesses but not kings and princes? What forces govern, socialize, and teach the gendered expectations and expressions associated with the rodeo? What types of freedoms are women experiencing the rodeo? What do women enjoy in the arena? One of the tenets of a feminist theoretical perspective is "an abiding concern with issues of power and oppression" (Crotty, 1998, p. 157), which this study highlights. While applying this perspective, I must also be aware that power structures evolve at the intersection of gender and other minority statuses. This informs my methodology in creating an awareness to those structures while conducting interviews and interacting with my participants. I strived to create situations where my participants felt empowered and safe to share their storied lives with me. Social inequity is not shaped by a single type

of power differential but grows from the intersection of multiple forces that work with and against each other (Collins & Bilge, 2016). In my research, I must consider not only gender but also race and other less respected masculinities within the arena.

Aligned with my theoretical perspective, in this narrative inquiry project, I approach the project as a woman participating in the co-construction of knowledge with other women, hoping to understand how women navigate the masculinized rodeo arena and what aspects of informal learning influence that process. This research is a feminist project; I have placed gendered experiences in a masculinized sport at the center of my work. Feminist inquiry often includes an agenda to facilitating critique as well as some type of social change (Patton, 2015). Nast (1994) contends

> that feminist scholars engage in fieldwork as a means of resisting patriarchy and other forms of domination in ways that are congruent with women's experiences. This is not to essentialize "woman" or any other marginalized "other" by to acknowledge the fact that historical and material (including bodily) conditions of oppression carried through patriarchy, racism, heterosexism, and capitalism, and so on foster different ways of knowing or epistemologies that affect how we (whomever we are and wherever and however we are positioned) negotiate the world and how we resist those in power. (p. 60)

My goal with this study was to work with rodeo women and to "re-present" the cowgirls' rodeo stories, illustrating and unpacking the meaning shared in the gendered rodeo arena they narrated. Therefore, I employed a feminist theoretical perspective.

Narrative Inquiry

A qualitative approach was appropriate for exploring cowgirls' experiences because it opens a window "into the stories of individuals to capture and understand their perspectives" (Patton, 2015, p. 8). Qualitative inquiry is well suited to illuminating "unintended consequences and side effects" (Patton, 2015, p. 10) which is helpful when discussing the prevalence of inequities in the cowgirls' participation in rodeo events. A qualitative approach allowed me, the researcher, to conduct interviews that revealed the cowgirls' "real world in their own words, from their own perspective[s], and within their own contexts" (Patton, 2015, p. 12). In this study, a qualitative approach was critical for exploring the stories that women narrate about their participation in the rodeo.

My qualitative methodology was narrative inquiry. There are many varieties of narrative inquiry, but I am interested in "re-presenting" my participants' rodeo stories as a pathway to illustrate and unpack meanings in the masculinized arena. Clandinin and Murphy (2009) presented a defense of narrative inquiry "as a methodology inquiring into storied experiences" (p. 598). This viewpoint aligns with my project. The question exists of why I chose narrative inquiry over other qualitative methods. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) helped me answer that question within their text:

> For us, narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience. Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it. (p. 18)

I wanted to understand cowgirls' experiences within the rodeo arena through the stories they chose to share with me. I needed a methodology that allowed me to co-construct

with my participants an understanding of the experiences they shared. Narrative inquiry was a way to dynamically enter the arena of their lives.

Additionally, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) explained that "narrative inquiries explore the stories people live and tell. These stories are the result of a confluence of social influences on a person's inner life, social influences on their environment, and their unique personal history" (p. 41). Cowgirls in this study experience the rodeo uniquely, and their stories emerge, through narratives, from the mixing of various social experiences. As I sought to understand each storied reality, narrative inquiry was the place to begin.

Narrative inquiry focuses on the lived experience of participants and the relationship between participant and researcher. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) explored the purpose of narrative inquiry as focused on "describing the way people go about making sense of their experience within these contexts, and contributing to that ongoing sensemaking, is the purpose of narrative inquiry" (p. 45). Cowgirls love to tell stories, and those stories are deeply rooted in their experiences within the rodeo arena.

My participants shared their stories with me as a fellow cowgirl and as a researcher. This process enhanced the relationship between my participants and me as I listened to their stories, chose how to present their narratives, and in turn made meaning of them. The depth of that relationship of researcher and participants is another hallmark of narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) shared that "narrative inquirers are always in an inquiry relationship with participants' lives. They cannot subtract themselves from relationship" (p. 69). Determining how to navigate that relationship was important in my growth as a narrative inquirer.

Narrative inquiry evolves from a puzzle; a puzzle that begins in the researchers' understanding of the world. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) say that "a narrative inquirer's first consideration is essentially an act of imagination" (p. 481). I had to consider my chosen topic of the rodeo, the participants, and the space my participants occupied (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The phenomenon of narrative inquiry begins with "topics that press in on the inquirer" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 125). My evolution to narrative inquiry began in a course on body politics. The course required me to complete embodied field notes, and I chose a project enmeshed in the rodeo and in my rodeo experience. At the time, I was just beginning my rodeo journey and was just beginning to learn the unwritten rules of the rodeo arena. This represented the first time I considered rodeo as a viable research topic. As I finished the field notes, I realized that I had questions about the women participating in the rodeo, including myself. Those questions evolved into the puzzle for this research.

Clandinin et al. (2007) describe the three types of justification that researchers must deal with for narrative inquiry projects: personal, practical, and social. The personal justification surrounds the importance of the researcher's placement within the study (Clandinin et al., 2007). I am a rodeo participant; I live the rodeo lifestyle although I did not grow up in a rodeo family. Due to my insider knowledge of the rodeo, I am uniquely placed to do this research and to ask the questions of cowgirls. I have watched and learned from cowgirls. The questions addressed in my study illuminate part of my life.

Practical justification addresses how the project will change both the researcher's and others' practices (Clandinin et al., 2007). I struggle with answering this justification for a narrative inquiry project. I would hope that by just telling their stories cowgirls

might come to recognize their agency in the rodeo. Additionally, I believe that cowgirls enjoy sharing their stories with others and this project encouraged them to give voice to their experiences. The women in my study speak of tradition and family. Only Mona seemed to narrate the desire to educate her fellow competitors about the boundaries she faced in the male dominated arena. Social justification concerns larger educational and social issues (Clandinin et al., 2007). The social issues in my research examine how cowgirls story their realties. My research also seeks to understand the types of informal learning process that cowgirls narrate about their participation in the rodeo arena.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discussed that narrative inquirers should focus on four directions of inquiry: inward and outward, backward and forward. Inward focuses on "internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). What did the cowgirls feel as they experienced the rodeo arena? Outward focuses on the environment or existential conditions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). How did cowgirls experience the environment of the rodeo arena? Backward and forward is once again focusing on the temporal aspects of storied experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is important that narrative researchers ask questions that explore all four of these areas. The narratives my participants shared attend to all four of these aspects. Cowgirls shared the past, the present, and their hopes of future rodeos with me during this process. My interview questions asked them to think about the rodeo arena as a place, as well as how they understood the rodeo.

What were cowgirls feeling, what was the environment they were in when they experienced it, and when did it occur? I strived to engage with my participants in understanding the experience they shared. To complete this project, I had to fall more in

love with the rodeo and my cowgirls. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated that narrative inquirers need to be fully engrossed; "must 'fall in love' with their participants, yet they must also step back and see their own stories in the inquiry, the stories of the participants, as well as the larger landscape on which they all live" (p. 81). Tension arising in the need to step forward and backwards, falling in and out of love, is co-constructed between participant and researcher and fundamental to the evolution of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) define five areas of tension that occur at the boundaries of narrative inquiry: temporality, people, action, certainty, and context. They detail that temporality of narrative thinking emphasizing that "any event, or thing, has a past, a present as it appears to us, and an implied future" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 29). Rodeo has a past rooted in masculine domination, a present as it appears now, and hopefully an implied future to implement changes to give women more opportunities. My participants shared narratives that addressed rodeo in the past and how it has evolved; they also shared hopes for future engagement in the sport. The second tension involves the point that people evolve with time and undergo instances of personal change. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasize that narrating a person in terms of their transformation is important.

The third tension is action and is often seen as a narrative sign; it is necessary to take the time to "give a narrative interpretation of that sign before meaning can be attached to it" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 31). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) illuminate that researchers need to understand all interpretations as tentative, realizing that other interpretations or explanations are possible. Lastly, context is fundamental to

understanding everything and "is necessary for making sense of any person, event, or thing" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 32). I placed emphasis on the storied experiences told by cowgirls that took place in the past, the present, and their hopes for the future of the sport which situated my work strongly within narrative thinking as defined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000).

Participants

I included ten women in this study, six White women and four Native American women. Participants in this study emerged through two different types of sampling: opportunity and purposeful. I recruited all women with purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling "focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (Patton, 2015, p. 264). Women approached for interviews had a history in the rodeo arena and are either current or were past competitors. I also used opportunity sampling. Opportunity sampling takes advantage of opportunities that occur during fieldwork (Patton, 2015). Talking to women entered in the same rodeos that I entered allowed for the identification of potential participants. I rodeo with most of these women on weekly basis. Most were my friends or my competitors, which is common practice when research is conducted from a relational or feminist perspective. They were all strong, amazing cowgirls who live the rodeo life. They chase the lines of the highway, going from one rodeo to the next during the summer months, and spend the winter training new horses and resting for the next season. Their ages and ethnicities varied, as did their experiences. I was able to use key rodeo associations' websites to consider who I interviewed at the rodeo because the websites list participants' names and current standings.

The participants of my study came from a wide range of experiences in the rodeo and in rodeo events including barrel racing, breakaway roping, tie down roping, team roping, goat roping, poles, ribbon roping, saddle bronc riding, and the raising and training of bucking bulls. Additionally, all but one of my participants entered open rodeos, 20% entered high school rodeos, 30% had entered college rodeos, 10% the Senior Pro circuit, 80% had entered a pro rodeo (associated with an association like CRRA, ACRA, IPRA), 30% had entered Black rodeos although none identified as Black, and 30% entered Native American rodeos. The following figures represent narrators' ethnicity and age ranges.

Figure 1

Ethnicity of Participants

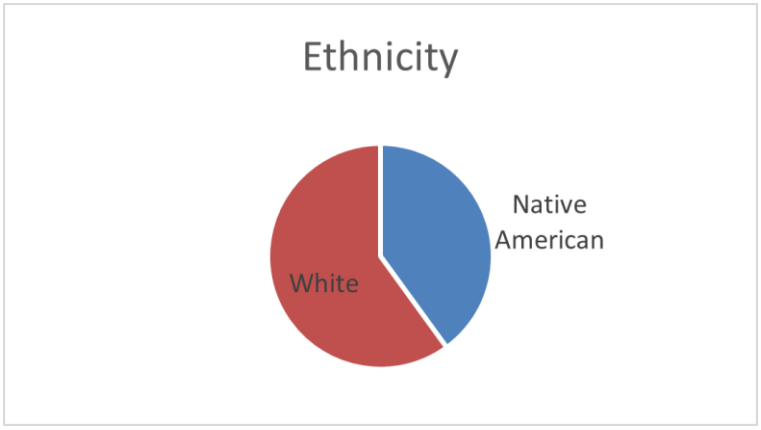
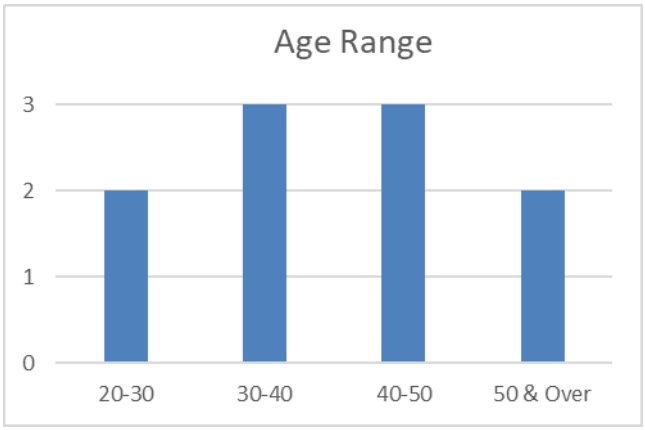


Figure 2

Age Range of Participants at Time of Interviewing



Data Collection

Collection of data occurred in a variety of ways to deepen the understanding of my study which will increase the quality and credibility of my work. Different data sets came from four different sources: observations, interviews, artifacts, and photo elicitation. The primary data source was interviews. The collection of data started with artifacts from rodeo websites, then rodeo observations, and interviews and photo elicitation completed the sequence.

Artifacts

Artifacts allow a researcher to expand his/her knowledge of a phenomenon without interaction. It is a type of unobtrusive measure "made without the knowledge of people being observed and without affecting what is observed" (Patton, 2015, p. 375). I analyzed several rodeo association websites to discover which events allow female participants, the amount of money paid at individual rodeos, and how many different participants compete in each event. These results illuminated trends in payouts and the order of events at various rodeos. In addition, Facebook pages and magazine adverts

provided opportunities to analyze dominant portrayals of race, ethnicity and gender in rodeo materials. I also reviewed videotaped rodeo events that are available to the public. These "texts" offer the advantage of being "readily available—in more cases more available than people to interview or events to observe" (Whitt, 1992, p. 452). I used these types of artifacts to analyze the ways women were portrayed in the arena and how those ways compare to how the women interviewed portray themselves.

Observations

I used the internet to identify rodeos near me so that I could conduct observations. Adler and Adler (1994) concluded that observations may include the recording of data for future review, but the researcher must actively witness the phenomenon that they are studying. Thus, I was a participant observer at various rodeos, which included open rodeos and all-Black rodeos.

I completed two types of observations: observations when I went to rodeos simply to observe the events taking place and observations where I also entered the rodeo. The second experience, when I was also entered in the rodeo, allowed me to have a behind-the-scenes experience rather than solely observing events. Observing behind the scenes allowed me to include both "depth and detail in the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those activities, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspectives of those observed" (Patton, 2015, p. 332). These observations allowed me to increase my awareness of which cowgirls entered various rodeos and how they functioned within the arena. Participant observation allowed me to develop an understanding of the situation and to better

"understand and capture the context within which people interact—for understanding context is essential to a holistic perspective" (Patton, 2015, p. 332).

The time spent for each observation varied, ranging from one to four hours, I observed two rodeos in which I was not completing and stayed on site for two hours. Additionally, I observed two rodeos in which I completed in the "slack" after the main performance and was at the arena for four hours ("slack" is when overflow cowgirls/cowboys compete after the rodeo performance). These occurred during the summer and fall of 2019. I strategized my participation with barrel racing and observation. I used the observations to note gender differences in the arena, refine interview questions, and triangulate.

Photo-elicitation

Photographs were another type of artifact used in data collection. Photo-elicitation is a visual method that has emerged as photography has become more common in our society. Using a photograph as a research tool can "prompt different kinds of talk from other interview methods" (Rose, 2016, p. 315). Researchers use photo-elicitation to create "sites in which the interviewees (and interviewers) perform their social identity by, in part making and talking about the photograph they have taken" (Rose, 2016, p. 323). I decided to include this method because our world is engulfed in images, and media is one of the most salient institutions on socializing or educating society in norms. Photographs are embedded in our lives, and as the saying goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words."

Rose (2016) details the four key strengths of photo-elicitation: it offers different insights than traditional methods, interviews using photos can stimulate different types of conversations, these types of interviews help explore the everyday items in participants'

lives, and it often leads to participant empowerment. My participants and I used photos as a jumping off spot, a place to begin a conversation that we may not have had without the image to guide us. I wanted my participants to think back over their lives and to bring images that said to them "This is a cowgirl".

Photo-elicitation, in my study, included both a photograph supplied by the cowgirl and a short discussion between my participant and me about what the photograph represented to the cowgirl (Rose, 2016). During the recruitment process, I asked the participants to supply photographs about their experiences in the rodeo with written descriptions that I would then analyze. Although I asked each participant to supply a written description of the photos, the three (of ten) participants who supplied photographs preferred to discuss their reasoning during the interview process, although an additional participant did narrate a description of photographs of her childhood experiences. The remaining six participants did not feel comfortable supplying photographs. None of the six participants explained why they did not want to supply photos and I did not push the issue. I wanted to make sure I honored each woman's decision. I did not provide examples of photographs as I wanted to hear the cowgirl's opinion rather than influence their choices with my own. The cowgirls' photographs focused on her either competing or with her livestock. When the three participants and I discussed their photographs, the visual aids were important for developing our conversation. I asked the women these questions:

1. How does this photograph address the gendered rodeo arena?
2. What does this photograph mean to you?
3. Why did you choose this particular photograph?

4. What photograph did you want to show me that you could not find? And why would that photograph be important?

For three participants, these photographs became part of the narrative process and opened windows into my participant's experiences. The conversations about the photographs that were supplied led to different conversations and more in-depth stories. These additional conversations are melded into the presented narratives and did contribute to the data analyzed in Chapter VII.

Interviews

I conducted in-depth interviews with cowgirls who competed in either or all the following: open, all-Black, all-Indian, and pro rodeos (any rodeo that requires membership in an association). I used in depth interviews to

> uncover participants' descriptions of their experiences related to such things as how experiences influenced the decisions they made, whether participants had a change of mind or a shift in attitude, whether they described more of a constancy of purpose, what elements relative to their objectives participants perceived as important, and to what extent those objectives were met (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 106).

I wanted to interview cowgirls in order "to find from them those things that we cannot directly observe and to understand what we've observed" (Patton, 2015, p. 426). More importantly, each interview illuminated the unique perspective that each cowgirl had of the arena and gendered rodeo culture. It was important to truly listen to the story (Poindexter, 2002). With each interview, approximately one hour in length, I became more aware of the experiences of cowgirls. Each interview led to the modification of

questions as common narratives emerged. Utilizing good interviewing skills allowed me to practice listening and "really hearing" the answers (Patton, 2015, p. 427). After each interview, I allowed time to record my reflections about the interview process and any additional thoughts that I considered during the interview.

Each interview evolved organically into a discussion between the participant and me. Although not all my participants have competed with me at local events, being a barrel racer supplied me with a common vernacular. I asked the following questions to elicit the cowgirls' stories of the rodeo arena:

1. How would you define what it means to be a cowgirl?
2. Can you describe your experience as a cowgirl in the rodeo? What are the stories that stand out?
3. Have you had any experiences in the rodeo where you feel you were treated in a distinct way because of being a girl/woman? If so, could you describe to me those situations?
4. Have you had any experiences in the rodeo where you feel you were treated in a distinct way because of being Native/Black/Hispanic? If so, could you describe to me those situations?
5. When did you first consider yourself a cowgirl? Was there an event or situation in which this happened? If so, could you tell me more about it/them?
6. Describe your earliest memory you have of rodeo. How old were you?
7. If all rodeo events were open to cowgirls, which event would you compete in and why?

8. Do you ever feel like there are certain places or spaces at the rodeo where women or people of color are not welcome? If so, which ones?
9. Do you ever feel like there are certain places or spaces at the rodeo where women or people of color are more welcome? If so, which ones?
10. If you could change anything about the rodeo, what would you change and why?

My interview questions reflected the spirit of narrative inquiry as I sought to encourage cowgirls to share their storied reality about the rodeo with me. Each cowgirl had a unique perspective to share. At times, my participants had difficulty relaxing into the interview. Each of the women in my study narrated doubt in their ability to share content of importance. I strived to put each participant at ease during the process, trying to take their mind off the recorder and focus our discussions on the stories they shared. During the interviews, I often asked for more information about a topic and probed for explanations when needed to deepen the story. Riessman (2008) discussed interviews as narrative occasions and stipulated that the goal "is to generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements" (p. 23). I believe that treating the interview experience as a conversation between friends allowed me to achieve the meaty conversations needed to construct knowledge with my participants. I found these methods successful; most rich stories were shared after my participants forgot about the recorder and relaxed. Doucet and Mauthner (2007) discussed that although power differentials between researcher and participants cannot be erased, they can be lessened by creating a friendly atmosphere which I strived to do; my efforts were best observed when my participants relaxed. The stories shared towards the end of the interviews were often the ones that illustrated how informal learning was part of my participants' rodeo experience.

Interviews took place in person at rodeos, at the homes of my participants, and at hotels while on the rodeo road. One interview took place via phone as the distance between me and the participant was too great to travel. During interviews at rodeos, it was not unusual for interruptions to occur. As mentioned specifically in Fancy Jo's narrative, other cowboys and cowgirls often stopped by to catch up during the interview process. We simply paused and restarted as needed. Mona, the one interview conducted by phone, had two individuals in the room with her during the interview. At times, she conferred with her friends as she answered the questions. Each participant was invested in the process and often asked for updates on my dissertation journey. The women whose rodeo stories are shared within this document truly are joint owners of this document.

I transcribed the interviews in a timely manner, as soon as possible after the interview took place. To Poindexter (2002), who wrote about narrative inquiry, transcription is not simply a mechanical event but an important process in the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and the participant. Field notes taken during the interviews added to the transcriptions and helped deliver a more detailed picture of the conversation. Naturalized transcription included "as much detail as possible" (Oliver et al., 2005, p. 3). This transcription approach decreased the risk of misrepresentation, as "one moves more closely to actually-existing speech" (Oliver et al., 2005, p. 3).

I followed up with short member checks for accuracy and clarification. I gave each cowgirl the option to review both their transcripts and finished narrative. This occurred as soon as possible after the initial interview. I used member checking for follow-up questions, written in the margins of transcriptions, or inserted as comments in

Microsoft Word, seeking clarification or further information. Although I sent transcripts to all participants to review, many did not respond. By asking questions in the margin of transcriptions, I gained another opportunity to explore each participant's narratives. I hoped to use member checking to elicit additional information, but this process did not occur as hoped. I did email/text participants when I had significant questions about their transcriptions, and they responded. I was lucky to have participants who were engaged in my journey. After the interviews were complete, I then wrote the narratives of each cowgirl (see Chapters IV-VI). I followed each participant's lead in writing their narratives. I let each cowgirl tell her own story transitioning from past, present, to future as they desired. I wanted their lived experiences told in their voices.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is a genre of analytic frames used to interpret stories from data collection. Riessman (2008) emphasizes that "a good narrative analysis prompts the reader to think beyond the surface of a text, and there is a move toward a broader commentary" (p. 13). Establishing the truth of an event is not the goal of narrative inquiry; narratives are not used to establish the truth associated with an experience; narratives are the participants' reflections on the world, as they know it (Riessman, 2008). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) believe that "there is no one bringing together of field texts into research texts" (p. 133) but instead many steps between the two. There is a positioning back and forth between field text and the final presentation negotiated between researcher and participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Although that process did not occur as I hoped with member checks, my goal remained to "re-present" the cowgirls' rodeo stories, illustrating and unpacking the meaning in the gendered rodeo

arena they narrated. The next paragraphs will detail my experiences making meaning from the stories women shared during the interview process.

My process for making meaning from my interviews began with the transcripts. As each interview was transcribed, I spent time with the text looking through each interview to find what I considered meaty sections. I then copied those sections onto index cards and wrote a potential topic on the back. I am a very tactile individual and having a physical representation of my data that I could touch and manipulate was important. This process focused on thematic analysis; according to Riessman (2008) "all narrative inquiry is, of course, concerned with content— 'what' is said, written, or visually shown—but in thematic analysis, content is the exclusive focus" (p. 53). I was interested in what my participants said, not how it was shared.

After the interviews were transcribed, I began the process of immersing myself in my data. I would spend time organizing and reorganizing my index cards into like groups looking for commonalty. The 'sorting' of my index cards was not a quick process. Time was spent reading, moving cards from one position to the next, then re-reading, and at times it felt like I would never finish. This was a way of immersing myself in my data. My index cards became a physical representation of the stories my participants told. I utilized an inductive approach, looking for codes to emerge from the raw data. I was not only concerned with the similarities but also with outliers that stood apart from the other participants. After repeated sorting, themes emerged that are presented in Chapters IV-VII. Analysis of the themes was completed using some aspects of feminist theory and other theories as the data deserved. I used various theorists to create my analysis as subthemes required different pathways to understanding.

Narrative Representation

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), writing research text begins with tension and, I would add, fear. What will I do with the hours of interviews and field notes, who is my audience and what will they get from reading my text, how will I preserve the voice of my participants? I needed to explore and value all these questions. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) summed up part of my struggle perfectly:

> Part of the writer's uncertainty comes from knowing, and caring for, specific participants. Abstract theoretical categories might be uppermost prior to the research, but participants, and one's relationship to them, are key by the time the research text is to be written. The researcher learns that people are never only (nor even a close approximation to) any particular set of isolated theoretical notions, categories, or terms. They are people in all their complexity. They are people living storied lives on storied landscapes. (p. 145)

I want my work to fully represent my participants. I want my participants to recognize themselves in the work. Like Kiesinger (1998) I wanted to write in ways that would show the lives of my participants. I wanted the words and experiences of my participants to be center stage (see Chapters IV-VI).

Writing the narrative versions of my interviews was both freeing and restrictive. As I began writing, I wanted each narrative to stand alone. Each of the cowgirls in my study have their own storied existence. I attempted to write rich, thick narratives that folded the cowgirls' own words into a verbal representation of the woman (see Chapters IV-VI). I wanted readers to be able to visualize these women after reading their stories. Part of the process was assigning pseudonyms to each cowgirl. I offered to let them pick

their own names, and only one did so. Trying to rebrand each cowgirl was honestly the hardest part of writing. How do you rename someone? I promised each cowgirl anonymity. To organize my narratives, I separated them into three chapters grouped by the events my participants identify as their focus in the rodeo. Chapter IV focuses on barrel racers: cowgirls who compete solely in barrel racing and self-identify with the event. Chapter V focuses on the breakaway ropers and represents half of my participants. Each participant in Chapter V has also participated in other events. Chapter VI focuses on Bella and Mona, my only two participants to identify with rough stock events.

As I began writing, I presented each narrative to my writing group. My writing group read, offered edits, and discussed each narrative with me. We searched for wording that needed defining, phrases that were unusual, and points that needed clarifying. I tried to bring the rodeo to life with written word. I often searched for ways to describe the textures and smells of the arena. Then I grouped those narratives.

Even now, it is difficult to write about my process, not because I do not know or understand why I made certain choices but because I am protective of "my" cowgirls. These women, their stories, their lives are part of my narrative. Their stories represent a labor of love; I want the world to *see* these women and to understand the strength of character they all possess. So, saddle up and join me for this ride.

Ethical Considerations

When beginning a research project, researchers must first address ethical considerations. I complied with guidelines set up by the Institutional Review Board at Oklahoma State University. Although Oklahoma State University's IRB procedure is robust, according to Connelly and Clandinin (2006) in narrative inquiry projects

"inquirers must deepen the sense of what it means to undertake a life study and to live in relation in an ethical way" (p. 483). Considerations must be taken to understand the relationship between participants and the completed research text. Each cowgirl was assigned a pseudonym (if she did not select her own); I emphasized that they could withdraw their participation in this study at any time. I provided written consent forms to sign before any interviews took place. After I transcribed the interviews, I offered the participants the opportunity to read their transcriptions and to correct or amend to ensure accuracy. I stored all data gathered from this project on a password-protected computer located within a locked office; I will destroy all data after five years.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of qualitative research is typically based on credibility, reliability, and dependability. Credibility ensures that the participants' perceptions are adequately and accurately portrayed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 112). However, in narrative inquiry, different types of conversations must be had. Riessman (2008) argues that narrative research is "not a simply a factual reporting of events, but instead one articulation told from a point of view that seeks to persuade others to see the events in a similar way" (p. 187). A narrative research project should contain data that is presented so that the analytic work is "plausible, reasonable, and convincing" (Riessman, 2008, p. 191). To create trustworthiness in my work, according to Glesne (2016), I needed to do the following: (1) engage in prolong, persistent observations, (2) create rich, thick descriptive text relying on interview transcripts, (3) use member checking, (4) be clear about my own bias and subjectivity, and (5) use peer review and debriefing. These are all steps that I took during my research process.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that the criteria that narrative inquirers need to consider is under continued development. First, we must be aware that writing a research text does not concern fact or fiction and, "in a different time, in a different social situation, and for different purposes, a different research text might be written. There is no ultimate finality, or limiting truth in the particular research texts written" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 485). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) indicate that we must consider the audience of our text when writing, but researchers need to be careful to write to both their participants and their intended audience.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) end their text *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* with a charge for narrative inquirers to exhibit *"wakefulness".* Being wakeful implies an "ongoing reflection" about the entire research process from a researcher's beginning puzzle to the final research text (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As a researcher, I was required to consider the stories being told, the writing of field notes, the composition of research text, and my continued concern with my use of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Throughout the research process, I utilized peer debriefing by asking my peers to read my work and provide feedback. My peer group consisted of 4 other doctoral students; we typically met every two weeks to discuss our journeys. These peers also considered my assumptions and helped me explore varied ways of approaching the problem (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). I used peer debriefing at every step of the research process: research question formation, field notes, document analysis, interview transcriptions, photography analysis, and findings. Peer debriefing facilitated discussion

and personal growth. Having a sounding board was helpful in maintaining a critical perspective in the research process.

Creating reflective statements to accompany my field notes allowed me as a narrative researcher to slip in and out of intimacy with my participants; "being in the field allows intimacy. Composing and reading field texts allows one to slip out of intimacy for a time" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 82). As a narrative inquirer, I was situated to create meaning with my participants, to be enmeshed within their stories. Throughout this process, I created reflective statements to go with each data collection; these statements were small notes tucked in odd places that helped me be aware of the many feelings/ideas that accompanied this journey. Self-reflection allowed me to examine the way I am involved with the research process, how my perspectives are both similar and different from my participants, and the many ways I interacted with my participants to facilitate the construction of knowledge. I acknowledge that my experiences influence the research because "different ways of viewing the world shape different ways of researching the world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 66), and this is part of my constructionist epistemology. My viewpoints influenced how I interacted with the participants, (re-) phrased my interview protocol, and interpreted my stories. Addressing this self-awareness took place in the notes I wrote throughout the research process. This type of self-awareness is an example of having an 'autoethnographic sensibility' as described by Butz and Besio (2004), acknowledging that my involvement with research participants "acts upon-or intervenes in" (p. 354) the production of knowledge. I acknowledge that power relations influence my participants. My work, undertaken with a feminist

perspective, should put women at center of the study and strive to empower and benefit women (Doucet & Mauthner, 2007).

Limitations

The findings of this study are not generalizable. Rather, they are a source of information to be considered regarding cowgirls' way of life and women in sports, specifically, rodeo. I worked with only ten cowgirls and, therefore, various types of limitations exist in my study. I also struggled to find cowgirls of color that were willing to participate in this project. I experienced missed opportunities to explore how race and tribal identity shaped Native American participants' experiences in the rodeo in depth; when directly asked during follow up interviews some data was obtained and presented in Chapter VIII. Additionally, instead of just one in-depth interview I should have conducted several shorter interviews where I could return to main points and explore more deeply the stories shared. Transferability is determined by "the fit or match between the research context and other contexts as judged by the reader" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 113). The purpose of this study was not to be a generalization of cowgirl experiences but to start a conversation about the masculinized rodeo arena and to "re-present" my participants' rodeo stories, illustrating and unpacking the meaning in the masculinized arena they narrated.

Conclusion

This chapter outlines the purpose of my research addressing the gendered rodeo arena. This qualitative research is grounded in constructionism and a critical feminist theoretical perspective that allows for the intersection of multiple meanings held by the participants. Ethical considerations such as confidentiality of participants and IRB

approval will be fundamental components of the research procedure. The credibility and dependability of the research includes the addition of member checking, triangulation, peer debriefing, and self-reflection. Research conducted in this manner is not generalizable to every cowgirl in every arena but may be transferable by supplying rich description and highlighting cultural differences in the rodeo arena. In the following Chapters IV-VI, I present narratives of my participants. Chapter IV showcases Sara Kate, Betty, and Susan who are all barrel racers. Chapter V tells the story of five breakaway ropers: Fancy Jo, Harley, Tonya, Sierra, and Jan. Chapter VI contains the narratives of Mona and Bella, the only two women involved in rough stock events.

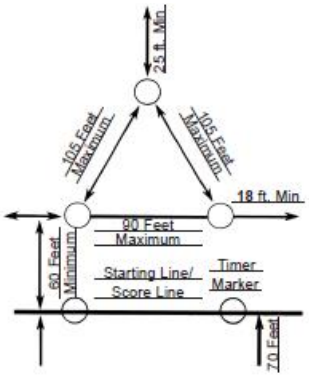
CHAPTER IV

BARREL RACERS

In this chapter I introduce three of my participants. Sara Kate, Betty, and Susan compete as barrel racers and have deep ties to the rodeo industry. Barrel racing is an event based on speed. A cowgirl sends her horse running from the alley of the arena and completes a clover leaf pattern around three barrels (see figure 3). Barrel Racers must slow their horses, called rating, at each barrel and adhere to the pattern to get a time. The fastest time wins! Although every cowgirl in this study has competed in barrel racing at some time in her career, only three consider themselves primarily barrel racers.

Figure 3

WPRA Standard Barrel Pattern



Note. WPRA Official Rule Book (https://www.wpra.com/index.php/rule-book). In the public domain.

Sara Kate

Sara Kate, in her typically efficient manner, hurriedly exited her truck carrying a folder overflowing with clippings, photos, and programs from her career in the rodeo. Sara Kate has been running barrels for decades, competing as a barrel racer in the WPRA (Women's Professional Rodeo Association*)*, ACRA (American Cowboys Rodeo Association), IPRA (International Professional Rodeo Association), CRRA (Cowboys Regional Rodeo Association), and in open barrel races. She qualified and competed in the NFR before it moved to Vegas and has been an IPRA World Champion multiple times. She's an active fifty-something White women dressed in comfortable jeans and a t-shirt with sunglasses perched on top of her shaggy, dirty-blond hair. Sara Kate teaches at a local elementary school and readily admits that she picked teaching as a profession for two reasons: "I prefer to be around children instead of adults, and, honestly, so I could have summer off to rodeo." Every time I see Sara Kate, I learn something new about rodeo, horses, or life.

Sara Kate is the stereotypical cowgirl. She raises and trains her own horses, and most of her family participates in the rodeo. She explained that a cowgirl doesn't merely compete but is "more independent, very capable of taking care of yourself. Basically, I think you can do as much as a man because you're on your own a lot. You don't depend on anyone ... you depend on yourself." Throughout our conversation, she stressed self-reliance and her ability to do what needs to get done through physical and mental strength. Interestingly, she assigns these qualities to men whereas cowgirls need to develop them.

Sara Kate has always considered herself a cowgirl; she says that it is an innate part of her. She recalled when she bombarded her father with endless questions about when he was going to buy her a horse.

> I can remember being three years old, I asked my dad every day, 'did you get me a horse today?' Every day he came home from work and that's when I asked him. One day he said yes, and we went and got this little Shetland pony named Candy. We lived in town, but we had the whole back side of the lot; that was an arena. My grandparents and dad and two cousins that lived in the houses down the street, I rode every day, and I would beg them to ride with me. I had pots and pans in the backyard to run barrels and go around the barrels. And I would ride Candy until she laid down. She would finally just get tired and lay down on me.

Sara Kate has taken and given lessons, but she says that she was born with this desire to compete in the rodeo. She doesn't remember what sparked the fire to compete, but she remembers always desiring to own a pony and run barrels.

Sara Kate spoke about being a cowgirl as "all the stuff you do before" competition, which included the daily training and care of her livestock.

> Even for me today, to miss a day or two riding, it just makes me feel strange. If I want to have a horse, I'm going to take care of him. I'm going to ride. They're not a pet. I mean we love them, but we have to use them. They're not just going to stand out there…I mean like today, my thoughts are I get to go here and I'm going to the vet and I have to go home and ride. You know, I have stuff to do, whether it's getting them out and brush and cleaning them and then doing their feet,

whatever. And it's like I can go ride. And it's just all of this kind of like therapy too. I always have stuff to do. I call it my other job!

Sara Kate stressed that getting to ride was both enjoyable and therapeutic; her day is not complete without being with her horses. At times, she explained, she had mixed feelings about selling horses.

> It's hard to say, oh, you wouldn't sell them. You would, and I say I love them. But when you're getting an offer of $100,000 and if you're not going make $100,000 on that horse, don't tell me, 'Oh, I love him. I can't sell him.' It's not fair to the horse to not allow him to go to do what he could do. And if somebody pays that kind of money for them, they're going to take care of them.

In Sara Kate's world, horses are tools as well as responsibilities. Although she loves her horses, she would also sell a horse to increase her and her horses' chances of winning. Offers to buy a horse can come from varied individuals: those who compete within the rodeo world, those who wish to breed a certain blood line, and those who want to begin competing and desire a finished horse (a horse that has finished training in any event and "knows" its job). In the rodeo world, the price of horses varies greatly, but the number of high dollar horses is increasing rapidly. A performance horse can cost anywhere between hundreds or a hundred thousand dollars; the market for horses fluctuates based on talent and availability.

Going through the photos Sara Kate brought to the interview, we finally settled on one from the year she made the NFR in the 1980s. At that time, the NFR paid a total of $740,870 in prize money among all the events (PRCA Media Guide, 2012). The photo,

taken by the professional photographer at the rodeo, was from the first go around of her riding her horse rounding a barrel and throwing dirt.

Figure 4

Sara Kate at the NFR in Oklahoma City

Sara Kate recounted her story of determination to win as she stared at the photo.

> Starting in like January, (my oldest child) was six months old, I started going to those pro rodeos. And I knew no one. I had no help at the pro-rodeos when he was a baby. Before I changed associations, I could go up to anybody, and they're going to watch him. So El Paso was the first rodeo I went to, I get there and the stalls for the horses were locked! I can remember that vividly! The stalls being locked, I never thought anything about somebody getting your horse so that was strange, and I had no one to help with [my son]. They were a different kind of people, they're not like a family. I couldn't say 'hey watch him while I run barrels.' I didn't know anybody and nobody volunteered. And so how did I do it? We bought a camper for the back of the truck and I had a playpen in it and I'd tried to get him to sleep before I would run. And I had a dog that I tied to the back of the truck. And I would warm up right by the truck and then I would go run. So,

> I'd go run. As soon as I ran, I went back to the truck and hopefully he was asleep…But anyway, that's how I did it. Yeah, that year was a very hard year. But once I set my mind to do something I did it. I wanted it! Up to that point, everything that I had set my mind to do as far as running barrels, I had accomplished. So, when I stepped over to the WPRA and PRCA, I had no doubt in my mind I wasn't going to make the finals. But the reason I didn't enter them earlier is because a long time ago, the WPRA, didn't have equal money. So, I was winning as much money in the IRA as I would have won in the PRCA. Does one of these tell the money won?

Sara Kate was married at this time, and although her husband did not travel with her due to work, he encouraged her to compete in PRCA and WPRA events. She sought childcare for her son who traveled with her.

At this point in the interview Sara Kate began flipping through old programs that she brought with her; these programs listed rodeo results and payouts. She could succeed in certain associations to stay close to home and have people around to help her.

> So, actually back then we were winning as much in the IRA as the WPRA girls were winning. So, it never made sense for me, to actually go…financially. I could go with a whole bunch of people to the IRA rodeos. We'd have, we'd have a whole rig full of people and split the gas seven or eight ways.

It is not uncommon for rodeo competitors to ride together to save money. A mixture of event competitors from the same geographical area will load up and travel together. This is one way individuals make participating in rodeos affordable. Sara Kate showed me a program and began to share:

> One of the years I won the IRA, with the money I won that year, I'd have been like third or fourth in that WPRA. Just taking the money over. It was financially easier for me to stay where I was, and I could still go to high school. In the WPRA you might be at Fort Worth on a Tuesday and the next Saturday, a lot of your winter big rodeos are all week long. So, if you're in school or worked, it's hard. But with your IRA rodeos, it's different: more weekend things and you can financially afford.

The IRA rodeos were set up for "weekend warriors": those individuals who typically have full-time jobs and only have the weekends available.

> When I went to the NFR, it didn't pay like it does now. It paid okay. But not near anything like it does now. You don't realize what it takes to go. I only went for one year because by the end of the year I was broke and went back to the IRA where I made money. To compete for the NFR, I was having to travel by myself most of the time...financially I couldn't do it. . . Like I said, a lot of the pro rodeos are all week long, or their slacks (the time that excess contestants compete, outside of the performances) on a Tuesday morning and people that work can't do that.

Financial issues determined where and in which level of rodeo Sara Kate participated. Rodeos draw participants from diverse geographical locations and having a community available to support her was not a given. Sara Kate chooses to compete in local rodeos where friendships with other contestants helped pave the way to success.

Sara Kate says she was born to be a cowgirl, and although she doesn't remember the reason she wanted to run barrels, she recognizes that it takes both family and friends

to support an individual as he/she rodeos. It isn't enough to have the desire to win; you need people willing to help you up and down the road. In return, Sara Kate gives back to rodeo now. She works with a local round up club and teaches the next generation how to compete.

Betty

I knew Betty worked for a Federal agency and competed in barrel racing, but the rest of her story was a mystery to me. Although I expected, from seeing her compete, a long history of rodeo successes, I was wrong. I met Betty a few years ago at a local barrel race, ran into her again at an "Indian" rodeo, and we quickly became friends. I had constructed a picture of an experienced rodeo participant and was surprised by how new she was to competition. Betty has competed for only four years; yet, Betty has a lifetime of rodeo knowledge gained form the "other side of the fence." This means that although Betty's family did not compete, they participated in rodeo by supplying the livestock. Betty talked about her delay in competing:

> Life happens. Opportunities come at different times for different people. Your journey is not the same as my journey. My journey is not the same as maybe somebody else's. I've been on horseback since I was ten years old. I was never in a position to run up and down the road and chase rodeos.

To Betty, "never in a position" to 'chase rodeos" meant that she did not have the time and money to compete. Betty mentioned other women who managed to juggle rodeo and family life: "You had these younger women that have families, have babies or children. I don't know. I couldn't take it. I couldn't do it. I don't multitask as good as I used to do." Betty did not compete in rodeos until she was in her forties; she waited until her children

were grown and her financial situation supported her rodeo dreams. Being present for her children took precedence over her desires to compete. Patience inside and outside the arena is a hallmark of Betty's rodeo story.

But just because she wasn't competing doesn't mean she wasn't involved with the rodeo. Betty told a story of family connection to rodeo, "I come from a family that were and still are stock contractors. My parents raised racehorses. So, it was always the business aspect of it. There wasn't any competition for fun. Now it's for fun." Betty was stuck behind the arena fences even though she wanted to compete. Like many girls, she dreamed of running barrels as she watched others in the spotlight.

> I'm a teenage kid. I'm always around, always the one who sat on the sideline just wishing I could go to the rodeo. But it was work. Calves needed fed, horses needed moved, bulls needed water, you know, that kind of thing. You're always preparing for the rodeo. We always had to help.

Coming from a family of stock contractors, Betty learned about the amount of work behind the scenes of a rodeo.

Betty's horse, Red, has been her ticket to competing at a higher level. She recently started running in the INFR (Indian National Finals Rodeo) rodeos. This picture was from the first time she entered Red at the regional finals.

> The photo is actually me and my horse walking out of the arena after I fell off at the first barrel at the Choctaw Nation Rodeo. At the beginning of the run, I had nothing to lose, nothing. It was the last rodeo of the season and I'm not in the standings, not in the money. Just got my new horse and my husband said 'how fast can you get there?' Perfect. He said, 'You have to' because I had nothing to

lose. So, I sent him (Red) down the alley and the barrel is there faster than I anticipated it to be. And I checked (tugged on the reins to let the horse know it's almost time to turn) and then I just slung right off. And when I did, I hit the ground. Well actually, like gingerly slid down off of him because he just stopped immediately when he felt me fall and my foot hung in the stirrup. I finally get myself composed and gathered up. When I stood up, I hear the announcer say, 'These girls, or these women, put so much time and effort into these horses that they're one and they know when the other is not right.' But what really stood out, the announcer said 'he is worth his weight in gold.' Talking about my horse. But then I'm trying to hold my composure and hold my head up with pride to walk out of there. I'm grimacing as I'm going out thinking, 'oh my, you just fell off in front of how many people?' I get to the back of the arena and my husband says, 'Are you okay?' I said 'no, I fell off in front of everybody!' And he said, 'That's okay.' That's okay? I wanted to finish the pattern. But at that moment I was just walking out, trying not to be embarrassed.

Figure 5

Betty and Her Horse Exiting the Arena

Learning from experience, Betty believes, is what makes a good competitor: “As long as you're hustling and you're trying your hardest.” Betty believes any mistake can be a teaching tool for the arena and for life.

> falling off teaches you that when you make mistakes it's timing and you learn from that. You learn from that error instead of a mistake. You learn from that error and move forward. Anytime you get knocked down in any avenue, whether it is in a relationship, a friendship, a competition, the only place that you can go is up.

And that might be the most important lesson in life, to pick yourself up and try again because you have nowhere to go but up.

Betty waited patiently to use her rodeo education, learned from her family, in the arena. Although she is an older competitor, her road to the rodeo began as child as she watched her family earn a living behind the chutes. Betty embodies the type of patience needed to succeed in a sporting event that may last only seconds but for which it takes years fully to prepare. Red is Betty’s reward for the wait.

Susan

“I'm not a cowgirl with my chaps on. It's not me. I'm starch pants and fancy tack on my barrel horse,” Susan frankly tells me from her living room sofa. Susan is a self-described “blonde-eyed Cherokee” who lives to rodeo. She does not initially appear to be Native American. “Just my passion. It's my love,” she says about rodeo and horses. She emphasizes that she works at a veterinarian clinic so she can afford to rodeo.

For Susan, like Betty, rodeo is a family affair. Both of her parents entered rodeos when she was young, and her mother continues to haul (travel together) with her every

chance she gets. She credits her parents as being the primary influences in defining her life and spurring her to learn to be a cowgirl.

> I have always been a barrel racer. Always, even before I rode horses. I carried a bat (a crop that barrel racers use) and I had buckets sitting up in the yard. I was always going to be a barrel racer. My mom and dad rodeoed, my mom rodeoed professionally before I was born. They knew all about the rodeo circuit. I won my first saddle when I was six as a peewee. I've always had high-powered or high-spirited horses. I was laughing with my mom recently saying 'y'all tried to kill me as a kid because I never had anything gentle.' I think deep down; I guess I've always considered myself as a barrel racer. I've never been able to rope. I've always considered myself, even when I was little, I ran on buckets in the yard, had my fancy belt on. I carried my bat. So I've always just been a barrel racer.

Her childhood barrel racing experiences continued to influence many of Susan's life choices. Reflecting on her future, she said:

> Here's the kicker. When you're 40 and you have no family and no kids. And then your parents are older. You're like 'I'm running out of time.' Everybody's like, 'Oh, you, you'd manage your time'... I understand that, but I don't know if I want to lose that part of my life that much. You know? And some people call you selfish and I told them, 'hey, I'm an only child. I already know that.' (laughing as she talked) But I have worked hard my whole life.

Susan is not ready to give up time with her horses or at rodeos to have a family. And she hasn't found a man willing to share her lifestyle.

Even though she considers herself a barrel racer and not a cowgirl, she defines her participation in the rodeo in terms of a cowgirl's hard work and dedication. Susan states

> being a cowgirl is a lot of training, especially a barrel racer. A lot of hours on the horse, lot of slow work but I think the joy of being a cowgirl, the rewards of it, is wonderful. There is a lot of hard times but when you have that one special run or that one special moment, it lives with you forever.

Susan spoke about her upbringing:

> You never realized as a child growing up how hard it is for your parents because my mom and dad worked full time jobs. They rodeoed every weekend with me. We took two sets of horses during the week because we had young horses and then on the weekends, we had rodeo horses. So, when you're little, you don't realize how hard it is to work and then to rodeo every weekend, every night, and then get up for the next morning. But after twenty something years it makes you realize how great your parents are and what they did for you all those years.

From Susan's experience, we can see that her parents are the backbone of her rodeo experience. They purchased and hauled horses to both rodeos and practices to ensure that their child's dreams were realized. Susan emphasized that it wasn't only weekend trips to the arena to compete but weekday jackpots (multiple levels of barrel racing competition) with green horses in order to prepare for the future.

As a Cherokee, Susan competes in the Native American rodeo circuit and has noticed racism at the rodeos. She explains:

> When you go to the tribal rodeos, like the ones in New Mexico, they definitely judge you. They don't like you. They don't want you there. Even though I'm a cardholder, a Cherokee, they definitely want a full-blooded Indian in their rodeos.

Even though Susan is Native American, she has light skin and blonde hair that allows her to typically pass for White. At those rodeos, she experienced racism from her fellow competitors who questioned her authenticity and membership in the Native arena. Brayboy (2010) addressed how others may question the authenticity of a Native American who does not adhere to the traditional specific physical qualities associated with being Native. The essentializing of Native Americans of having dark skin, long black hair, and certain cultural markers can lead to other Natives becoming marginalized when they do not adhere to those attributes (Brayboy, 2010). It did not stop Susan from competing in the Native American rodeo circuit, but it bothered her enough that she mentioned it several times during our meeting. Susan also encountered problems entering Black rodeos:

> recently, I have not had any incidents but in my young twenties I did. I've had several Black rodeos that banned me from competing. Okmulgee, this weekend, is one of them. They literally made it an invitational instead of open rodeo, due to the fact that a lot of the Black participants didn't want to compete against me. My mom used to go to them and then they literally will not let you run at them now. There's definitely is some criticism or ethnic judgment at some level. But I don't judge anybody either way, so what happens is they don't like me? So be it! I don't go to the ones that don't allow me, but I do go to the ones that I'm allowed to go to.

Susan relates her experiences with racism, highlighting who is “allowed” to participate, and the prejudgment that occurs without even inquiring. She perseveres regardless.

She has spent her entire life competing. As we talked about her horse, Kat, she kept bringing up how blessed she was to have him and how well he takes care of her when they compete.

> I went through some health issues. This was actually last year, and Kat was doing good. I was determined that I was going to make the Indian Finals, and I was going to go to the Tahlequah Indian Rodeo. Well I had a [health issue]. And it was just before the Tahlequah rodeo popped up. . .and my family was insistent that I not enter or go. And I was like, ‘no, I'm going,’ and mom was like ‘Susan you're not going you had a [health issue] two and a half weeks ago. You cannot ride a horse. You're going to get hurt.’ I've got to prove a point. I'm going to get up and I'm going to do this ‘cause I may not be on my game, but I'm going to run, and the doctor wouldn't release me. So, I still entered Tahlequah's Cherokee Indian rodeo and Kat won it.

Interestingly, Susan gives credit to the horse for winning the rodeo. She realizes that she wasn’t physically at her best and describes her horse’s drive and desire playing into her success.

> I cried and I cried because it was something that I had worked for and that had got taken away from me. When that last girl ran and I knew, and I stood there with Kat, my arm around him. Did we do that? Do we actually do this? I cried, and I gave a lot of things to the Lord. Gave a lot of things that little sorrel horse down

there (her first horse, who is buried on her property). But we made it and we came back strong. I was told ‘you couldn't,’ but Kat took care of me. and we did it.

When asked about her health issue, Susan replied that she “didn't tell nobody because I was so embarrassed because I'm like, how do you have a [health issue] in your thirties?” She just got out of bed and did what every cowgirl does: work hard, hope for the best, and plan for the future.

Like many women in my study, Susan learned about the rodeo through her parents. She has traveled up and down the highway hauling with her mother and father in turn. Her parents did their best to afford her a lifestyle conducive to success within the arena. The type of hard work needed to succeed on this path fortified her when she faced major health issues at a young age.

In the next chapter I present the narratives of breakaway ropers to help deepen our knowledge of women’s experiences in the rodeo as they described them. Like barrel racers, breakaway ropers compete in a male-dominated arena for prize money. Rodeo is a tough lifestyle that in turn builds tough women with interesting stories to share.

CHAPTER V

BREAKAWAY ROPERS

Breakaway roping is a timed event, and the fastest rider to rope the calf wins. Breakaway roping is a variation of calf roping where a rider ropes a calf but does not throw it down and tie it. The rope "breaks," to prevent jerking the calf down. Five cowgirls in this study self-identify as breakaway ropers. Each cowgirl has also run barrels, but roping is their passion and their event of choice. Fancy Jo, Harley, Tonya, Sierra, and Jan recount different rodeo journeys.

Fancy Jo

Fancy Jo and I met by the grandstands on a July night. Intermittent cool breezes lowered both the heat and the humidity typical of Oklahoma summers. Fancy Jo was up in the slack[1] and uncharacteristically nervous. Fancy Jo is a stocky woman who can control a 1200-pound horse while roping a running calf, but the thought of participating in an interview rattled her. Seeking privacy, we walked away from the stands towards my truck; I perched on the tailgate while Fancy Jo paced near me. Cowgirls and cowboys

[1] Slack is when the overflow contestants compete after the main performance; only ten contestants compete during each performance per event. Being up in the slack indicates that a competitor will be competing after the main rodeo.

interrupted us as they warmed up their horses nearby. Many would say "hello" and catch up, for Fancy Jo is well known. Rodeo in Oklahoma is a family affair because everyone knows everyone, and every performance is tantamount to a small family reunion.

Fancy Jo is not a pop culture dime store cowgirl[2]. Unlike some female competitors, she doesn't wear bedazzled jeans or flashy clothing. This night she is wearing what I might call her "rodeo uniform": baggy jeans, a blue t-shirt, sunglasses, ball cap, and cowboy boots. Her long brown hair is tied back, and although she is Native American, she passes for White. Her smile lights up her face; kindness radiates from her.

Her father is a teacher and influenced her to be the same. Fancy Jo's grit goes beyond the rodeo arena, for she seeks out and bonds with the "troubled kids" in the classroom. Choosing education as a career is tied to her rodeo journey. Teaching fits into her lifestyle; having summers off allows her to follow in her father's footsteps into yet another arena.

At the time of the interview, Fancy Jo was ranked in multiple rodeo associations standings for breakaway roping. So far this year she has earned over $4000 roping in just two associations. She competes in the ACRA (American Cowboys Rodeo Association), CRRA (Cowboys Regional Rodeo Association), IPRA (International Professional Rodeo Association), INFR (Indian National Finals Rodeo), open rodeos, and jackpots. Ladies' breakaway roping is her main area, but she also barrel races and team ropes in the "off" season. Fancy Jo comes from a family of cowboys; her family considers competition "a lifestyle. Sometimes I call it a hobby. . .*a bad habit*. It's just a way of life. That's all I know." Fancy Jo learned how to compete in the rodeo from her parents; her dad

[2] A dime store cowgirl would be a cowgirl that wears stylized western clothing and fits into the hegemonic definition created by Western movies and books.

specifically was instrumental in her learning to rope because he put a rope in her hand early in her life. The arena is like a second home for Fancy Jo.

The conversation turned to a photo Fancy Jo posted on Facebook of her backed into the box.[3] Fancy Jo explained that she had been roping since she was five years old. "I started running barrels first. And then I was always in the way, so dad would put a rope in my hand, and I was twelve or thirteen when I entered my first breakaway roping...I've been roping ever since." Describing the photo, Fancy Jo stated "I was maybe five, and I am sure my mother took the photo. My cousin was in the chute acting like a fake calf (smiles in remembrance) for my dad to turn out."[4] At this point Fancy Jo starts to tear up and suddenly walks away, returning with sunglasses on, although it's dusk. She quickly starts talking about her dad.

> That's who he was as a parent, and that kind of memory is. . .I was always in the way. I was always in the pen roping. . .in the way. I was having my boom box rocking out (you can hear tears in her voice). *In the way*. My dad added steps by the chute, so I could help turn calves out. It was definitely a good childhood. My parents are my biggest impacts and have taught me to do the best and to be a good person both in and out of the arena.

Like Susan and Betty, Fancy Jo narrates rodeo as a family event. Her family travels and competes together. Fancy Jo stalked away from the truck and took a short break to regain her composure.

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[3] The box is the area a horse and rider back into before they make a roping or steer wrestling run

[4] Turn out is releasing the calf/steer from the chute so they can run into the arena and be roped

When she returned, we discussed if there were times she was treated differently at rodeos because she was a woman. She looked away from me and seemed to gather her words carefully, almost like she was both anticipating and dreading this topic. “I would have to say no. Just because that's all I know and everybody that's around me knows that's all I know.” She takes a long pause, turns and walks away from the truck and then comes back like she had rethought her answer. She starts again:

> Well, maybe we should start that again. And I thought about this, how I want to answer this question when you first mentioned this project. In 2005, Donna came to me and asked me to be the first director of the CRRA. They wanted to add girls’ breakaway roping. And I'm not a position type person. I'm more of a…I’m a leader but not like wanting to make decisions. And I told her I would do it, and it's (women's breakaway roping) been in there ever since. They say it's the best thing they ever put into the rodeo. And we started out with our event at just a few rodeos and now we have to make a decision about which rodeo to enter. It’s changed from just a few rodeos to now it's . . . we get ‘the book’ out and there are options for every week.[5] I mean, it's amazing, every rodeo includes breakaway! We're still fighting the added money situation. We still get shorted on added money.
>
> And then two years later, we went to the ACRA board, about five of us, and we begged and pleaded with them to have our event added. We literally had to go with a list of pros and cons, and in front of the board of directors. And they

[5]‘The book’ is a monthly magazine that is released by rodeo associations that list each rodeo, which events are being offered, and how much added money is available.

said ‘yes,’ but we had to go Saturday morning in the slack of the finals instead of the performance. So, the first two years of ACRA finals, we went Saturday morning. The third year we got to rope during the perf [performance] and they timed us. Literally had a stopwatch because they thought we would take too long. And I think we finished all fifteen girls in less than five minutes. And it's like every association we have had to show ourselves, prove ourselves. And that's what a friend of mine and I were about talking earlier, she called the CRS[6] and asked for the entries of like the bareback riding and they had 824 for the whole year. And the breakaway had almost 3000.

And at the IFR once we got it in there our event paid $333 to win a round, and that was in 2012. By comparison, I think the regular events pay almost $2000 a round. And now we're up to a $1000 a round, so we're still not equal added money. Now in the CRRA and the ACRA, we are equal added money at the finals. Never did I think that our event would go to so many different rodeos, that they would be able to rope at Cheyenne, and at the IFR for $50,000.[7] It's all been hard work. It wasn’t handed to us but was hard work; multiple people have paved the way for us to compete at this level.

And that's what irritates me, these young girls just entering the sport, they don't realize how much work has went into it. Let them get on social media and complain because we don't have equal added money. And I'm like, “you should've

[6] CRS is the Cowboy Rodeo Sports, an online platform that contestants use to enter rodeos

[7] Cheyenne Frontier Day Rodeo, called “The Granddaddy of them All,” is a weeklong rodeo

been there." What was happening twelve years ago when we first started this endeavor! Because when I was a kid, you went to high school rodeos, you went to college rodeos, and you were done. There were a few open rodeos. But we've had to work hard. I had a friend ask 'why didn't you enter Cheyenne?' Because I've worked hard but it's a long way to Cheyenne. It was amazing just watching them, but the opportunities that are there now are just unreal.

Fancy Jo is so thankful to be able to compete in her chosen event.

> I feel like sometimes they just kind of run us whatever in there to rope [referring to the quality of cattle supplied during breakaway roping]. I can remember when we first started roping the calves would barely fit in the chute. Shoot-Sam (her husband) couldn't even get in there to push because they were so big and it was just like the breakaway ropers will run them because we were so eager to be an event. We didn't care what we had to do. I mean, morning slack, if the calves were big, if they had horns, whatever they sent for us. Well, we have to get our foot in the door before we can start rocking the boat. We can't be making people mad. And that's, that's what I feel like the younger generation doesn't understand because I mean they (the rodeo associations) were pretty much like, 'if this doesn't work, it's not going to happen'.

After the conversation, we said our goodbyes and walked in different directions. I went to watch the rest of the rodeo, and she went to warm up her horse. Over the course of the evening, I received several texts from her thanking me for including her in this project and adding little tidbits to complete the conversation. The interview spurred her to reflect

on her childhood, and she wanted to make sure I knew how important her parents were to her, and why she cried that evening.

Fancy Jo, narrating a type of determination to succeed, provides an example of how hard cowgirls work to have their events included in the rodeo. In one of her texts to me, she said that it takes a "drive and desire to succeed" in the rodeo. Fancy Jo's rodeo education, which began with her parents, taught her the value of persistence and how to blaze pathways of access. Fighting for her rightful place in the arena has encouraged her to teach future generations how women compete, and Fancy Jo still believes that future generations have a lot to learn.

Harley

"Being a cowgirl can be very vague. But when I think of a cowgirl, I think of a girl that can get stuff done and doesn't need help from anyone" remarked Harley. Harley is the girl next door: blonde, White, and just pleased to help anyone and everyone. She makes her living as a fitness instructor and rodeos on the weekend with her husband, extended family, and group of close friends. Her dogs travel with her to almost every rodeo – she loves her animals just like she loves the people in her life. For Harley, cowgirls are independent, know how "to get things done on their own: whether it is riding a horse, catching a horse, anything."

I first met Harley when she barrel raced during her college years; now she enters rodeos as a breakaway roper. Harley explains

> I'm already so consumed with everything that I'm already trying to do. I can't imagine trying anything else at this point. But I do know for a lot of women that

> they would do other things if it was more, you know, socially acceptable. Roping is something I always enjoy, I love to do it, it is more than a hobby but fulfills…

Although she notes that other women would branch out if social constraints did not limit them, she has found the event that speaks to her heart. Harley realizes that rodeo culture has placed limits on women's access. Women are socialized to believe that participation in certain events is socially unaccepted. This leads to fewer women entering events consider masculine; instead, women enter barrel racing and breakaway roping the two events promoted for women.

Harley used participation in a college rodeo team to finance her formal education. She received scholarship to compete at both her associate's and bachelor's institutions. Having the time to rodeo and study let her explore varied areas of study and, as a result, she changed her career path outlook/design. "The people that you meet along the way influence your educational experience," Harley began in discussing how her educational journey unfolded. Harley expanded on the topic.

> I was getting a business degree because I was very unsure of what I wanted to do. In the back of my mind, I thought if I had a business degree, I can always do something with it. But as I was taking those classes, I realized I hated business for the most part. I knew that I wanted to work with people, but I also didn't really want to be a teacher per se. I'd always been willing to really think of sports and physical fitness, and I actually met a professor that really influenced me to go into the field [personal training] I am in now.

The contacts she made through rodeo gave her insight on her career path and opened pathways of possibility. Given the freedom to explore areas of education led Harley to

new avenues for her life. Competing on the college rodeo team was the gateway to her future career because it supplied her with a college scholarship which helped finance her degrees.

The love of breakaway roping did not stop her from recognizing that she is treated differently from her male competitors. Harley indicated that it is not her male counterparts that treat her differently due to her gender but those that sponsor the rodeos, rodeo committees, judges in the arena, and others she knows in her professional life. This is a type of discrimination rooted in the structural system of the rodeo. Harley explained that discrimination happens more in "my work-world or my professional world, [with] friends that don't rodeo, don't understand what we do." Harley openly discusses that her coworkers and friends who do not rodeo often are confused about her activities in the rodeo and express concern.

Harley continues explaining how those experiences with coworkers and friends differ from what she experiences at rodeos.

> So, there's a lot of time that I go by myself without Connor (her husband), just me or with other girls. We're all capable of driving our own truck and trailer and taking care of our own horses when we get to the rodeo; whether we're parking or checking in. There's always people that act like we don't know what we're doing or we can't take care of ourselves or whatever it might be because we're girls. I feel like it's like rodeo committee people [who discriminate] because most cowboys have grown up around or been around an environment where they're used to women that rodeo. I'm not saying they're [the cowboys] always treating us great because they do a lot of stupid shit (laughs), but I don't think they're sexist

> or anything like that towards women competitors. They want us there. They want equal and fair treatment for us.

As Harley describes her experience, rodeo organizers often underestimate the abilities of the cowgirls who compete. Harley and her friends have often experienced gender bias about their abilities to park their rigs and take care of their horses.

Harley believes that cowboys may do 'stupid' things, but they want the women who compete alongside them to succeed. This opinion is fundamental to her cowgirl lifestyle. Harley explained that when she first started going to rodeos by herself, she was aware of being a woman behind the chutes. She was scared others would consider her questions stupid, "but over the years I've got over that and I just no longer really care. But, at one point, yes, I was self-conscious. I guess I was worried about them. They might think I was stupid, but I don't care anymore." She's grown into her role in the arena, becoming a cowgirl whom others respect. Harley has her eye of her goals and is not derailed by others' understandings of her abilities.

Tonya

Tonya, hauling hay in temperatures topping 98 degrees, shouted from the hay field, "We need to get this done so you can finish your project!" Tonya states her opinions about being a cowgirl quickly and in a straightforward manner:

> [It takes] hard work, lots of hard work and dedication. Even when you don't feel like doing something you got to do it. I mean even if you're sick or something, you have to still get up and feed. You can't just up and decide you're going to quit. You still have to go twice a day to water and feed your animals. I don't think it's for the weak at heart.

Everyday Tonya not only cares for and works with her animals, she also has a full-time job. Tonya is a fourth-grade teacher and softball coach at the local public school. Her point is that families cannot neglect livestock even if a person is sick or tired. Being a cowgirl involves a time investment in caring for the animals in addition to training for the competitions. As Tonya phrases it, working hard for little reward is the highlight of a cowgirl's lifestyle.

With a twang in her voice, Tonya frankly discusses using rodeo as a steppingstone for her future; "I went to Murray state in Tishomingo my first few years. I graduated from there and then I followed a kid [a young man who also competed in the rodeo] out to Panhandle State and I graduated from there." She continues:

> When I was ready to go to college, we sold him (the horse) for $30,000. And that paid my whole college. I never borrowed a dime to go to college and that horse was really special. A couple of years later he went to the NFR with a guy; he had our brand [the horse, carrying her brand, competed at the NFR]. So, everybody knew that brand. But there was times that I didn't want to sell that horse. I wanted to take it to college. And my dad said, "nope, that's going to be your college."

Instead of using the horse to compete in rodeos, her dad used it to provide income to send his daughter to college. Although her family is highly competitive in rodeo, they put Tonya's education first.

After college, Tonya needed to make choices about her rodeo career because at that the time opportunities were not plentiful. Tonya runs barrels, but roping was her event of choice and finding places to rope isn't always easy. She explains:

> We weren't able to rope. When I went to college, I stayed out in the panhandle a couple of summers because out there you could rope in the open rodeos. Back here you couldn't. They [rodeo associations and committees] didn't let girls rope until after I graduated college at the open rodeos. So after I turned nineteen, I couldn't go to that nineteen and under rodeos no more. There was nowhere for me to rope. So I stayed out in the panhandle a couple of summers because they had women's breakaway.

Women ropers still struggle to find acceptance within the arena, but times have changed, and more rodeos offer breakaway roping for women.

Tonya, a White woman in her forties, is self-assured when speaking about the different ways people are treated in the arena:

> I think in the rodeo world respect is the best thing you get. It don't matter what color you are. I was raised in the Black community going to Black rodeos. Those boys treated me like I was a queen, from the time I was probably ten I knew all those guys (she names some well-known black cowboys). I'll be honest; I've never had any problems. Everybody's always been willing to help, no matter where you're at or what you were doing. I've always felt very secure; I've never been afraid of anything. We went to North Tulsa all the time and people saying how bad it was. And I was like, 'I'm not afraid to go in there.' We went up there to Turley all the time and attended the rodeo there. Even at Boley, you know they got some guns out a couple of times and were shooting. And my mom would always say, 'you stay close' and like people would be yelling 'get down or take cover.' I never was ever scared. Never!

As the conversation continued, Tonya talks with fearless confidence:

> One day. I was with a kid named Samuel and we were going back from the bulldogging in Checotah to Panhandle [a college in Oklahoma]. We had a blow out there in Cushing across the bridge. We pulled across the bridge and it was just about dusk and raining. We decided to go ahead and unload and we'll tie to this gate right here and feed them [the horses]. An old car come up behind us while we were changing the flat and two big old Indians got out. I could see them getting out. I ran to the truck, and Samuel yelled 'what are you doing?' I said, 'Man, I've got a gun. You better get that crowbar because something's about to happen.' Then the two men come up on us. And I had that gun stuff down in my pants and they said they were fishing under the bridge. And I think fishing under the bridge (in a sarcastic voice)? It's almost dark and it's raining, I don't think so boys. And they indicated they wanted to see what's going on. And I said, 'Oh, we just had a flat.' And they offered to help us change it. I said, 'We don't need no help.' And the one started to get back into our trailer. And I just pulled that gun out and said, 'Boys, we don't need no help at all. You guys can leave and back away slowly or I'll gut one of you right out here.' And they both started to back away. And Samuel is like, 'Would you have used that?' And I said 'if either one of them would have touched us. Yes, I would have...protecting myself' (gave a small laugh), but I've lived on the road my whole life.

Tonya's personality is strong and vibrant almost like something out of the Old West, having taken some cues from her husband.

> I've always kind of just done what I wanted. I guess that's bad to say because I say my husband does it all the time (she laughs). Do what you want, when you want, however you want, and nobody not involved matters.

As a cowgirl, Tonya characterizes her experiences and personality as self-reliant, fearless, and determined. Tonya's rodeo education began at home, teaching her to make sacrifices with the long road in mind. She is the woman you want in your corner when your back is against the wall. Tonya is honest and forthright. While she is always lending a helping hand, she does not mince words while sharing her opinion and feelings.

Sierra

"If you don't try, you can't win" Sierra said about considering entering the tie-down[8] event at the Alumni rodeo on campus. These are words she lives by. Sierra, a White woman in her late thirties with a bachelor's degree, works as the head of facilities management at a small two-year community college. Her husband's reaction to her wanting to enter the tie-down event was not encouraging. Sierra grinned about the memory:

> I hadn't been tie-ing down very long. I've been breakaway roping. I think it was just one of those things you're going to get your tail end handed to you. You don't have a chance type situation. Then also as the safety deal, I mean, if I get into bind, I didn't have, not that, there isn't a gazillion people there that would not run up and help me. It is dangerous for even those who are really good at it. Um, you know, and the whole thing of you're just wasting everyone's time cause you're not

[8] Tie-down is a traditionally male event in which the cowboy ropes a calf and then dismounts his horse to tie three legs of the calf together. It is a timed event in which the fastest time wins.

> any good and you're probably not going to win anything. I am okay with that. I'm okay with not winning anything. Um, I'm all about new experiences. I had just started tie-ing down and I was like, what's the worst thing that can happen? I lose? Everybody after third place is the loser ultimately, because only the top three place. So, if I'm number fifteen, I'm not the only one that didn't win money, but you know, that's how our personalities are different. But ultimately it just taught me "don't ask, just enter."

Sierra grinning about this memory is not unusual; she always has a grin on her face. This rodeo is an annual event used to raise money for the rodeo program on campus. Sierra and I both have entered for the last four years, and I always look forward to our conversations on horseback.

This year, her young son was riding double with her as she warmed up. Rodeo is important to her family even though she doesn't come from a background of rodeo history. Her grandparents operated a trail ride where Sierra began her education that led into a lifetime commitment. Sierra explained that she has considered herself as cowgirl "probably from day one. I mean, as long as I can remember." And although her mom competed in rodeo queen pageants and her dad was around horses his entire life, "really I was probably the first in my family to, to really have that love and that desire." Sierra stated:

> I mean I always had a horse available. I probably started riding about two and then I started doing shows and events and things like that at the age of 3. We actually owned a trail ride. My grandparents did. It's not rodeo obviously. But, I was at two or three riding six hours a day, just in a line following people. That is

> pretty hard core. I just loved it. I mean, I just wanted to be on the back of a horse, even if I was just sitting. Now, as an adult, it's kind of my therapy. That's how I get away. That's how I relax. Um, whether it's just riding in the pasture or it's going somewhere and, and competing.

Sierra managed to take a childhood love for horses and transform it to her lifestyle. Now she is bringing that love into her children's lives.

> From day one, I've tried not to make it [her children's participation in rodeo] because I enjoy it so much. I, as a parent, I've tried not to force it. But we [Sierra and her husband] made the decision our children would have good horses. So, if they wanted to, and if it was a desire, that it was something they would start out enjoying because they had good horses. Yeah, they're ate up with it.

Sierra and her husband have encouraged, but not required, their children to be involved. The decision to have "good" horses for the children is most telling; this ensures that their kids will have quality resources for their horseback education. Having a skilled horse is a leg up in the rodeo world. Instead of teaching the horse, children can learn from the horse.

Sierra defines a cowgirl in terms of "attitude" and, ironically, by referencing what it means to be a cowboy.

> Heart, I mean there are obviously the physical things that go along with it. I think you can be a cowgirl even if you don't ride, even if you don't work cows, even if you don't do those things, it's kind of like a cowboy. What do you think of being a cowboy? You think of a guy in a hat and Wranglers and working cows, but, um,

so many other things. Honesty, work ethic, integrity, no fear or fear but you do stuff anyway, attitude, those kinds of things.

Sierra's definition of a cowgirl focuses more on character traits and values rather than riding horses and competing in the rodeo. Sierra explained that her rodeo journey

has been a blast. It's extremely hard though. Um, lots of blood, sweat, and tears. And then you still show up and miss, you still show up and your horse doesn't work, or you know the weather's bad, whatever. So, it is very intense. But if you really love it and you have the real desire for it, it's all worth it. You know, even if you're terrible, it's worth it. You learn something every time: win, lose or draw. You will come away with something, whether it's what you need to do better next time, meeting somebody, or you always learned something about yourself. The work you put into it.

It is obvious that Sierra loves competing in roping. But even then there are details she would change about the rodeo, and most of those items deal with obtaining the capital (Bourdieu, 1986) needed to navigate the rodeo world. Sierra explains:

it's hard to find open rodeos anymore. I mean, it's getting harder every year to find open rodeos. You really need to join an association. I mean, it's not like it's intense, but it's just getting the information to become a member, make sure you do it on the right date. You don't want to do it before their finals because then, you know, it screws up your entries and finals for the next year. I don't understand all the ins and outs of it because I didn't grow up straight rodeo-ing and it's just a whole new world. And so I guess being able to navigate like the paperwork and how to enter and how to draw and you know, cause there's like a, there's a science

> to it and I don't understand that a lot of times. And, so I've made it like just have the attitude, "God'll fix it."

Sierra is a multi-event cowgirl whose initial love of riding transformed into a passion for rodeo. She learned to ride while participating in her family's trail ride business and even continued to earn a college degree in the field. In turn she is teaching her children to love the sport.

Jan

Jan's face is weathered, showing her 57 years; she has competed at many different levels within the rodeo from high school to the Senior Pro Rodeo Association. She sat next to me in a hotel lobby the morning after the first round of the ACRA (American Cowboy Rodeo Association) Finals in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Jan's family *is* rodeo; she barrel races and breakaway ropes; her husband ropes and steer wrestles; her mom was a trick rider; her dad rode broncs; and her uncle steer wrestles. It is a family business, and everyone in it contributed to her rodeo education. Jan spoke to me about how she learned about being a cowgirl.

> I had been horse crazy my whole entire life; just one of those little girls. My dad was disabled and stuff, so we didn't have a lot of money. My uncle had an indoor barn down the road from us…maybe three or four miles. My mom started taking me down there and they always had steer wrestlers. I've always had a passion for steer wrestling because he [her uncle] was a steer wrestler… he had one of the first indoor barns. I'd been around it my whole entire life and anything they'd let me on I'd get on. So I used to cool out[9] all the bull dogging[10] horses and all that

[9] "Cool out"-ride the horses until they cooled down after being rode hard
[10] Bull dogging and steer wrestling are the same event

> stuff. And then he [her uncle] had an old stud horse that they'd just gelded…I start running barrels on him when I was eight. And then he always kept me in really good horses, and I helped to break a lot. He bred a lot of horses and sent a lot to the track and like I broke every horse I'd ever rode; you know? But I mean, with his guidance, he was very good. If I'd go rope, you know, four out of five calves, he'd say 'well you should have roped all five of them' and he was just very gruff and harsh and very hard on me and my self-esteem**.**

Jan discussed her uncle's attitude towards her during her younger years. He expected perfection and was often gruff with her in the process. He wanted her to be tough and exhibit characteristics associated with the cowboys he also trained. Jan's experiences with her uncle influenced not only how she experiences the arena, but also how she, in turn, influenced her family.

Her parents were involved with the rodeo before she was born and instilled in Jan the importance of hard work and competition. Jan explained the importance of her uncle's ranch and when she first considered herself a cowgirl,

> I had ponies and stuff before then [when she started going to her uncle's barn]. My mom started taking me there, you know, to help me get on better bloodline horses. Because he [my uncle] had a lot of really nice horses and he wanted to help me.

Going to her uncle's was not the beginning. Jan's love affair with horses started at a young age.

> And I think the first horse I was on; I was four or five and then my mom had bought me a couple of ponies and I played around all the time after school. First

> thing I did was go get my pony and they were ornery and contrary, take off and run you off, rub you off on a fence and do all the pony kind of things. But, but I still loved them and you know, that kind of a thing. So probably ever since I can remember**.**

Jan is a cowgirl; she was exposed to the lifestyle at a young age and does not remember the socialization process. She suggests her family created an environment where cowgirl ethics were imprinted on her. Jan discussed how her parents influenced her.

> I've always been an animal lover, of all animals. Can't ever kill anything or anything like that, you know. My dad was a bareback rider before my parents got married and my mom, she trained a lot of horses when she was young, and she did a little bit trick of riding before she got married. My mom and her brother used to break horses for…Fannie Steele. She was a famous lady bronc rider. She had a huge influence on my mama because they lived in the mountains in Montana, and Fannie Steele lived over the mountain and every spring, for a summer job, my mom and her brother, they'd go trail like twenty head of colts from Fannie Steele to train. Well, anyway, my uncle would snub[11] my mom up on these horses like he used to me when I was a little girl. He'd snug them up. The mountains were like this, very steep [made a hand gesture to indicate a steep slope]. They just take off, and we'd loped them to the top because the horse can't buck or get going up the hill. And they would, by the time they got to the top of that mountain, mom said they'd usually give it up. And that's what their summer job was as kids for several years there that they broke horses for Fannie Steele. So my mom always

[11]To snub up a horse you lead an unbroken horse with a rider on it closely to a broke horse and rider. It forces the unbroken horse to follow the other horse and rider, adding some control.

had a passion for it. And then, you know, she got married and had four kids and the other three kids weren't interested. But I, from the time I can remember, I was just horse crazy**.**

In turn, Jan and her husband socialized their son to love rodeo. Jan explained that although they didn't force their son to compete, he was always involved with rodeo as an extension to their life choices.

> Oh, we never made him. I don't believe in that. I felt that I would never treat my child the way my uncle treated me because I was so browbeat, and I was always a pretty good hand, but I didn't win as much as I could have because my uncle had browbeat me and had my confidence down. And when I met my husband, he's the one that really lifted me up. He really, really built me up and really helped to bring me to my full potential and still does that to this day…of course we were always going to a rodeo and he [her son] went to his first rodeo when he was a month old. He's just, he's been on a horse his whole entire life. He always wanted to; he just always wanted to ride and rodeo, and we started taking him to some junior rodeos. And ironically the first song he knew was the National Anthem. I have a recording at home of him singing it and stuff, you know. And the other thing was and this sounds bad. He would see the arches of McDonald's because it's the only place you can get in with the truck and trailer and he'd sing 'E-I-E-I-O' you know, McDonald's... (laughing)

Jan and her husband taught their son the value of rodeo; that a life in the saddle was a life worth living.

Although Jan went to college, finished her elementary education degree, and taught special education for several years, she chose to stay home with her son after he was born. Jan emphasized that she worked from home; “My husband installs billboard signs all over the United States. We have an 800-acre ranch, and I pretty much take care of a hundred to a hundred forty head of mama cows while he's gone.” Jan had the demanding job of taking care of the ranch.

When Jan describes what it means to be a cowgirl, she uses phrases that are often associated with men more than women. Jan told me that to be a cowgirl,

> You have to be “gritty.” You have to be very dedicated to your animals. You know, a lot of times they have to come first before everything, because they need your care and love. I'm very dedicated to our animals. All of the ones on our ranch: horses, cattle, dogs, cats, calves. So you have to be gritty. I mean, you gotta be able to be out there when it's 110 or 10 below zero, you know, and be resilient. Self-resilient and self-sufficient because a lot of times I have to do a lot of things that a lot of women wouldn't even dream of doing.

Jan learned to be a cowgirl through the work on the ranch. Jan describes being a cowgirl as dedicated to ranch animals and is willing to regularly invest a lot of time and hard work to succeed. One has to be self-resilient and self-sufficient. Jan shared many stories about how she and her girlfriends worked hard on the road.

> My girlfriend and I, we used to. . .we hauled my little bumper pull with her van and then, I don't know if there was something wrong with axle or whatever, but every time we left we'd, we'd go through a tire. We got to the point that we timed

ourselves, we could change a tire in ten minutes. Her and I. We left the horses in. We just jacked it up and took care of it and away we went.

Many of Jan's stories focused on her uncle's fundamental role in her learning during her early rodeo life. His presence was pivotal in her early experiences. When she stopped working with him, she bought her first "good" horse. Jan shared the story of 4-10 Shotgun, which demonstrates how Jan developed as a cowgirl.

> I was in my early twenties, but, as a kid, I was a poor kid growing up, and I always wanted to rodeo and wanted really good horses, cause I wanted to be competitive. And I had an uncle who had no children who was kind of, had a lot of money, and I would spend hours upon hours every day after school at his house from the time I was like eight years old until I was 27 years old. I would ride horses and train horses for him. He taught me a lot. He was very cranky, ornery and very hard on my person, my confidence. I started jock breaking race horses when I was about twelve. He would snub them up off another horse, and he had an indoor barn. And I'd sneak in there and get on them and ride them. He and I had a falling out in my early twenties because I wasn't the little girl that he could bash anymore. And you know, it was . . . I learned an awful lot and it was a great experience. It's time to move on. But anyway, I didn't have a lot of money and my friend in Texas had come across this horse who was bred very, very well, but this girl had abused him. She about starved him to death. When I went and looked at him, I immediately fell in love with him. He was a grandson of Native Dancer and Go, Man Go. I get this little horse. He was kind of broken and he was only five or six, and he's registered name was 4-10 Shotgun, and I mean I had a connection to

this horse like no other horse. I have every horse I've ever owned, I've never sold them, I can't bear to part with them. And anyway, long story short Shotgun was this little old skinny thing and I brought him home and started feeding him and I wormed him and he colic[12]. He dang near died the first week I had him, I spent all night out in the cold in Montana with him and I saved him. We had a great old vet in the town at that time and he's like, "you need to check this horse every night." We wormed him and he had blood worms so bad. I built him up that whole winter, and he became this beautiful gorgeous horse that everybody looked at and thought, "wow, he's awesome." And he was slick and fat and beautiful, had a long mane and tail. I started working with him. He'd never been roped on. He'd run barrels, but the girl had blowed him up.[13] I took him to this little barrel race. I thought, "Oh, there's a little barrel race series in town I'm going to take him." And my friend said that he'd [the horse] had never been to like any big. . .any barrel races. At the barrel race, I go and entered him in the novice class. . .in the green class.[14] And I run in there and he makes a smoking run and beat every (cow)girl there. And, they're like, "that's not a green horse." They get all mad at me, blah, blah, blah, blah. Next. I go, "no, he's never been anywhere really!" Get to the next barrel race. Go into the first barrel. It was scary because this horse could run and he grabbed the bit,[15] and he run off. He run right to the first fence, come around and went to the second fence, I mean as fast as he could go. They're like, "well

[12] Colic is a term used to refer to a variety of stomach issues that horses can suffer.
[13] When a barrel horse is blown up, the horse gets too excited when he runs barrels and is uncontrollable in the arena.
[14] A green horse is not a finished, completely trained, barrel horse.
[15] "Taking the big" means the horse bit down on the bit in his mouth and took all control away from the rider.

maybe this horse really hasn't been out." At the end of that season, he did the same thing to me at the finals. First run, he blows in there and beat everybody there. He makes a smoking run. I mean I beat all the 1D girls— everything. And, I'm in the green class. They, they tell me they vote me the most improved horse. I was all thrilled. Second run, he run off so hard. We got around first barrel, go into second. I was like, Oh, you could just feel him. He'd go (made motions like the horse was gritting his teeth and stretching out), and he run into the fence so hard. He threw me over the fence onto the other side. My barrel racing with Shotgun was over at that day. I said, "okay. He does not want to be a barrel horse. He wants to be a roping horse." So long story short, so he and I had this love relationship.

So, then I worked with him that whole next summer and he was doing really good, but I just needed to finish him. And I had a friend in Arizona that was a really good horse trainer and I went down there and spent the winter with him and I only paid like $3,500 for this horse. This pro guy, he walked up to me, I'm a little old, poor girl from Montana, mind you, and he offers me . . . has his checkbook in hand. And this was like in 1982 or 3. He said, all right, "I'll give you $10,000 for that horse right now." I'm like, "I wouldn't take 10 million for this horse. This is my best friend. This is my, buddy, you know?" I think it was the next spring I was working, and my mom called me, "Jan, you got to get home. Something's wrong with Shotgun." I got home and he was laying there and we got the vet there and from his history of having all the worms and everything...he's laying off flat. And, he was barely breathing when I got to him. And the vet got

> there and um, we had to put him to sleep, he was my baby. I loved that horse. He and I had been through everything. That was probably one of the most awesome things for me, but yet one of the most tragic things, because I dearly love this horse, so we had a connection.

Jan loved her horses. She spent time with each of them and has never sold a horse off her place. They all retired in her pastures.

When asked about what organizers should change about the rodeo to make it more inclusive, Jan talked about the inclusion of breakaway roping in rodeos. Like other women interviewed in this study, she discussed how the evolution of rodeo has happened in her lifetime to include this event. Jan talked about how "now girls fussed about the size of cattle and stuff" but when rodeos first offered the event girls were just thrilled to have the opportunity. Jan went on to add,

> they started adding it to the amateur associations and, but you just roped whatever they had, you know, we weren't, we were just kind of on the cutting edge, just getting in the door. And, and I remember Three Forks, Montana, they have little bitty calves for the guys to rope. And we had their mama, they were like big two-year-old heifers. They barely fit in the shoots and boy did they run. They had their babies at the back end. I mean, boy, you'd have to cowgirl up to get rolling and catch one before the back end, you know.

Jan believed that rodeo has changed with the times and is becoming more inclusive simply because they added breakaway and women are not as openly objectified as they were in the past.

> It's evolved to where we're eventually going to be at the NFR. I mean, that's in the near future from what I've been told, like they're thinking by 2023.It's already been added as an event at Fort Worth at the PRCA rodeo. I really think that women's rodeo is evolving. It used to be, you know, of course the only thing that was in the man-oriented rodeo was the barrel race. And people always screamed and hollered. And I remember growing up, going to rodeos with my parents when I wasn't competing and in those rodeos and seeing the women and they always made a big deal about the "pretty cowgirls" and all that kind of stuff. You know, the girls really dressed nice and all the barrel racing and, and all that. I've never felt like we, you know, it just kind of the change of the times. I mean back then, you know, women's rights and women, I feel like rodeos kind of evolved with, with women's rights and the times.

Jan sees the addition of breakaway roping as one way that the rodeo is becoming more inclusive to women. But, in her interview, Jan doesn't question the organization's tendency to relegate women to certain spaces within the arena.

Jan's experience in the rodeo started at home with parents who valued that lifestyle. Although she had negative experiences with her uncle, those experiences did not turn her away from a lifestyle of competition. In turn, she taught her son how to navigate the rodeo arena. Jan's family is another example of how rodeo is a learned experience throughout generations of families. Jan is a gritty cowgirl, reared in Montana, and flourishing within the arena.

In the next chapter the last two cowgirls are introduced. Bella and Mona both have competed in several different rodeo events but now focus on rough stock events. We

will meet two cowgirls who spend their days with bucking bulls and horses. Although different from such timed events as barrel racing and breakaway roping, rough stock events still take place in the arena.

CHAPTER VI

ROUGH STOCK

In this chapter I introduce the final two cowgirls who both participate in rough stock events. Rough stock events include any event that involves bucking. They include bull riding, saddle bronc, bronc riding (without a saddle), and showing bucking bulls. It is uncommon for women to compete in these events. Mona is a saddle bronc rider and is the only woman to compete at her current level. Bella raises and shows bucking bulls. Each of these cowgirls has also competed in other rodeo events; Bella barreled race and Mona has tried her hand at multiple rodeo events. These two women highlight the wide- range of paths women can take into the arena.

Mona

Mona is a First Nation's cowgirl with a unique story. She has paved a path of inclusion, broadening the discussion on women's place in the arena. Mona began her rodeo career as a barrel racer when she was eleven and then rode steers and even a few bulls; it is unusual for women to ride steers and bulls as rough stock events are very masculinized. When she was sixteen, she began professional trick riding and continued for about five years. She tried many different jobs/roles within the rodeo before she

settled on bronc riding. Mona is still competing and travels extensively, working in the equine therapy industry. Mona explained her interest in saddle bronc riding during our interview:

> I wanted to stay in the rough stock[16] events. Saddle bronc riding was something that I hadn't seen women ride in during my rodeo career. But I knew women use to ride saddle bronc. So, I was wanting to learn how to ride the modern style of saddle bronc. And because I didn't know about any other woman that had done that. And at the same time, my oldest brother was wanting to learn how to ride. So, we kind of started learning together. And my dad used to ride saddle bronc, so it kind of ran in the family.

Learning to ride saddle broncs required a lot of support from her family because she was paving new paths for women in the modern rodeo world. Her father was pivotal in this journey, and, examining her Facebook page, I noted numerous mentions of her father and how he helped her down this path. Mona narrates her reason for sticking with saddle bronc riding when she had conquered and moved on from several other events as a desire to prove herself. Mona explained,

> it was one of the hardest things for me to do because I had done a lot of sports prior to this that I had excelled at it [other sports] and then kind of moved on to other things. At every step of the way, everyone was telling me that I couldn't ride, that women weren't allowed.

[16] Rough stock refers to any event where an animal bucks including saddle bronc, bull riding, and bronc riding.

She succeeded despite the lack of support for women. As she talks about entering her first amateur event and transitioning to professional status, one can see she has studied the history of the rodeo.

> I did well at the first year riding at the amateur level, then I was like, okay, I'm going to go pro. And there was like, “no, you can't, you can't ride pro; women can't ride pro.” So, I looked at the rule book and it doesn't say anything about it. So, I entered in my first rodeo and I placed at it. And then about a week later, all of a sudden, it was like big news because they realized I was a woman. I was the first woman to ever make money at a professional rodeo [in saddle bronc riding]. Then it kind of evolved from there. I became the first one to ever become professional as a saddle bronc rider. At seventeen, I had done lots of different things and done really well athletically and equestrian wise. Now I've spent half my life riding saddle broncs. I'd gone through all these pivotal moments where I'm like, “okay, am I retiring?” You know, I'd had lots of injuries and this or that. And for some reason I did keep hanging onto it. But surprisingly, I've kind of had a turnaround now in the last couple of years where I'm enjoying it more than I ever have and I still am doing really well. At the last competition I went to, the BC Rodeo Finals, it was basically me and another kid [a male competitor] who's like half my age. We were the only ones really in contention for the top. So, it's quite interesting. He's like twenty-one and I'm forty-one.

Mona keeps entering and winning. Mona mentioned that she receives messages via social media from other women/girls wanting advice on how to compete, but to her knowledge,

none of them have “gone to the sort of extent that I have with, with learning how to ride. And then being competitive.”

Talking to others who want to ride saddle broncs is full circle for Mona, for she too looked up to successful cowgirls when she was younger, “When I was a kid, that's who I idolized, those cowgirls. And I was always like ‘wouldn't that be cool if I could trick ride and ride broncs?’ Well, I did both.″ Mona knows the history of the rodeo and realizes that women used to compete in the bronc riding events. She idolized the path-blazing women of the old West and is excited to follow in their footsteps. Yet, at every turn, individuals told her it wasn’t permissible for women to enter saddle bronc at different rodeos. Mona explains,

> there is still this perception that women can't ride rough stock or can't do time events and stuff at the rodeo. And, honestly, the only associations that they can't do that is anything that's gender specific; high school rodeo association or the college rodeo association. At every other association, unless it’s an all-girls rodeo or whatever, it's open for everyone. There's still a misconception. I get it all the time. And I'm like, you guys just don't listen to everybody else; like do some research, people.

Finding acceptance in the arena came with time, and Mona explains that she hasn’t always felt completely welcomed.

> I feel pretty good for the most part now. I mean, there's always a little bit of skepticism. I've been around it long enough that like, that I've been through a few generations now with my riding. The original generation that I rode against was the hardest on me and the most critical. Probably the most satisfying thing for me

was that I won over a lot of these old timers that didn't think a woman should be there. I'm not saying they think that women should be there, but they respected me for being there and doing my best. Riding well…they will respect you if you prove that you're worthy of being there. And that's what I've learned, which has been, like I said, really cool. The younger generation is definitely way more accepting of it than before. Maybe stuff doesn't bother me as much because I've been around it so much, and also, a lot of people already know who I am now, that when I complete, they have heard of me. I don't really get that much flack. Like they might talk behind my back. I mean I'm sure that they do, but I don't usually hear about it. Right. I have less to prove now, and I enjoy it more. If people say anything, it has rolled off me. Whereas before it used to really bother me. Because I was always trying to prove myself being the only female in a male-dominated sport when I first was in it. And then I had this perfectionist mentality and so it was like, it was real rough on me mentally. Um, and stressful and especially my earlier years of riding when I went pro because I had all this media attention and then I'm trying to ride and compete to the best of my ability.

Mona has the experience in competing that allows her to compare and contrast popular attitudes regarding women in the arena. Not only has she noticed the shift in attitudes of other competitors, but she has also noticed her own attitude evolve.

What does it mean to be a cowgirl to the saddle bronc rider who has paved the way for others to compete? Mona stated "It's a way of life, a lifestyle. But there's variations of it. I would consider myself a cowgirl, but I don't look typical of the role except when I'm competing in the rodeo." Mona remarked that people had asked her

many questions over the years, but not that one. For Mona, part of being a cowgirl and a bronc rider is letting others know that females are “allowed” within the arena.

> The whole thing has to be education. Because even it seems like the rodeo is such an old boys club…it's like this little club. This club of guys that wants to like cater to their needs and what's best for them or whatever. They don't really care about anybody else. Um, but even then, there's a lot of stuff that's hidden from other people that unless you go and do the research, like I said. Even with like woman riding broncs, they still have impressions that women can't ride broncs and all. I was like, “well hello here!” Like even looking back in history, there’s been a bunch of women that used to ride. Like I said, it is this perception.
>
> And then too, like with the events, the guys just assume it's like theirs, you know? Don't intrude on their group, you know, and it's like, well it's not all yours, right? But, I think that's probably the biggest problem with there not being enough females going into it is because they get this reaction from the guys like, we don't want you here. And you know, you have to want it bad enough and kind of get through all this flack before you can start acting like everybody else. I just say like, it just, there kind of is the education to everyone. Like, you know, like we in terms of their being more accepted. I would say more than not, that's what a lot of other girls have encountered…you're not going to be welcomed with open arms coming into it. You have to like, if you want to do it bad enough, you have to keep pushing through stuff.

Mona has worked hard to gain acceptance within the arena. She sees the future of this sport as a more inclusive for women with more education for everyone involved. Women

need to work for acceptance by working hard and remembering that in the past women had a greater place within the rodeo than they currently do, a place women participants are striving to regain. Finding one's future by not forgetting the past is fundamental to Mona's rodeo education.

Bella

Bella is a long, lean White girl in her twenties at the time of our interview. Her dirty blonde hair was carelessly twisted into a messy bun. Her smile is infectious. She drove up in a cloud of dust and jumped down from a truck called a dually.[17] Bella spoke of her upbringing in the rodeo: "My parents both put on rodeos. So, I was kinda thrown into it. Actually, the day I was born my dad had an open rodeo. So, I've kind of been involved in it my whole entire life." Bella currently runs barrels and raises bucking bulls. She has run barrels in open, Black, gay, college, and various pro rodeos. She drops names of famous competitors as if they are next-door neighbors because in her world they are. Bella defines cowgirls:

> "They" think a cowgirl is like your shirt and boots and jeans every single day. And in my life, that's really not what I think about. Every day we go out and we feed horses, and we feed bucking bulls and we take care of them. They're like family. So, I see it more not as working on the ranch and doing that kind of thing and dragging calves to the fire or whatever. They're our partners, and this is how we make a living. So when somebody says, "Oh, you're a cowgirl," it really

[17] A dually truck is a truck with dual rear wheels on each side (for a total of 4 rear wheels). These *trucks* are fitted with heavy-duty brakes, heavy-duty shocks, and, frequently, large motors; they are used for hauling heavy loads.

means a lot because somebody sees us out there taking care of them and working hard.

Although Bella has a degree in business, she works solely on the ranch, earning her living by raising and selling bucking bulls. Her college education was secondary to her rodeo career. Cowgirls are made “at home. You just go to the events you to get your buckles. Um, all the work is put in at home.” Livestock, both horses and bulls, requires daily interaction in order to perform appropriately and win. Bella added:

> You've got to be mentally tough; you know? And, then there's a lot of people that go out and they try to pro-rodeo and try to make NFR. When they leave for the summer run, I think… say a little prayer for them because there is no way. One thing goes wrong, and they head home because they can't be mentally tough enough to say, “all right, that's a little bit of setback back.” They just quit and want to come home. And so you have to be mentally tough enough to know that.

Bucking bulls can be compared to competing in the rodeo in many ways. To those unfamiliar with the sport, Bella discusses the season with passion. Bella continues:

> being tough about it and in staying really mentally tough it's hard because there's a lot of things that can go wrong. I have a fifteen-minute rule running barrels, bucking bulls, whatever. For fifteen minutes I can kick and scream and go to the truck and cry. But when that fifteen minutes is over, that's done. Time to get serious and go back forward.

Being able to move past the bad runs in the arena is critical to success. Bella also talks about how the rodeo teaches important lessons.

It was just like a light came on, and I figured this was really hard. We got through it. And you apply that back to your life. Like things get really hard. And get really dark and then you get it figured out and it's like a light comes on again.

Bella grew up at the rodeo and talked about her experience:

I was probably six, seven maybe. We were in Fort Worth. My dad had to put on a rodeo down there. Of course, they couldn't have a rodeo without me, so I wasn't even entered. I had a horse, they brought him, and I got to run barrels and everybody there knew me, so it was super cool. I'm pretty sure I trotted the pattern and maybe loped home. And I'm pretty sure from that day on I was, I was hooked.

Figure 6

Bella Competing (year unknown)

Bella becomes nostalgic after looking at her photographs:

I look back at pictures like that and it just reminds me, when I have a really bad day and horses aren't working good. I go back and think, I've been doing this for a really long time. I know what I'm doing. Don't doubt yourself. You know what's going on. Take a deep breath, walk away for a minute, come back and have a whole new outlook on it. There's been times when it's not been fun when it's been

more like a job and (deep sigh) I was listening to everybody else. And so finally it was like, okay, step back. I know my horse, I trained her, and I know how to ride her. And when I started riding for myself is when I went back to winning.

Barrel racing is an important part of Bella's rodeo career, but lately she has been spending more time behind the chutes than on a horse. Bella has been raising bucking bulls with her grandfather.

I guess I have a little different outlook simply because when I was seven or eight and I was back there behind the chutes with my dad helping him flank bulls[18]. So I've always kind of been on the other end of it. We all rope; I've had an opportunity to do about everything. When I was little and we rode sheep and I got bucked off or fell off, whatever, got run over, had my fill of sheep riding. So, I think as far as going even anywhere towards bull riding that was not for me. I see a lot of girls that try to ride bulls, (deep sigh) we're not made for that. I've been able to flank bulls and go that route about it.

Figure 7

Bella Scratching Her Favorite Bull (2019)

[18] Flanking a bull is the process of loosely attaching a flanking strap to a bull that helps enhance the bucking action.

Once she started flanking bulls, she had to reestablish her rodeo credentials within that select group.

> When I first started coming to the bull futurities[19]...I took eighteen bulls, and they saw this blonde-headed girl come in there. I hadn't really been to many futurities, and I won. And up until I won that, late that night, they didn't treat me the same. They didn't think I could handle it. They didn't think I knew what I was doing. And now a year later it's gotten better, but they still are a little leery of a girl flanking.

It took winning her first event for Bella to feel like she fit in at the bull futurities.

> I think it might've been a little more of me just thinking, I'm in a man's world, women don't do this. I won the classic (the futurity for four-year-old bulls), and from then on everybody was just like you're kind of one of us. But, the fact that I had to win something for them to be that way.

Bella realizes that winning garners legitimacy. Bella expressed the belief that she was judged by other competitor simply because of her gender and not her abilities. From barrels to bulls, Bella narrates her experience as forging her own path, rarely looking back. Instead, Bella focuses on to the next goal. Living in a family with a long history of rodeo success taught Bella the unwritten rules of the arena, how to succeed in the industry.

As we reach the end of the ten narratives, it is now time to explore the meaning behind our cowgirls' words. The next chapter will open with discussion of themes that

[19] A bull futurity is an event limited to young bulls, usually around 2-years old, where the bulls compete in a rider-less bucking contest. Judges score the bulls on things like height of the buck and the degree of difficulty that the bull shows.

emerged from the cowgirls' stories.

CHAPTER VII

ANALYSIS: LEARNING THE ROPES

Within this chapter I will present a comprehensive theme that emerged from feminist and thematic narrative analysis based on the semi-structured interviews conducted with ten present or past female competitors in the rodeo; that theme is "Learning the Ropes" (Riessman, 2008). I will also share subthemes that focus on the cowgirl identity, rodeo lessons for life, family social production and socialization, and the joy narrated by cowgirls. This theme, Learning the Ropes, focuses on how my study's participants narrate their experiences in rodeo, what techniques they used to navigate the masculinized arena, and what they learned in those processes. Each cowgirl presented a unique perspective, with experiences that both overlapped and diverged.

I used various sociological or feminist concepts to analyze my data. A feminist approach to analysis has many different pathways. First, as a researcher I must be aware of how I am representing others. Doucet and Mauthner (2007) discussed that although power differentials between researcher and participants can be lessened by a "friendly" relationship, they can never be erased. I strived to create friendly relationships with my participants. Even with that awareness, power differences exist, and I had "to consider

how power influences knowledge production and construction processes" (Doucet & Mauthner, 2007, p. 40). Although I consider myself an insider in rodeo culture that does not mean I have insights or know better than others (Doucet & Mauthner, 2007). Feminist analysis must reflect on the tensions and dilemmas inherent to research and recognize the complexity in coming to know (Doucet & Mauthner, 2007). There is not one way to do feminist analysis but it commonly reflects on women's experiences, puts women at the center of the work, and benefits and empowers women (Doucet & Mauthner, 2007). I strived to fulfill those qualities in this chapter.

Understanding cowgirls' stories about their rodeo experiences requires, in addition to a feminist approach, a discussion of Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity and how it functions in rodeo. I use Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity to describe how it regulates the role of cowgirls in the rodeo in working to produce the bodies that it controls through a type of productive power (Butler, 1993). Hegemonic masculinities become a system or set of practices that are, according to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), "the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue" (p. 832). This does not focus on individuals but the system as a whole. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) expanded his concept to say that

> masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals. Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in a social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting. (p. 836)

Although, as Schippers (2007) emphasizes, few men exemplify the ideal of hegemonic masculinity, the symbolic meanings provide legitimization for the social rules that allow for the ascension of a system that creates an idealized version of men and the domination of women, such as rodeo. Particular forms of hegemonic masculinities are normalized in different places and fields and tend to go unquestioned, facilitating and supporting men's power and domination while regulating and limiting women's power. Accordingly, our understanding of the concept needs to recognize "the agency of subordinate groups as much as the power of dominant groups and the mutual conditioning of gender dynamics and other social dynamics" (Connell, 2005, p. 848). This is consistent with rodeo, a male dominated sport, where women still compete but are overshadowed by cowboys.

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to "re-present" my participants' rodeo stories, illustrating and unpacking their experiences. My participants narrated ways of navigating the arena that allowed them to create a place for themselves in rodeo. Despite the function of patriarchy in the rodeo, my participants narrated experiences that changed their lives, fun stories, and joy to be found in the rodeo. There is complexity in the stories shared by my participants that mirrors rodeo; rodeo is not just one thing to every cowgirl. Despite the masculinist arena that has shaped rodeo, women have found and continue to find meaning in the sport and the lifestyle. Rodeo is not always narrated as a sport but as a way of life for my participants.

Cowgirls are not univocal but narrate a variety of experiences and world views. Ford (2020), when discussing race specific rodeos (i.e. All-Indian rodeos), stated that by "participating in these rodeos, competitors demonstrate that rodeo belongs to more than White, heterosexual, masculine men. It belongs to many people, and by being a part of it,

they are redefining what it means to be an American" (p. 11). We can expand this sentiment to anyone who competes in the rodeo, they are claiming the arena as their own, not just a place for White men. I bring awareness both to women's experiences in rodeo from their perspectives and to the power dimensions that rodeo women negotiate to straddle in their saddles. I used concepts from feminist theory in analysis to identify gendered components of their experiences. Cowgirls see the world from many viewpoints. As a researcher, I endeavored to capture all the variety they revealed to me. My research illuminated how cowgirls shared experiences and learning with an emphasis on the influence of their families. My findings include their learning experiences as they become cowgirls. These experiences are enumerated and listed in the next section as I describe my theme Learning the Ropes. I will discuss many subthemes in the following chapter.

Learning the Ropes: Where the Ride Begins

The theme of Learning the Ropes reflects different forms of nonformal and informal learning that my participants narrated about their experiences. Many of the cowgirls in my study experienced informal learning opportunities early in life that fostered the navigation skills they needed to make the masculinized arena their own (Ford, 2020). Informal learning involves multiple definitions. Jeffs and Smith (2005) determined that informal learning takes place without formal organization during daily activities. Women learn society's gendered expectations during their daily lives, at home, in school, or any group activity, as a type of informal learning through socialization processes. Cowgirls experience many types of informal learning as they grow in the rodeo. In addition to informal learning I will also highlight nonformal learning

experiences. Nonformal learning has some sort of organizational framework but takes place outside of a formal learning environment (Council of Europe, n.d.). Many skills needed to win in the rodeo require some type of informal and nonformal learning to excel.

Each cowgirl brought new insights to how they learned rodeo. Collectively, these types of informal and nonformal learning experiences allowed my participants to identify ways they want to compete and grow in rodeo. I begin with the role of family in the early socialization of cowgirls in "Saddle Up". Next, I address women's narration of the relationship between a cowgirl and her horse, the dependence on physical objects to create identity, the role of capital in the rodeo, the 'hard work' they needed to succeed in rodeo, and my sense of how cowgirls navigate the masculine arena and expectations and find their own path to rodeo success.

Saddle Up: The Role of the Family

For many cowgirls, learning the ropes starts with their family upbringing. Each woman in the study narrated stories about their family and the influence they had on their rodeo education throughout the entirety of their narratives. Selection of women to participate in this study did not require that they had family members who also competed in the rodeo, but it is an interesting characteristic of the data that it occurred. Family plays a pivotal role in the cowgirl's rodeo education. How does a girl or woman become a cowgirl? How does their family history influence the cowgirls' processes for learning gender and participating in the rodeo?

Socialization is a type of informal education that helps the young function in society. Socialization begins at an early age with those that raise you and continues with

every situation in our lives. We learn from those around us how to navigate social settings. Rodeo is no exception. Cowgirls in this study began their learning process at home and learn more as they continue in the sport. In sport, as well as in any area of life, children learn from those who raise them and the hegemonic culture what gendered norms they should adopt (Boiche et al., 2014). Women in this study often narrated their participation in rodeo was influenced by their parent's history with the sport; it appears that family connections are one of the ways that my participants find legitimacy in the rodeo and make it 'their own' (Ford, 2020). Some research has found that family tradition in sport, regardless of gender, can lead to an increase in participation (Beki & Gal, 2013).

The importance of family tradition and learning for rodeo women is evident in their descriptions of having "a cowgirl mentality" and naturalizing it as "a way of life." They grew up in families who emphasized the skills needed to succeed in the arena, had parents who actively participated in rodeo, or family members involved in equine or rodeo businesses. They highlighted the formation of skills and attitudes that took place initially within the family and finally, in the arena. Like in Ford's (2020) work, participating in rodeo was part of each cowgirl's family identity. Women's accounts reflected the organic nature of this learning: Rodeo was just what they did, how they chose to live their lives, and who they were. Rodeo is part of their identity. The attitudes of their family members played a pivotal role in the paths of these cowgirls' lives. They learned from those around them daily; Fancy Jo narrated that "that's all I know and everybody that's around me knows that's all I know." Ford (2020), when discussing the charreada (traditional Mexican rodeo), pointed out that "often entire families participate in the charreada. If a young woman is on an escaramuza team, it is likely that her

brothers, husband, or father are in the local charro group as well" (p. 41). Likewise, participating in rodeo connected my participants to a community, their family, and Western folklore (Ford, 2020). Fancy Jo's upbringing in the rodeo made it central to her lifestyle later.

The women in this study identified as cowgirls, except for one who strongly identified herself with the event in which she competed, a "barrel racer." This identity category speaks to women's narration of their identity as linked to a rodeo way of life. My participants naming themselves as 'cowgirls' demonstrates how they distinguish themselves from other women (i.e., rodeo queen, buckle bunny, audience member). My participants are making a claim about their identity that is related to rodeo and is explicitly gendered. The term 'cowgirl' or 'barrel racer' describes a sense of self that differs from those of other women.

As Jan said, "a lot of times I have to do a lot of things that a lot of women wouldn't even dream of doing." In this sense, cowgirls view themselves as differing from other women who do not live a cowgirl lifestyle and from other non-competing women in the rodeo. This language reflects their belief that cowboys, and cowgirls, are unique categories of identity. Their identification as cowgirls is part of a process of making the rodeo their own, creating a pathway to belonging in the sport. Many of them recounted possessing this identity from a young age, a reflection of family socialization and learning. They often could not recall a time in their lives when they did not consider themselves a cowgirl/barrel racer. The learning that contributed to their identity is implicit learning; the cowgirls were not aware of it occurring it simply happened during their daily lives (Rehm & Notten, 2016).

Family Ties: Pathway to Belonging

Accounts reflected that, for these participants, having parents who participated in the rodeo fostered women to develop the courage needed to claim a place, or to assert themselves, within rodeo. Susan discussed how her parents' knowledge of the unspoken rules of the arena gave her an advantage when she decided to rodeo. Susan narrated that "my mom and dad rodeoed. My mom rodeoed professionally before I was born. They knew all about the rodeo circuit." Susan's learning experience was spontaneous, learning from her parents by observing their activities in the rodeo as well as from stories they shared. Susan narrated a type of reactive informal learning; she is aware she learned from her parents in her daily life (Rehm & Notten, 2016).

But as Susan learned to ride, enter jackpots, and compete using the skills that her parents shared from their past experiences, she transitioned from informal to nonformal learning. According to the Council of Europe (n.d.) nonformal learning does not occur in formal environments but has some sort of organization. According to Susan her parents modeled acceptable rodeo attitudes, exposed Susan to rodeo activities, and taught Susan unspoken rodeo rules. Susan's advantage, having parents that competed in the rodeo, allowed her to orient herself to learn the skills needed to compete. Comparable to how Jeffs and Smith (2005) explained informal learning practices, Susan's daily life activities, with her parents, contributed to her rodeo success in rodeo. Family acted as a socializing force that enabled cowgirls to become part of the rodeo and family support empowered women to seek opportunities to better their skills through nonformal learning.

Bella, Susan, and Fancy Jo, because of their parents' history in rodeo, narrated that they received access to areas of the arena that are off limits to those without

connections to a rodeo family. These examples all tie together because the cowgirls' parents were the driving force behind their early entry into the rodeo arena. La Belle (1981) explained that "informal education is associated with either socialization in kin-based societies in which the family is the dominant institution or the sort of education involving basic attitudes and values that occurs within the family in all societies" (p. 314). Family does not only socialize women to desire competition in the rodeo but also contributes to the gendered socialization of cowgirls. Rodeo contributes to a unique expression of gendered womanhood that resists hegemonic expressions of womanhood and cowgirls' learning within their rodeo families enables the development of that identity. Interestingly, though, family socialization creates a tension between what it encourages these women to do—compete in the rodeo; and the expectation that they only compete in limited female-designated roles. This tension both encourages and confines rodeo women; cowgirls are placed at the intersection of belonging to two different definitions of womanhood. Cowgirls are encouraged to both buck the system and conform to it. Cowgirls narrated both learning from their parents and the value of rodeo as a skill set, culture, and sport. My participants were able to learn the sport at a young age and a cowgirl identity that is not the norm for families in the U.S. but does function as an important identity category to compete in the rodeo.

Women's family involvement in rodeo was consistent across most accounts. Many of my participants, Susan, Fancy Jo, Tonya, Jan, Harley, Mona, and Bella, shared stories of their family's involvement in the rodeo and how it influenced them. The other women in the study had history of family involvement in the equine industry but not rodeo specifically. Their families' sport history influenced them to compete in rodeo.

Scholarship notes that children with extensive family sport history tend to have higher rates of participation in a particular sport (Downward et al., 2014; Gustafson & Rhodes, 2006; Hayoz et al., 2019; Knight, 2019). Additionally, Jan narrated how her and her husband's history with rodeo had encouraged their son's interest in the sport.

Interestingly, with the exception of Susan, narrators referred to their father's influences in guiding them in the arena even though their moms also competed. This patriarchal socialization was a common thread. What does this narration of fathers' involvement mean for women's rodeo stories? I believe this is evidence of one of the ways that these cowgirls' socialization may differ from other women. Their fathers are involved in creating their unique gendered identity of cowgirl. I suggest that fathers involved in rodeo offers a symbolic blessing for women to create their gendered identity and become involved in rodeo roles. The youngest cowgirl, Bella, also expressed how her father's involvement in the rodeo shaped her path. "My parents both put on rodeos. So, I was kinda thrown into it." Bella grew up with the rodeo; her first teachers were rodeo role models. These role models helped create a place of belonging in the arena. Her informal learning was simply living her life as it was happening. Jeffs and Smith (2005) highlight that informal learning is both reactive to the needs of individuals and rarely intentional. Life happened and lessons were taught as needed (Jeffs & Smith, 2005). Bella rarely questions that she crosses gendered expectations in the arena by focusing on bucking stock because at an early age she was socialized to do so. At some point, Bella crossed from informal learning to non-formal learning as she decided to continue in the sport and wanted to learn how to excel. Early exposure to rodeo, through their father's

involvement, helped the women develop the skills needed to navigate the arena by increasing their knowledge of rodeo power structures.

Another element of women's accounts of family involvement is that participating in the rodeo seemed a pathway to strengthen family identity outside of the arena. In this sense, their participation in rodeo functions as a binding to their family's structure and purpose. Rodeo seemed to become part of their family identity, history, and through their participation part of their family's future. Cowgirls belong to their families through their rodeo ties. In my opinion, this reflects a cyclic process between rodeo participation and family identity. Their family history creates navigation opportunities in the rodeo and then their participation in the rodeo in turn strengthened their family identity. Women in this study belong in the arena because their families also belong.

Participants in my study often talked about the young age they began learning the skills needed to succeed in the rodeo. These skills were often taught by their parents, with an emphasis on their father's role; cowgirls are taught that competition in the rodeo was something they *could* do. Families also act as sites of socialization and give rise to these gendered norms; this reflects cowgirls gendered socialization in their families. This may have led them to acquire a sense of empowerment every time they saddled up and rode into the arena with their families, improved their skills, and became socialized into the lifestyle and sport of rodeo. Like Ford (2020) stated "these are not just rodeo families—these families *are* the rodeo" (p. 110).

For some cowgirls, their families' history of rodeo success creates a feeling of empowerment and belonging in cowgirls. Fancy Jo said "I started running barrels first. And then I was always in the way, so dad would put a rope in my hand, and I was twelve

or thirteen when I entered my first breakaway roping...I've been roping ever since." Fancy Jo's father was the main influence in her decision to compete in the rodeo. Fancy Jo was influenced by her father's heavy involvement in rodeo and experienced early socialization into the sport (Strandbu et al., 2020). Fancy Jo narrated that her father encouraged her rodeo development. He instilled a "family sport culture" that increased her acceptance of the sport (Strandbu et al., 2020). Her father's message was participation in the rodeo was desired and that she belonged in the masculinized rodeo arena.

Some cowgirls narrated that rodeo was a part of their lifestyle. For example, both Mona and Fancy Jo used those exact words. Fancy Jo said "Sometimes I call it a hobby. . .*a bad habit*. It's just a way of life. That's all I know." Mona went farther and added that being a cowgirl was different for each person; "It's a way of life, a lifestyle. But there's variations of it. I would consider myself a cowgirl, but I don't look typical of the role except when I'm competing in the rodeo." Each woman in this study used the cowgirl vernacular to express their link to rodeo; this language contributed to the need for Table 1. The vernacular common to women in this study is an example of the socialization they have experienced into an insider group. Examples of the women's insider language follows. Jan's daily language is filled with examples; "So I used to cool out all the bull dogging horses" and "He'd run barrels, but the girl had blowed him up." Fancy Jo also stated that "My cousin was in the chute acting like a fake calf (smiles in remembrance) for my dad to turn out." You can see in just these three examples there are numerous terms used as part of the rodeo lifestyle that are likely unknown to those outside it.

Their sense of belonging to a ranching or rodeo family helps create a rodeo space for themselves. Strandbu et al. (2020) discussed how a "family sport culture has an enduring and relatively consistent influence on young people's sport participation" (p. 942). Hayoz et al. (2019) also stressed the importance of family in socializing children into a sports-related lifestyle. My participants' families laid the foundation for a rodeo mentality, emphasizing the importance of rodeo as a sport, a lifestyle and family value. Cowgirls narrated informal learning experiences that influenced their desire to compete, helped create their cowgirl identity, and encouraged them to seek nonformal learning experience to further hone their skills. At the same time, though, they are socialized to the masculine rodeo arena while they can only participate in a few events. Gender norms in rodeo both align with and diverge from society as a whole. As noted earlier, cowgirls experience a tension between what rodeo competition requires them to do, placing them at the intersection of belonging to two different definitions of womanhood. Rodeo is a lifestyle, it's a place they know, and their experiences fit within the rodeo.

Learning Together: The Bond Between a Cowgirl and Her Horse

The bond between a cowgirl and her horse is important. Cowgirls need a good horse in order to compete in the rodeo and most cowgirls spend hours training with their horses before they even enter the arena. Some cowgirls in this study narrated stories about their horses; about the bonds they form, and how much those horses mean to them. They share many details about their horses: from their size, their cost, the time and effort needed to care for them, how high spirited they were, and how much they are part of their daily lives. Weninger and Dallaire (2017b) discussed the bonds between barrel racers and their horses that are similar to the stories shared in this study. Every contestant at the

rodeo is defined by not only the time he/she spends in the arena but by a combination of time and effort that it takes to prepare both rider and horse to compete.

I argue that women narrated relationships as one way they make rodeo 'their own.' The dependency between a cowgirl and her horse enables them to win, and they often talk about the partnerships that exist between them and their horses (Weninger & Dallaire, 2017b). Susan shared her experience winning a rodeo after a major health scare and gave all of the credit to her horse for taking care of her;

> When that last girl ran and I knew, and I stood there with Kat, my arm around him. Did we do that? Do we actually do this? I cried, and I gave a lot of things to the Lord. Gave a lot of things that little sorrel horse down there (her first horse, who is buried on her property). But we made it and we came back strong. I was told 'you couldn't,' but Kat took care of me. and we did it.

Weninger and Dallaire (2017b) examined the shared rider-horse relationship that evolved between some Canadian barrel racers and their horses that is comparable to experiences shared by my participants. Horses functions as more than access to rodeo they also become part of these women's daily lives, Sierra narrated how she depends on her horses for relaxation and to cope with life; "I just loved it. I mean, I just wanted to be on the back of a horse, even if I was just sitting. Now, as an adult, it's kind of my therapy." Weninger and Dallaire (2017b) found that barrel racers used the horse-rider relationship, an "intense and caring human-horse relationship that they believe characterized their sport and define them as barrel racers" (p. 3), this relates to the construction of the cowgirl identity that allows women to distance themselves from other gendered categories in the rodeo such as buckle bunnies, rodeo queens, other rodeo pretenders, and

cowboys. Therefore, this relationship is gendered, positional, and used to create legitimacy for Weninger and Dallaire's (2017b) participants.

Weninger and Dallaire (2017b) found that the time spent training horses is a fundamental part of the process involved within the creation of a legitimate barrel racer. In addition, a woman's alleged affinity towards nurturing, a gendered aptitude, is often the key to acceptance within the arena. Several cowgirls shared stories about the time and intense training that they did with their horses. Bella stated "I know my horse, I trained her, and I know how to ride her." Jan shared her bond with 4-10 Shotgun; "he's registered name was 4-10 Shotgun, and I mean I had a connection to this horse like no other horse." But Sara Kate shared how every day of her life involves training and caring for her horses,

> Even for me today, to miss a day or two riding, it just makes me feel strange. If I want to have a horse, I'm going to take care of him. I'm going to ride. They're not a pet. I mean we love them, but we have to use them.

Developing a bond with their horses was an important aspect of their cowgirl identity.

Value is placed on preservation of femininity through caring for horses by showcasing a nurturing attitude that is considered to be inherently female (Butler & Charles, 2012; Weninger & Dallaire, 2017a). A woman in the rodeo must be physically strong enough to take care of her horse, but still fit into gendered norms and expectations associated with hetero-femininity, the normative expectations of women. This intense horse-rider relationship is developed from hours of practice and the co-creation of horse-human relationships (Weninger & Dallaire, 2017b).

Shilling (2012) explored how society views our bodies as constructions that are assembled through interactions with materials objects. Our bodies are not created in a vacuum but are social constructions that in my participants' experiences revolve through their embodied interactions with horses. These embodied interactions become a way to identify who is a cowgirl and who is not, functioning as a resistant identity category that differentiates between cowgirls and other women in the rodeo. As noted earlier, Sara Kate believed that she needed her *own* horse to be a cowgirl. In this way, Sara Kate's identity depended on her owning a horse; being a cowgirl. Sara Kate remembered asking her dad repeatedly for a horse; "I can remember being three years old, I asked my dad every day, 'did you get me a horse today?' Every day he came home from work and that's when I asked him." Sara Kate narrated her sense, perhaps through a complex socialization process, that cowgirls had horses; if she wanted to be a cowgirl the first step was owning her own horse. Sara Kate's insistence, as a child, on having a horse is part of the embodied process of defining her cowgirl identity.

Ellingson (2017) explains that our bodies are not in isolation, that we experience life through interactions with others and with non-human bodies. Our bodies are enmeshed in our environment and interact with everything around us to form embodied responses (Ellingson, 2017). Cowgirls interact with their horses, they are influenced by their activities that include horses, and learn to understand themselves and others through horses as part of their identity and this embodied interaction (Ellingson, 2017). During rodeo performances, a cowgirl controls her horse through physical movements while also being aware of the horse's responses through physical interaction. A cowgirl can feel

tension, excitement, and other emotions both through the physical link between rider and horse and the mental bond that forms through hours of training.

A cowgirl's attachment, relationship and identification with her horse was another form of embodiment. The cowgirls in this study talked about how their love of horses influenced their desire to compete and deserves special attention. These experiences exist in two areas: early interaction with horses, and horses that changed their lives. There are multiple sayings about girls and their relationships with horses. For example, "all horses deserve, once in their lives, to be loved by a little girl" and "whoever said diamonds were a girl's best friend never owned a horse." Two narrators talked about their early experiences with horses or ponies; how those relations bloomed regardless of the nature of the animal. They shared fond memories of horses that challenged their riding while reflecting the distinctiveness of the horse's personality.

The cowgirls narrate relationships with their horses that begins with their first horse, grows with experiences, as well as the time and energy they invest into the animals. Jan shared the most about the relationship between herself and her horses, but others discussed this as well. Cowgirls develop a bond with their horses that matures during countless, feedings, grooming, rides, training sessions, and other lived experiences. Jan spoke about the relationship she had with 4-10 Shotgun that grew from having to care for him, "I wouldn't take 10 million for this horse. This is my best friend. This is my, buddy, you know?" Susan described her feelings about rodeo and horses as "Just my passion. It's my love." Through the time and effort spend bonding with their horse, cowgirls experience an integration that leads to an embodied relationship; this creates another way to understand cowgirls' bodies in relation to their horses. According

to Shilling (2012) “the body is constantly being ‘put together’ and can, on the basis of this work-in-progress, be *enacted* in various ways” (p. 76).

Strong relationships with their horses help cowgirls make the arena their own by fostering a sense of belonging and of legitimacy (Ford, 2020; Weninger & Dallaire, 2017b). Three cowgirls in this study discussed life-changing horses. The cowgirls’ identities included their unique experiences with their horses. The horses were a part of the cowgirls’ lives as actants, non-human objects (Ellingson, 2017; Shilling, 2012). Jan bonds easily with her horses and has ensured that each horse has a good retirement after they can no longer compete. Jan stated, “I have every horse I’ve ever owned, I’ve never sold them, I can’t bear to part with them.” In contrast, Sara Kate would consider selling a horse. Sara Kate discussed that if she couldn’t make as much money in rodeo with the horse as she could make selling the horse, the horse deserved the opportunity to go win with someone else. Both cowgirls loved their horses, and both had relationships with them, but they had different ways of honoring the horse’s lives.

Having a skilled horse is important to winning in rodeo and cowgirls learn early to rely on the quality of their horses. Horses fulfill many roles for cowgirls. Horses are an instrument for competing in the rodeo. Horses allow women to embody the role of cowgirl, contributing to a cowgirl’s authenticity in the rodeo, and paving a pathway to belonging in the arena. Jan stated, “I always wanted to rodeo and wanted really good horses, cause I wanted to be competitive”. She recognized that she couldn’t win without a good horse. Sierra wants to compete but also, she wants to be competitive (to win). Being competitive in rodeo is essential for women who rodeo. Sierra also realized the need to have a good horse when discussing how to help her children’s participation in rodeo;

> But we [Sierra and her husband] made the decision our children would have good horses. So, if they wanted to, and if it was a desire, that it was something they would start out enjoying because they had good horses.

A quality "good" horse is needed to be truly competitive, which involves care, and even, a familial relationship. Bella sees her horses as partners in the rodeo journey and believes that taking care of them is important for making a woman a cowgirl and competitive. Her animals are more than tools; "they're like family." These cowgirls realize that horses are fundamental to journey of finding a place in the rodeo arena and making it their own. Horses make the cowgirl; and through intense training cowgirls make the horse.

Weninger and Dallaire (2017b) emphasized that legitimacy in the rodeo depends on time, effort, and relationship between a cowgirl and her horse. Even rodeo announcers notice the relationships between cowgirls and their horses. Betty fell off her horse at a rodeo and recalled the announcer saying the following "these girls, or these women, put so much time and effort into these horses that they're one and they know when the other is not right." During the endless hours of training a cowgirl and her horse develop a bond that is visible and part of rodeo culture to the extent some describe them as "one." Together they are rodeo competitors; enmeshed as one body.

Tools of the Trade: Legitimacy with Objects

Women in this study often correlated their early rodeo understanding in tandem with a physical possession: a type of clothing, or carrying a bat (crop). Women's reliance on objects as actants (Ellingson, 2017) act as building blocks for the women's identities as cowgirls. Some of women in this study relied on actants (clothes, crops) as a physical

manifestation of their belonging to the rodeo. Competing was not enough to belong; they learned they needed physical tools to signal belonging to the culture.

Susan said "I've always considered myself . . . even when I was little, I ran on buckets in the yard, had my fancy belt on. I carried my bat. So, I've always just been a barrel racer." Susan narrated a type of entanglement; a dependence of physical objects to reveal and reinforce their belonging in the arena (Ellingson, 2017). Susan associated being a barrel racer with specific clothing and carrying a "bat". The bat and fancy belt are both non-human objects also known as actants (Ellingson, 2017). Actants are one of the ways that people exercise their agency within the world (Ellingson, 2017). Susan used her actants to find a pathway to legitimacy in the rodeo and emphasizing her part in the rodeo, as if true cowgirls possess these physical objects. The act of being seen by others and recognized as a cowgirl in the larger space of rodeo seems like a building block in some of my participants' cowgirl identity.

Susan uses her bat and clothing choices to claim her agency as a barrel racer; they are the props she needs to reinforce her own sense of belonging in the rodeo or convey to others a type of legitimacy in the arena. Appleby and Fisher (2005) also found that female rock climbers relied on clothing choices to both legitimize their participation in sport and contribute to their identity formation. Dressing appropriately helps women in both the rodeo and female rock climbers to show others that they are serious about sport—they are legitimate. Appleby and Fisher (2005) stated that "female rock climbers feel as though they have to perform 'appropriate' femininity by wearing clothing that is not only functional but also 'cute'" (p. 16).

Appleby and Fisher (2005) were not the only scholars to report a reliance on clothing choices as a pathway to legitimacy in a male dominant sport, Weninger and Dallaire (2017a) also discussed clothing choices. Weninger and Dallaire (2017a) discussed how cowgirls used clothing choices as a method of separating "legitimate" barrel racers from other women at the rodeo; legitimate barrel racers "underlined the importance of proper attire; they believe how they dress reflects on the sport as a whole" (p. 1085). Both Appleby and Fisher's (2005) and Weninger and Dallaire's (2017a) studies reflect that women sometimes judge themselves and others by their clothing choices and strive to fit within hegemonic norms of dress for their respective sports. In this study, Susan, Jan, and others associated the possession of certain objects as related to their cowgirl agency and identity. They tried to assure that they looked the part, possessing the correct tools, of a rodeo cowgirl.

Finding Capital to Navigate Roadblocks with Informal Learning

Another form of learning is associated with cultural capital. Cowgirls needed to recognize and activated various capital successfully to navigate rodeo associations, enter rodeos, compete, and negotiate the gendered arena. Women in the rodeo often gather to support each other as they navigate the gendered environments of the rodeo but did not describe *who* was responsible for creating the gendered differences in the rodeo. Arnot (1982) in her discussion on the development of the theory of cultural production and the importance of gender stipulated that the first major step in any theory of gender is to understand

> that gender categories are in a very important sense arbitrary social constructs. The arbitrary nature of their contents, both historically and in terms of social

> class, is the product of "work" carried out by a variety of social institutions and agents (e.g., schools, churches, the mass media—teachers, priests, authors, film producers). (p. 80)

Social institutions, like rodeo associations, work both historically and currently to create the differences attributed to gender (Arnot, 1982). I have considered Arnot's (1982) arguments about how schools construct the differences between boys and girls in school and how that conversation would apply to gendered differences that rodeo arenas and organizations also create. Why are men and women placed in different events? Why are those the categories of separation? Why is one of the unwritten rules of rodeo that women are expected to dress differently than men in the rodeo, using more bling and flash? All these questions build on the constructed gendered differences between cowboys and cowgirls in the rodeo.

The acquisition of capital revolves around the steps that individuals take in order to fit into society, the unwritten rules and regulations that individuals submit to in order to succeed and how women learn to navigate gendered areas in the rodeo (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital is the possession of certain forms of knowledge acquired through extensive work beginning in the home and extending into society (English & Bolton, 2016). One aspect of capital that is important within the rodeo, highlighted in Mona's journey, is social capital. Due to the extensive networks of male competitors in the rodeo, cowboys have more access to cultural capital and therefore social capital. English and Bolton (2016), in *Bourdieu for Educators*, define social capital as:

> the social connections and networks that bring the old adage of 'not *what* you know but *who* you know' to the fore, as social contacts can open doors and ease

> the way for accessing different social positions and opportunities that might not be open to those agents lacking such elevated levels of social capital (p. 56).

Mona received instruction in bareback riding not because of who she was but because of who she knew, mainly her father. Mona resisted the cultural labels associated with gender and saddle bronc participation by instead accepting how she was socialized at home. She was able to access her father's social capital to enter and compete in a male-dominated event. One form of social capital is this access that comes from the "relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" that Mona's father had established from a lifetime of rodeo competition (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). Mona's father supplied a network of resources and access to learning environments that provided Mona with the skills needed to compete in a masculinized event comparable to Bourdieu's concept of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Other women in this study also narrated extended family networks that offered similar types of access to social capital. Most participants in this study narrated stories of either their fathers or other males in their families as influential in their rodeo upbringing even though they had women in their family that competed in the rodeo also; the majority of rodeo competitors are male therefore the major social networks of influence would be comprised of men.

Cowgirls with family in the rodeo possessed social and gendered capital (and, indeed, cultural capital) that facilitated finding their places in the arena due to those family connections. Bella dropped names of famous cowgirls and cowboys, past and present world champions, as if they were next-door neighbors because they were. She had access to their knowledge and that access opened doors. Social ties allowed cowgirls to gain economic, cultural, and symbolic capital and explore paths into the arena.

Several cowgirls expressed concern over the social roadblocks that they encountered competing in the rodeo. I understand these roadblocks as a lack of social capital. This lack of social capital is generally specific to cowgirls as gender is the dividing line. Some cowboys have access to extensive networks of past competitors that can educate and transfer capital to them through networking, what Bourdieu (1986) would describe as social capital:

> the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 21)

Since the majority of rodeo participants are cowboys, women do not have the extensive gendered networks, which often leaves them out of the loop. Navigating the social norms that intend to limit cowgirls' access to the arena involves informal learning and developing social and cultural capitals. Rodeo associations are affiliated with many rodeos and also host rodeos with large monetary prizes. Belonging to a rodeo association provides one with status and legitimacy, a form of symbolic capital. Belonging to a "rodeo family," which is typically a social group naturally created by cowgirls including both cowgirls and cowboys, facilitates a smooth pathway into rodeo associations. Although women often find barriers to belonging, they persist and do find homes in the arena. They navigate to form bonds with other cowgirls and cowboys and additionally have the socialized family bonds that create a sense of belonging. Most of my

participants narrate that as cowgirls they belong to the rodeo; even if they do not match the masculine norms of the rodeo, they match the categories assigned to them.

However, they also noted persisting limitations. As Susan mentioned, she enjoys her events, “But I do know for a lot of women that they would do other things if it was more, you know, socially acceptable.” Sierra discussed her lack of capital during her interview related to roadblocks she faced. Sierra, even though her family worked with horses, did not have any experience navigating rodeo associations. Walking me through her attempts to join an association for the first time, Sierra discussed the difficulty of navigating the websites and rules. Sierra, like many competitors, who are new to the rodeo, did not have the knowledge, cultural or social capital, needed to enter the competitions correctly. Sierra finally relied on other cowgirls with more experience navigating the gendered arena to open pathways for her success in the rodeo. Sierra found a group of cowgirls and created her own “membership group” that supplied her with the “collectively-owned capital” that she needs to navigate the arena (Bourdieu, 1986).

Knowing how and when to join the association was only the first roadblock. She also needed to determine how correctly to enter rodeos, and how to maximize her ability to enter the maximum number of rodeos per weekend. Being able to correctly enter rodeos, allows Sierra that ability to maximize her access to prize money. Sierra explained “I guess being able to navigate like the paperwork and how to enter and how to draw and you know, cause there's like a, there's a science to it and I don't understand that a lot of times.” Sierra had yet to invest the time needed to develop embodied cultural capital which Bourdieu (1986) discusses as a “work on oneself” (p. 85). I see this as another type of “hard work” that Sierra needed to complete in order to belong to the rodeo. In the case

of Sierra, “work on oneself” involved her taking time to understand to learn the rules of the game, embodying cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). This embodiment implied “a labor of inculcation and assimilation, cost time, time which must be invested personally by the investor” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 85); activities that must be done firsthand. Sierra had to labor and invest time developing a strategy for entering rodeos before she could even compete.

Rodeos are also money-making events, and cowboys have access to more money than cowgirls. Cowboys may enter more events than cowgirls because rodeo committees assume that cowboys’ competitions will draw a larger audience than cowgirls-only events will draw. The larger crowds are symbolic capital, which translate into economic capital. Cowgirls, who traditionally may only compete in two events, are prevented from earning as much as cowboys, who are allowed to compete in many more events than cowgirls. The focus on profit, audience, and popularity coupled with the ways gender norms are perpetuated and reinforced in this context are the main reasons that cowgirls have limited access to competition events. For the institution of rodeo, cowgirls will always earn less payout due to restricted participation and limelight, as the patriarchal legacy of the rodeo perpetuates the differential value assigned to gender (Bourdieu, 2001; Connell, 1987).

The Importance of Learning About “Hard Work”

A cowgirl’s identity requires a discourse of hard work. This type of learning centers on physical and mental struggles of rodeo competition. Susan stated that

> being a cowgirl is a lot of training, especially a barrel racer. A lot of hours on the horse, lot of slow work but I think the joy of being a cowgirl, the rewards of it, is

> wonderful. There is a lot of hard times but when you have that one special run or that one special moment, it lives with you forever.

But Susan was not the only cowgirl to discuss “hard work” and the rewards of it. Fancy Jo, when discussing the steps needed to add breakaway roping to rodeo associations said” It's all been hard work. It wasn’t handed to us but was hard work; multiple people have paved the way for us to compete at this level.” Each account reflected the extensive dedication, hard work, and perseverance needed for success. Rodeo is not just a hobby; it can consume the lives of cowgirls. Such learning is not passive; women and men do not simply receive the dominant culture’s understandings and expectations, rather it is “an interactive process in which people negotiate meanings and identities” (Cain, 2002, p. 67). Cain (2002) adds that within informal learning settings, inequities exist as in formal learning environments (such as schools), especially along lines of gender and race, affecting the perceptions placed on self and others. Patton and Schedlock (2012) discuss the attitudes of women in the rodeo and their expected gendered actions:

> the current roles of White women in the rodeo show the complexity of the cowgirl. She is supposed to be beautiful, poised, and sexy, while also being competent at her sport, so long as she remains in her place on the professional barrel racing circuit. The outside world sees a beautiful, sexual, and mostly untouchable woman, while the cowgirl identifies as fearless, strong, and, most important, an equal. (p. 126)

Cowgirls in my study do not narrate stories of feeling ‘beautiful’ but emphasize the hard work and a feeling of equality. Tonya added the being a cowgirl takes “hard work, lots of

hard work and dedication. Even when you don't feel like doing something you got to do it." They highlight different qualities than these gendered expectations.

Women's memories of rodeo change to fit the times, for example Jan narrated that "I remember growing up, going to rodeos with my parents…and they always made a big deal about the 'pretty cowgirls' and all that kind of stuff…I feel like rodeos kind of evolved with, with women's rights and the times." What society sees and expects is not what cowgirls use to define themselves. The accounts emphasize women's grit when experiencing adversity and defeat while also enjoying the ride. My participants narrate a discourse of "hard work" to justify their position in the arena. They navigate the masculinized arena through their "hard work"; cowgirls do not simply show up in the arena and compete. My participants narrated "hard work" as a pathway to *earning* their place in the rodeo all while fitting the gendered norm of the strong cowgirl. In the process, cowgirls cultivate joy through competition. They continue competing despite the "hard work" because they love the rodeo lifestyle.

One aspect of hard work is knowing that time commitment to rodeo, cowgirls have obligations to their sport and lifestyle. Cowgirls cannot take the day off because the animals that make rodeo possible depend on them. If it is raining, freezing, or just too hot, animals still must be feed and watered. Tonya discussed how having time off was not an option. Tonya said "you still have to go twice a day to water and feed your animals. I don't think it's for the weak at heart." Cowgirls' accounts emphasize that their animals come first and hard work is needed to take care of them. Adams (2016) emphasized a ranchers' love and devotion to both their horses and livestock; this is an important responsibility, because ranching economy is based on the lives and deaths of livestock.

Cowgirls show grit through appropriating what might be considered socially constructed, stereotypical masculine traits: independence, spending time outdoors, engaging in heavy physical labor, and getting dirty in the process. Showing grit and trying hard in preparing for the arena are the key learned behaviors that women argue leads to their success. Sierra stated that "If you don't try, you can't win." Betty summarized grit by saying: "As long as you're hustling and you're trying your hardest." My participants narrated that cowgirls hustle, they have grit and above all they work hard. Patton and Schedlock (2012) also found that cowgirls emphasized the need for hard work to succeed in rodeo; "cowgirls let their work stand for their abilities, and they work to get the job done inside and outside of the arena" (p. 126). My participants' stories of hard work are important part of their experiences. The hard work helped them claim their place in the arena. They belonged to rodeo through active participation in the sport that included the same hard work as cowboys.

Women emphasize that "hard work" happens both inside and outside of competition. Susan discussed the intense work needed to be a barrel racer. Susan said

> being a cowgirl is a lot of training, especially a barrel racer. A lot of hours on the horse, lot of slow work but I think the joy of being a cowgirl, the rewards of it, is wonderful. There is a lot of hard times but when you have that one special run or that one special moment, it lives with you forever.

Here Susan describes that spending time with her horse doing the training needed to succeed was important to her place in the arena. Susan narrates that taking shortcuts does not pay off in the long run, but training of both rider and horse, and time contribute to

success in the arena. This is another example of the gendered cowgirl identity, narrated around the idea of hard work, a sense of accomplishment, and joy.

Harley also narrated how a cowgirl in turn learns to be independent by using a discourse about hard work. Harley stated that cowgirls know how "to get things done on their own: whether it is riding a horse, catching a horse, anything." Harley was sharing life lessons that she had learned while competing in the rodeo. Sierra too discussed hard work: she categorized her rodeo journey as "lots of blood, sweat, and tears." Jan similarly said that cowgirls needed to be "self-resilient and self-sufficient because a lot of times I have to do a lot of things that a lot of women wouldn't even dream of doing." My participants are working to distinguish themselves from other women, creating a gendered identity for themselves enmeshed in the unique type of "hard work" of the rodeo.

Multiple cowgirls showcased that making mistakes can also contribute to future success. Each mistake is seen as a learning experience and a way forward. For example, Betty narrates her fall at the first barrel as a learning opportunity,

> falling off, teaches you that when you make mistakes it's timing and you learn from that. You learn from that error instead of a mistake. You learn from that error and move forward. Anytime you get knocked down in any avenue, whether it is in a relationship, a friendship, a competition, the only place that you can go is up.

Betty applies this lesson to all her life's mistakes: learning from a mistake is fundamental to success. I would stipulate that rodeo could be considered a metaphor for life; how you show up and compete at the rodeo is how you show up for your life. Sierra also shared

this belief: “you learn something every time: win, lose, or draw—learning through doing…mistakes can teach.” Betty and Susan are just two examples of cowgirls learning through their experiences of making mistakes in the arena. They emphasize the physical actions needed for rodeo. Patton and Schedlock (2012) were not the only scholars to discuss the hard work needed for cowgirls to compete, Weninger and Dallaire (2017a) also contributed to the scholarship. Weninger and Dallaire (2017a) stated that “the most critical disciplinary technique for ensuring her rodeo and athletic credibility was through her work ethic in honing her horse(wo)manship expertise” (p. 1987). This construction provides examples of how cowgirls narrate their belonging through their physical labor and the discourse surrounding it.

Women narrate the appropriation of the masculine characteristics of independence and toughness as well. Harley said that cowgirls “get things done on their own: whether it is riding a horse, catching a horse, anything.” Sara Kate, Tonya, Harley, Betty, and Tanya discussed appropriating what culture has defined as male qualities and exhibit some pride in that appropriation, but who defines what it means to be male or female? Connell (1987) discusses the development of unitary characteristics that are culturally defined for males and females in the evolution of hegemonic masculinity: “the cultural ideal (or ideals) of masculinity need not correspond at all closely to the actual personalities of the majority of men” (p. 184). The media, too, have helped to construct the rugged, western ideal of masculinity, reinforcing the gendered norms, such as working with livestock, which is considered “men’s work.” However, cowgirls must and willingly do assume this same work as part of their lives as cowgirls and rodeo participants.

Working hard does not just include physical labor. Cowgirls must work hard to ensure that their mental game is strong also. Bella narrated the importance of mental toughness, “you’ve got to be mentally tough; you know?” But she went on to talk about how she dealt with difficulties in the arena. Bella has a fifteen-minute rule that she uses to deal with disappointment and loss. Bella states that “for fifteen minutes I can kick and scream and go to the truck and cry. But when that fifteen minutes is over, that’s done. Time to get serious and go back forward.” Bella has learned that having a moment to process a loss is just as important as the strength to move on.

Although many of my participants grew up in the rodeo, over time their attitudes changed as they grew into their identities to find a type of self-actualization. Harley was one cowgirl who has grown more confident even in the time I have known her. Harley began competing in breakaway roping after college and narrated the change in her attitude;

> over the years I've got over that and I just no longer really care. But, at one point, yes, I was self-conscious. I guess I was worried about them. They might think I was stupid, but I don't care anymore.

Harley no longer looks to anyone else for validation of her placement within the arena but has grown more confident and assertive. Instead of looking to others, Harley has reached a level of self-confidence and acceptance in how others see her in the rodeo.

Women also narrated the hard work involved in bringing about change in the arena. The women of breakaway roping narrated advocacy for equity in rodeo events. Fancy Jo, Sierra, and Tonya were all involved in breakaway roping as it transitioned into more rodeo opportunities for cowgirls in the last decade. When discussing the addition of

breakaway roping to rodeo associations, Fancy Jo stated, “it wasn’t handed to us, but was hard work.” Cowgirls learned that they could not just sit on the sidelines and watch the rodeo but had to put in the hard work needed to increase their opportunities in the rodeo.

Learning In the Arena: Navigation and Barriers with Gendered Challenges

Cowgirls encounter barriers; examples of those barriers are limited events to enter, not having equal money for their events, livestock that are not appropriate for roping, and fan and commentators’ statements about their abilities based solely on their gender. These barriers exist because of the socially constructed nature of gender. Within this section, I analyze the ways the male-dominated sport, rodeo, denies women equal access to the arena reflected through the limited number of events in which cowgirls may compete along with other types of gendered obstacles. In response to these obstacles, I will highlight the strength, grit, and perseverance that cowgirls described as learning in response to those obstacles to navigate the arena and make it their own (Ford, 2020). Cowgirls navigate the arena by working hard, adopting a cowgirl identity, and confronting and resolving adversity strategically and creatively.

One form of learning surfacing in the narratives is associated with understanding and enacting the rules associated with gender. What does society expect differently of men and women? Learning to navigate the arena is more than fighting to find one’s place in the sport; cowgirls also experience difficulties with juggling home life with the desire to compete in the rodeo. Patton and Schedlock (2012) emphasize that “the roles of women in rodeo are ultimately still contested. As far as women have come with women’s liberation, rodeo seems to have gone backward in time to shut women out of a sport that they once dominated” (p. 131). Although cowgirls once had more access to the arena,

they now have to navigate to find ways to fully belong. One cowgirl narrated a lack of support while juggling both motherhood and the rodeo lifestyle.

Sara Kate, for example, described traveling with her youngest child and the difficulty of finding someone to watch him while she competed. Although she was married, leaving her son with her husband was not an option because her husband considered childcare a "woman's responsibility," and Sara Kate accepted her gendered role, reifying the patriarchal hierarchy (Bourdieu, 2001), and creating challenges for participating. Bourdieu (2001) explained that

> the division between the sexes appears to be 'in the order of things', as people sometimes say to refer to what is normal, natural, to the point of being inevitable: it is present both in the objectified state – in things (in the house, for example, every part of which is 'sexed'), in the whole social world, and – in the embodied state- in the habitus of the agents functioning as systems of schemes of perception, thought and action. (p. 8)

The expectation of childcare is normalized and associated with women's work, it was inevitable that Sara Kate would take her young son on the road with her. Her experiences reflect the challenges cowgirls must navigate in entering rodeos. This lack of childcare influenced Sara Kate's ability to compete, causing her to compete in local rodeos instead of the more prestigious WPRA (Women's Professional Rodeo Association) rodeos. Although Sara Kate faced roadblocks to competition, she successfully navigated them, created a place for herself in the rodeo, and continues to have a successful rodeo career.

Accounts generally reflect women's acceptance of the disparities between their experiences and that of cowboys. Through informal learning experiences and

socialization to gendered unwritten rules, cowgirls learn about differences in the rodeo arena, and they must find ways to navigate them. The rodeo has traditionally been a wealthy White man's sport. A recent way that cowgirls have resisted is their fight to include breakaway roping as an event recognized by rodeo associations in order to create new pathways to belonging for cowgirls in the rodeo, to challenge the "order of things".

Beginning in 2007, breakaway roping became the latest rodeo event in which cowgirls competed. Cowgirls eagerly discussed the inclusion of this event to extend access. By fighting for the addition of breakaway roping, cowgirls have created another way to belong to the rodeo (Ford, 2020). Fancy Jo and the women that stood with her were not satisfied with their position in the rodeo instead of accepting it "actively pushed back against it" (Ford, 2020, p. 14). They fought to change the current gendered rodeo limitations. Fancy Jo described the extensive process involved for including breakaway ropers in the ACRA (American Cowboys Rodeo Association) finals and how the inclusion of breakaway roping started with cowgirls reaching out to the board of the ACRA. The board of the ACRA functioned as a gatekeeper to their access. As a gatekeeper, the board ensured that women breakaway ropers stayed isolated from the rest of the arena, regulating, and maintaining what Bourdieu (2001), in his theory of masculine domination, terms the "order of things," the normalized expectations that form the bases of order in society and justification for the continued domination of women.

To gain access to performing in the rodeo, instead of the slack, the judges literally timed the cowgirls to ensure that the women competed quickly, limiting their rodeo time performance. Fancy Jo narrated about the situation

> The third year we got to rope during the perf [performance] and they timed us. Literally had a stopwatch because they thought we would take too long. And I think we finished all 15 girls in less than five minutes.

The rodeo judges took measures to ensure cowgirls' events would be quick, assuming women would not draw much of a crowd. By contrast, traditionally male-dominated rodeo events are included in the performance without time limits. Cowgirls seized the opportunity offered to them and excelled; their performance ensured that future cowgirls would have access to the arena. Fancy Jo and others' accounts emphasized they were agents in working to rewrite the norms of the rodeo. They ensured that cowgirls received expanded access to the rodeo and at the same time, honored their family sport heritage. They felt they belonged in the arena and took steps to actualize their beliefs.

When the cowgirls challenged the *status quo* by approaching the ACRA board in 2007, the first step involved recognizing that women belong to the most oppressed group (hooks, 1984). bell hooks (1984) stated

> women are the group most victimized by sexist oppression. As with other forms of group oppression, sexism is perpetuated by institutional and social structures; by the individuals who dominate, exploit, or oppress; and by the victims themselves who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status quo. (p. 43)

Cowgirls worked to show the ACRA board how the social structures of the rodeo oppressed them and what steps could be taken to resolve the issue. Although cowgirls still fight for equal pay, this discussion was the first step in the process of liberation. These 2007 cowgirls educated the ACRA on rodeo's inequities through discussions with

the ACRA board, and the rules changed to become more inclusive, a revolutionary improvement in terms of the acceptance of cowgirls. As a result, breakaway roping has grown exponentially since its introduction into the ACRA in 2007, and now women can compete, highlighting their skills; they created a pathway for belonging that is open to all cowgirls.

The women of breakaway roping had to prove to various entities that their event would be a moneymaker that crowds would want to see. Fancy Jo was a pioneer in the field of breakaway roping and worked with other cowgirls to ensure that this event flourished in different associations. Fancy Jo explained, “when the event first was offered, girls were just thrilled to have the opportunity” but when on to discuss her feelings towards the next generation of ropers “I feel like the younger generation doesn't understand because I mean they (the rodeo associations) were pretty much like, ‘if this doesn't work, it's not going to happen’.” Fancy Jo, and others, struggle with the younger generation not appreciating the hard work it took to get the event added. The opportunity was full of difficulties, for example, sometimes the proper livestock for the various events were unavailable for the cowgirls though they were available for the cowboys. Jan and Fancy Jo both mentioned this disparity. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) speaks to this disparity in society that the cowgirls experienced in the arena: “the concept of hegemonic masculinity presumes the subordination of nonhegemonic masculinities” (p. 846) and women. Stock contractors supplied the proper amount of calves for the men’s event and then limited the amount for the women’s. Cowgirls in this study, like others who were pioneers in the arena, learned to compete despite the gendered obstacles. Cowgirls overcame the obstacle of having inappropriate livestock for the break roping

event by roping the overlarge livestock anyway and by performing in the slack. If the rodeo's organizers thought they would "scare" these women away by having oversized livestock, they grossly underestimated these women's determination and drive. These cowgirls' accounts emphasized charting their own paths to find areas of acceptance.

What happens with cowgirls in the rodeo, a male-dominated sport, is merely a reflection of the larger patriarchal society of which it is a part. In one sense, women learn their status in relation to men, typically one that is inferior and submissive to men (Bourdieu, 2001). Bella, herself, questioned her ability to compete in the sport of bucking bulls. Using Bourdieu's (2001) lens of masculine domination, I consider Bella's internalization of her belief system into the gendered "order of things" and therefore she struggled to compete in a more male-dominated area of the arena. In his theory of masculine domination, Bourdieu (2001) speaks to this process that I use to analyze Bella's experience:

> girls internalized, in the form of schemes of perception and appreciation not readily accessible to consciousness, the principles of the dominant vision which lead them to find the social order, such as it is, normal or even natural and in a sense to anticipate their destiny, refusing the courses or careers from which they are anyway excluded and rushing towards those for which they are in any case destined (p. 95).

Discussing how she felt when she entered a bucking futurity for the first time, revealing a growing consciousness of the patriarchal hierarchy, Bella said "I think it might've been a little more of me just thinking, I'm in a man's world, women don't do this." Bella shared that the men she competed against doubted her abilities, as she also did, until she proved

them wrong. The men's attitudes reinforced the cultural expectations and the gendered barriers to arena access. Bella learned, through her daily life as discussed by Jeffs and Smith (2005), that men did certain activities and women did not. She felt that she needed to prove her worth by winning to be accepted. But after she had the first win under her belt, Bella began to believe in herself. That first win was what Bella needed to find her own place. Now she belongs behind the chute and has claimed her identity as a bucking bull breeder.

Cowgirls in this study followed a long history of struggle to be accepted and respected by cowboys and the rodeo committees who hosted the events. Mona is my one rough stock competitor (one of the events that involves the riding of bucking animals), and she emphasized, "there is still this perception that women can't ride rough stock or can't do timed events and stuff at the rodeo…you guys just don't listen to everybody else, like, do some research people." Mona strove to educate her fellow competitors and rodeo organizers regarding the more inclusive history of rodeo, emphasizing that women were not always marginalized in rodeo. Her effort to educate others reflects a dialogue necessary to achieve liberation reflects, as Freire (2012) states,

> an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in their vocation to be more fully human (which is not the privilege of an elite, but the birthright of all). Faith in people is an *a priori* requirement of dialogue. (p. 90)

Mona strived to make a different future by educating her fellow male competitors, to engage in dialogue with the hope of making a difference. She had faith that she could enlighten those around her and bring gendered change to the arena (Freire, 2012). This

engagement was fundamental to providing space and events for cowgirls. Mona did not need others to tell her that she belonged, she had been socialized through her family networks to *know* she had a place. She spent time educating those around her to women's place in the arena—that, in fact, cowgirls belonged.

While respect may be a given to cowboys, cowgirls must earn it from cowboys and male-dominated committees and organizations. Mona openly discussed the exclusion she experienced when she began to compete; she had to earn the trust of the "older" generation of cowboys before they welcomed her into the arena. Some men may be surprised to see cowgirls behind the bucking chutes or on bucking horses. The arena is steeped in male dominance. Although in Mona's case, the men reacted with surprise, sometimes the reaction can take the form of symbolic violence, or what Bourdieu (2001) calls "the violence of emotional reactions to the entry of women" (p. 96). The cowboys defend the arena

> against feminizations, men are trying to protect their most deep-rooted idea of themselves as men, especially in the case of social categories . . . which owe much, if not all of their value, even in their own eyes, to their image of manliness (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 96).

Rodeo history, due to reinforcement from media, especially Hollywood, has revolved around the "manliness" of its participants—the rugged, masculine cowboy. Bella and Mona both learned to assert their agency and navigate these male-dominated, rodeo arena with confidence after repeated successful experiences behind the chute; they learned not to depend on acceptance from cowboys and how to negotiate potential obstacles while

claiming their places within the arena. In the process, both Mona and Belle have claimed their own agency. They belong in the arena.

Harley does not consider the cowboys' attitudes towards cowgirls to be sexist. She stated "I don't think they're sexist or anything like that towards women competitors. They want us there. They want equal and fair treatment for us." Harley, and many other women who compete in the rodeo, do not see the disparity of their treatment but have grown to accept the status quo. They believe that cowboys in the arena want them to succeed and thrive. bell hooks (1984) explained that

> many women do not join organized resistance against sexism precisely because sexism has not meant an absolute lack of choices. They may know they are discriminated against on the basis of sex, but they do not equate this with oppression. (p. 5)

Harley realizes that rodeo committees, associations, and other factors do in fact marginalize cowgirls but fails to equate this as oppression. Harley does not resist the oppressive forces that control the rodeo arena but accommodates rodeo norms. She belongs in the rodeo because she believes she does and enjoys her rodeo life. Patton and Schedlock (2012) stipulated that the world may see cowgirls as "beautiful, sexual, and mostly untouchable" but cowgirls themselves believe they belong because they are equal (p. 126). Cowgirls primarily believe they are equal and create a pathway to belonging in the rodeo. Harley, when discussing her joy in competing, stated "Roping is something I always enjoy, I love to do it."

Conclusion

This chapter presented a comprehensive theme in my data: Learning the Ropes. It centered on the informal learning that formed cowgirls' identities, how horses participated in the embodiment process of those identities, and the joy that cowgirls narrate about competing in the rodeo. Within the theme, cowgirls repeatedly narrate an overarching theme of family belonging. Rodeo participation honors their family traditions.

I used theories associated with informal learning to explore how women learn to be a cowgirl. Family socialization led to the socialization of cowgirls in the rodeo arena. Analysis was approached with a feminist mindset to find ways to center women in this study. Additionally, I used embodiment, as defined by Shilling (2012) and by Ellingson (2017) to discuss how women in the arena interact with nonhuman agents as pathways to find acceptance and belonging within the arena. The relationship between cowgirls and their horses and other livestock intertwines with the creation of cowgirl identity. Cowgirls narrated that rodeo was more than a sport but a lifestyle that they enjoyed and horses helped facilitate their enjoyment in the rodeo.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS: 'THIS IS WHERE THE COWGIRL RIDES AWAY'

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to "re-present" my participants' rodeo stories, illustrating and unpacking the meaning in the masculinized arena they narrated. My research focused on the experiences of my participants within the gendered arena, how they learned to navigate the arena, and the informal learning experiences that occurred before, within, and without of the rodeo arena. This chapter consists of a summary of my study design, the final conclusions, reflecting on the ways the findings from this study compared to gendered aspects of findings from scholarship in rodeo and other male-dominated sports. These conclusions are followed by the implications, recommendations, limitations, future research, and final reflections. I will begin with a summary of my study including study design, participant selection, and how the narratives were presented.

Summary of Study

This study grew out of my love for the rodeo, my own journey competing within the arena, and my personal evolution as a researcher. Although I now compete in the

rodeo, I did not grow up in the rodeo lifestyle. But I am uniquely placed to do this research, as both an insider and outsider, and to ask the questions of cowgirls. I was interested in how cowgirls would narrate their stories of the rodeo. I explored how they learned to be a cowgirl and what gendered experiences they had during that process. I am critical of current rodeo dynamics and this research started from that point. Crotty (1998) stated that "critical forms of research [including feminist research] call current ideology into questions, and initiate action, in the cause of social justice" (p. 157). The findings of this study indicated that women in the rodeo do narrate experiences of a masculinized arena. My participants discussed informal learning environments that included extensive family socialization. Additionally, a discussion of "hard work", rodeo lifestyle, and the joy actualize through competition is illuminated through my participants' narratives.

I conducted this qualitative study during the summer and fall rodeo season of 2019. I used a narrative inquiry methodology as defined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) because I was interested in the lived experiences of my participants. I used a feminist mindset to conduct the inquiry and analyze the narratives created during this process; my participants and I co-created narratives of the rodeo as they shared their storied realities with me. The narratives shared in Chapters IV-VI of this study showcase the lived experiences of ten women who either currently compete or have competed in the rodeo. In Chapter VII, I presented a comprehensive theme "Learning the Ropes" that focused on how cowgirls narrated their experiences in the rodeo, what techniques they used to navigate the masculinized arena, and what they learned in those processes. Subthemes emerged that detailed the cowgirl identity, rodeo lessons for life, family social production and socialization, the joy narrated by cowgirls as they discussed rodeo

competition. Data was collected for this study through in-depth interviews with my participants, observations at rodeos, photo elicitation with three women, and reviews of websites associated with various rodeo associations.

Participants

Ten women participated in this narrative inquiry study. I gave each of them a pseudonym: Sara Kate, Betty, Susan, Fancy Jo, Harley, Tonya, Sierra, Jan, Mona, and Bella. Sara Kate, Betty, and Susan competed only in barrel racing. Fancy Jo, Harley, Tonya, Sierra, and Jan were primarily break away ropers although they had competed in other events and in different equine activities. Mona and Bella had the most diverse rodeo journeys but are currently competing in different ends of the rough stock spectrum. Fancy Jo, Betty, Susan, and Mona identify as Native American or First Nation. The remainder of my participants are White.

I used both purposeful and opportunity sampling to find my participants. Purposeful sampling allowed me to select individuals that would provide information rich cases that would narrate deep understanding of the rodeo; opportunity sampling allowed me to select from the individuals that I see at the rodeos I attend. I interviewed ten women who participate in the rodeo, including four Native Americans. Understanding how Native American women experience the rodeo can expand understanding of how gender and race functions in the arena. Except for Mona, I had a rodeo relationship with each of my participants. Although I consider each of these women superior to me in terms of rodeo talent and experience, I have competed with/against them. This created an insider/outsider relationship between me and my participants. These relationships

allowed my participants and I to co-create this project. In most cases, they relaxed with me in ways they may not have with another researcher.

Construction of Narratives

I conducted in-depth interviews with each participant. As soon as possible after the interviews I uploaded the audio recordings to a transcription service. This began my process of immersion in the data. I read and re-read each transcript searching for commonalities and differences. I focused on what my participants said and did not say. My participants often asked me about the state of my research when we would meet at rodeos, jackpots, or at the arena.

I created index cards with statements from the interviews. These cards were part of my coding process as I sorted and resorted them into piles as themes emerged. These themes transformed into the findings as discussed in the previous chapter.

Inquiry Questions

My inquiry questions were:

1. What is the storied reality of cowgirls who perform in the predominantly White, male rodeo arena?
2. How do women navigate the masculinized arena of rodeo?
3. What do cowgirls learn in the arena?

Discussions and Implications

In this section I revisit each of my inquiry questions in discussion with scholarship of rodeo and other male-dominated sports. How did the findings of my study both agree and disagree with discussions presented in scholarship about Women in male dominated sports, including rodeo?

Each of my participants narrated various rodeo experiences but within each narrative the over compassing theme of informal learning was present. Narratives from this study detailed different ways that women narrated informal learning practices as part of their storied reality within the rodeo, how they navigated the arena, and how those practices were part of what they learned in the arena. Examining the narratives within this study contributes to the limited scholarship on how women learn in the rodeo. In the following sections, I connect the theme of "Learning the Ropes" to my inquiry questions. The first question addresses the storied reality of women who perform in the contemporary rodeo arena—predominantly White and male.

Storied Realities

Many of the stories narrated by cowgirls in my study emphasize the amount of hard work and discipline that is needed to compete and navigate the rodeo. My participants not only narrate hard work but expect it of cowgirls. Hard work builds a type of agency that they claim as cowgirls; hard work is required of the sport and creates a pathway to acceptance in the arena. I have learned that you must complete the "hard work" in order to successfully compete at rodeo, you cannot be successful without first learning the needed skills. For example, Fancy Jo, when discussing the steps needed to add breakaway roping as an event for women in different rodeo associations, said "it's all been hard work. It wasn't handed to us, but was hard work; multiple people have paved the way for us to compete at this level." Other women in the study discussed physical and mental labor that was needed to succeed in rodeo. Harley emphasized the independence required and learned from rodeo, stating that cowgirls know how "to get things done on their own: whether it is riding a horse, catching a horse, anything."

These repetitive discussions surrounding hard work are explicitly feminist in describing how women narrate that they earned their right to be in the arena. They relate to Patton and Schedlock's (2012) discussion of how women in the rodeo view themselves as equals and LeCompte's (1993) discussion of how frontier heritage affected women. Patton and Schedlock (2012) discussed the differences between the current roles of White women in the rodeo with how these cowgirls see themselves. Patton and Schedlock (2012) stated that "the outside world sees a beautiful, sexual, and mostly untouchable woman, while the cowgirl identifies as fearless, strong, and, most important, an equal" (p. 126). Women in this study narrated their sense of belonging in the arena; not once did they discuss their looks with the exception of Susan's reference to fancy tack. Hard work was more important and their pathway to belonging in the rodeo.

LeCompte's (1993) classic work on women in rodeo detailed how women who grew up on ranches held the belief that they were as capable as the men in their lives. Women in my study also narrated feelings of equality when discussing the cowboys that competed with them; my participants did not differentiate between themselves and men in the arena. For example, Harley stated

> most cowboys have grown up around or been around an environment where they're used to women that rodeo. I'm not saying they're [the cowboys] always treating us great because they do a lot of stupid shit (laughs), but I don't think they're sexist or anything like that towards women competitors. They want us there. They want equal and fair treatment for us.

Women in my study viewed their participation in the rodeo as based on hard work, dedication, and desire to win. They felt empowered by their work in the arena. Women in

my study did not recognize the duality of their identities when juxtaposed with expectations placed on them by society. Being a cowgirl is complicated and layered; women see themselves as competitors, participating in hard work to engage in the arena, and living a family life style they were socialized to do.

Weninger and Dallaire's (2017a) participants also discussed the importance of the hard work and physical labor needed to earn legitimacy in the rodeo. Their participants, Canadian barrel racers, did not classify the hard, physical labor needed to care for horses as "'women's work' but rather 'men's work' in dominant gender discourses" (Weninger & Dallaire, 2017a, p. 1082). Like my participants, the women in the study simply completed the work needed and "were not concerned with such issues" (Weninger & Dallaire, 2017a, p. 1082). The women in my study, with the exception of Mona and Bella, did not dwell on the gendered barriers they crossed but simply went about their business, taking care of animals and competing in the rodeo. What drives a cowgirl's desire, in some cases, to ignore the gendered barriers she faces? It could be taken as an unconscious affirmation of the way things are done, a desire to not tackle the gendered differences, an awareness of the growth experienced during competition, or arena realization of the enjoyment and exhilaration that they experience while competing. As stated earlier, being a cowgirl is complicated. There are a variety of gendered attitudes to be addressed but at the end of the day cowgirls are not univocal; each woman addresses her unique set of experiences and finds her own joy within the arena.

Weninger and Dallaire (2017a) also stated that "having grown up with sisters and mothers who contributed to outdoor physical labour, male ranchers and farmers presumably did not view cowgirls as transgressive" (p. 1082). The men in cowgirls' lives

experienced other women crossing into male dominated spaces as a type of agency to claim cowgirls spot in the arena and therefore do not consider it unusual for women to be involved in the rodeo. The independence and self-actualization of cowgirls, as narrated in my study and in Weninger and Dallaire's (2017a), is expected by both the women and men involved in the rodeo.

Patton and Schedlock (2012) emphasized that cowgirls want to participate in and promote the rodeo while also finding ways to reclaim the access that past cowgirls had in the arena. Mona and Fancy Jo both narrated stories about how cowgirls are reclaiming roles once open to women in the rodeo that are currently limited. Mona openly discussed the participation of women in bucking events in the past encouraged her to compete in saddle bronc events even though other competitors repeatedly insisted that women do not belong. When discussing her rodeo career, Mona said "at every step of the way, everyone was telling me that I couldn't ride, that women weren't allowed." But she persevered and educated herself and others on the history of rodeo. Mona realized that women once had more access to the arena and are not currently banned from entering events. Instead of rules against entering, women come up against society's roadblocks. Mona explained

> there is still this perception that women can't ride rough stock or can't do time events and stuff at the rodeo. And, honestly, the only associations that they can't do that is anything that's gender specific; high school rodeo association or the college rodeo association. At every other association, unless it's an all-girls rodeo or whatever, it's open for everyone.

Mona realized that women previously had a bigger part of the rodeo. Patton and Schedlock (2012) discussed how women are "focusing on reclaiming the roles once

occupied by their early cowgirl namesakes" (p. 126) and looking for ways to assume the previous roles of full rodeo competitors. Fancy Jo fought for the inclusion of women's roping events in rodeo associations in comparison to the women who use to be showcased in rodeos as trick ropers.

Cowgirls in my study narrated themselves as agents in the arena and emphasized that hard work was needed to succeed, and were more than willing to do that work. Patton and Schedlock (2012) attributed that attitude to all cowgirls by saying "cowgirls let their work stand for their abilities, and they work to get the job done inside and outside of the arena" (p. 126). Tonya was frank in her discussion of what cowgirls need to do outside the arena to succeed "[It takes] hard work, lots of hard work and dedication. Even when you don't feel like doing something you got to do it." Tonya's attitude is just one instance of a cowgirl showcasing the hard work needed to succeed in the rodeo. Tonya's expectation, and other women in this study, is that women should, could, and do compete in the rodeo.

How Cowgirls Navigate

Cowgirls must find ways to navigate the male dominated rodeo and the women in my study shared many ways that they do so. Cowgirls are not univocal; each woman highlighted different ways to belong to the rodeo. Many scholars have discussed the history of rodeo and how women were pushed to the sidelines after World War II (Ford, 2020; LeCompte, 1993; Patton & Schedlock, 2012; Thomas, 2014). Rodeo has acted as a site of gendered separation and "men become masculine men and conversely women become feminine through the events in which they compete and the attire they don"

(Ford, 2020, p. 12). Defining the gendered space within the arena is more than one moment; it is the summation of preparation and societal expectations.

Cowgirls must navigate between socially constructed gendered spaces and self-constructed identities to achieve social acceptance within the arena. Cowgirls are expected to compete in barrel racing, breakaway roping, as a rodeo queen, or other limited positions while men are given more options. The expectations associated with cowgirls' presence within the arena vary greatly, these expectations are dependent on the cowgirls' goals and who is observing them. Several women in my study gave examples of ways they overcame these barriers to participation, such as connecting with networks of other cowgirls, pushing to increase access to events, and others in many ways simply ignored gendered barriers.

Cowgirls navigate in ways that emphasize their femininity while competing in the masculinized arena. From my rodeo observations, I noticed that the clothing and tack choices of cowgirls was more ornate and frilly than their male counterparts. Cowgirls, as a whole, utilize more bling, fringe, and ornate patterns—items associated with femininity. Dashper (2012) found that some women in the equestrian field highlight socially constructed feminine traits to reduce perceived differences between their abilities and cultural norms. The ways to highlight feminine traits can be as simple as clothing choices or hair styles. Adelman and Becker (2013) found that others within rodeo culture used constant references to women's looks and nurturing attitudes as a type of control to ensure that female contestants understand that male approval is dependent on the cowgirls fulfilling certain gendered roles. I have heard multiple rodeo announcers make comments about cowgirl's physical appearances at rodeos. For example, on July 18,

2020, during the barrel racing portion of the performance a cowgirl knocked down two barrels and the announcers stated “She has two down but she is still a beautiful cowgirl.” As long as her physical appearance matched hegemonic norms, her defeat in the arena could be overlooked.

Another way that cowgirls navigate the male dominated spaces of rodeo is through the bonds they form with their horses. Several women in my study narrated experiences with horses that were fundamental to their rodeo journeys. Likewise, Weninger and Dallaire (2017b) found that the time spent training horses is a fundamental part of the process involved within the creation of a legitimate barrel racer. In addition, a woman’s alleged affinity towards nurturing, a gendered aptitude, is often the key to acceptance within the arena (Butler & Charles, 2012; Dashper, 2016). Dashper (2016) stipulates that “caring and nurturing are commonly believed to be feminine skills, things which women have a ‘natural’ capacity for” (p. 261). Defining the gendered space within the arena is more than one moment; it is the summation of preparation and societal expectations. Cowgirls must navigate between socially constructed gendered spaces and self-constructed identities to achieve social acceptance within the arena. Simply allowing women to compete in all events does not address the gendered inequities that operate at the less visible level, nor change the perceptions of gatekeepers who see male competitors as more dedicated than women (Dashper, 2012).

Ford (2020) stated that “women are feminized by rodeo because of their position and competitive events, and this emphasis on separation and the maintenance of gender norms remains in place” (p. 12). The women in my study did not express or recognize this separation. When asked about gendered differences in the rodeo, most of my

participants denied that differences were still present. They narrated stories of family heritage and belonging and did not focus on the disparity that I see in the rodeo. My participants simply went about their business and succeeded. They narrated that rodeo is part of their lifestyle, and told stories of joy and belonging.

Women in my study did work to cross barriers in the rodeo. For example, Fancy Jo narrated her part in expanding women's participation in rodeos association through the inclusion of breakaway roping. Fancy Jo was a pioneer in breakaway roping and her journey could be compared to the stories of other women as shared by Ford (2020). Ford (2020) detailed how women, angered over their exclusion from profession rodeo, held the first "'all-girl rodeo' in 1942" (p. 13). Ford (2020) and LeCompte (1993) both described how women found a place in the arena through the creation of an all-girl rodeo association, which later became the WPRA. Women had to fight for their place in the arena and cowgirls in my study, not limited to Fancy Jo, shared stories of that process. Mona also had to find ways to navigate the arena and shared stories of how she educated men in her field about rodeo rules in order to compete.

Women in my study shared stories of communities of women that worked together and supported each other in their rodeo journeys. Together, with other women in the rodeo, they form groups that travel, practice, and navigate the male dominated arena together. Bush (2016) discussed how women form all female social groups to create spaces in surfing where they can successfully enact their own subcultural norms. These groups allowed female surfers the ability to view themselves as successful surfers and influence how other surfers also view them (Bush, 2016). Women in the rodeo also frequently create all female groups that travel together and help strengthen the bonds of

acceptance in the rodeo. These groups encourage other women to compete and celebrate the success of individuals in the rodeo. An example of this type of female empowerment through group activities was shared by Fancy Jo when she discussed how breakaway roping was included in rodeo associations as an event for women. Fancy Jo discussed how she and a group of other women banded together to advocate for change in the arena. These women stood together to insist that they be included in the rodeo and even still advocate for the success of their event.

What Cowgirls Learned: Making the Rodeo Their Own

Cowgirls, like other members of our culture, learn in multiple ways. All of the women in my study narrated types of learning that began at home through a socialization process that started with their families. These various types of learning function to create a sense of belonging and identity for cowgirls in the rodeo. Family is important to the women in my study. Several scholars discussed the importance of family in a child's decision to compete in a given sporting event and these discussions can be expanded by my study (Boiche et al., 2014; Downward et al., 2014; Forsyth & Thompson, 2007; Gustafson & Rhodes, 2006; Hayoz et al., 2019; Kiewra & Witte, 2018; Knight, 2019; MacPhail & Kirk, 2006; Strandbu et al., 2020). Mona and Fancy Jo are both examples of how cowgirls learned from their parents to value competition in the rodeo.

Mona came from a family of saddle bronc riders, her father competed and her brother also has done so. Mona was able to enter a male dominated event due to the early exposure she received at home from her father; she learned to compete from him. Mona's family has an extensive history of rodeo competition and her entry into the arena has furthered their claim to the sport. Competition informs her own identity and the place of

her family. Likewise, Fancy Jo narrated how she learned from the early exposure she experienced due to her father. Fancy Jo began roping because she was “in the way”. It never was a question of gender appropriate but simply exposure to the sport at home, from her father, at an early age. Rodeo fuels their families, and their families feed back into the rodeo; it is a cyclic process that strengthens their family heritage. The arena helps them actualize a core component of their family heritage. Three of the sites of influence suggested by Kiewra and Witte (2018) apply to Mona and Fancy Jo, their parents both facilitated the introduction the sport, arranged appropriate coaching, and supplied the needed motivation and fostering a work ethic by expecting and modeling high achievement. Mona, Fancy Jo, and others in this study saw their parents compete in a sport they loved and then followed in their footsteps regardless of the gender appropriate boundaries of the sport.

Forsyth and Thompson (2007) found that ideas of heritage and tradition were considered by their participants as the reasons for the way the rodeo functions today. Several of my participants talked about heritage and tradition in rodeo, for example Bella was raised in the rodeo and followed in her families’ footsteps. My study showcases the type of heritage engrained in rodeo competitors. Boiche et al. (2014) explained that children are influenced by parents regarding gender appropriate sport participation and the women in my study corresponded to this statement. Women in my study competed because they loved the rodeo but also because their parents encouraged that love. Competition in the rodeo is a family affair, cowgirls use the communal family identity to navigate the arena. Children learn the unwritten rules of sport through socialization that is influenced by parents that love the sport (Downward et al., 2014; Gustafson & Rhodes,

2006; Hayoz et al., 2019; Knight, 2019; MacPhail & Kirk, 2006). My study expands on how important early socialization is to women's participation in sport. Women in my study learned from their parents.

Women in my study also learned from society as a whole and experienced sexist attitudes that influenced their placement in the rodeo arena. Sexism is an institutionalized system of domination that works to produce hegemony in our society. This system doesn't not imply lack of choices, or total oppression of women, because "under capitalism, patriarchy is structured so that sexism restricts women's behavior in some realms even as freedom from limitations is allowed in other spheres" (hooks, 1984, p. 5). Otto (2018) considers patriarchy as a system of violent domination, as it is:

> a pervasive, insidious social system that not only counts among those social systems deemed "the natural order of things," but, maddeningly, its violent intent is softened by a veil of paternalism; a sub-narrative alleged to be rooted in care, love, and protection. But neither care nor love are part of patriarchy, for patriarchy, simply put, is a system of violent domination. (p. v-vi)

In a capitalistic society, like our current one, both women and men are jointly controlled by the economic needs associated with capitalism (hooks, 1984). It is more than sexism, more than racism, and more than classism that controls our society, it is truly all three of those forces and more working together to create a stratified system of control. In the examination of Patricia Hill Collins's work, Dotson (2015) considers hegemonic power operating to create a justification of disparities in social and political sectors and often unjust practices that underwrite and suppose those disparities. It is important to note, that

although a hegemonic system engulfs rodeo, women still compete, find acceptance, and love the rodeo.

Recommendations and Limitations of the Research

This study tells the stories of ten cowgirls and how they navigated the male-dominated arena. Most of the women in this study have considered themselves cowgirls since birth and come from rodeo families or families with ties to rodeo businesses and associations. Most of the women in this study grew up in rural Midwest towns with three exceptions. This study would be strengthened if participants included individuals from more diverse geographical locations.

Additionally, cowgirls in this study identified as either White or Native American. None of the articles in my review focused on diverse women's experiences, and I was unable to increase diversity in my study. Finding Black cowgirls, or cowgirls of other races and ethnicities, to participate was difficult. I approached Black cowgirls for inclusion, but they declined. I wanted my study to showcase additional diversity including varied races and sexual orientations but it simply did not happen. Most competitors at rodeos are White; statistics are not easily accessible about the diversity of contestants due to the sheer number of rodeos. Although Native American cowgirls were included, no questions directly addressed their cultural identities and how they were enacted within the arena.

When beginning this study, I focused on not only gender but how race was enacted in the rodeo arena. Scholars like Ford (2020) have discussed how minority groups claim space in the predominantly White arena. Unfortunately, my data did not support a discussion of race. The lack of complexity of race in my data could have

occurred through my design process, the characteristics of my cowgirls' narratives, or for other reasons. Race simply did not surface as a core aspect of the lived experience of the cowgirls in this study and yet research and history of rodeo have clarified its importance. Future research should consider how race functions in women's experiences in greater depth. I hope to encourage cowgirls of color to share their experiences in the arena at a future date.

An area of future research should be to repeat aspects of this study with a purely Native American cohort. Over the last year, I have seen a growing number of Native American rodeo participants on social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. These Native cowgirls are claiming their place in the arena and participating in more male dominated events. In my study, only four of the ten women were Native American and three of them belonged to the same tribe. This study would be more dynamic if it included more examples of Native participants including the growing number of Native women that are competing in events like bull riding. What has changed that a growing number of Native women are competing in more masculinized rodeo events? Adding additional Native American voices can help expand understanding of how gender and race functions in the arena.

However, the data that surfaced did point to areas relevant to tribal identity and women's participation. My Native American participants did not spontaneously narrate issues involving their tribal identities. As follow up questions, I asked about tribal identity and rodeo and three participants responded. All three discussed the pride they felt when competing at the Native rodeos. Susan responded with "going to the All-Indian rodeos and the tour rodeos really showed how each culture is so different…each tribe is

proud of their people and want their tribal rodeo to be the best." Likewise, Betty said she felt "pride, power, and strength amongst Native peoples" when she competed at the all-Indian rodeos. Competing at all-Indian rodeos gave my participants that responded a place to proudly be both cowboy and Indian and to compete without the fear of discrimination. The All-Indian rodeos provided a way to navigate the White, male rodeo arena and make it their own through participation in the All-Indian rodeos (Ford, 2020).

Penrose (2003) explored how the socially constructed dichotomy between cowboy and Indian often presented roadblocks for Native American rodeo competitors, but the All-Indian rodeos were a place where individuals could be both with pride. Likewise, Ford (2020) stated that All-Indian rodeos were a place that Native American cowboys/girls could compete without experiencing discrimination. My Native American participants that responded all narrated a pride in their heritage that became more evident when they were surrounded by other Native Americans at the tribal rodeos. From personal experience at All-Indian rodeos, I found competing with only Native American to be empowering and freeing. None of my participants discussed gender and Native experiences but seemed to de-gender and de-race the experiences they narrated.

Changes: How the Rodeo is Evolving

Change is happening in the rodeo world. Professional rodeos offer larger and larger monetary incentives which has increased the number of competitors. The addition of breakaway roping is giving more women the chance to compete. As more women enter elite rodeos (used here to indicate rodeos with larger than usual prizes), the diversity of competitors will create both opportunities and resistance to change. Further

research is needed to discuss how the inclusion of more women into rodeo affects competitors, rodeo committees, and audience attraction.

Cowgirls have a smaller piece of the monetary pie in rodeo than do cowboys. Being restricted to only two events limits the amount of money a woman can win. Rodeo is a capitalist, patriarchal system that functions within our society. There are lines drawn that separate women from men and cowgirls are no exception. Women are relegated to two events now, it has not always been that way, and I believe the future of women in the rodeo will include more cowgirls crossing cultural boundaries. Cowgirls, like Mona, are demanding access to events traditionally reserved for men. Future research should explore the ways women are crossing those boundaries.

Researcher Reflections

November 21, 2015 is a date etched in my memory, the night I entered my first rodeo. I entered the Alumni and Friends Rodeo at the college where I teach. I had started riding horses in July and entered on a dare from some of my students. What makes a woman in her forties take up a new hobby? For me, it was simply that someone told me I couldn't, so I sat about proving that I could. I did not belong at that time, I only trotted my horse around the barrel pattern, but it was the beginning of this story. My students, family, co-workers, and friends were shocked that I decided to run barrels. In the video from that first run, you can hear screams and yells from my "fans" as they encouraged me. I can still remember how freeing it was to just enter.

Now I run barrels at jackpots and rodeos weekly. I am a cowgirl, and my transformation is amazing. Learning to pull a horse trailer, in traffic, is one example of the transformation; it has given me a type of confidence that I can tackle any obstacle and

simply move on to the next. I am strong. I ride horses that are compared to fire breathing dragons; I am a barrel- racing cowgirl. My rodeo family of cowgirls have been instrumental in grooming me as a cowgirl. By sharing their life stories with me, through this research, they have taught me what it means to be a cowgirl and helped me define my place in the arena. I am now confident enough to drive into the rodeo grounds with my truck and trailer, enter in the office, and make a run that leaves me proud.

As a researcher, completing my first major research project, I have struggled in how to portray these cowgirls' experiences. The cowgirls I interviewed did not seem aware of the originality and strength of character they possessed. These women are simply living their lives. They primarily did not seem to question the male-dominated arena because that is the world to which they are accustomed. Often, they did not narrate barriers placed before them, although they jump over them on a regular basis.

I struggled with how to reconcile these women's voices with mine. I am a feminist. I see the barriers placed by male patriarchy within and outside of the arena. I am aware of the struggle and am often frustrated by the acceptance exhibited by my cowgirl rodeo family. Yet, as I read and reread the stories presented by these women, I began to understand that they also struggle in their own way and find satisfaction in rodeoing, just like I do. These cowgirls are strong, independent women who have fought injustices and worked for change. They get things done, and this feminist is thankful and a better person for knowing them and those who declined participation as well. I am grateful they shared their stories with me. To end this journey like an old Western, this would be where the cowgirl rides away into the setting sun in search of a new adventure.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

Dear Lynett Rock,

The Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved the following application:

Application Number: ED-19-77
PI: Lynett Rock
Title: Ride Like A Girl: Equity Issues in the Rodeo
Review Level: Exempt

You will find a copy of your Approval Letter in IRBManager. Click IRB - Initial Submission to go directly to the event page. Please click attachments in the upper left of the screen. The approval letter is under "Generated Docs." Stamped recruitment and consent documents can also be found in this location under "Attachments". Only the approved versions of these documents may be used during the conduct of your research.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

- Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted for IRB approval before implementation.
- Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period.
- Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair within 5 days. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
- Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete by submitting a closure form via IRBManager.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB office at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Best of luck with your research,

Sincerely,

Dawnett Watkins, CIP
Whitney McAllister, MS

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board
Office of University Research Compliance
223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078
Website: https://irb.okstate.edu/
Ph: 405-744-3377 | Fax: 405-744-4335| irb@okstate.edu

Appendix B

IRB Approved Interview Protocol

My name is Lynett Rock, and I am a doctoral candidate at Oklahoma State University. I want to take the time to thank you for agree to meet with me today and participate in my research. I have a series of questions regarding gender and race within the rodeo that I am hoping we can explore together. I also am asking you to supply photographs that highlight your career and experiences within the arena. I am very interested in your particular experiences within the arena and how they have shaped your definition of what it means to be a cowgirl.

Before we formally begin the interview I would like to share the procedures that will both proceed and follow our conversation. Although we are on a first name basis, your identity will be protected throughout this process. Your name will not be used when I report the results of this research. I will be giving you a pseudonym in order to protect your privacy, or you can pick a name for yourself if that is your preference. With your permission, I would like to make an audio recording of our interviews in order to ensure accuracy during transcription, and to limit the distractions associated with note taking. The recording of our sessions will be destroyed after the completion of this research project. Do I have your permission to record our time together?

I want to remind you that any participation in this study is voluntary and you may request to be withdrawn from the study at any time. Additionally, you may ask for the audio recorder to be turned off at any time. There are no associated risks to this study. This first session will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and follow up interviews will take place as needed to clarify points within the transcription.

Would you like to begin at this time? We will start with a review of the informed consent document. (Present participant with the informed consent; allow them to review the document; proceed with interview only after informed consent form has been signed by the participant).

At the conclusion of the interview, ask the participant if she is willing to follow up the interview if needed. Give options of phone, email, zoom, or text. Gather contact information if needed.

Appendix C

PROJECT FACE PAGE

Please take a moment to help us better understand your background. Leave blank any questions that you would prefer to not answer.

1. Name _____ age _____
2. How do you identify?: ☐ African American ☐ Hispanic ☐ Native American ☐ Asian
   ☐ Caucasian ☐ Other _____
3. What types of rodeos do you usually enter (check all that apply): ☐ Open ☐ Native American ☐ Black ☐ Association(s): _____ ☐ Other: _____
4. Which events do you compete in? (list all that apply)
   _____
   _____
   _____

Appendix D

Specific Questions for the Interviews

1. How would you define what it means to be a cowgirl?
2. Can you describe your experience as a cowgirl in the rodeo? What are the stories that stand out?
3. Have you had any experiences in the rodeo where you feel you were treated in a distinct way because of being a girl/woman? If so, could you describe to me those situations?
4. Have you had any experiences in the rodeo where you feel you were treated in a distinct way because of being Native/Black/Hispanic? If so, could you describe to me those situations?
5. When did you first consider yourself a cowgirl? Was there an event or situation in which this happened? If so, could you tell me more about it/them?
6. Describe your earliest memory you have of rodeo. How old were you?
7. If all rodeo events were open to cowgirls, which event would you compete in and why?
8. Do you ever feel like there are certain areas at the rodeo where women or people of color are not welcome? If so, which ones?
9. Do you ever feel like there are certain areas at the rodeo where women or people of color are more welcome? If so, which ones?
10. If you could change anything about the rodeo, what would you change and why?

Photo Elicitation Instructions:

Each participant will be given the following instructions before the first interview. These photos will be used to spark the interview process.

Script: Please bring with you one or two photographs that highlight what it means to you to be a cowgirl within the arena.

The following questions will be asked about each photograph supplied:

1. Why did you select this photograph?
2. Describe what is happening in the photograph.
3. How does this photo relate to rodeo?

Topics for Follow Up Interviews:

In addition to the interviews and observations, I hope to follow up with each interviewee to discuss themes that emerge after analysis of previous interviews. These follow ups would exist to explore more deeply stories presented in the initial interview or themes that have emerged with other participants.

VITA

Lynett Michelle Rock

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: RIDE LIKE A GIRL: A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF WOMEN IN THE RODEO

Major Field: Education

Biographical:

Education:
Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Education at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December 2021.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Physics at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in 1996.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Engineering Physics at Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma in 1996.

Experience:
College Professor and Administrator (Division Chair of Math, Science, and Physical Education) at Connors State College, Warner, Oklahoma.

Adjunct Faculty Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma and Oklahoma City Community College, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Public School Instructor (Mathematics and Science) for 1 year at Ripley Schools in Ripley, Oklahoma

Professional Memberships: American Anthropological Association, Society of Philosophy and History of Education, American Indian Science and Engineering Society, American Physical Society, American Educational Research Association