

Playing Sport, Playing Citizens:
The Socialization of Adolescents through Organized
Youth Sport in France and America

by

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Class of 2008

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in Romance Languages and Literatures

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Acknowledgements

There comes a point in every great work (or mediocre work . . . or work) in which people must be thanked. The biggest and most important thanks goes to my thesis advisor, Professor Leservot, whose work ethic inspired me to work longer and harder on this paper than I ever could have imagined, and whose encouragement sustained me through the inevitable slumps that accompany a long-term project. So thank you Professor Leservot. Your dedication to this project and ability to direct my brainstorming process has been inspirational. I could not have done this without you.

I also would like to thank my family: first my mother for taking her January sabbatical so that we could have time to “do our routine” every day. Thanks for making it almost relaxing to set up in my “carrel” at home and drink tea while we wrote (not to mention helping me edit in crunch time)! Thanks also to my father, sisters and brother for putting up with my stress all month long and listening to me vent as April 14 drew near.

Finally, thank you to my friends and teammates who have been incredibly supportive throughout the whole process. I especially want to thank Zoe, Caitlin, Katie, Sage and Harry (who is especially therapeutic) for letting me hole myself away in my study-spaces without questioning my stress level, and for not mentioning the “T-word” for months at a time. We did it!

“In order to form a just estimation of the character of any particular people, it is absolutely necessary to investigate the Sports and Pastimes most generally prevalent among them.” - Joseph Strutt¹

In the introduction to a lengthy work entitled The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England, historian Joseph Strutt’s opening sentence declares that understanding the sports practices of a community is vital to understanding how a society functions. Strutt’s book, published in 1801, focuses on outlining the historical sporting practices of the people of Great Britain beginning with the practices of the ancient Roman colony on the British Isles. Strutt’s opening sentence is of paramount importance, then, because he begins by asserting that the significance of his topic is not confined to uncovering sports practices for the sake of historical edification. Rather Strutt recognizes that discovering how British communities throughout the centuries participated in sport helps one better understand the cultural practices of the people in a given era.

Strutt’s theory can be safely exported to other cultures. Studying how French and Americans practice sport today, for instance, should be acknowledged as integral to understanding their broader culture. Contemporary Western societies such as France and the United States encourage sports participation especially for children, and thus it is important to begin the study of sports practice with the organizations revolving around youth sport. A perpetual project for contemporary sociologists is to discover the cultural implications of playing a sport as a child. Second to schooling, which is mandatory for young children and adolescents, sport is among the most

widely practiced activities among youth in the Western world. Because participation in sport is voluntary, yet widespread, organized youth sport is particularly interesting to study as a tool of socialization. For example, 66% of children in France participate in sport,² while 99% of American children are involved in sport.³ In spite of a 33 point disparity, which clearly shows that American children are more involved in sport than French children, these statistics still reveal a high participation overall. Therefore, organized youth sport is indeed a useful tool in understanding children's socialization into cultural practices. Not all sports socialize in the same manner, however. While individual sports instill certain cultural values, it is really team sports that provide the atmosphere that mimics a social hierarchy and group orientation valued in both France and America. However, the study of all youth sports is too broad to provide meaningful insight into either French or American culture. In order to properly analyze how sport socializes youths into their respective cultures, this study will focus on the most popular team sports for youth in the United States and France.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the difference in overall enrollment in youth sport between the two countries, the sports that adolescents in France and the United States currently choose to play are quite similar. Swimming is the most popular sport in both France and America among children aged 12-17. 39% of French children⁴ compared with 38.3% of American children⁵ swim.ⁱⁱ The next most popular sport in both these countries is bicycle riding with 38% participation in France,⁶ and 30.8% participation in the United States.⁷ Statistics demonstrating the wide-spread practice of individual

ⁱ Statistics from 2004 as calculated by author given 9,650,000 participants and a population of 20,724,000 youths in that year.

ⁱⁱ For the surveys, "participation" implies that the children partake in the sport more than once a year.

sports may seem surprising, especially in the United States where team sports are omnipresent in popular culture, yet it must be recognized that these statistics delineate not the most popular *organized* sports, but sports practice in general: both recreational and competitive practice. Evidence of team sports is only found once the third most popular sport is examined. In France, European football (or soccer) yields 32% participation by adolescents,⁸ while the most popular team sport in America is basketball, with 28.5% participation⁹ in this same age group.

In order to analyze and compare the sport practices among American and French youths however, we cannot rely on the statistics given for the two most popular sports in France and America, namely swimming and cycling. This is because individual sports participation is measured by a child's participation in the given activity, whether in a formal or informal setting. As swimming and bicycling are activities that can be enjoyed without any organization, there are many opportunities for children to participate in these tasks independently which can therefore create subjective and unreliable statistics. For example, American children who swim in the ocean several times a year on vacation were counted as swimmers for the purpose of the aforementioned statistics. The same unreliability exists around cycling, the second most practiced sport in both the United States and France. In this case as well, there is no way of verifying whether all 38% of French adolescent cyclists are athletes or casual riders who simply use a bicycle as a means of transportation. A French child might ride his bicycle to school every day and thus qualify as a cyclist for the purpose of the statistics. Team sports, on the other hand, offer more reliable statistics about how children are *socialized* through sport because team sports encourage interaction

among peers and are much more likely to be organized, rather than individual sports which may be integrated into daily life without supervision.

The more elaborate a sport's rules are, the more likely it is to be an organized sport. If a sport has complicated rules, it is more likely to be practiced under the supervision of a coach and a league. Team sports are thus more likely to give an accurate picture of the cultural practices associated with sport in France and the United States. Because group interaction is a condition of participation on a team sport, these sports offer more opportunities to study a child's socialization. While a swim team certainly encourages children to foster relationships with each other and work together during certain team events, a team sport in which athletes must work as a group to accomplish a role is a better model of socialization due to the simple fact that communication is essential to proper participation in the sport. For example, a soccer team cannot score a goal without the participation of 11 players. The same is not true on a swim team where an individual can set an Olympic record with or without teammates. In a team sport, players have to work together to accomplish goals; without this constant interaction, the game does not function. This makes team sports ideal to study for their sociological ramifications.

The most popular team sport among American youth is basketball. Basketball teams are often organized by adults for adolescent participation in the United States, but this organization can take many forms for the youth that choose to participate. The game calls for five players on each team to be on the court at a time. The only equipment needed for participation is a ball and one hoop. Because of the simple equipment and relatively small size of the teams, basketball games are played

formally and informally all over the county, as basketball is an affordable game.¹⁰ In a more structured venue, children participate in this sport in a variety of associations. The easiest, cheapest, way to play organized basketball is to join a school team. School teams often begin in junior high school – when the child is around 11 years old – and generally encourage children to try out, having slightly modified the rules to increase the children’s success at this age.¹¹

Most children who participate in basketball from ages 12-17, however, started playing in an organized league before middle school.ⁱ The recreation departments of many cities in America organize leagues for children beginning as young as age 7.¹² These leagues generally hold competitions locally. Outside of what has become known as “rec leagues,” a wide variety of private associations have member chapters spread across the country and encourage youth basketball participation. These include the CYO (Catholic Youth Organization), AAU (Amateur Athlete Union), and a myriad of regional programs.¹³ Because these associations vary with region, there is no standardized age of participation across leagues in the United States.

The organization of French youth soccer mirrors American basketball organization to a certain extent. Individual organizations abound that offer participation opportunities to children based on age. These organizations include “les fédérations sportives affinitaires”,¹⁴ as well as a multitude of regional sports associations and private organizations.¹⁵ Included in the “fédérations” are youth sport programs which are affiliated with religious organizations, such as the ACJF (*L’Association Catholique de la Jeunesse Française*) and *l’Union chrétienne de*

ⁱ Middle school is referred to in some areas as “junior high school”; both include students of approximately 11-14 years of age.

jeunes gens which were created based on the American model of the YMCA.¹⁶

Despite the popularity of private organizations, organized youth sport is more standardized across France than across America because teams are divided into the same age groups across the country. Sport - like many aspects of French life - is centralized and consequently, soccer teams are uniformly organized.¹⁷ There are six age-brackets in all French youth sports that aim to allow children to participate at the same level throughout the nation: the *Débutants* are aged six to eight, the *Poussins* are eight to nine, the *Benjamins* are ten to eleven, the *Minimes* are twelve to thirteen, the *Cadets* are fourteen to fifteen, and the *Juniors* are sixteen to eighteen.¹⁸ Similar to basketball, soccer can be played almost anywhere by anyone as the only required equipment is a ball and a goal. However, “pick-up” soccer is slightly more complicated than “pick-up” basketball because the rules of soccer require 11 players on each team to be on the field at a time, and therefore it is much harder to play this sport informally.

French children are generally socialized to play soccer in their physical education classes where they are introduced to the rules of this sport in a gentle manner: as young children in *l'école primaire*ⁱ, they are encouraged to play *le ballon-pied* which is a modified game based loosely on soccer yet leaves the final rules of play up to the instructor based upon the class' level of play.¹⁹ As children age and move from *l'école primaire* (ages 6-10) to *collège* (ages 10-14), their exposure to “*le ballon-pied*” makes them better soccer players. In school, youth have the opportunity to participate in soccer, but due to French schools giving priority to academics over sport, soccer never becomes a major part of life in school. As there is less after-school

ⁱ Elementary school

time in France than in America, not as much time is committed to “after school sports” in France as in the United States. Soccer can, however be incorporated into school in two ways that are not possible in America: it can fulfill part of a student’s requirements for the *Baccalauréat* examination,²⁰ or it can fill half of the school day if the student is enrolled in a schooling program that allows a student-athlete who is serious about pursuing his sport to be educated while concurrently undergoing intense athletic training, in a program called *sports-études*.²¹

No matter how a child is socialized into sport, sport provides more than physical benefits to children in both France and America. Organized sport is generally understood to help instill values into children as well.²² The “American Sports Creed” lists character development, discipline, competition, physical fitness and mental fitness among the values sport should impart to its participants.²³ Additionally, ideals such as the importance of goal-setting, success, hard work, teamwork, “deferred gratification”, progress and external conformity are listed by American scholars as an outcome of sports participation,²⁴ while French sports-researchers list teamwork and collective identity above all else as the merits of sport.²⁵ While some of these terms are self-explanatory, some require a more detailed explanation.

Character development through sport is one of the most often cited reasons for sports participation in both France and the United States at all levels of play.²⁶ The “character” that develops, however, is difficult to define:

. . . in no instance did the present study find any effort by persons expressing a belief in the intrinsic character-building capabilities of sport to explicitly define the concept . . . thus . . . the sports creed relies on the more

or less intuitive understandings of the concept within the context of American culture.²⁷

Despite the average person's inability to define this term, it seems that this "character" is composed of many of the other values found in sport such as enthusiasm, cooperation, self-esteem, moral development and competition.²⁸

Although competition may not seem like a value to some, especially those acquainted with the news articles about overzealous American parents getting into fistfights at their children's hockey games, competition is considered an essential value for developing adolescents that is best taught through sport.²⁹ In a capitalist society like the United States, it is important for children to learn the worth of competing to win fairly, as American cultural standards demand this ability "to compete against somebody, [to] try to dominate...[and] work your way up the ladder" in order to be successful in the business world.³⁰ However, this "winning is everything" attitude has drawn much criticism of youth sport from academics in the recent years.

Despite the negative connotations of some of the values that sport imparts on youth, most of the values promoted around sport are purely positive. For example, mental fitness through sport participation is believed by American scholars to contribute to academic achievement in that it promotes focus,³¹ and, provides students with a reason to stay in school: to be able to participate in after-school sports.³² Academic achievement is additionally bolstered by sport in that mental alertness is primed through sports participation. Athletes must simultaneously use motor skills and mental concentration in order to perform.³³

Both soccer in France and basketball in America help instill the values of teamwork, success, competition and progress to the young sports participants. However, underneath this veneer of good sportsmanship and personal growth, another layer of values are imparted upon the young athletes that are equally as integral to society, but less acknowledged as a byproduct of sport, and are certainly more disturbing. Organized sport, and especially sports activities organized for children and adolescents intend to and do serve a role essential to society: it socializes people into “good” citizens of their country. In this context, “good” does not connote a value judgment - it does not imply that sport strives to produce a moral citizen - but rather “good” is used to imply a citizen that ascribes to the ideals of the country to which s/he belongs without challenging the paradigms of this society.

“Good” citizens shaped by sport seem to comply with social norms in three main fashions: they play the role dictated to them by their socioeconomic class, they comply with racial norms, and they conform to the gender norms dictated by their society or socioeconomic class. Because “good” is subjective relative to the society to which each citizen ascribes, a “good” French citizen is different from a “good” American citizen. The purpose of this thesis will then be to discuss how adolescents who play soccer in France and adolescents who play basketball in the United States are socialized through their respective sport to comply with the norms of their society based on gender, race and socioeconomic class.

The norms ascribed to in France and America differ based on varying expectations of what constitutes a “good” citizen. Social class norms, for example, influence the decision of how to spend free time. In France, the social status of the

parents has the most direct impact on whether or not a child participates in sport.³⁴ Statistics reveal that the more educated their parents are, the more likely an adolescent is to participate in sport: 80% of French children aged 12 to 17 whose parents have a degree superior to the baccalaureate (which is equivalent to a high school degree in the United States) participate in sport, compared to only 55% of children whose parents do not have a higher degree.³⁵ A higher degree generally correlates with a greater income, and a greater income means more discretionary spending. People who have access to larger funds have the ability to pay for their child's participation in sport. The costs of equipment, uniforms, inscription fees and transportation all combine to make sport more accessible to people with greater means. Thus children in poorer families have less opportunity to participate. What, then, are the implications of soccer being the most popular team sport in France? Because soccer requires minimal equipment, it seems likely that it is more accessible to children coming from a broader range of socioeconomic backgrounds than are other team sports. The question of whether or not particular sports in France are associated with certain social classes therefore arises. Are there other ways in which social class inhibits, or conversely, promotes participation in a specific sport? If soccer in France is a "classed" sport, what classes of children are attracted to soccer and what does the game teach them about their future role in society?

Children's participation in basketball in America seems to be similarly classed. Statistically, only 2.2% of American youth who play basketball come from the lowest end of the socioeconomic spectrum, while 10.1% of basketball players aged 12-17 come from the upper- and upper-middle-classes.³⁶ This implies that, as in

France, children in the lower classes participate in sport at a lower rate than do more wealthy children. Yet, the popular American conception is that sport is one domain in which class divides make no difference in participation. Therefore, in theory American youth from every “walk of life” should have equal opportunity to participate in basketball. Basketball, like soccer, requires minimal organization and equipment but yet, its participants are subject to this inequality. How does social class continue to determine sport participation in America despite the expressed value of equality through sport? Does class play the same role here as it does in France? American physical educators believe a goal of sport to be to socialize children into the democratic process:

Democracy does not blossom in a vacuum; it reaches stature through group experiences. It reaches heights through sports where self is often sublimated to the good of the whole; where a cause is worth fighting for. We were not born with the ability to listen and learn from opinions of all those about us; to offer our own contributions where appropriate. These things must be learned. Where can one find a better laboratory than the field of team sports?³⁷

Yet it is clear that “the opportunities [for youth] to engage in sports programs are unequal across genders and social classes”.³⁸ Is this difference exposed in American society, and if so, how is it reconciled? These are some of the questions about the role of class in sport that the first chapter will address.

Despite the American belief in equal opportunity for all, race and class are still closely linked in most Western nations.³⁹ Children choose to play a particular sport based on not only social status and their parents’ education, but also on their race. These issues raised by the role of race in youth sport will constitute the focus of

the second chapter. In most youth sports, lower rates of participation among lower-class adolescents equally mean low participation rates among minorities. However, the most popular collective sports in France and America are also sports that historically attract minorities. For example, blacksⁱ currently comprise 79% of players in the NBA.⁴⁰ In France, while statistics concerning race are almost impossible to find, due to the Republic's official policy of color-blindness, soccer is hailed as an integration tool for some immigrants. How, then, does race function in youth basketball in America and youth soccer in France? The domination of minority players in professional basketball and soccer must have an effect on the adolescents who are choosing which sport to play. When given the opportunity to participate in sport, are minority children in France more likely to choose to play soccer due to the increasing popularity of its minority players? Whether discrimination is inherent in soccer in France or basketball in America must equally be studied, as well as whether the organization of these sports allows for integrated teams in youth play.

Finally, the third and last chapter of this study will analyze the way girls are socialized through these two sports in France and America. Participation rates among girls playing soccer in France and basketball in America clearly demonstrate the different gender norms in the two countries. For example, while 45% of American high school students who play basketball are females,⁴¹ only 20% of soccer players in France aged 12-17 are girls.⁴² This shocking disparity is indicative of the varying opportunities for young women in each culture and what society expects from them. As French sport practice is seen as a cultural practice rather than a simple game, girls

ⁱ The term "black" will be used exclusively in this paper due to the current sentiment that "African American" does not correctly describe this minority group as not all black Americans have African ancestry.

are often encouraged to participate in more traditionally “feminine” sports, such as gymnastics and dance.⁴³ In America, on the other hand, it is clear that female participation in basketball has become a normⁱ and therefore that American high school girls regularly choose to participate in sports that are not necessarily gendered. What cultural factors influence a girl’s choice in sport? What does the decision of what sport to play say about the roles that girls are expected to fill in French and American societies? Are soccer and basketball altered to allow for female participation? What are the implications of this difference in sport choice? The young women who are playing team sports in France and America are still subject to cultural standards of “femininity” and thus must navigate this “femininity” while maintaining their athletic identities.

Given that class, racial and gender norms seems to be an inextricable part of sports practice in France and the United States, the idea that sport instills only the values of physical activity, hard work, team work and character into the minds of youth becomes problematic. Soccer in France and basketball in America are not practiced merely for the sake of fun and exercise. Beneath the façade of the character development of children through sport lies another set of values: ones centering on the normalization of youth in the dominant socioeconomic, racial and gendered paradigms. Because childhood participation in soccer in France and basketball in America has become not a diversion but an essential component of society through

ⁱ Girls’ participation in basketball in high school is “normal” to the extent that basketball is the most popular girls’ sport. However, the fact that the women’s professional league is entitled the WNBA – Women’s National Basketball Association – while the men’s is simply the NBA – National Basketball Association – indicates that female sports practice in the United States is still not compliant with “the norm”.

which adolescents learn how to become “good” citizens of their respective countries,
it is essential to study how they socialize children.

References

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Chapter 1: Socializing Socioeconomic Class through Sport

“All footballersⁱ were equal but some were more equal than others.” – Richard Holt¹

*“Modern sport actually contributes to the reinforcement of class distinctions.” -
Richard Gruneau²*

The choice of what sport to practice is closely tied to one’s social status and the norms that accompany a person’s social class. While class mobility is possible in France and America, sports practice is still closely tied to the traditional social class structure in each country.³ In both nations, the general perception is that sports that require expensive or abundant equipment are practiced by the elite. While this is true, the classification of sports as “belonging” to the upper-class or lower-class is even simpler than even this general rule. The wealthier classes in France and America tend to practice individual sports, while people of all ages in the lower- and middle-classes tend to practice team sports⁴. Youth have more flexibility in sports practice.

Therefore, certain team sports such as basketball in the United States and soccer in France are practiced by adolescents more broadly across classes. Yet, despite this flexibility, adolescents practice a form of basketball or soccer that is particular to their social class. By participating in organized basketball in the United States and by participating in organized soccer in France, youth are taught to ascribe to the norms of their own socioeconomic class, and those adolescents in the lower classes are given false hopes for social mobility through sport by society.

In both America and France, the myth of the accessibility of basketball and soccer is prominent regardless of social class. As team sports, basketball and soccer

ⁱ soccer players

are hailed as games that place all participants on an equal level, since in theory both sports provide the opportunity for individuals to work as a team to achieve a common goal, regardless of status off of the court or field, respectively.⁵ Yet sociologists maintain that team sports are practiced most often by youth of the lower social classes. In America, however, youth participation rates in basketball seem to reverse the theory that basketball is a sport for adolescents of the lowest socioeconomic status: according to a census in The National Data Book, of the 28.5% of youth between the ages of 12 and 17 who play basketball, only 4.5% is composed of adolescents whose family's annual income renders them below the poverty line for 5-person households.⁶ Surprisingly, it is the middle classⁱ which provides the most adolescent basketball players, accounting for nearly half of this 28.5% of American youth, comprising a total of 13.9%.⁷ Meanwhile, those households with an annual income of over \$75,000, the upper-middle class and the wealthy echelons of society, account for 10.1% of youth basketball players.⁸

These statistics disprove the theory that basketball, as a team sport, is most commonly played by the lowest classes. In fact, what is found is that basketball is the most popular among youth of the workingⁱⁱ- and middle-classes. Team sports are popular among middle-class youth because this class has more access to recreational activity than the lower classes, as a consequence of their having more leisure time.

Adolescents whose families are at or below the poverty line struggle to find the

ⁱ According to the definition of the census, the middle class is comprised of the working class, the lower-middle class, and the middle-middle class.

ⁱⁱ "Working-class" and "*classe ouvrière*" in both America and France, respectively, refer to the class of people in a society who work for wages and produce the goods owned by the upper-classes. The distinction between working-class and lower-class therefore is that lower-class is a broad category that at times encompasses both the working-class and the under-class (those typically without a job), while working-class refers simply to those working as unskilled laborers. (Scott, 2005, p. 706), (Johnson, 2000, p. 286)

money for transportation to and from activities and are often responsible for helping with household tasks. Thus, their lack of free time and discretionary income limits their opportunity to participate in organized sport.⁹ Middle class youth have the advantage of access to transportation which makes sport participation much more accessible. The middle class youth's choice to play basketball exposes them to a team sport that does in fact teach a useful skill for future careers in business: how to work with peers in an egalitarian setting to achieve a common goal.¹⁰ The upper-class, however, has access to more capital, which allows for the youths to participate in individual sports, as well as those team sports that require more expensive equipment. The theory of equality through team sports does, however, continue to hold to a certain extent, considering that the population of upper-class youth playing basketball is more than double that of the members of the lowest class who play basketball. Thus, the myth of basketball as both an equalizer is exposed as being misleading, and basketball is statistically proven to be a "classed" sport.

In France, while data for soccer participation according to class is not available specifically for the age group of 12-17, the information can be extrapolated by looking at the data for non-professional adult soccer players because youth are influenced by the sports that their parents play.¹¹ French sports studies are more forthcoming than American studies in terms of acknowledging that specific sports in each society are strongly tied to specific social classes. For example, a 2003 survey that was conducted to discern who practices which sports breaks down the age groups, level of education, profession, social class, type of community, marital status, and type of household of the participants for each type of sport. According to this

study, soccer practice decreases dramatically with age,ⁱ and is highly dependant on class. For example, 11% of people living in the lowest socioeconomic quartile play soccer, while 9% of both those in the lower-middle-class and the upper-middle-class play and only 7% of people in the highest quartile play soccer.¹²

Despite the relatively small discrepancy of participation between the classes, a rift becomes further apparent when soccer players are broken down not by wealth, but rather by level of education. While only 2% of people without a degree and 8% of those with a baccalaureate degree play soccer, 36% of those with a high school degree play. However, only 18% of those with higher degrees, as well as those with an education beyond high school play soccer.¹³ Thus, despite cultural expectations, soccer – like basketball - is not a game for every class, but rather for the lower and middle classes.

History of Sports-practice according to Socioeconomic Status

Although this is not reflected in the current practice, soccer in France originated as a sport for the wealthy before became a pastime of the working-class. Soccer came to France during the nineteenth century Industrial Revolution from the United Kingdom and was originally a game of the upper echelon of society.¹⁴ During the Industrial Revolution, the concepts of rural and urban life, of community and society, and of the *classe populaire* were rapidly changing.¹⁵ At this time, the French bourgeoisie controlled most forms of organized physical activity in the country, and as of 1830, sport was installed into public schools by the bourgeoisie as a regular part

ⁱ According to this 2003 study, 34% of adolescents aged 15-19 play soccer, as opposed to the survey administered by the *Ministère de la Jeunesse et des Sports* which lists 32% in 2002. (Moreau, Pichault, & Truchot, October 2002)

of the curriculum.¹⁶ By tying together the traditions of education and soccer, the bourgeoisie hoped to create a new elite, well-educated class to rival the current aristocrats. Soccer was considered to be a valuable form of education because it was thought to teach the values of competition and “team spirit”, an appealing quality to a pre-capitalist society.¹⁷

From the confines of education, soccer practice grew to become an integral part of communities and society as a whole. The game spread rapidly, thanks to the “développement des transports urbains... [et] aux grands mouvements d’émigration”ⁱ¹⁸ Churches created teams, and patrons of factories began to use soccer as a tool to unify their workers. Soccer teams were also used by factory owners to improve the physical health of their young workers, an idea which spread rapidly at the time, beginning the stereotype of French soccer as a game of the masses.¹⁹ On these teams, equality was stressed, ameliorating tensions created by the hierarchies inherent in factory work. The motivation for the overseers and owners of factories to maintain soccer teams was not limited to the increased production that accompanies happy workers; rather the social status gained by the owners when they produced successful teams was also an impetus.²⁰ While teams organized both through the work-place and through churches helped to foster a sense of belonging to a place and community for the workers during the Industrial Revolution, the soccer team itself was neither the cause nor the effect of the community that formed around the individual members. Rather, the soccer team became “quelque chose qui s’inscrit dans la vie d’un individu ou d’une collectivité et qui est l’objet non d’une réception passive, mais d’un travail

ⁱ “development of urban transportation . . . [and] to the massive immigration movements”

d'intégration par rapport à un passé ou par rapport à ce qui peut advenir".ⁱ²¹ Soccer thus helped to foster an identity that was specifically *ouvrier*.ⁱⁱ²²

The development of working-class soccer teams did not pass unnoticed in elite circles. Instead, this appropriation of an aristocratic sport by the lower classes was a point of contention. When professional soccer teams began to develop, and when factory owners began to recruit especially athletic *ouvriers* to work at their factories, the upper tier of society pulled away from the sport, realizing that their practice of soccer as an elite sport was fundamentally opposed to the use of "sport comme outil d'ascension sociale".ⁱⁱⁱ²³ Yet this soccer was continually used by the middle- and upper-middle classes as a tool to gain political and social recognition. For example, by creating a successful team, the owner of a factory could draw regional – and in some cases even national – attention to his city, drawing crowds of spectators that would economically benefit the whole region.²⁴ Similarly, politicians in small market communities used soccer teams as a way to make a name for themselves and thus gain political power.²⁵ A successful team could be a source of pride for any member of the bourgeoisie, as "le football [devint] un appareil de puissance, de domination, [et] de pouvoir".^{iv26}

In the early twentieth century, the working-class increasingly began to play soccer, while the spectators and managers of soccer teams were of the upper tiers of society. Thus, "[i]nstead of helping to break down class barriers, perhaps sport actually confirmed and added a new subtlety to social divisions".²⁷ There were two

ⁱ "something that implanted itself in an individual's life or the life of a community and was not the object of a passive reception, but rather a past or future work of integration"

ⁱⁱ factory worker

ⁱⁱⁱ "the use of sport as a tool for social ascension"

^{iv} "soccer became a tool for strength, domination [and] power"

classes of sport in the 1930's - *sport bourgeois* and *sport travailliste*ⁱ - which were composed of athletic games of three categories: "sports played only by the rich; those played by the poor; and those which began as *élite* sports...but which spread rapidly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" and became appropriated by the masses.²⁸ This third type of sport - which includes soccer - gave rise to political tension among the social classes, especially in the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie ostensibly had the hardest time ceding their sports to the masses because they did not have tradition which entitled them to play purely *élite* sports, but they were not ready to relinquish team sports to the working-class. For them, "[t]he ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity should be kept firmly where they belonged: on public monuments and on the backs of coins".²⁹ Thus sport, and specifically soccer, became a point of contention among the classes as "[r]eal class barriers could not be bridged by sport, which was more important as a means of consolidating prestige than as a method of acquiring it".³⁰ The bourgeoisie was not the only class that was concerned with remaining distinct: unions representing factory workers were apprehensive about the formation of town-wide soccer clubs as opposed to clubs within businesses. This apprehension stemmed from the fear that combining people from more than one social class into a situation where they were technically equals on the field could cause the laborers to lose social consciousness.³¹

There are several theories as to why soccer caught on specifically with the members of the French working-class. The first is obvious: as a team sport, soccer involves twenty-two players at once, making it ideal for competition among larger crowds. The second theory postulates that the game of soccer is comparable to war:³²

ⁱ working-class sport

it provides for adolescents “un moyen de canaliser et de réguler la violence, particulièrement la violence sauvage de l’adolescence”.ⁱ³³ In essence, whereas war and violence create utter chaos, soccer is a way of channeling the violent tendencies of adolescence into an ordered structure, fitting into the rules of the game.³⁴ The comparison of soccer with the violence of war also helps to place this game in a context of young males, as these are the people who generally go to war. Thus, soccer becomes for young men an “occasion de s’exprimer”,ⁱⁱ³⁵ without resorting to “real” violence. Sport in France was originally used to train armies by using games as a mode of physical activity. It therefore is understandable that soccer is seen as an outlet for violence and an alternative to war for adolescent boys in contemporary French society.³⁶

It is also no mistake that the link between soccer and war was drawn once soccer became popular among laborers. There is a distinct connection between the formation of a working-class in France in the post-Industrialization era and the installation of soccer as a national sport. The mass of workers at this time was seen as a volatile group needing to be controlled by the more “civilized” middle-class patrons. Since the 1950’s, monetary incentive has been associated with soccer among the members of the working-class, and to play soccer became distinctly “un métier d’ouvrier”.ⁱⁱⁱ³⁷ Up until the late 1960’s in fact, talented working-class soccer players preferred to remain amateur because their bosses would provide them with extra luxuries in order to remain on their teams. After this time, there was a massive move of young *ouvriers* to become professional soccer players, especially among

ⁱ “a way to channel and regulate violence, particularly the savage violence of adolescence”

ⁱⁱ “opportunity to express themselves”

ⁱⁱⁱ “a factory-worker’s job” or “a working-class job”

immigrant populations.³⁸ Despite statistics and its working-class history, the French currently view soccer as a sport that is universally accessible, boasting that the majority of its professional players come from educated, middle-class backgrounds,³⁹ and viewing soccer as “autant le symbole de l’intégration à une communauté nationale que celui de l’appartenance à une classe sociale”.ⁱ⁴⁰

Just as soccer developed in France as a tool for social-class development, sport has a similar post-Industrial Revolution function in American history. Unlike France, the social development of sport in the United States is not specific to one sport, but rather much of the literature around the history of sport and social class discusses team sports in general, listing basketball among other games.⁴¹ During the American Industrial Revolution in the early twentieth century, there was rapid expansion of cities. As these cities developed, a need for recreation and outdoor activities grew, and as such, the “process of city building influenced sporting developments in nearly every conceivable way”.⁴² In the era immediately following industrialization, a new enthusiasm for physical fitness and particularly for modeling physical fitness for children was born. The next wave of American preoccupation with fitness occurred in the 1950’s when a survey was conducted which compared the health and activity levels of American and European children.ⁱⁱ The published results showed that American children who lived in one of the wealthiest counties in the country – implying that they had monetary access to physical activity – scored significantly lower than European children of varying socioeconomic backgrounds, prompting a national movement to increase children’s physical activity levels.⁴³

ⁱ “as much the symbol for integration into a national community as [a symbol] for belonging to a particular social class”

ⁱⁱ This survey was later declared invalid.

Organized youth sporting leagues were thus initiated into American culture in the early twentieth century. The main influence of this movement was the youth sport movement in England of a decade earlier. The movement explicitly stated different values to be taught to children, corresponding with their socioeconomic class, despite the fact that the sports introduced in these programs were mostly team sports.⁴⁴ Thus, within the context of a single sport, boys of the upper-class were expected to learn different skills appropriate for their futures than boys of the lower classes!ⁱ In Britain, like in America, sport for upper- and middle-class boys was supposed to help them “develop into strong, assertive, competitive men who would eventually become the captains of industry, government, and the military”. Conversely, working-class boys participated in sport to learn “values related to work, productivity, obedience to authority, and teamwork in the pursuit of competitive success”.⁴⁵ In this way, *team* sports began to be used as a tool to teach young Americans class-appropriate values. For a time, adult practice of sport in the upper classes was the only type of practice that glorified individual (and expensive) sports over team sports. This separation was an attempt of the upper echelon to distance themselves from the lower classes and show “their disdain for games that needed no more than an open field and a ball”.⁴⁶

Current Sports Practice in Relation to Social Class

Today, the American perception of team sports as fundamentally egalitarian overshadows the history of segregation of social classes through sports practice. Yet

ⁱ At this time, only boys were encouraged to participate in sport because it was used as a way to teach values appropriate to their social class, as well as a way to “offset” the largely feminine influence of their lives at home. Girls’ “leisure time” however, was structured as a time in which to learn feminine tasks from their mothers in their homes. (Coakley, 2006, p. 6)

unequal opportunities for under-privileged people continue to permeate sports practice. For example, there is an “underrepresentation of people from the lowest income levels among participants in organized sports and physical recreation”.⁴⁷ Although this statement implies adult participants, children from low-income families have also been shown to participate less in organized sport. As Robert Griffin notes, “[a]ssuming that the parents’ sports practice reflects their social class position and that this is the model of sports involvement their children are exposed to, [sports practice] is another way children’s engagement is shaped by their social class backgrounds”.⁴⁸ Parents can additionally effect the adolescent’s decision of which sport to play by not being able to provide expensive equipment or by balking at the cost of participation. Working-class parents are also concerned with whether or not they can provide transportation for their children to and from practices and games.⁴⁹

The beginning of adolescence in America marks a shift in the way that youths make decisions: before this time children generally model themselves on the actions of their parents, but during adolescence, their peers begin to have a bigger influence than their parents. Therefore, the decisions that adolescents make regarding sports practice at this time depend not on how their parents spend their leisure time, but rather whether or not their closest friends are of the same socioeconomic class (which implies similar norms and values), and how these friends choose to participate in sport.⁵⁰ Sports participation is most accessible for American adolescents through school. In the 2005-2006 school year, 546,335 boys and 452,929 girls played high school basketball across the country.⁵¹ At many of the public schools in the United States, there is diversity of socioeconomic background among students. Therefore, it

is likely that in the course of playing the most popular team sport in their high schools (basketball), athletes will come in contact with peers outside of their socioeconomic class. However, it is still the case that students “from the middle-class and above tend to participate on interschool teams to a much greater extent” than those students with lesser means.⁵² Basketball seems to be the exception to this generalization in high school sports: in fact, basketball has “more variation in the socioeconomic backgrounds of the participants” than other high school sports.⁵³ This is due to basketball’s status as a game for “inner-city youth”: minority –and specifically black – youth of lower socioeconomic means.⁵⁴

Basketball is unique even among team sports: while it is not overwhelmingly common for youth of the lowest socioeconomic class to play *organized* basketball, it *is* accessible to this class as well as the other classes. Basketball is accessible due to the fact that it requires only a basketball and hoops (often found in courtyards and parks in the poorest neighborhoods) in order to be played.⁵⁵ This informal practice allows adolescents from low-income neighborhoods to still feel prepared to play basketball once they reach high school with their peers who have had the privilege of participating in organized sport since a very young age. While many suburban children play basketball in official leagues around the country, basketball is also “the game for young athletes without cars or allowances”.⁵⁶

The blending of adolescents in several socioeconomic classes in the framework of high school basketball makes for an interesting dynamic. Some scholars claim that by placing such a diverse group of people in an egalitarian situation, basketball teaches the American values of democracy and cooperation.⁵⁷ In

reality, the situation is much more nuanced than this overview of the relationship between basketball and democracy. As Edwards writes in his Sociology of Sport, people who believe in sport as equalitarian are generally black, middle-class and well educated or elite athletes.⁵⁸ Instead of a “perfect” democracy forming on teams, however, children of lower socioeconomic status tend to observe their peers in the middle-class and learn to act as if they were of the middle-class, appropriating these values in addition to their own.⁵⁹ Therefore, basketball is one sport through which the values of their socioeconomic class are not necessarily reinforced. Rather through their participation in basketball, adolescents have the *ability* to begin to think the way that their teammates of higher socioeconomic class think and therefore appropriate the values of education which may help them to pull themselves out of poverty. Therefore, learned compliance with socioeconomic class norms through basketball participation is highly conditional.

In France, soccer does not have the same role for adolescents as basketball does in America. Unlike basketball, which appears to remain un-associated with a particular class, soccer in France continues to be linked to the working-class.ⁱ Like in America, French sports practice is dependant on class, yet whether or not adolescents in France play a sport is more specifically dependant on the highest degree that their parents have received. According to a survey issued by the *Ministère de la Jeunesse et des Sports*, only 52% of youths aged 12-17 whose parents have not attained a high school degree play sports, while 83% of those whose parents have more than a high school degree play sports.⁶⁰ Athletes of all ages who are a part of the middle- or

ⁱ This is beginning to change in favor of the middle-class playing soccer as professional soccer becomes more and more popular, following the French National team’s success in the 1998 World Cup.

upper-middle-class tend to play not team sport but rather individual sport, which physically allow for more room between competitors. Additionally, French athletes of the upper classes tend to compete against themselvesⁱ as opposed to competing against other people.⁶¹ Finally, sport for upper-class citizens, and specifically for the well-educated, generally valorizes grace over force.⁶² In fact, a sport can be “prédisposé à l’usage bourgeois lorsque l’utilisation du corps qu’il appelle n’offense en rien le sentiment de la haute dignité de la personne... [qui est] en tout opposé à la hâte populaire ou à l’empressement petit-bourgeois”.ⁱⁱ⁶³ This pattern of upper-class athletes playing individual sports while lower-class individuals play team sports is also reflected in youth sports practice.

Traditionally, French working-class youth play team sports with high amounts of physical contact.ⁱⁱⁱ Soccer is a game that requires physical strength and promotes “virility” through contact;⁶⁴ therefore, this sport seems to fit the needs of the lower classes. Additionally, like American working-class adolescent basketball players, young French athletes with lower socioeconomic status have limited sports options due to the fact that some sports require more expensive and elaborate equipment than soccer. Yet, the nature of the game itself and the amount of money that adolescents have to spend on sport do not completely account for the reason that the choice of sport played by French youth is so class-dependant. Rather, institutions such as “la tradition familiale et l’apprentissage précoce ou...les techniques de sociabilité de

ⁱ French upper-class athletes also compete against nature in individual sports such as rock-climbing or windsurfing.

ⁱⁱ “predisposed to being used by the bourgeoisie because the way in which [the sport] uses the body does not compromise the person’s dignity [which is] utterly opposed to the rushing of the lower-classes or the hurry of the petit-bourgeois”

ⁱⁱⁱ While rugby is often played by members of the upper-classes, generally young people do not begin to play rugby in France until after adolescence. Therefore, the French working-class youth do indeed practice sports with physical contact.

rigueur qui interdisent [d]es sports aux classes populaires et aux individus en ascension des classes moyennes ou supérieures ”ⁱ come into play.⁶⁵ The violence of these “sports de masse”ⁱⁱ however, does not lend them to be easily practiced after adolescence.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, the sports of the bourgeoisie take up less energy and are practiced to maintain physical health and therefore the popularity of these sports increases with age. Thus, the “relation to one’s own body...distinguishes the working-class from the privileged classes” in sport.⁶⁷

Despite the violence associated with youth soccer, it is still considered an important sport to teach to children and adolescents due to some of the values that it promotes, especially to working-class children. First, soccer accentuates the importance of solidarity among peers by promoting teamwork.⁶⁸ An adolescent must learn to cooperate with his/her colleagues in order to achieve common goals and become a successful labor worker. Second, the game of soccer “symbolise la division du travail”ⁱⁱⁱ and demonstrates this cooperation among equals in a very clear way. It therefore subjugates the individual to the collective, allowing children to recognize that the end is more important than the means. Soccer also allows children to find “la valeur personnelle”^{iv} in “le résultat d’une compétition entre égaux”,^{v69} which teaches them that their worth as future labor workers is measured in results, and not in personal growth.

ⁱ “family tradition and higher learning or . . . the strict social codes which forbid the lower classes and individuals seeking social mobility to the middle- or upper-middle-classes from playing certain sports”

ⁱⁱ “sports of the masses”

ⁱⁱⁱ “symbolizes the division of labor”

^{iv} “personal value”

^v “the outcome of a competition among equals”

Soccer is included in the French physical education system in schools because the values of respecting one's peers and working together are deemed to be inherent to the game. Yet, as discussed, some of the values taught are geared more toward teaching adolescents to perform their class status than about learning to become independent citizens of the capitalist society. In fact, such values as "la soumission de l'individu...au profit d'un tout"ⁱ can be construed as positive when teaching selflessness to a group of young adults.⁷⁰ Yet, when soccer is understood to be the major sport of the working-class, it is the compliance to these very values that perpetuate the working-class attitude and therefore the working-class status of these adolescents. Meanwhile, the individual sports of the middle- and upper-middle-classes teach autonomy,⁷¹ which helps the adolescents learn to think on their own and advance their own interests in order to be the most successful individuals possible.

Although the participants in youth soccer are generally of similar socioeconomic backgrounds and one of the objectives of participation for the working-class is to teach subservience of an individual to the team, a hierarchy is still present on most youth soccer teams. Despite the theory that soccer is egalitarian in nature, there are many ways that the game still preserves and even encourages hierarchies to form. For example, while some adolescents are talented enough to continue on to a higher level of play and thus join a more prestigious team in the club, some adolescents do not have enough talent and must continue to play on less skilled teams or discontinue their play altogether.⁷² Hierarchies additionally form on teams that are not socioeconomically diverse. Theoretically, all of the players have equal opportunity to establish themselves in the hierarchy by proving themselves to be the

ⁱ "the submission of an individual to the benefit of all"

most talented and dedicated players on the team.⁷³ Therefore, soccer sends mixed messages to the young working-class athletes: on the one hand, it is important to self-sacrifice for the good of the team, but on the other, hard work and talent will gain individual recognition and perhaps promotion to a higher position.

In America, the values taught to adolescents through their basketball education are further complicated by the fact that multiple classes play basketball concurrently. Moreover, sports participation – especially for the lower classes – occurs most frequently through the school. Despite this correlation of sport with school, however, “youth from the middle class and above tend to participate on interschool teams to a much greater extent”.⁷⁴ While participation is largely limited to interschool competition for members of the lower classes, lower-class athletes are still outnumbered in school sports by their wealthier peers, and are therefore much less involved in athletics than their wealthier peers. Additionally, youth in less wealthy school districts have fewer opportunities to participate in sport because there is less money available. In lieu of investing money in an athletic program in these districts, funds for educational materials are augmented. Sometimes under-funded school districts even charge the young, poor athletes a participation fee in order to generate enough revenue to run a team.⁷⁵ Conversely, wealthier school districts have money built into the budget for sports teams, and thus upper- and middle-class athletes are rarely charged for participation,⁷⁶ furthering the inequality evident in American high school basketball.

Some of the same principles of teamwork and cooperation are applied to youth basketball in America as they are to soccer in France. Like in France, American

boys are encouraged to participate in sport – and specifically team sports – to prepare for the teamwork mentality prevalent in the corporate world.⁷⁷ As middle and upper-middle class boys are the most likely to play basketball on school teams, this group of boys is the primary recipient of the values of teamwork. Thus, the norms of this socioeconomic class – that is to work as a team in order to pursue common goals and to learn how to engage in “healthy” competition – are reinforced through participation in basketball.

In addition to promoting the value of competition, high schools throughout the United States are beginning to change their requirements for athletic participation in order to have a minimum academic standard required for its athletes. As athletic participation becomes contingent on both good grades and good behavior, the middle-class standard of the value of education is reinforced.⁷⁸ For the working-class adolescents who play basketball, being exposed to this value is of paramount importance because intellectualism is presented as an alternative to manual labor. By making basketball participation contingent on academic achievement, adolescents of lower socioeconomic status who might not otherwise be exposed to models that recognize the importance of education for a successful future are now compelled to value of education in order to continue to pursue athletics.

The minimum academic expectations for athletic participation influence more than high school grades. High school athletes, regardless of social class, tend to have higher educational aspirations than non-athletes.⁷⁹ Members of the lower classes begin to appropriate the attitudes of the “peer elite . . . [which are] influential in shaping educational plans and expectations beyond high school”.⁸⁰ This “peer elite” is

in turn influenced by the coaches, teachers and parents who inadvertently demonstrate their higher expectations for adolescents of higher social classes. The self-confidence of individual players of greater economic means and their expectations about higher education are influenced by the coach. Additionally research has shown that the players on a team who start the games have more positive expectations about their future than do the substitutes.⁸¹

Scholars and politicians often perceive high school sport to be a good distraction for “problematic” youth. The term “at-risk youth” is often used in America to describe adolescents perceived by outsiders to have the potential to take part in criminal activity, and generally refers to lower- and working-class, minority youth. As Richard Lapchick notes, “all data shows that school-age children are more likely to get into trouble between the hours of three and six p.m.”⁸² After-school sports, therefore, provide these youth a free, adult-supervised activity to keep them busy and, to the relief of politicians and law enforcement, out of trouble.

French politicians also recognize organized sport as a way to occupy the time of working-class children in a positive manner.⁸³ Historically, business owners and churches started soccer teams for working-class “youngsters” in order to “ensur[e] *complete and continuous containment* of the working population”.⁸⁴ Sport thus developed into an “*extremely economical* means of mobilizing, occupying, and controlling adolescents”⁸⁵ who might otherwise find more destructive ways of occupying their time. Through the initiatives to control working-class youth, soccer practice has become grossly “classed” because it is only working-class youth who are perceived to need to be controlled by systems out of their parents’ management,

whereas middle-class children and adolescents are left largely under the direction of their parents or trusted to occupy themselves constructively.

The goal of controlling the free time of working-class youth was reintegrated into French society with the initiative to establish soccer in school in recent decades. The “*haut-commissaire à la Jeunesse et aux Sports*”,ⁱ Maurice Herzog, started a movement in the mid-1960’s to integrate sports into the public schools. The goal of this program was to provide equal access to sport for children and adolescents of all socioeconomic backgrounds, which, in a French system where sport had formerly been practiced only through private clubs, was an innovative idea.⁸⁶

In the 1970’s, physical educators were brought into several French school systems to teach soccer in the poorest neighborhoods. Soccer was chosen again because it involves many adolescents at the same time, and because it requires the least amount of resources for participation. Yet, an underlying motivation to control the working-class permeated this charitable outreach, evidenced by the presence of police at the competitions as well as the practices.⁸⁷ From this government program followed the “Sport pour Tous” initiative which, as a part of the “initiatives associatives et bénévoles”ⁱⁱ by the French government, established teams “avec les ressources des services départementaux de la Jeunesse et des Sports”.ⁱⁱⁱ⁸⁸ This program was established as a public service and marked one of the first times that sport was viewed as a right for all citizens.⁸⁹

The “Sport pour Tous” initiative was unique in that it sought not only to control the lower-class, but also to “lutter contre la ségrégation de fait...s’ établit

ⁱ “High Commissioner of Youth and Sports”

ⁱⁱ “associative and benevolent initiatives”

ⁱⁱⁱ “with the resources of the departmental services of ‘Youth and Sport’”

principalement dans nos villes”,ⁱ implying the segregation of sports practice by class.⁹⁰ Recognizing that sports practice may not be *the* solution to societal inequities, “Sport pour Tous” nonetheless continued to attempt to “réduire les inégalités”ⁱⁱ of sports offered in less wealthy parts of the country as an attempt to establish a “nouvelle société”ⁱⁱⁱ through sport.⁹¹ The principles of “Sport Pour Tous” were made into law in the mid-1970’s, declaring that “les activités physiques et sportives...sont un élément fondamental de l’éducation, de la culture et de la vie sociale...leur pratique constitue un droit pour chacun quels que soient son sexe, son âge, ses capacités et sa condition sociale”.^{iv92} Yet, this law also underscores the importance of professional sport, which as a profit-making enterprise, seems to oppose the goal of “Sport pour Tous” to make sport an equal opportunity for each adolescent athlete.

By underscoring the importance of professional sport, the “Sport pour Tous” program seems to perpetuate the myth of social ascension through sport. However, the French government attempted to compensate for this by distributing tickets to lower-class youth to professional soccer matches. Because ticket prices are sometimes unaffordable for those with no money to spare, the French government established a “Youth and Sports” program which, among other things, subsidizes tickets to professional matches for impoverished youth today.⁹³ Once inside the stadium, “toutes les couches sociales sont représentés...et le stade d’une ville est le

ⁱ “battle against the fact of segregation which . . . principally establishes itself in our cities”

ⁱⁱ “reduce the inequalities”

ⁱⁱⁱ “new society”

^{iv} “physical and sporting activities . . . are a fundamental element of education, culture and social life . . . everyone has the right to practice [sporting activities] no matter his/her sex, age, ability, or social condition”

reflet presque fidèle de sa composition sociologique”,ⁱ⁹⁴ excepting the overabundance of “artisans et des commerçants, [et] des ouvriers”.ⁱⁱ⁹⁵ In effect, despite the cost, “le public du football est un publique *populaire et jeune*”.ⁱⁱⁱ⁹⁶ Young people comprise between 25% - 45% of the crowd at a given professional soccer game, and about half the crowd is made up of *ouvriers* and *employés*.⁹⁷ An explanation for the omnipresence of young working-class fans at the professional stadiums may be that this social category is also overrepresented as soccer *players*. In other words, either the fact that working-class youth are the most likely to play soccer causes this same group to attend more soccer matches, or the fact that they attend more matches causes them to be more likely to play soccer.

Another hypothesis about why stadium crowds are composed largely of working-class adolescents states that soccer matches, and more specifically rooting for one team, are integral to the mental health of the less fortunate French youth. For example, the feeling of victory after “their” team wins helps these young people to feel as though they belong to something bigger than their social circles, and gives them temporary happiness and hope.⁹⁸ Yet, this hypothesis seems to reflect the opinions of French government programs like “Youth and Sports” which attempt to credit programs that they put in place with the overall improvement of standards of living – and even mental health - of the children in the banlieue through relatively low-budget changes such as the implementation of sports programs.

ⁱ “all social classes are represented . . . and a city’s soccer stadium is almost a faithful reflection of the city’s social composition”

ⁱⁱ “artisans, merchants and labor workers”

ⁱⁱⁱ “soccer fans are working-class and young”

In the past, sports scholars claimed that social class was eradicated among spectators within a stadium, stating that “l’élite et la masse se fendent en un même corps”,ⁱ yet in reality, stadiums are specifically designed to respect the social hierarchy and physically separate the upper- and lower-classes.⁹⁹ This separation is achieved by ticket pricing: the closer a spectator is seated to the game, the more expensive the tickets. Thus, social class is highly visible in the stadium because the wealthy are closest to the action. This design helps to cause the fans to be divided into sections according to their age as well as their social status.¹⁰⁰

The unification of fans according to social status within the stadium has the additional consequence of producing the phenomenon of “hooliganism”. Soccer hooligans are generally young, working-class fans who create cheers for their own team, and jeers against the opposing team, but who have made international headlines by becoming violent when they fall victim to the mob mentality. According to sports-theorists, hooligans are simply resisting the bourgeois hegemony by committing violent acts.¹⁰¹ Yet, the acts are not even partially justified with a righteous sentiment; “ce n’est jamais la passion pour l’égalité et la justice qui s’expriment en ces lieux, bien au contraire, c’est celle de la hiérarchie et du classement...à « l’égalité dans le droit à l’injustice »”.ⁱⁱ¹⁰² In other words, it is understandable for these frustrated youths to act out within the sports arena because they are taught that sport is egalitarian and that the best competitor will win regardless of social status, a realization which makes them further understand their social disadvantage.

ⁱ “the elite and the masses split into one body”

ⁱⁱ “passion for equality and justice are never expressed in these places, on the contrary what is expressed is [the sentiment] of hierarchy and classification . . . of ‘equality in the right to injustice’”

Although spectatorship in American professional sport faces relatively few problems with youth violence comparable to hooliganism in France, it is still fairly exclusionary of the lowest classes of Americans. Unlike the French government which funds tickets to make professional sport more accessible to the lowest classes, American youth outreach programs are largely privately funded, and there is therefore no uniform philanthropic organization ensuring that professional sport in America remains accessible to everyone. Thus, the exorbitant ticket prices of many professional basketball organizations fundamentally exclude the poor from attending.¹⁰³ Moreover, underprivileged families often bear the brunt of the expanding popularity of professional sports. For example, these families are the ones displaced to make room for a new stadium that will be built, yet they are still required to pay taxes that contribute to the building.¹⁰⁴ These state-funded projects to build stadiums have a direct effect on lower-class American adolescents: they take money away from other social developments such as parks and schools that the lower-class youth *could* benefit from in order to provide recreation in the form of sport spectatorship for the upper-classes. Additionally, even if they are fiscally able to attend professional games, the exorbitant prices of tickets for professional sporting events in the United States cause lower-class youth to be relegated to the very back of the arena, publicly demonstrating their inferior social status,¹⁰⁵ much like the soccer stadiums in France.

Social Mobility through Soccer in France and Basketball in America

In America, the myth of sport providing a means for social mobility continues to be alive in popular culture, especially among the members of the lower classes.¹⁰⁶ Basketball in particular, and sports in general, contribute to the American dream of success through merit,¹⁰⁷ and in the poorest areas, adolescents perpetuate false hopes that they will be able to “make it” to professional basketball.¹⁰⁸ However, less than one percent of all people who play basketball as children will have the opportunity to play professionally.¹⁰⁹

American social scientists fear that the unrealistic belief in social mobility through sport will cause youths from poor families to forgo academics in order to pursue athletic endeavors, limiting their other avenues to social mobility. Lower-class adolescents who believe in their own athletic ability become so intent on athletic achievement that they often do not give themselves an opportunity to find a “middle ground” between poverty and success, such as a skilled trade or through higher education. Therefore these young Americans are very likely to end up with a career as an unskilled laborer.¹¹⁰ It is for this reason that socially active professional athletes such as tennis star Arthur Ashe encourage lower-class children and their parents to pursue academics and not exclusively athletics. In one letter, Ashe persuaded parents to “send [their] children to libraries” instead of sports arenas.¹¹¹

The national initiative in America to mandate a minimum grade point average for athletic participation has aided in the process of finding a middle ground for high school athletes. Social mobility is fostered through this initiative because it compels athletes to be more conscientious students which will put them in a better position to

find a skilled job later in life.¹¹² Additionally, the status afforded to high school and college athletes can help them to obtain better jobs because employers consider them “well-rounded” and thus better able to handle challenges at work.¹¹³ The most important skill for social mobility gained on the high school basketball court, however, is that of “learning middle-class attitudes, behaviors and social skills”.¹¹⁴ In “learning middle-class attitudes” the value of education will be reinforced to lower-class youth, and therefore they are more likely to take their studies seriously and have a greater chance of escaping the cycle of poverty.

Similar to American adolescents, French youth see the possibility of social mobility through soccer participation. At a very young age, French children are exposed to professional soccer players, and these athletes become their first idols. As the children begin to mature, these idols become models for social mobility for working-class youths. Bourgeois children, however, are dissuaded from idolizing professional soccer players as their parents stamp out hope of pursuing professional athletics in their children in favor of pursuing higher education or athletic success through a more exclusive sport.¹¹⁵ In lieu of parents pushing them toward viable paths of upward mobility, the working-class youths are exposed on a regular basis to “success stories” of professional soccer players who rose out of poverty.¹¹⁶

The idea of social mobility is perpetuated for talented working-class adolescent soccer players because once they achieve a certain level of play, the soccer club that they play with starts to pay for travel expenses, food, uniforms etc. and the players begin to realize that professional soccer players receive even better care.¹¹⁷ Yet, like in America, “l'école, l'espoir de devenir fonctionnaire, de reprendre

l'exploitation familiale ou...d'acquérir une qualification constituent des rêves réalistes d'ascension sociale".ⁱ¹¹⁸ Therefore, adolescent soccer players in France have a similar problem to young American basketball players: they believe their chances to "s'en sortir"ⁱⁱ are greater through their athletic skill than through education, a more realistic dream.¹¹⁹

Although touted in popular culture, as well as by certain social scientists, as a way in which to promote total equality and to overcome the social hierarchy, youth soccer in France and basketball in America not only reinforce class norms in the professional sphere, but also help to perpetuate them by offering false hopes of mobility through athletics. While soccer is celebrated as the national sport of France, with a display of national pride and unity whenever the professional team wins, soccer still holds the stigma of a working-class sport since the nineteenth century in France. While children of other classes are beginning to participate, there is still the feeling in contemporary French culture that soccer teaches working-class values and is too physical to be a sport for children of elevated status. And while basketball is more often seen in America as a sport played by all, the relative lack of equipment, as well as its recent use as a means to control "at-risk" youth has begun to stigmatize the sport as one for the lower classes. Thus, despite the claims of popular culture, basketball and soccer via their firm roots in the social traditions of the United States and France, respectively, are not egalitarian sports and participation does indeed help to perpetuate social class norms.

ⁱ "school, the hope of becoming a public servant, re-appropriating the family business or . . . to acquire a skill constitute realistic dreams of social ascension"

ⁱⁱ "escape"

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Chapter 2: Socializing Race through Sport

“Le football constitue probablement le meilleur exemple, dans notre société, de « programme éducatif intégré » pour tous, et tout au long de la vie.”ⁱ - Idrissi¹

“. . . athletics may become perceived as one of the few means by which a black can succeed in a highly competitive American society.” - Eitzen²

Perceived by many as an opportunity for equality, sport is in fact wrought with as many racial tensions as the broader societies around it. The general public believes that soccer in France and basketball in America are not only avenues for social mobility for lower-class urban and minority youth, but also look to soccer participation among minorities to set the pace for ending discrimination. Professional soccer in France and professional basketball in the United States have indeed opened opportunities for many individual minorities, yet there is a large gap between the perceived impact of sport on the integration of minorities into society among white citizens in France and the United States, and the actual reduction of racial tensions that sport produces in both of these countries. While both organized youth soccer in France and youth basketball in America are perceived by French and American citizens as a way in which to lessen racial tensions and raze the racial hierarchy in each country, participation in these sports generally reinforces racial stereotypes and teaches young participants to abide to the current racial norms of French and American societies.

Part of the difficulty in studying this particular aspect of sport is that race is not studied in France in the same way that it is in America. Due to the republican

ⁱ “Soccer probably constitutes the best example, in our society, of an ‘integrative educational program’ for everyone, for life”

ideal of equality, French culture does not allow for the discussion of race in relation to social composition, not even in government censuses. Instead, immigrants and people of various ethnic backgrounds are expected to become fully integrated into French culture by attaining citizenship and “embracing equal rights, the social contract, and socialism”.³ Not only does the lack of acknowledgment of racial difference make the academic discussion of race difficult, but it also limits the undertaking of sociological studies because racial composition studies of the population are limited and independently researched. Therefore, the rate of participation of adolescents in sport categorized by race remains uninvestigated. This does not mean that there is a general apathy in France for issues surrounding race, it simply indicates that much research remains to be done on this subject.

In contrast, race is discussed and studied on a variety of levels in the United States. In a random sample of high schools used for research on interracial contact conducted by Charles T. Clotfelter in 2000, it was found that non-whites comprise 26.2% of high school basketball teams (public and private), with blacks accounting for 23.7% of this population,⁴ while blacks only comprise 15% of the general population as of 2002.⁵ In comparison with other sports this rate of participation among students of color is astronomical.ⁱ For example, the third most popular boy’s team sport, baseball, has only 8.5% participation by students of color.⁶ The high rate of participation in basketball among minority adolescents makes the study of basketball vital to understanding how children learn to abide by racial norms. Although the study of basketball cannot offer the most typical look at the impact of

ⁱ Football is the exception: as the most popular boy’s sport, it boasts 26.8% rate of minority participation.

race on youth sport due to its very popularity among minority youth, this extensive minority participation could be a large contributor to the fact that basketball is the most popular team sport among high school adolescents in the United States. The disproportionate minority interest in basketball relative to the general population indicates that basketball participation has important cultural implications for both the black and white communities. The possibility for cultural implications increases when it is considered that minority youths participate in basketball at a disproportionately high rate despite their generally decreased athletic opportunity. Additionally, this surge of minority participation helps to augment the overall rates of participation in America and hence increases the general popularity of the sport. The relative popularity of basketball among the minority population has provoked a wealth of literature discussing minority (specifically black) participation basketball. Additionally, the fact of black domination in professional basketballⁱ incites an in-depth analysis of why basketball is popular for minority youth.

These same issues can be examined in France despite the fact that comparable statistics of minority participation in youth soccer in France are not available. Scholars are beginning to examine the repercussions of the 1998 French World Cup victory on French perceptions of minority status. The French National team that won this championship was comprised of “*black-blanc-beur*”, meaning individuals of all races – black, white and “*beur*” (a slang term used to describe a person who has North African ancestry) – and began to be used as an allegory for a united France, and a symbol of the ideal French nation that has combated racial tensions.⁷ Since this

ⁱ Currently, 75% of the athletes in the NBA are black. (Evans Jr., 2001, p. 212)

victory, minority participation in youth soccer has expanded, and as a result, racial relations in sport have begun to change.

History of Minority Participation in Basketball in America and Soccer in France

Historically, basketball has been a popular sport in America among non-whites and immigrants. Although it is unclear what minority *youth* participation looked like at the beginnings of basketball, much is learned about the racial climate of the time by studying the professional leagues. Change in attitudes about race and racial integration tended to start at the professional level and trickle down to youth sport. The first professional league created in 1898 included players that were Jewish, Serbian, Polish and Lithuanian. According to Steven Riess, in his essay “Sport, Race and Ethnicity in the American City, 1870-1950”, “[t]he best players were almost all drawn from inner-city ethnic groups”.⁸ Eastern Europeans initiated the tradition of people in urban centers playing basketball. At the time, interethnic competitions were created to ease tensions between cultural groups. However, these competitions often increased inter-group tensions and reinforced prevalent racial hostilities. Despite this salient tension, professional basketball leagues continued to be formed across the country in the early twentieth century as a mode of “ethnic community entertainment” in urban areas.⁹

The discussion of modern “ethnic” groups in basketball no longer includes Eastern Europeans. Instead, today’s discussion of race in American sport largely

concerns black and Latino athletes.ⁱ While it is nearly impossible to ascertain the first instance of integrated play in *youth* basketball, it is helpful in terms of basketball history to understand that the first time professional black and white players interacted on the court. This occurred in 1929 when the all-white Boston Celtics played the all black New York Renaissance.¹⁰ The first single integrated team, however, did not come about until after the “color barrier” was broken in baseball by Jackie Robinson in 1946.¹¹

In the decades following integration, racial tensions within teams were still apparent. For example, white coaches of both college and professional teams would mandate that players appear “clean-cut”, implying that they not engage in particular forms of self-expression such as wearing their hair in an Afro or growing facial hair. Despite the obvious “right” of participation being respected by white coaches who allowed black participants, white power was still implicit in the enforcement of seemingly pointless rules. Thus, white society maintained “institutional powerlessness” for black athletes for several decades after integration.¹²

Because participation in a white-controlled sport implicated a black athlete in helping to maintain a system of “institutional powerlessness”, the role of the black athlete in the larger civil rights movement was a point of contention. Some black activists viewed black athletes as progressive people who paved the way to full equality under American law. This view-point stressed that equality is inherent in athletic competition by virtue of the fact that it teaches the American mentality of a meritocracy: the most talented and hardest working athlete or team will be victorious. According to this viewpoint, there is no such thing as white dominance on the playing

ⁱ Black athletes statistically play basketball much more often than Latino athletes.

field as full equality of participants is theoretically inherent in the game of basketball. The civil rights movement used the respect that black athletes attained during the 1960's from the American public to prove black equality and to pursue liberty.¹³

However, the phenomenon of positional segregation – the delegation of minority athletes to the less crucial and less intellectual roles in a given sport – was rampant in basketball at this time.¹⁴ While the positions in basketball are more equitable than in other team sports, the position of guard is described as the “floor general”, and requires a player with “judgment, leadership [and] dependability”.¹⁵ The center, in the literal center of the action, has the largest amount of control over the outcome of the game, and thus is the “pivot of the team’s offense”.¹⁶ Finally, the forwards are the last line of defense, and require the physical capacities of “speed, quickness, physical strength, [and] rebounding”.¹⁷ It is clear that while guard and center are viewed as “thinking” positions, a successful forward requires mostly physical attributes. According to the theory of positional segregation, therefore, the majority of black players are expected to play forward, while the positions of guard and center should be white-dominated. In the 1970's, this sort of discrimination was indeed found in collegiate basketball, although not often in the professional arena.¹⁸ It can be assumed that this phenomenon trickled down to multiethnic adolescent teams, and that thus young black athletes were taught to fulfill roles that need strong physical capabilities as opposed to strong mental capabilities. While positional segregation – also known as stacking – is still present in sports such as football and baseball, there is no longer evidence of stacking in any level of basketball today.¹⁹ And, true to the stacking principle, as black athletes continue to diversify their roles in sport, there

becomes greater opportunity for black American youth to follow their heroes and continue to expand in the world of sport.²⁰

Despite positional equality in the second half of the twentieth century, it was still rare to find black people holding positions of power in the sporting world. While blacks during the civil rights movement were allowed to be athletes, they were not allowed to assume coaching or managing positions. Therefore, some members of the black power movement viewed black athletes as compliant with the social hierarchy. These athletes were thought to teach subjugation to black American youths by their participation in professional sport and were therefore considered detrimental to the attainment of civil rights. Some critics even went so far as to assert that black athletes were “at least passively in political support of ‘white society’” by participating in sports organized by whites.²¹ Regardless of their role in achieving equality, blacks currently comprise 75% of the National Basketball Association,²² and 23.7% of high school basketball teams.²³

Sport has been used historically as a tool for racial integration in a similar way in France. The French policy of ignoring racial difference, however, has made the dynamics of race in sport function differently. In fact, since the inception of soccer as a professional sport, French teams have been recruiting foreign players in hopes of improving their overall record. The winning team of the 1934 national championship was composed of players from all different social spheres; for example, an Algerian laborer was a member of the National Championship team.²⁴ While the pre-World War II professional soccer clubs were structured to allow players to hold another job, soccer became the primary occupation of professional athletes in the era following the

Second World War. In the 1950's, there was a surge of laborers, who were mostly immigrants, who became interested in playing professional soccer. In fact, minorities were quite enthusiastic about playing soccer : “ les immigrants, Polonais et Italiens d’abord, Espagnols et Maghrébins ensuite ont pu penser que le football était vraiment le meilleur moyen d’échapper au travail de la mine”.ⁱ²⁵ It was also in this era that the French state became interested in using organized sport as a way to promote healthy competition and equality for all. Since this era, sport has become a medium through which the state can socialize and integrate immigrants into the French lifestyle and ways of thinking.²⁶

Minority Relations in Modern Youth Soccer and Basketball

The French government and the French public alike ascribe to the same importance of integration through sport as does the American public. After the French World Cup victory in 1998, the team celebrated the diversity of its individual players instead of pretending that this diversity did not exist. As a result, this team became a “symbol of the new, multiethnic society” that has just begun to discuss issues of racism and investigate social problems surrounding ethnicity.²⁷

The marginalized groups in France are slightly different from those in the United States. Like America, France has a history of oppressing blacks. However the *Maghrébins*ⁱⁱ are the fastest growing group of immigrants who participate in sport. Many of these immigrants (both from the *Maghreb* and from Western Africa –

ⁱ “Immigrants, first Polish and Italian, then Spanish and North African, were able to think that soccer was really the best way to escape working at the mines”

ⁱⁱ People of North African descent.

L’Afrique Noire) live in the *banlieues* of France – the areas directly outside of the large cities where the housing is cheapest, notorious for being “rough” neighborhoods.²⁸ Stereotypes of these areas tell of common gardens and parks which are appropriated by and divided among competing youth gangs where they loiter and intimidate other citizens of the *banlieue*.²⁹

Yet, youth involved in gangs appropriate the communal parks for sport as well as illegal activity. Pick-up soccer games are common in these spaces.³⁰ The games are played without adult supervision, and have altered rules to accommodate the number and skills of the participants. One public space may have several games played concurrently, but in these crowded conditions, an outsider is easily able to identify an organized structure of play and “permissive creativity which...allow[s] for self-organized challenge matches and tournaments”.³¹

These pick-up soccer games do more than occupy the youth of the *banlieue* with productive, non-violent activities. The appropriation of the space sparks a sense of belonging to a place and group pride – something that outsiders perceive to be lacking from their daily interactions.³² In fact, this community pride propels adolescents and young adults to “protect a playing field or gym from the use (or abuse) of outsiders”.³³ Thus impromptu sports participation can give a sense of belonging to the youth of the *banlieue* as an alternative to gang participation, and thus marks an initiative by *banlieue* youth to take responsibility for their own time and actions by creating their own version of soccer.

In contrast to the French system, American adolescents are not often limited to appropriation of public space in order to play basketball. No matter how

impoverished the area, adolescents generally have the opportunity to play basketball in school. Yet, whether or not they play sport through school, many American children play pick-up basketball in a similar way to French soccer in the *banlieue*. However, adolescents and children in the suburbs who are generally white play pick-up basketball in a very different way than those in crowded urban environments, who are generally minorities. Informal basketball games in the inner-cityⁱ are very social experiences: similar to French soccer in the *banlieue*, there is competition for playing-time and for space on the limited courts, thus basketball in urban spaces is a highly competitive and fast-paced experience. The play is organized among the participants, and here too “norms have developed to handle the abundance of competitors” in these urban parks.³⁴ The crowded conditions help to develop players that are accustomed to defending the ball from their adversaries, as well as players who accept physical contact as a standard part of the game. As a result, the young “ballers”ⁱⁱ train themselves to weave in and out of defenders and guard the ball from opponents.³⁵ In contrast, finding space to play basketball does not tend to be a problem in the suburbs. Here, adolescents generally practice by themselves on their driveway, perfecting their shooting technique by taking the same shot several times in a row before moving on to another shot.³⁶

The different conditions of practice in suburban and urban areas make for different styles of play in basketball. The urban adolescent “baller” develops athletically in front of an audience of peers waiting to play on a crowded court where several games may be occurring simultaneously, so that the amount of time that he

ⁱ The term “inner-city” is used to imply poor neighborhoods in urban centers.

ⁱⁱ A term used to connote a basketball player.

personally gets to play is dependant on his skill level.³⁷ Therefore, a young black maleⁱ develops a style of play which is flashy enough to hold the attention of his audience, yet is effective at controlling the ball in traffic. In contrast, the suburban “baller” does not develop in an informal meritocracy: when he practices with others, there are generally not enough players to fill two teams, so every available body is included in the game, regardless of gender, age, or skill level. Additionally, the suburban player’s individual practice gives him a methodical style, focused on technique and unaccustomed to contact in his play.³⁸ These two styles of play are reflected in each race at the professional level as well.³⁹

While basketball organized by youth in the ghettos of urban America does prove to be formulative for young basketball players, the general sentiment among adults in positions of power is that minority youth in inner-cities are predisposed to crime, and that adult-organized basketball is the most effective way to keep minority youth “out of trouble”.⁴⁰ A recent American effort focuses on crime-prevention in the ghettos through increased youth participation in sport.⁴¹ An initiative called “Midnight Basketball” was created by G. Van Standifer, who believed that by creating a fun, safe activity for young urban men (ages 17-21) between the hours of 10:00 pm and 2:00 am he could effectively reduce crime in inner-cities.⁴² Running on the assumption that minority youth are likely to be involved in crime, the program, which began in the 1980’s, boasted a 30% decrease in crime in its first three years in Glenarden, Maryland, and was replicated all over the United States. Later studies, however, questioned the effectiveness of “Midnight Basketball”. The results of more

ⁱ The majority of research done on race in relation to basketball in adolescents has focused on black males.

recent studies prove that while this program does not reduce violent crimes at any considerable rate, it does seem to significantly reduce property crime rates in the cities that have adopted “Midnight Basketball”.⁴³ Nevertheless, these results have perhaps helped to reinforce the idea that inner-cities are violent areas and that this violence can be reduced through sport.

Basketball has also recently become the focus of a program used to teach urban minority adolescents and pre-adolescents the skills to safely combat provocation and to use violence-reducing behavior. Using the premise that basketball is “popular in America . . . primarily because of the cultural style and movement creativity of African American athletes”, generous citizens opened a community center where young athletes could learn conflict-resolution and how to play basketball at the same time.⁴⁴ As an experiment to teach social responsibility and emotional control through basketball, staff members would observe situations in which players would start to become upset, and intervene to ask them how they could resolve conflict without violence. The basketball court proved to be an effective arena in which to teach self-control in that, with insults and “trash-talking” ingrained in basketball culture, emotions constantly change, which, along with high levels of adrenaline, tend to lead to conflict in youth of all races and backgrounds.⁴⁵ By introducing coping skills to black urban youth in the context of basketball, social scientists hoped to reduce the predisposition to violence that they perceived in minority youth. Therefore, the staff of this program was trained to recognize potential conflicts, and intervene by suggesting a positive alternative outlet for this emotion. The program was created on the psychological theory that, while the best tool to

“keep African Americans out of trouble” is conceived to be sport, in fact the best tool is the relationships made through sport and the respect of the team which causes behavioral change.⁴⁶ The problem with this form of outreach programs is that, while it does teach social skills and problem-solving to minority youth, it still essentially stigmatizes black urban boys by targeting them as “at risk” and thus perpetuates the stereotype that to be black is to be at a higher risk for violent behavior.

Similar programs have been developed in France to combat the perceived gang violence in the *banlieue*, as well as to prevent youth crimes and the consequent flooding of juvenile detention centers with minorities. For example, the French government instated the “Youth and Sports” program in the fall of 1992.⁴⁷ This program set up several leagues for different sports – including soccer – as well as weekend trips and summer programs for “at risk” children and adolescents to escape the *banlieue* temporarily and learn such values as “le respect, la citoyenneté, la tolérance et l’engagement”ⁱ through recreation.⁴⁸ Similar to pick-up games, the sports leagues that were established through the “Youth and Sports” movement often use the courtyards of apartment buildings and local parks as the location for games. Formerly trafficked by gangs and drug dealers, these common spaces are now perceived to be much safer due to the fact that they are being used for an explicit purpose (sport) as opposed to being what government officials perceive to be an idle destination of under-stimulated youth.⁴⁹ This government initiative also has the intention of creating more “mainstream” adolescents out of the teens living in the *banlieue*. Unlike sports practice through school in the United States, French adolescents generally participate in sport by joining a private club. As the majority of French adolescents do have the

ⁱ “respect, citizenship, tolerance and commitment”

economic opportunity to participate in sport, those growing up in the *banlieue* are at a distinct disadvantage by virtue of not having access to enough money to join a formal sports club. The “Youth and Sports” program therefore hopes to help equalize physical education among all of the French youth.⁵⁰ In short, through “Youth and Sports”, the French government hopes to better integrate the minority adolescents of the *banlieue* by giving them an upbringing more similar to the rest of French youth via a complete sports education.

The result of these programs was a re-appropriation of the communal spaces in the *banlieues* by the recreation facilitators, yet, while government officials maintain that these programs have served to “defus[e] potential asystemic threats”, they have also become a “rallying point for class conflict and antinational sentiment and violence”.⁵¹ This is the case because, while recreational programs occupy the minds and bodies of the *banlieusards*, these adolescents and young adults recognize that the sorting activities are overseen by uniformed police, which is a constant point of contention for the *banlieusards*.⁵² It becomes clear, therefore, that the youth in the *banlieue* does not recognize the intention of the “Youth and Sports” program to be integration. The fact that the events are policed clearly demonstrates to the minority youth that they are “other” in the French government’s perspective and therefore not to be trusted. The message sent by the French government is that installing sports programs in the *banlieue* to occupy the time of the youth (which is the stated goal of the program) is clearly not enough of a safety measure against the minority youths’ “pre-disposition” toward violence and therefore police must be present at the contests as well. The action of inviting law enforcement to the games sends a plain message to

the *banlieue* adolescents from the French government: the message of their “otherness”. By virtue of their minority status and where they live, the children of the *banlieue* are seen as different and dangerous. Thus the government initiative for integration is perceived by the youth of the *banlieue* as an initiative to control this foreign body – the citizens of the *banlieue* – and therefore as the young *banlieusards* start to either believe in or reject this stereotype of being dangerous, they react to the injustice and thus perpetuate the stereotype of *banlieusards* as unstable.

This being said, the results of the urban “Youth and Sport” programs are not entirely negative. In fact, playing on one of the soccer teams or even going away on one of the trips affords the adolescents an increase in social status among their peers. Additionally, despite the control issue present in the *banlieue*, youths who have participated in these programs *are* proven better able to integrate into mainstream society.⁵³ This integration is partly accomplished when teams are created because the sense of belonging to a team fosters a sense of regional identity and pride.⁵⁴ The pride is particularly vital because often adolescents from the *banlieue*, living in sub-standard facilities, often do not feel as though they have much to be proud of. The sense of regional identity and pride that they feel therefore by playing soccer – and especially by winning matches – helps them to valorize themselves.

In addition to division of athletes by locale, teams in the “Youth and Sports” program are often organized by ethnic group.⁵⁵ This is particularly puzzling as the French government officially does not recognize ethnic groups, rather attempts to fully integrate all people as French citizens. The confusion is perpetuated by the fact that the ethnic lines drawn for teams often do not necessarily correspond to the

current racial composition of that area of the city; rather, teams tend to be organized by the ethnic group originally associated with particular areas of the city, whether or not that region is still primarily composed of people from that particular ethnic background.⁵⁶ Despite France's attempts to eradicate all traces of ethnic diversity to demonstrate France's integration, however, ethnic teams continue to be popular in youth soccer.

Unlike French youth soccer teams, American basketball teams specifically organized around race are less common and prove to be problematic. First, according to a study by Loy and McPherson, teams organized according to ethnic backgrounds in the United States "retarded the rate of assimilation"⁵⁷ of the black athletes to "mainstream"ⁱ American life. "Assimilation" is in fact hindered by the group reinforcement of cultural norms within an ethnic community. In other words, an all-black team will reinforce the "ghetto-style" play by using slam-dunks, while a purely Navajo basketball team will encourage technique but dissuade aggression on the court.⁵⁸ Secondly, research has shown that when playing a team composed of members mostly or entirely of another race, racial tension, stereotyping and slurs increase.⁵⁹ The competition thus allows young athletes to displace their competitive energy and spirit into racial aggression.

Yet, multiethnic youth basketball teams can be problematic as well when they have racially-based hierarchies. Many social psychologists believe that "teams are one of the few contexts in which multiethnic youth come together under conditions social psychology has found favorable for the reduction of prejudice...: equal status contact between...groups in the pursuit of common goals".⁶⁰ Social scientists differ in

ⁱ Here, "mainstream" is used to imply white society.

opinion on whether or not interracial teams actually serve to lessen or to increase racial tensions. Sociologist Richard Lapchick, for example, maintains that sport helps to “create friendships across racial lines”.⁶¹ Many texts proclaim recommend that contact between races does decrease tensions and stereotypes. Indeed equal status among peers proves necessary for the reduction of racial tensions. Yet the mere fact of playing on a multi-ethnic team is not sufficient for inter-group harmony. The phenomenon of hierarchies forming according to skill or favoritism is particularly evident in boys’ basketball: there can be a “disruption of equal status team membership by the formation of an ethnically defined social dominance hierarchy”.⁶² This hierarchy can be formed inadvertently or deliberately by a coach who subscribes to the stereotype that black people are better at basketball than white people and who favors his/her young black players by giving them more playing time and instruction.⁶³ This favoritism can lead to racial conflict among the young players: the white athletes rebel against the hierarchy and turn their anger not toward the coach, but *toward the black players*.⁶⁴ One implication for this hierarchy could be that white players generalize their feeling toward their black teammates to black people as a group, thus perpetuating racism and stereotyping.

Race-based Violence in Youth Sport

Racial tensions on and off the playing field have a history of leading to violence in both France and America. Violence can begin during a high school basketball game in the United States – due partially to the adrenaline of the players, and partially to the excitability of the crowd – and escalate quickly, especially in

public high schools in “inner cities”. Despite a “no-contact” rule in basketball, high-tension and particularly intense games have been known to become violent. Sometimes this violence takes the form of “flagrant fouls” called against the players by referees, but sometimes violence escalates to fist-fights erupting between players on opposing teams.⁶⁵ The actions of the players on the court have an effect on their spectators as well. Escalating violence between two “ballers” “may also incite collective actions by fans and pose a serious threat to maintaining order, safety and property”.⁶⁶ In order to prevent such collective actions from occurring, many public high schools in less safe areas “have been forced to play their games in the afternoons and in some cases in the absence of spectators”.⁶⁷ The coupling of sport and crime in these cases has been a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy: the stereotypes associated with “inner-city” violence cause adolescents from these areas to react violently, and thus the stereotype of young black athletes and athletic supporters being incapable of controlling their temper is self-perpetuated.⁶⁸

Fan violence, which is common around sport, is frequently associated with soccer in Europe. This is called “hooliganism”, a term which describes crowd violence at games as a form of showing support for a particular team.⁶⁹ Adolescents make up a good proportion of the spectators at professional soccer matches in France: about 25% - 40%.⁷⁰ Yet, unlike most spectator sports, the youthful portion of the French soccer crowd does not include solely white middle-class males. The goals of the “Youth and Sport” program were not limited to making participation in sport accessible, but rather “Youth and Sport” focuses on making professional sport accessible to the youth of the *banlieue* as well. To this end, an initiative was put forth

by the government agency overseeing “Youth and Sport” to purchase and distribute tickets to children and adolescents of the *banlieue* for major soccer matches. In this way, enthusiasm is built in these adolescents not only for playing soccer but also for following professional soccer.⁷¹ In a way, the distribution of tickets to professional games could be seen as a way to cultivate a market for professional sports and to promote a sense of regional pride, as well as to cultivate an enthusiasm that might help to produce future athletic stars out of “disadvantaged [and minority] youth”.⁷²

In keeping with European practices, French youth culture at soccer matches is strongly tied to hooliganism, yet French hooliganism has become less violent than that of most other European countries.⁷³ The hooligan rivalries in France are discussed as “displays” to support a team as opposed to using violence toward the opposing team and its fans in order to support a team. French “displays” are hailed as an occasion for youth to “let off steam”,⁷⁴ and the rivalry among hooligan groups has begun to revolve around the creative ways in which they express their pride for their teams instead of physical violence.⁷⁵

A study of the soccer stadium of *l'Olympique de Marseille (OM)* shows that fans are organized into supporting groups and divided by race by virtue of where they are seated. In fact, Christian Bromberger proposes that “la géographie sociale de la cité [de Marseille] se projette grosso modo sur celle du stade”ⁱ⁷⁶. For example, the northern portion of the city which houses the *banlieues* and the neighborhoods with a large *Franco-Maghrebi* population is reflected in the northern section of the stadium which is largely populated by the children of *Maghrebi* immigrants. When one of

ⁱ “the geography of the city of Marseille is largely projected on the geography of the soccer stadium”

these soccer fans undergoes a change in social status (for example, by marrying) he will also change the section from which he cheers.⁷⁷

According to Bromberger, opposing the *Maghrebi* population at the south end of the stadium, sits the hooligan band called the “Ultras”.⁷⁸ This group is also composed of adolescents and young adults, but the “Ultras” are white, xenophobic youth. In the late 1980’s the “Ultras” were tied to the *Front National*, which is the extreme rightist political party in France.⁷⁹ At the time, this rowdy group would shout insults at black players on visiting teams, while maintaining respect for their own black players. As more professional soccer teams were built and fan followings developed, supporters began to assume a regional identity which united residents of each city as opposed to creating a nationalist identity which focused on a “true” French identity that did not include the non-white French. Thus the ties between the *Front National* and the “Ultras” of the *OM* club dissipated.⁸⁰

Not only is the stadium a reflection of the city, it is also a reflection of the societies’ changes and, to a certain extent, the stadium is a reflection of the process of social mobility.⁸¹ In fact, for a young *banlieusard* of foreign origins, movement from the northern end of a stadium into a different section can be seen as a right of passage, and the first step toward integration into French society.⁸² Therefore, the French initiative to give soccer tickets to the young working class of the *banlieue* through the “Youth and Sport” outreach, combined with the nation’s refined version of hooliganism - focusing on finding creative, representative cheers – perhaps serves to integrate the non-white adolescents of the *banlieue* into French culture in a more constructive way than playing on soccer teams with other members of the same ethnic

group. In the soccer stadium, youth of all races are theoretically exposed to a cross-section of French society at large – although women⁸³ and the population of middle-aged people of *Maghrebi* origins are largely underrepresented⁸⁴ – and are invited to take part in a display promoting regional pride and French nationalism, not without encountering some of the racism still very much alive in France today. Thus the stadium, as a theoretical microcosm of a French city demonstrates quite clearly that, while adolescents of all races are integrated into this one French cultural practice of attending a soccer game, the segregation of fans along racial lines proves that soccer fandom teaches a form of integration that is nonetheless segregated.

A similar phenomenon occurs in the stadium of the *Paris-Saint-Germain* (*PSG*) team. The fans of this club are also mostly young: 41% are under 24 years old and 64% are under 35 years old.⁸⁵ In the 1980's, there was a massive rivalry among the fans of the *PSG* (especially the young fans) according to whether the fan lived in Paris, the provinces, or the *banlieue*. A group of “Ultras” was present at this stadium as well, yet this group was split into two. At one end of the stadium, the white “Ultras” reigned, while the other end was home to people of *Maghrebi* origins and black Africans. Certain scholars believe that “the appropriation of a territory in the stadium can be interpreted as an affirmation of and identity by the disaffected youth of the poor *banlieues*”,⁸⁶ meaning that the mere presence of these minority groups at the *PSG* stadium affirmed that these youths do feel firmly ingrained in French society as citizens. On the other hand, this form of integration was far from ideal. Tension was evident between the two poles of the stadium, which just served to increase violence and the rivalry between the white “Ultras” who thought themselves to be the

“real Parisians” because they lived in the center of Paris, and the multiethnic “Ultras” who lived in the *banlieues*. Soon, the white “Ultras” formed the *Boulogne Kop*, an adolescent white bourgeois group that, feeling threatened by the immigrant population, served to “prolong” the racial conflict, as well as the contention between those who lived in Paris proper and those who lived outside Paris by promoting inter-group physical and verbal violence.⁸⁷ In the early 1990’s, the *banlieusards* banded together to form their own “Ultra” club – *Auteuil* – which was also highly organized, promoted the traditional dress of fans in team colors, and had its own cheers as well. By pursuing a non-violent route to integration, the *Auteuil* group made a permanent place for itself in support of the *PSG*. In 2000, by moving the *PSG* stadium outside of Paris into one of the *banlieues*, the club permanently deserted its bourgeois identity. A reduction in violence among the fans has recently been noted and attributed to this move,⁸⁸ and although sociologists still note a perpetual fan “agressivité latente envers l’adversaire”ⁱ⁸⁹, the move also brought a greater attendance rate by minority youths.⁹⁰

The Role of Professional Athletes in Helping to Form Minority Youth Athletes

As part of the French government’s initiative to reduce crime among *banlieusards* include distributing tickets to professional soccer matches, so American efforts to reduce juvenile delinquency involve promoting sport through outreach programs. One such basketball-oriented outreach program focuses on the support of professional athletes to model success and social mobility through sport.⁹¹ Because

ⁱ “latent aggression toward the adversary”

sport is publicly conceived of as helping black children attain educational, social and life skills, these outreach programs have begun to focus on the image of black celebrity athletes as role models.⁹² While basketball is touted as the main focus of the programs, underneath this veneer, professional athletes are hired to make a lasting impression on the young black “ballers”, enticing them to avoid drugs and alcohol, to “create friendships across racial lines”, and perhaps most fervently, imploring that they stay in school.⁹³

The “stay in school” initiatives are interesting to study. Children and adolescents model their behavior on what they see as socially appropriate for people “like them”. Because – statistically speaking – it is less likely for a black person to have a corporate, high paying job than a white person, it seems to many “inner-city” children that the only path to social mobility is through sport, and specifically basketball. The black domination of the NBA makes black adolescents believe more often than white adolescents – 51% of young black basketball players compared with only 18% of white - that they would “make the pros”.⁹⁴

The “stay in school” initiative is quasi-successful because it uses the voice of black professional “ballers” – the people emulated by their target audience – to stress the importance of education while encouraging adolescents to continue to play basketball in school. In order to play basketball in school, one must stay in school. It is thus unsurprising that black athletes tend to excel in those sports that are traditionally offered in public school districts.⁹⁵

Staying in school and playing basketball is also advertised by black professional athletes as a vehicle to obtain higher education. Many colleges offer

scholarships which pay for a college degree for elite athletes in revenue-producing sports.⁹⁶ Unfortunately, some of these elite athletes are not academically prepared for the college experience. While this number has lessened, in the 1980's 25% - 35% of black athletes could not accept athletic college scholarships due to academic ineligibility.⁹⁷ Many high schools at this time did not require a minimum grade point average for their athletes to be academically eligible to play sport. This caused academic difficulty for the athletes in college and resulted in a much lower graduation rate for black intercollegiate basketball players than for white basketball players.⁹⁸ Sadly, part of the cause of this low graduation rate in black athletes was that they believed that they could not "be both a baller and a scholar", and thus did not see the payoff connected with education.⁹⁹ In keeping with this tradition, black youth often only see possible success through athletic achievement and unrealistically believe that they will become professional athletes. As a result, they begin to devalue education and devote their lives to the idealistic dream that basketball will bring them success.

The influence of professional athletes on black adolescents' participation in basketball cannot be stressed enough: not only do these youth play basketball because they see a market for black men's success, but they are even more likely to want to play the *position* that their hero plays in sport than are white boys of the same age. Research has shown that approximately 90% of the professional athletes idolized as role models by young black athletes are black. Contrasted with young white athletes who selected "almost an equal number of black (70%) and white (78%) athlete role models",¹⁰⁰ it is clear based on the precedent established that young black athletes will continue to choose to play basketball over other sports because, not only is it

accessible to them, but it is also the game of their role models, which allows them to believe in basketball as a means for social mobility.

Part of the heavy influence of black sports role models on the young black community lies in the fact that so much pressure is put on young black athletes to be great at sport for the sake of the “African American community”, in order to be a “*credit to [their] race*”.¹⁰¹ While unheard of in white communities, this pressure to deliver the race from stereotype and discrimination rests heavily on the shoulders of all young, talented, black athletes. This is due largely to the sentiment in the black community that black people can only be successful through athletics. Sociologist Harry Edwards maintains that “society...teaches its members to strive for what is defined as the most desirable among potentially *achievable* goals”.¹⁰² Because white adolescents have visible white role models engaged in professions other than athletics, they are able to conceive of other alternatives to sport as roads to success; however, black adolescents are often only presented with black role models pursuing the one feasible path to social mobility: basketball. While over half of young black “ballers” believe they will become professional athletes,¹⁰³ in reality, a black adolescent has only a one in 135,800 chance of making it to the NBA.¹⁰⁴ This profound disillusionment self-perpetuates through community outreach efforts led by professional athletes because, as young “ballers” come into close contact with their heroes, they become more determined to be like them, and thus become more invested in their dream of becoming professional athletes.

French minority youth idolization of soccer heroes is markedly less well documented. The hooligan bands do pick favorite players on a given team based upon

race, specifically targeting the most talented players that look like them.¹⁰⁵ However, it seems that the relationship between a young soccer fan and a professional player is less personal than that of a young black American “baller” and his hero: French adolescent soccer players and fans focus more closely on the *fact* of an integrated team, rather than on specific players.¹⁰⁶ In contrast, while specific players are used as national symbols of integration, it seems as though these symbols - such as Mekloufi in the 1950’s who was cited as a “model of ‘fraternal and successful integration of the indigenous Arabic population and the larger settler community in French Algeria’”,¹⁰⁷ and Zinedine Zidane who was 1998’s “symbol of the new multiethnic society” - are appreciated as national and ethnic heroes, but not personal heroes.¹⁰⁸

The phenomenon of minority youth idolizing a common hero as opposed to a personal hero is especially apparent at the soccer stadium. Each section of the stadium, associated with a different fraction of society, has its own favorite players “en fonction de l’appartenance sociale”.¹⁰⁹ Thus the emotional tie of young *banlieusards* to a certain player is inextricably linked to the fact of being from the *banlieue* and rooting with this massive group of people for a regional hero. As more non-white players join particular teams, the feeling of “appartenance”ⁱⁱ becomes more apparent among the young marginalized hooligan groups.¹¹⁰ “Vus sous cet aspect, les joueurs, dans leur diversité, apparaissent comme des figures emblématiques des identités sociales”ⁱⁱⁱ for young fans.¹¹¹ Thus French youth take on heroes as a group, but rarely idolize professional players in the same manner as do young black

ⁱ “according to social status”

ⁱⁱ “belonging”

ⁱⁱⁱ “Viewed in this manner, the soccer players, in their diversity, appear to be emblematic figures of social identities”

American basketball fans. It is difficult to gauge the implications of group idolization; it could be that the fan-hero relationship is less personal in France, and therefore that young French soccer fans become less attached to the idea of becoming like their heroes. However, research suggests that the dream of attaining social mobility through soccer is very much alive in working-class and minority French youth. Therefore, whether the presence of minority professional soccer players influences the perceived feasibility of social ascension through sport remains to be determined.

Minority relations in youth sport in France and America are more similar than initially anticipated. Both young French soccer players and young American “ballers” in impoverished areas create their own versions of their respective sport to “keep themselves busy”, and both have athletic opportunities presented to them by outreach programs. Despite these similarities, however, the goal of sport is different in these two nations. Young urban basketball players are highly encouraged to play in order to better their racial status, while young minority soccer players are told to play in order to fully integrate into French society and – by extension – into French cultural values. Thus the function of race in youth sport is proven to be culturally specific.

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Chapter 3: Socializing Gender through Sport

“Sports may be good for people, but they are considered a lot gooder for male people than for female people.” – Bill Gilbert¹

“[L]a place des femmes [en sport] est nettement inferieur à celle des hommes.”ⁱ - Jacques Defrance²

As gender is commonly used to divide athletic participation, it is important to discuss the repercussions of gender-categorization in sport on young athletes. The study of gender in sport is at very different stages in France and America. American academics and sportspeople have been researching and discussing the issues around female participation in sport for more than three decades, while the same dialogue in France is still in its beginning phases. However, the lack of research on gender and sport in France is telling of the lack of respect that female athletes receive. Currently French girls participate in youth soccer at a significantly lower rate than French males because soccer is still highly conceptualized as a “masculine” sport in France. Girls’ participation in soccer in France and basketball in the United States is indicative of the status of women in each respective country; the organization of soccer and basketball for girls both in youth arenas as well as in professional spheres teaches adolescent girls the ways in which they are expected to behave in their societies according to the constraints of their sex.ⁱⁱ

While “compris[ing] 49% of the high school population”, only 41% of girls in America participate in sport in high school.³ The diminished participation rate could be due in part to residual gender discrimination in sport or it could be due to a lack of

ⁱ “The place of women [in sports] is clearly inferior to that of men.”

ⁱⁱ As youth sports are divided by the sex of the participants, there is often no distinction made between “gender” and “sex” at the adolescent level of play.

interest in sports among high school girls. Statistically, basketball is the most popular sport for high school girls in the United States (approximately ages 14-18), while American football is the most popular sport for boys. Boy's basketball, however, is the second most popular sport, and the high rates of male participation in American football can be justified by the relatively large number of players required for a team. Despite having only the second largest number of participants nationwide, men's high school basketball has over 100,000 more participants than women's basketball. Thus, it is clear that while adolescent girls and boys participate in similar sports in the United States,¹ boys continue to play sports in greater numbers.⁴ Yet, compared to sports participation in France, organized sports in the United States show fairly even distribution among adolescents of both genders, although boys still participate somewhat more often.

In France, gendered participation in sport is drastically different. The most popular sport for boys aged 12-17 is soccer, which yields 25.6% participation. For girls of the same age range, however, soccer is the ninth most popular sport with 6.4% participation.⁵ The fact that overall soccer is statistically the most popular team sport for French youth despite the low participation rate among girls underscores the paramount importance of soccer for young boys. Choosing sport according to gender appears to be commonplace in France: for girls, swimming is still the most popular sport with 17.55% participation, followed by cycling, walking, dance, jogging, badminton, basketball, gymnastics, soccer and finally roller-skating with 6.15% participation.⁶ For boys, however, following soccer is cycling with 23.18%

¹ In terms of participation, outdoor track and field is the most popular sport for boys and girls after basketball, followed by volleyball for girls, then baseball for boys and softball for girls, and then soccer for both.

participation, then swimming, table tennis, basketball, walking, tennis, jogging, *sports boules*, and finally badminton with 9.86% participation.⁷ Like American girls of the same age, French adolescent girls participate in sport less often than do their male peers, but this phenomenon is even more prominent in girls' youth sport in France than in America. In addition, participation statistics show that French girls are less likely than boys to participate in "competitive" sports, those that explicitly require a winner and a loser. French girls are thus sequestered into sports that are deemed "feminine" by French society, those that are traditionally considered to be culturally appropriate for women's participation and thought to teach the ethics and demeanor proper for a girl, such as dancing. If sport is a reflection of society, then it can be assumed that gendered sports participation practices in France are reflective of how gender is viewed in French society as a whole.⁸

History of women's basketball in America and women's soccer in France

The practice of choosing sport based on gender-identification and of dividing athletes according to sex is historically based. Until the past several decades, gender roles were not only strictly defined in all aspects of life, but also a form of discrimination.⁹ It was unremarkable for women to be excluded from regular practice of any sport at the time of basketball's inception in 1891. Basketball was invented by Dr. James Naismith in Springfield, Massachusetts as a part of a course which challenged its students to come up with a sport that could be played indoors in the cold winter months.¹⁰ This new sport must be "capable of building...school spirit" while "demand[ing] excellent physical condition and endurance".¹¹ This was

achieved by Dr. Naismith by suspending peach baskets in a gymnasium at the local Y.M.C.A. and instructing players to shoot a soccer ball (chosen for its property of a uniform bounce) into the basket.¹²

Two weeks after basketball was introduced to men, a group of women saw it being played, and requested to join. They were given a time to use the gym when their practice would not interfere with men's practice and, attired in dresses with bustles and heeled shoes, the women shot the ball into the net with a general disregard for the other posted rules of the game. Thus, unlike the vast majority of sports, the quick adoption of basketball by women allowed "girls' basketball [to grow] into its own right, not as a boys' game played by girls but as a girls' game".¹³ However, advocates and opponents to women's play in the early twentieth century were concerned that the game was "too strenuous" for the women.¹⁴ The women's game therefore evolved independently of men's basketball, as did the regulations of play in order to take women's "frailty" into account. The rules of the men's game were "adapted...to reduce [the game's] roughness and make it more suitable to the putative limits of women's strength; but this measure also reduced the excitement and dash of the game".¹⁵ By not exerting themselves as much as men, the players were also able to maintain a more "feminine" demeanor for the duration of the game. The absurdity of this modification is that, while it made the game more widely acceptable for women's participation and allowed critics to see the value of basketball for women in physical education, it also made the women's version of this sport much less physically active, as well as less interesting for spectators to watch. The precedent was thus set for women's basketball to be seen as a way to increase the "personal health of the

average player, not [for] the public exhibition of inordinate competition”.¹⁶ This American public perception of women’s sport as less competitive endures today, largely due to the efforts of physical educators in the early twentieth century to assure the public that women would not be competitive in their physical activities so they could continue to appear “feminine”.¹⁷

In the twentieth century, the various cities that had programs for women’s basketball also had different rules for the game. It soon became necessary for the rules to be homogenized so that intercity play would be feasible.¹⁸ A convention held in Springfield, Massachusetts in 1899 standardized different regulations for women’s and men’s play; instead of the court being divided into halves, this conference called for a court divided into three sections, due to the confusion of one of the female educators who advocated the game when she mistook winning strategies put forth by a basketball handbook for the actual rule of the game. In 1936, the rules were changed to allow the two-court system to be adopted into the women’s game.¹⁹ The rules of the “male” and “female” versions of basketball, however, remain different in the modern era. Although the number of players on the court at a time is now five for both men and women, up through 1967, the women’s game called for six players at a time.²⁰ Currently, girls’ and women’s basketball – including the professional women’s league: the WNBA (Women’s National Basketball Association) - use a smaller ball than is standard for men. Additionally, the WNBA has a variety of regulations that differ from those of the men’s professional league (NBA) such as timing the game in halves as opposed to quarters and consequently shortening the game, using narrower lanes in the court, and making the field-goal line closer to the

basket.²¹ Some of the modifications to the rules of the WNBA follow the standards of the men's game in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (the NCAA) as opposed to the NBA.²² These modifications, while claiming to increase the pace of the game, were originally instituted in order to make the game less strenuous for the women, in a condescending manner implying that women were not capable of playing basketball in its original form.

Modifying regulations to make sport more conducive to female participation in America is not unique to basketball.²³ A variety of sports, most notably lacrosse and ice hockey, change major facets of the game in order to "feminize" the sport to make it more suitable for women to play by catering to their "weaker" nature. The most striking example of "feminization" in women's lacrosse is the uniform: women's teams traditionally wear skirts to compete whereas the men's teams compete in shorts. In fact, skirts used to be mandatory for participation in the sport, and remain standard attire for play. According to several online blogs, many women who play lacrosse feel as though their uniforms are sexist because they confine them to traditional "feminine" dress. These women lacrosse players feel objectified by wearing skirts to a certain extent because this is not logical apparel for sporting activities especially as the skirts tend to fly up with extensive activity.²⁴ Additionally, women's lacrosse players are equipped with sticks with a smaller pocket to cradle the ball than are the male players. Finally, in women's lacrosse, it is strictly prohibited to "check" an opponent, meaning it is illegal to hit the opponent's stick to try to dislodge a ball that she is carrying. In men's lacrosse, however, not only is "checking" legal, but it is an essential component of the game.²⁵ In ice hockey, a similar practice of

“body checking” an opponent into the boards surrounding the rink is legal for men, but illegal for women.²⁶ These rule modifications are interpreted by some as precautionary for the “weaker sex”, but are perceived by many female athletes as discriminatory. Because women are relegated to the “female” version of the sport, they are excluded from participating in the men’s version of the game. Therefore, women are banned from engaging in more violent aspects of the game. The rules of ice hockey and lacrosse were established for men’s practice, so the versions of the sport that women practice are not considered to be “original”.²⁷ The women who participate in these modified sports therefore tend to feel as though they are not participating fully in the game.

In France, literature on the topic of gender discrimination in sport is beginning to surface, sparking recognition and discussion of the problem. However, this literature is still quite rare and in the early stages of development.ⁱ Gender roles in France are reified and reinforced by sports practice and in fact, “réduisent à un rôle subordonné, secondaire, voire périphérique l’action de démocratisation des activités sportives et d’éducation populaire”ⁱⁱ which thus limits sports available to women.²⁸ Historically, women in France have not been included in sport, “partly because men did not wish them to” be given opportunities to compete.²⁹ In the early twentieth century, upper-class women were predominately excluded from sport while the activities of the women in the lower classes went largely unregulated. Simone de Beauvoir disgustedly noted that “tennis was really the only form of exercise

ⁱ It was much more difficult to find statistics and discussion of women in sport in France than it was to find this information about American sports practice.

ⁱⁱ “reduce the democraticization of sporting activities and popular education to a subordinate, secondary, even peripheral role”

permissible to a well-bred young woman”, and even this practice was used only to “stay fit, feminine and to find a man”.³⁰ Once sports practice did open to women, it was still laden with gender stereotypes that regulated which sports were appropriate for which participants.

The labeling of particular sports as “masculine” or “feminine” is still common practice in France. “Masculine” sports are those in which one is able to

montrer ou exercer sa force, se livrer à un combat, porter ou recevoir des coups, les armes, les grands terrains, le pilotage d’engins lourds, *la prise de risques corporels*...autant d’attributs que les femmes semblent ne pas pouvoir faire.ⁱ³¹

By this definition, sports that are more physically taxing and violent are gendered “masculine,” while those that expend less energy and require less strength are “feminine.” Femininity, however, is rarely defined in sports literature in and of itself, but rather is commonly defined in opposition to masculinity. As mentioned in sociologist Louveau’s article on “masculine” versus “feminine” sports, the only suggestion of what constitutes a “feminine” sport is a sport which women traditionally dream of, like doing, and study.³² This circular logic demonstrates that women are expected to participate in sports traditionally played by the “weaker sex” because they like these sports because it is traditional for women to like these sports.

While France is beginning to slowly move away from the practice of characterizing sports as “masculine” or “feminine,” the French adolescent population is still expected to follow gendered guidelines when choosing a sport. In fact, finding

ⁱ “show or exert his force, to deliver himself to a combat, to throw or receive blows, as well as weaponry, large courses, operating heavy engines, *taking bodily risks* . . . among many conquests that women seem unable to undertake”

a woman who chooses to play a “masculine” sport “oscille entre l’inhabituel et l’interdit”.ⁱ³³ Being successful in a male-dominated sport is certainly not easy for a woman, especially as tradition and rules try to discriminate against her on and off the playing field. Not only does she have less opportunities to participate in “boys’ sports” like competitive cycling, wrestling, weightlifting and soccer due to the lack of girls’ teams available,³⁴ but once she finds an arena in which to practice, she is subject to the judgment and speculation of her peers as to why she is playing a “boy’s sport” in the first place. Therefore, fewer girls choose to play these “masculine sports” because they “s’accommodent mal avec la féminité telle qu’on la vit”.ⁱⁱ³⁵ In this society, subscribing to the gender norms is ostensibly so important that joining a sport traditionally played by males becomes taboo.

It is with this understanding of soccer as a “masculine sport” that the history of women’s involvement in soccer must be studied. The game itself originated in Ancient Greece and Rome as a game for the (male) masses in which entire towns competed at the same time.³⁶ The Romans brought the game to England when they colonized, and the game was revived in the middle Ages as a game for the English commoners. Although soccer at this time was a “moyen d’identification et de cohesion entre villages et communautés”,ⁱⁱⁱ³⁷ soccer matches were not arbitrated and thus tended to become violent. Moreover, there was no limit to the number of players on the field at a time, often cause mass chaos, which motivated the royalty to oppose the practice of this sport.³⁸ Over the centuries, however, it evolved to more or less incorporate the current rules and spread back through continental Europe. France’s

ⁱ “varies between inhabitual and forbidden”

ⁱⁱ “do not conform to the societal view of femininity”

ⁱⁱⁱ “means of identification and cohesion between villages and communities”

first international competition was played in 1904,³⁹ and in 1917, a women's sporting club began to play soccer in Paris. Quickly, other clubs began to "adopt" this sport, and soon a women's soccer league was born. For several years, while the majority of young men were away fighting in World War I, women's soccer thrived due to a lack of male protest. In 1918, a women's championship cup was established - "la Française" - which was organized around men's championship regulations with several major modifications including the legalization of protecting the chest (a rule which remains in effect today), shortened halves of play, a smaller field, a lighter ball, and the strict restriction of *charge en avant*.ⁱ These changes were made because sexist belief at the time made clear that "la femme n'est pas construite pour lutter mais pour procréer".ⁱⁱ⁴⁰ The belief that women were fundamentally weaker than men prevailed despite the fact that women continued to be allowed to play soccer. Women in the 1920's were explicitly told that their soccer skills were inferior to those of men. They were told that soccer was simply not made for women and that "les autres sport leur conviendraient mieux".ⁱⁱⁱ⁴¹ True to this belief, in 1930 the French government reduced its funds for the women's soccer organization. This act, combined with the economic depression - which brought a "retour à des valeurs conservatrices reléguant les femmes à des activités plus traditionnelles"^{iv} - and the perceived violence and "virility" of the game (e.g. the kicking of the ball) helped to temporarily end women's soccer leagues in France.⁴²

ⁱ forward charge

ⁱⁱ "woman is not created for battle, but for procreation"

ⁱⁱⁱ "other sports would better accommodate them"

^{iv} "return to conservative values which relegated women to more traditional activities"

In 1968, due in part to the feminist movement, women's soccer rebounded, and although a women's club team was sent to participate in an international women's tournament in 1971,⁴³ the first national championship was not held until 1975.⁴⁴ In its second era, women's soccer became a spectator sport used to provide amusement for crowds comprised of predominantly male spectators. Women's teams were invited to compete at festivals and carnivals for comedic value as a parody of sport, despite the fact that the women knew themselves to be involved in serious competition. In 1970, however, the *Fédération Française de Football* (F.F.F.) - a national regulatory body for men's soccer - organized the women's national championship again around modified rules: a smaller ball than regulation size for men's teams, referee lenience in the regulation involving the use of hands when a woman was trying to protect her chest, and – like women's basketball - shorter periods of play. These rule modifications again treated women as a fragile entity, as players incapable of fully participating in sport without adding regulations for their protection. The prejudices inherent to the rules of the women's game perceived females to be feeble, yet were the foundation of the institution of a women's soccer league.⁴⁵

Despite France's role in helping to establish a European cup in 1982, and eventually the Women's World Cup in 1991, there was still, in comparison to men's soccer, a very small pool of women enrolled on these teams. The board of directors of the F.F.F. decided that, despite low enrollment rates, it would be prudent to control women's soccer organizations rather than to ignore them. However, despite being under the control of the Fédération, women's competitions were largely ignored by

the F.F.F. In fact, the many statements issued by the F.F.F. throughout the 1990's entirely ignored women's soccer, including a declaration entitled "football et société"ⁱ⁴⁶ In fact, in comparison with other European nations, France is still significantly behind in its development of women's soccer organizations. For example, the statement issued by the president of the F.F.F. in 1996 called for the recruiting of the lower classes and of youth to soccer but exclusively *male* youth. The plan for the national soccer program from 1996-2000 made no mention of the future of women's soccer, or even of females in general.⁴⁷ Currently, the lack of administrative development of the women's program has made their level of international competition sub-par. However, "les récentes incitations ministérielles en faveur de la pratique féminine menacent une fédération qualifiée de « machiste »".ⁱⁱ⁴⁸ With this historical context in mind, it is simple to understand the current mentality of soccer as a "male" sport, and to understand why there continues to be significantly less female participation in this sport than male participation.

Current structure of girls' soccer in France and girls' basketball in America

The low percentage of female participation in soccer results in a unique youth soccer structure in France. Due to the highly gendered nature of sport in France, children are generally divided into categories for sports participation by not only age, but also sex. But because girls' participation in soccer is quite rare, there is often not enough female interest in the sport to justify a separate girls' soccer team in the

ⁱ "soccer and society"

ⁱⁱ "recent ministerial statements in favor of women's practice menace a federation qualified as 'macho'"

lowest age brackets. In these cases, a minority of girls play with on boys' teams until approximately age eleven.⁴⁹ At the *Minimes* level (ages 12-13), there tend to be many more girls' teams, and therefore eleven is the age when girls begin to play on all-female teams.

The "mixed" teams in France – teams comprised of both boys and girls – seem to serve a double function in children's soccer: they allow girls to participate without needing funding and interest enough to establish their own team, and they weed out girls who are not willing to succumb to the constant pressure to conform to "virile" practices and attitudes.⁵⁰ A girl's decision to participate in this highly "masculinized" sport, especially before age twelve, is generally influenced by her father. Statistically the father, due to his socio-professional status, is the most influential force in a girl's decision of which sport to play.⁵¹ In general, consistent with the working-class stereotype associated with youth soccer participation, the more prestigious a father's career, the less likely his daughter is to participate in soccer.⁵² Despite constant encouragement from her father, however, a young female soccer player cannot be protected from the sexism that she may feel in public spheres.

Defrance notes

Même quand une fille refuse d'entrer dans un sport « pour filles » et se soumet aux apprentissages nécessaires pour intérioriser des dispositions ajustées à la pratique d'un sport « viril », elle obtient difficilement la reconnaissance des pratiquants masculins qui lui reprochent soit son manque de féminité, soit sa pseudo-masculinité et son manque de performance.ⁱ⁵³

ⁱ "Even when a girl refuses to play a sport 'for girls' and submits herself to the trainings necessary to interiorize the disposition required to practice a "virile" sport, she only obtains the recognition of the male players with difficulty, who reproach either her lack of femininity or her pseudo-masculinity and lack of performance [skills]"

In this way, young girls are exposed to gender discrimination and sexism at a young age, which can only be avoided by conforming to gender norms and participating in a “girls” sport.

While adolescent girls are further inclined to play soccer with their father’s encouragement and if their brother plays soccer, the influence of a mother on her daughter’s sporting decisions is still currently debated among sources.⁵⁴ Statistically speaking, when a mother participates in sport, the differences between boys’ and girls’ rate of participation in sport are completely nullified.⁵⁵ It therefore stands to reason that if a mother played a sport, then the mother’s opinion on sport would be more influential to her daughter than the father’s. However, sociological sources claim that as sport becomes a rite of passage among adolescent girls as well as boys, the girls begin to view their mothers’ decision to stay at home and pursue domestic chores as her alternative to physical activity.⁵⁶ A rejection of the role of wife and mother may well be an impetus for adolescent girls to continue physical activity. Relatively few women participate in organized sport after adolescence. If they do continue with sport through early adulthood, many women then give up sport after marriage and maternity.⁵⁷ Thus a source of rebellion for adolescent girls against traditional gender roles can be the practice of sports heretofore deemed “masculine”.

The choice of young girls to participate in soccer is often not based on their skill level, but rather on the myriad of social influences discussed, as well as their ability to “tenir un rôle « viril »”.⁵⁸ Jacques Defrance cites two types of girls who choose to play soccer despite the inevitability of playing on a boy’s team. The first girl stands up well to the harassment of her coaches and teammates, accepts herself as

ⁱ “hold a ‘masculine’ role”

a “garçon manqué”ⁱ and, upon her successful inclusion onto a team of boys, receives a boost in morale when she feels accepted in this male peer group and reaps the benefits of a perceived superior social status by being attached to this group. The second girl cannot abandon her femininity and therefore, even if she is a talented soccer player or loves the game, she quits the team so as to not subject herself to further gender-confusion or the misogynistic behavior and language of her coach and teammates.⁵⁹ In this manner, by the time female soccer players in France are of age to be on all-girls’ teams, they have self-selected not by talent, but by their willingness to appear “tomboyish” and thus perpetuate the stereotype of soccer as a “masculinizing” sport.

Girls’ participation in basketball in the United States functions very differently: not only are the organizations de-centralized, but the gender-dynamics within the sport operate in a very different manner as well. It is difficult to discuss the organization of youth basketball as a whole in America simply because the way in which it functions depends entirely on what area of the United States is being discussed and the organizational body responsible for the basketball league. There are religious organizations, recreational departments in towns and cities, schools and private businesses that sponsor and run basketball teams and leagues for young men and women. Some of these organizations believe that it is better for boys and girls to participate in sport together before adolescence as the girls at this time are equally as strong as the boys.⁶⁰ This presumption was put forth in the 1970’s as a way in which to be “progressive” and socialize men and women to treat each other as equals. However, coeducational teams were also used as a tool to improve boys’ characters

ⁱ “tomboy”

by humbling them when they were beaten at a sport by a girl. Studies today reveal that co-educational teams are often crippled by coaches with biases such as the perception that young girls are just as happy to sit quietly and engage in activities which are deemed “feminine” by society – such as playing dolls or coloring – as they are to participate in sport.⁶¹ The coaches then inadvertently reinforce these same gender biases by their actions such as giving boys more athletic attention or allowing them to take a more active role in contests.⁶² Generally in the United States, boys and girls have separate sports teams after entering the first or second grade. However, this too varies by region. Therefore, in order to compare how gender in sport functions in basketball in America to how gender functions in soccer in France, it is useful to discuss girls’ basketball as it is organized through school districts as an after-school activity.ⁱ

School-organized basketball divides its participants not by age, but by year in school. Beginning in most areas of the country as a school-sponsored sport in middle school, girls around age 12 begin to play basketball through school. Prior to playing basketball in school, however, the majority of girls will have played in an outside organization such as a league put forth by a local recreation department. In addition to their participation in the school team at this age, particularly dedicated girls will often play in an outside league that runs in the same season as the school team. Moreover, while there are certainly dedicated one-sport athletes in middle and high school, many of the girls at this age participate in additional sports in other seasons.

ⁱ While this form of athletic participation does not exist in France, with the exception of *Sports-études* and pre-professional programs, it is useful to discuss girls’ basketball in a context that is fairly uniform throughout the country.

Participation in school sports in the United States is often taken more seriously than sport participation in other contexts. For this reason, basketball play in school becomes more competitive and much more selective during adolescence. In middle school, coaches begin to select the more talented girls to play, and tell others that they cannot participate. This phenomenon is perpetuated in high school athletics, where, of the entire school population, only approximately 12 girls will make the Varsity team, meaning that only 12 girls are participating at the highest level of high school basketball.⁶³ Thus, girls' sporting participation in the United States is "merit-based",ⁱ while participation in France at the club level for the same age-group seems to be self-selecting according to sex-role stereotypes.

Once a young girl has become "masculinized" through her participation in boys' soccer in France, she graduates to all-female teams. This point in the soccer career of many young girls is met with great resistance.⁶⁴ The resistance could be due to the uncertainty of playing with other girls after so many years of being surrounded by boys, and being forced to leave teams where they feel comfortable. Her reluctance to join a girls' team could also be due to the young girl's anxiety after she realizes that she has appropriated masculine characteristics in order to fit in with her male teammates, while her new team consists of girls who are more traditionally "feminine" than she. Finally, a girl's resistance could be due to her understanding that, due to the fact that she has been playing soccer from a very young age while the rest of the girls on her new team will just be beginning to play, she will now be playing soccer at a level of competition inferior to her own, which is a potential

ⁱ The decision of who participates in basketball at this level falls to the coach of the team. Therefore the selection of players is merit-based to the extent that the coach can objectively judge the talent of each player.

source of frustration. Furthermore, she may come to realize that her aggressive style of play learned from her male peers will not be appreciated on a girl's team.

Once French girls have left the "mixed" teams, they feel a definite difference in the game itself. As a way of re-appropriating the sport once they are away from the male influences of their peers, women who play soccer cite the "civilized" quality of *their* game. Those who play it discuss the aesthetic quality of their version of soccer, as opposed to the "brute muscle power" of the men's game. The relative lack of financial motivation for participation in soccer causes young women to play for "du beau jeu ou de beaux gestes",ⁱ and the "innocence" of the sport rather than the thought of riches or hope of a professional soccer career.⁶⁵ Referring to the way that women's soccer is played as "innocent," however, is still problematic. This terminology implies that the women's game is in a lower stage of development, while the men's game is more advanced, which implicitly reinforces the gender hierarchy of the sport.⁶⁶ At the same time, coaches who train girls discuss their "innocence" on the field in terms of having "vraiment envie de bien faire, alors que les hommes s'imaginent tout savoir"ⁱⁱ and thus citing the girls as more "coach-able".⁶⁷ Perhaps this perceived gender difference can be allotted to discrepancies in the ways that girls and boys learn, but coaches seem to perceive it as a "feminine" thirst for knowledge, and a real eagerness to learn and understand the sport.

The only girls who escape playing below their level once leaving "mixed" teams are those who are recruited to play professional soccer. The twelve-year-old age bracket is the point at which young athletes begin to be scouted for recruitment to

ⁱ "the beauty of the game or the beauty of the moves"

ⁱⁱ "really having the desire to do well, whereas the men think they know everything"

pre-professional teams and schools, as well as *sports-études* programs.⁶⁸ If a girl is talented as well as thick-skinned, she will likely have the opportunity to perform in several competitions at the national level. Like in boys' soccer, there exist several options for gifted girls' soccer players. First, a talented adolescent can go to a specialized *sports-études* school, where she will have the opportunity to go to school while making soccer a focus of her daily life.⁶⁹ Yet, while available, *sports-études* is an unlikely path for a young girl to take, due to the comparative lack of opportunities for women in the sporting world, including the lack of professional competition.⁷⁰ Therefore, if a girl is very talented in soccer, her only viable option to become a professional is to enroll in a *Centre de formation* for girls. These *Centres de formation* are essentially boarding schools that focus on honing the skills of young elite athletes in hopes of producing professional soccer players. Beginning at age thirteen, a girl enrolled in a *Centre* will go to school from 8:30 am to 3:00 pm, then play soccer for 2 ½ hours every week day for three years. The schooling, room and board is paid for by the F.F.F., and is reportedly a highly successful system in that the majority of its graduates become professional athletes.⁷¹

France's recruiting system thus offers the opportunity to play soccer at an elite level to only a handful of girls due to the cultural perception that soccer is a "masculine" sport. Team sports in the United States, however, are generally not culturally classified as "masculine" or "feminine". Therefore, American girls have more opportunities than their French contemporaries to play basketball at a higher level. As basketball in America is the most popular girls' sport, the same gender discrimination that female French soccer players face does not apply to girls'

basketball. In fact, much of the discrimination in sport in the United States is no longer overt, but rather administrative. In 1972, an act was passed in American Congress as a part of the Educational Amendments which states:

No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex be excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal aid.⁷²

This act, while never intending to include sport under its domain, has been applied to many physical education activities in order to legally stipulate equal treatment of the genders in sport under United States law. While the law is still far from fully effective – for example fewer than 5% of the nation’s universities are currently fully Title IX compliant⁷³ – the legislature ensures that women’s sports have at least the potential to be treated on an equal level as men’s sports.

The Title IX legislation has afforded equal sports participation opportunities to both adolescent boys and girls in American middle and high schools. However, even with legislation to reinforce sports participation choices, gender-stereotypes continue to oppress female athletes in the United States. The opinion that female athletes exhibit both “masculine” and “feminine” traits such as “self-confidence, assertiveness [and] determination” endures and these traits continue to be punished in a girl by her parents.ⁱ Formerly referred to as “masculine” traits, characteristics such as aggression in girls are now referred to as “androgynous”.⁷⁴ While this new label is obviously an improvement from the previously sexist terminology, the

ⁱ Incidentally, the same stereotype is applied to American high-achieving women in the corporate world.

“androgynous” label applied to a self-confident girl still implies that “real women” are not capable of being athletically successful.

This sexist terminology can be reversed. If a girl is “masculinized” in America by playing a sport, then a boy is culturally “feminized” by not being athletically inclined due to either a lack of interest or a lack of talent. Due to this particular myth of sports participation, there is indeed an element of sex-role stereotyping within sport. Boys, when not performing up to the standards of the coach, are insulted – and at times motivated – by being called feminine names, such as “ladies”. On some boys’ teams, “central to the group dynamic is the denigration of anything feminine”.⁷⁵ Interestingly, a study shows that sex role stereotypes are prevalent in American culture, which is demonstrated by the fact that Americans are generally more accepting of successful female athletes participating in an individual sport than of female teams.⁷⁶ This finding is listed as a result of the study without further analysis, but a possible reason for this discovery is perhaps it is easier for the general public to accept the athletic achievements of a girl if she seems to be a solitary success story, as opposed to coming to terms with an entire team of women who thrive in athletic arenas.

Despite the obvious cases of gender discrimination in sport, the merits of female participation in sport are also widely studied in the United States. Adolescent girls who play sports in school are significantly less likely to drop out of school, are less likely to engage in sexual intercourse and therefore less likely to become pregnant,⁷⁷ have a better chance of going to college, and report having higher self-esteem.⁷⁸ Thus, it is clear that high school sports have a significantly positive

psychological effect on its female participants in the United States. The primary finding is that adolescent female athletes have better self-esteem. This could be due in part to a girl's exposure to a group of peers with similar interest – that is basketball – which facilitates friendships. Friends with similar interests at this age help to give a girl self-confidence which in turn boosts her feeling of self-worth. The team also works to achieve common goals and is very demanding of time, two factors which, combined with better self-esteem, may tend to dissuade sexual promiscuity. Finally, a team can serve as an incentive to stay in school, because those who drop out of high school are no longer eligible to participate in sport.

In France, the effect of soccer participation on young women is markedly different. As sports participation is not linked to school – with the exception of the *Centres de formation* or the *sports-études* programs – few studies have been published linking academic achievement or even school drop-out rates with sport. Additionally, due to the small numbers of adolescent girls who play soccer and the relatively recent academic interest in this topic, there is a distinct lack of literature related specifically to *adolescent* girls who play soccer, and therefore this portion of the analysis is confined to young women, from ages eighteen to twenty-two.

The young women who are not involved in professional organizations but still play soccer tend to be confused about their body image and gender roles. These women generally have played soccer from a young age, and were thus socialized into the sport by playing with their male peers and agreeing with misogynist statements, and then later readjusting to the sport as a women's activity during adolescence. As a result, many of these young women grew up attempting to make themselves appear

more “masculine”, and are now trying to justify their “masculine” appearance with how they perceive their femininity. The difficulty in assessing their own femininity lies for them in the fact that they still must “faire comme les hommes”ⁱ by participating in a male sport, but “être une femme”ⁱⁱ in daily life⁷⁹.

The perception of soccer in France as a “masculine” sport hinges largely on tradition. For example, a boy’s first journey to a professional soccer game is viewed as a rite of passage into “le monde viril”. There, he is surrounded by a masculine energy, which perpetuates misogynist stereotypes by insulting the opposing team with references to its members’ femininity, and praising the favored team by asserting “masculine” characteristics. Additionally, the victorious cheers and chants sung after a goal are highly virile.⁸⁰ This atmosphere, coupled with the fact that less than 10% of attendees at professional matches are female,⁸¹ reinforces to young boys and girls that the world of soccer is primarily reserved for males.

Young female soccer players have a variety of ways in which to deal with this perception of soccer as a “masculine” sport and the stereotype of soccer players as “virile”. Some players grow their hair long so as to be readily identified as women. Others keep short hair, but justify this culturally perceived “masculine” trait by claiming that it is longer than a boy’s hair. These athletes are additionally concerned with how they dress: some justify their femininity by wearing different clothes than those of boys. Some wear what is perceived as boys’ clothing, but instead assert their femininity by pointing to their level of cleanliness, stating that boys and men never keep their clothes as clean as do women.⁸² The result of this constant concern with

ⁱ “do like men”

ⁱⁱ “be a woman”

appearing “feminine”, or rather not “masculine”, is that women soccer players are constantly working to keep themselves one step away from being perceived as “masculine”, as opposed to embracing their bodies the way that they are. These women often seem to get caught in a trap of feeling most comfortable in what is traditionally perceived as boys’ attire, but feel the need to justify their own femininity by insulting males and perpetuating stereotypes that men are unclean, or using derogatory language to describe them.

Women who play soccer in France are faced with the difficult task of walking the line between the “vase sacrée”ⁱ image of women and the vulgarity associated with sportsmen. Girls and women are expected to gain grace from physical education but by playing soccer are infused with values which instead promote hard work and sweat.⁸³ Instead of justifying their sexuality in terms of affirming their femininity, therefore, soccer players often feel compelled to define themselves in opposition to traditional masculinity. For example, they cite their “refus de vulgarité”ⁱⁱ and their actions such as refraining from spitting as that which distinguishes them from male soccer players. In some aspects of life, they even become more prudent than their “feminine” female peers so as to assert their “traditional femininity” as women by for example, not patronizing bars and not consuming large quantities of alcohol in one sitting.⁸⁴

The majority of these women focus on promoting the image of “la femme active”ⁱⁱⁱ no matter what gender she most closely resembles.⁸⁵ Yet this too has gendered connotations: in order to be a “real woman” by these standards, one cannot

ⁱ “sacred vase”

ⁱⁱ “rejection of vulgarity”

ⁱⁱⁱ “the active woman”

buy into the Barbie doll® image of femininity – that is the image of women as fragile and dependant on males. Therefore “sports” such as dance and gymnastics that promote grace and aesthetics and pretend to not engage in grimy, sweaty movement align themselves too closely with traditional “feminine roles” and do not fit into the standards of these “active women”.⁸⁶ In the mind of the female soccer player, while she embraces the sweat and hard work associated with playing soccer and thus rejects dance as a “cauchemar”,ⁱ she also defines herself in opposition to “masculine” sportswomen such as rugby players and body-builders. These sports are seen as more masculine than soccer perhaps because of the violence of the sports,⁸⁷ or perhaps because of the more muscular bodies needed in order to effectively participate in these activities. Thus, it is evident that female soccer players’ definition of self as gendered is dependant on a fluid definition of both masculinity and femininity.

In the United States, this struggle between “masculinity” and “femininity” is present in young female athletes, but not nearly as dominant in basketball as in French soccer. This being said, there is a myth that sport “masculinizes”, both for men and women.⁸⁸ Like in France, American boys who do not play sport are seen as effeminate, while girls who are serious about playing sport worry about appearing tomboyish and masculine. Despite the myth that physical activity sculpts “masculine” body types that are not desirable for adolescent girls, research shows that the actual changes in physique through sport are much more marked for boys than for girls.⁸⁹

Sport in America is not generally used to build muscle in girls; rather it is used to shape a good personality and morality through the promotion of a healthy body. The lowered pregnancy rate is justified in American female high school

ⁱ “nightmare”

basketball players in this way as well. There is a proven correlation between the health and the amount of physical activity of young women, which shows the “coordinate importance of mind and body”.⁹⁰ Not only does sport help to create healthier girls, but increased physical activity – especially on teams – increases a girl’s positive body image. As one author phrased it, “either more psychologically secure females enter sport or they develop this ego-strength through participation”.⁹¹ And while sports participation helps to promote “sexually attractive, young, healthy and fit persons”, these “sexually attractive” young women are not eroticized as sex objects, but rather are seen as “attractive” healthy bodies.⁹² Sports educators teach sports participation to children beginning at a young age as a way to remain healthy and youthful, and especially emphasize physical activity to young girls in order to encourage them to fall in line with the American obsession with appearing healthy and youthful.

Women and girls in America are culturally warned against practicing sport to the point of appearing muscular. Research suggests that women have a higher capacity for endurance sports and training than men, which, combined with their stronger thighs,ⁱ makes them ideal basketball players. Because of these assets, as well as the current move in the American public toward toned and fit bodies,⁹³ girls who play basketball receive a boost to their body-image because they fit into this “toned and fit” category.⁹⁴ This new standard of attractive bodies comes with a caveat, however. In order to fit the “attractive” mold and remain “feminine”, women must tone the correct part of their bodies. For example, while muscular legs are “appropriately feminine”, cultural biases perceived toned arms to appear masculine

ⁱ Relative to body size

and are undesirable on the female figure.⁹⁵ These seemingly arbitrary areas of the body to “target” continue to correspond with male opinions of attractiveness. Ironically, the “target” areas on women’s bodies such as the stomach and rear are culturally perceived as the most distasteful places to appear out of shape, yet are the places where women’s bodies naturally store fat. The most desirable body-image in American society today thus “resembles that of a young boy: wide shoulders, tight muscles, narrow hips”.⁹⁶ Women today are therefore still judging themselves according to a masculine standard of fitness, without allowing themselves the ability to accept that while “womanly bodies” store significantly more fat than men’s bodies, they can still be fit. This being said, basketball does not overwork the upper body, and instead tends to produce slender, strong young women who are confident in their own bodies.

Women in Professional Sport as Role Models for Young Female Athletes

Female professional basketball players in the United States, despite playing at an elite level, are still concerned with having a body that appears too “masculine”. The WNBA, an organization operated by the same association that is responsible for the NBA,ⁱ is relatively new - it was founded in 1997 - and it furnishes many of the active role models for adolescent girls who play basketball. The advertisements used to incite enthusiasm for this league before its debut featured “strong, sweaty female bodies”, and claimed to offer “game[s] of naked female aggression played below the rim”.⁹⁷ The intended audience for these games is the same fan base as the NBA, as

ⁱ The NBA is the most prominent professional basketball league in the country.

the WNBA season occurs primarily during NBA's off-season, and the advertisements preliminarily seemed to capitalize on its mostly-male audience by sexualizing these athletes.⁹⁸ The choice of advertising the athletes' "naked female aggression" seems to sexualize the women by first inducing an image of "naked female", and then adding "aggression" to refer to women's serious capacity to play sport. The word "naked" juxtaposed with "female" subtly entices male heterosexual fantasy, which serves to "normalize" the fact that a cultural standard is being broken by women who are paid to play a sport. It is additionally interesting that the advertisements for the WNBA emphasize the "aggression" of the basketball players, as cultural codes of femininity still suggest that women should remain passive, even on the playing field.⁹⁹ Cultural standards of "femininity" therefore suggest that "deviant women" play professional basketball, and therefore marketers highlight those players who subscribe to traditional "feminine" norms in order to legitimize this league as an appropriate career for women.¹⁰⁰

Once the WNBA got underway, the competitions were described as a "return to the purity of the game", and while spectators would complain that these competitions were less exciting than the NBA games, the different "feel" of the WNBA was marketed as a game of teamwork in juxtaposition with the one-man-show approach of NBA players. The new approach to competition in the women's game was facilitated by the rule modifications cited on pages 80-81. In this way, the game appears faster to the spectators, and markets itself as the game of basketball in its basic yet modified form. Fundamentally, the game is played through passing and

working with set plays, but is modified due to regulations relating to the fact that women are the participants.

“Women” is the correct term to use when discussing the participants in the WNBA: unlike other high-level competition, or even the Olympic Games, the participants in the WNBA must have completed college or be 21 years of age in order to play. This minimum age requirement lends itself easily to providing mature role models for young basketball players throughout the country.¹⁰¹ Whereas Olympic players might be emulated by young girls, their 14-18 years of age lends itself to limited life experience. Therefore, having a group of “real” women who participate in the same sport to look up to is quite attractive for young American girls.

The marketing team of the WNBA is additionally conscious of promoting its players in their traditional “feminine roles” such as marriage and maternity. While current trends indicate that men are becoming more willing to accept “whatever a woman does [as] feminine”,¹⁰² reinforced traditional sex-roles aid the American public in their consumption of the “new” roles of the modern woman. Therefore basketball players who become pregnant are given leave from the association, and when they return, their role as a mother becomes sensationalized to the point of cameras panning to the father and baby when the mother scores a basket.¹⁰³ This explicit approval of motherhood serves two purposes for an adolescent girl who looks up to professional athletes. First it reinforces the hetero-normative lifestyle and goals as heterosexual relationships are glorified in the media and homosexual “tendencies” are hidden from public view. Second, for the heterosexual girl, this overt approval of motherhood by the American media reinforces that she is not only able to play

basketball while retaining her femininity, but that she will also be presented with the opportunity later in life to become a mother and achieve all of the expectations of society without having to give up her active lifestyle.

Despite the WNBA's recent success in the media, the majority of women's sports are not as easily accessible to the American public. So while an adolescent basketball player can look up to a WNBA star, she may understand that her chances of playing at this level of competition are slim. She might therefore emulate a college basketball player or even a woman sportscaster instead. Here, the media fails her. Women are not only largely underrepresented in sports-media jobs,¹⁰⁴ but women's college sports get a fraction of the coverage of men's competitions in prime-time television. For example, in the 1993 NCAA basketball season, 370 men's games were broadcast on national television, while only 29 women's games were shown in the entire regular season! Women's athletics additionally only received 5% of the sports news broadcast for the season, while 94% went to men's sports and 1% discussed gender-neutral topics.¹⁰⁵ This discrepancy in media time makes it difficult for adolescent girls to find a younger female role model who plays basketball like her.

Role models for American basketball players are not necessarily athletes who compete at high levels of sport. Often girls at this age are influenced on the court by the ways in which adults treat them off the court. The activities encouraged by a mother - for example whether or not she watches professional sporting events herself, or how active she is - can influence whether or not her daughter is interested in continuing to play basketball in adolescence.¹⁰⁶ Both parents "make a major contribution to the shaping of sex-roles" by accepting different levels of aggression in

play from their sons than their daughters. Additionally, a teacher can unwittingly influence the level of aggression that a girl feels comfortable demonstrating on the basketball court by the way in which s/he prevents disruptive behavior in the classroom from girls compared with boys.¹⁰⁷

In France, role models for young girls who wish to play soccer are primarily male. Unlike America, analyses which break down air time allotted to men's versus women's sports are not available, but it is easy to see that men's soccer dominates the media. This is due again to the stigma that follows women's soccer. The games played by women's teams are not taken seriously, are perceived as "funny" and are regularly mocked. As initiation into the world of soccer is a right of passage only for boys, the women's teams are virtually ignored by not only the mass media, but also by government funds.¹⁰⁸ Televised games – the overwhelming majority of which are men's games – are watched by primarily men. According to surveys, the majority of women who often watch soccer games on television do so because a male in the household has chosen the program.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, young and adolescent girls who play soccer are watching the sport with men, and are idolizing the men on the screen.

Most of the French girls who play soccer before eleven years of age are playing on "mixed" teams. The fact that there are not enough girls before age eleven interested in playing soccer to start a team indicates that soccer-playing female role models are not available to young girls. The domination of male soccer in the media is thus more easily understood: by not broadcasting women's soccer matches, young girls are indirectly told that it is not culturally appropriate for girls to play soccer, and

ⁱ This phenomenon occurs more often in lower-class households where men tend to exercise more power.

therefore there is less of a demand for female role models.¹¹⁰ This is not to say that young girls playing soccer on “mixed” teams lack soccer role models altogether. Oftentimes French youth teams belong to a larger club that oversees teams for all ages and skill levels. The young girls on these teams are frequently initiated into the world of adult soccer via their exposure to male teams within their club. They follow the matches, participate in the parades, and idolize the male players along with their male teammates.¹¹¹ Due to the weeding-out process of young girls via the misogynist views of their teammates and the fact that girls’ teams are so hard to access, young girls are often not exposed to successful female soccer players until they become serious about the sport and join a club or *Centre de formation* in adolescence. In fact, the socialization of these girls into soccer is so male-centric that the girls who do play from a young age often believe until well after they have played with a female team that girls cannot play soccer at the same level as boys.¹¹² This belief is due in part to their primarily male surroundings, but it is also due to the fact that after they grow too old to play on boys’ teams, these girls have to travel extensively to play on sub-par female teams.¹¹³

Thus, French female soccer players are not only thick-skinned due to their requisite imperviousness to insults, but also have to be dedicated to and passionate about their sport in order to persevere throughout all the adversity that they are faced with in their early careers. This passion translates into hard work, and girls who work hard become very good soccer players. Therefore, by the time adolescent girls are no longer permitted to play with boys, they have far exceeded the level of other girls at this age. In theory, once these girls have developed into women and play at the club

level, they will be very good role models for the younger generations. Despite their socialization which resembles more closely that of young boys,¹¹⁴ French soccer-playing women are self-assured, and have skills and life experience that the younger girls can emulate. Yet, even the girls who never played soccer with boys do not have female soccer-playing idols: once the girls join from “des équipes mixtes”ⁱ they play in such a “masculine” –aggressive – manner that their skill cannot be appreciated because it is not “feminine”. Perhaps once girls are recruited to the *Centres de formation*, they are able to emulate the older, more experienced girls in the *Centre* and look to them for guidance.

There is a current trend in French sports literature which encourages parents to disregard traditional gender roles in sport. One such magazine article features a female soccer player turned coach who highlights the benefits of soccer for young girls such as the advantage of practicing outdoors in open spaces.¹¹⁵ Child-rearing books which bemoan the fact that “on a sacrifié les sections féminines pour accueillir les garçons”ⁱⁱ also encourage girls to pursue all sports regardless of stigma. Yet, even these “progressive” child experts warn against “le mélange des entraînements pour filles et garçons” .ⁱⁱⁱ¹¹⁶ While French society is certainly making progress in its treatment of female athletes, it still has a long way to go to achieve gender-equity.

Today’s adolescent girls’ experiences playing basketball in America and soccer in France are very different. While gender stereotypes make girls’ participation on soccer teams almost taboo before they are old enough to join all-girls’ teams, American girls are able to join a variety of basketball teams starting from a very

ⁱ “mixed teams”

ⁱⁱ “we have sacrificed girls’ teams to welcome boys”

ⁱⁱⁱ “mixing [sporting] practices for boys and girls”

young age, and are in fact encouraged to do so. This difference, however, does not mean that there is a lack of gender discrimination in sport in the United States. While federal legislation in the United States has made it illegal to discriminate on the basis of gender in education and sport, cultural norms which value male sports more than female sports continue to prevail. In France, a girl's very choice of which sport to play comes laden with the understanding of certain sports as "appropriate" or "inappropriate" choices based on whether they are traditionally viewed as "masculine" or "feminine" sports. Thus, soccer in France and basketball in America do indeed perpetuate stereotypes of what is "masculine" and what is "feminine" behavior and teach compliance with cultural gender norms to their participants.

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“Cet innocent sport...aura pour fonction de camoufler la réalité sociale, d’effacer les difficultés politiques et économiques et d’obscurcir la conscience des classes défavorisées.”ⁱ – Idrissi et Oblin¹

My original intention in writing this thesis was to highlight the positive role that organized sport plays in childhood development in America and to investigate how youth sport functions in France. As a young adult who has participated in organized sport nearly all her life, I knew from personal experience that sport fosters in children and adolescents self-confidence, a sense of individuality, the ability to work well with others and anticipate their needs, the ability to follow directions, time management skills etc.; in short I fully ascribed to the American myth that youth sports are integral to healthy development and teach children some of society’s vital values as cited by many child development experts and sports advocates.ⁱⁱ

As I began to contemplate organized youth sport in America, however, I realized that despite initial appearances, it is not a purely positive institution. Over the past several years, the media has run dozens of stories of overzealous parents who become so invested in the outcome of their ten-year-old’s game that they engage in physical disputes over contentious calls. As I began to research, I was immediately confronted by the current controversy in American sports literature which debates whether enrolling children on multiple sports teams concurrently is giving them an advantage in that sport or causing them to be overscheduled and over-tired. I then paused to analyze my own sport-socialization and realized that growing up in the

ⁱ “This innocent sport will have the function of camouflaging social reality, of erasing political and economic difficulties, and of obscuring awareness of the disadvantaged classes.”

ⁱⁱ Ex. (Edwards, 1973, p. 97)

upper-middle class, I had access to nearly any sport imaginable, and pursued several individual sports as well as team sports. I began to wonder what the implications of my vast choice of sports were and whether children who had access to only low-budget sports were socialized in a different manner.

As I continued to investigate this other side of sport, I found that the problems inherent in organized youth sport run much deeper than pugnacious parents, exhausted children, and opportunity (or lack thereof). Through further introspection, I remembered feeling frustrated at times by the level of aggression encouraged in boys' sport and adamantly suppressed in girls' sport. I remember being the only girl at several baseball camps throughout my childhood and adolescence, and feeling surprised by the number of misogynist insults thrown about (e.g. a coach yelling to his players, "Yea, but don't run like Bobby. He runs like a girl!") followed by a quick recognition of my gender and a hasty "No offense". In fact, I remember on several occasions appropriating this language and teasing a (female) teammate by telling her that she "throws like a girl".

Several years later, I spent a semester abroad in France, where I decided to join a rugby team. When I told this to my host mother, she appeared confused and wondered why a "feminine" girl like me would want to play rugby. This was my first clue about gender norms in sport in France. My second clue came when I learned about the extracurricular activities in which my host siblings chose to participate. While my 5-year old host brother played soccer, my 9-year old host sister played the guitar. I asked her if she liked sports and whether she wanted to play soccer, and she replied that she liked dancing, but that soccer is for boys. These conversations seemed

to suggest that sport in France functions differently from sport in America, in that practice is more obviously gendered, and I became eager to discover more differences.

In analyzing my own memories I began to realize that even in my experience, sport very clearly did set a tone for socially appropriate behavior based on gender. Using this as a starting point for my research, I found studies to back my new understanding of sport, and realized that sport is even more gendered in France than America. Furthermore, sport teaches more than just gender norms: it also teaches racial and class norms. Research shows that organized sport in both France and America permeates and structures the development of its participants, thereby shaping their social interactions to comply with cultural standards and these norms. From this research, a new hypothesis was developed: organized youth sport socializes children into “good” classed, racial and gendered citizens of their respective countries.

The decision to study the socialization of children through sport by using two specific sports was necessitated by the realization that different sports function in very diverse ways, making it impossible to achieve an in-depth analysis of all children’s sports in the context of gender, race and socioeconomic class in the two countries. It then made sense to examine soccer in France and basketball in America because they are the most popular team sports among children. It is important to compare team sports because they are more inclusive in terms of gender and class, and because they are more likely to be adult-organized as opposed to individually initiated or sustained, rendering statistics about these sports more reliable.

The practice of sport based on class is very clearly, and in some cases inextricably, linked to racially-based sports practice in France as well as in America. Government sports initiatives to ameliorate social conditions in economically depressed areas often focus on activities for minority youth, erroneously believing that if this population of underprivileged minority youth is kept busy, crime rates will decrease.² Associations such as those between poverty and minorities subtly teach children that their level of success in both France and the United States is contingent upon their race. These initiatives additionally inadvertently imply to minority children that their race predisposes them to bad behavior. These initiatives, while arguably well-intentioned, teach minority children that they are associated with crime, causing the problem to self-perpetuate among certain minority youth. These initiatives additionally reinforce the stereotype that minority children are innately inclined to behave poorly and makes this stereotype more explicit for the minority youth by targeting poor areas with large minority populations for youth sport programs.

The sports initiatives also perpetuate the promise of social mobility through sport which is an idea prevalent throughout minority sports practice, as well as the practice of adolescents of lower socioeconomic status.³ Yet, half of the population is excluded from this dream: females. As the women's professional teams in both France and America receive significantly less media attention than the male leagues, the unrealistic hope of becoming a professional soccer or basketball player, respectively, and therefore achieving social mobility, is hardly visible in girls' organized sport.

Much of the research on sport for minorities and the lower classes, in fact, is concerned with primarily male participation for both France and America. Thus, girls and women are virtually excluded from the chapters on social class and race. The implications of this are astounding: girls are not seen as equals in either society. The fact that girls are not mentioned in most of the literature involving race and social class in sport (and especially in youth sport) implies that female participation is still so rare that it merits its own discussion as a minority in sport, rather than inclusion in discussions of the general population. This further implies that girls are taught different values through sport than are boys, perpetuating societal prejudices and performances of gender difference.

Conversely, race and social class are excluded from discussions specific to gendered sports participation, especially in France. Whether girls generally live in rural or urban communities when they participate in a specific sport is often discussed, yet their actual social statuses remain unmentioned. As social status is often an impetus for choosing to participate in a particular sport, it can be assumed that these class differences in sports practice apply to girls as well as boys. By treating girls as a separate group, however, sports scholars relegate female athletes to the periphery of sports practice, judging them to be outside the “norm” of organized sport participation.

This treatment of girls’ sport as a topic that already lies outside “normal” youth sports practice makes researching participation by gender *and* race or gender *and* social class extremely difficult. But the fact that race is explicitly discussed in the United States makes female minority participation much easier to research. For

example, there are studies available which compare the academic achievements of black female athletes in college to their male counterparts, which gives an indication of racial tensions in sport for these young women, yet the basic studies on government sports-initiatives for minority youth, and indeed the initiatives themselves, involve primarily male athletes.⁴ And since soccer in France is admittedly a sport primarily for boys, and since the racial policy in France largely excludes discussion of minority status, there was no mention of race in girls' soccer in all of the research done for this thesis. Additionally, there is no specific mention of girls in the government initiatives to establish sports leagues for minority *banlieusards*.⁵

Research involving girls' sports and social class is equally difficult to obtain. While soccer and basketball are hailed in popular culture as sports for the working-class, and while individual sports such as golf or tennis are generally popular among the upper-class, there is no evidence to indicate whether or not these trends apply to women. The history of soccer as a tool to unify communities of factory workers does not inherently exclude women from soccer practice. Yet, the fact that girls comprise such a small proportion of young French soccer players (20%)⁶ begs the question of which 20% of girls play soccer. It is unclear whether this percentage reflects the upper- and upper-middle-classes, the working-class, or if female participation mirrors male participation by class. Likewise in America, basketball is primarily a working-class sport for adolescent boys, yet whether or not girls' basketball practice reflects this categorization remains unresearched.

Whether or not the social norms are reinforced on organized youth teams are of course dependant on the influence of the coaches. The reinforcement of gender norms on a girls' soccer team in France, for example, would be much less prominent with a female coach who appears traditionally "feminine" than with a male coach who ascribes to the societal views that soccer "masculinizes" women. Similarly, an American coach who shows preference for his black "ballers" over his white players with extended playing time helps to strengthen the hope of social mobility for these young athletes. By having a coach that does not promote gender, racial or social class norms, however, a young athlete can have an organized athletic experience that socializes them outside of the dominant paradigms, and therefore in certain cases, children do have sports experiences that fairly closely resemble the ideals that sport is purported to teach. Finding the ideal coach however, one who does not fall victim to *any* of the American or French hegemonic ways of viewing social class, race and gender seems to be just as rare as finding only the pure values of teamwork and cooperation at play in sports practice.

Thus the opinion that "[a] major function of sport as a social institution is to socialize persons (primarily athletes) in the secular values of society"⁷ is prevalent among most sociologists in the field. Yet, the same sociologists still tend to highlight the positive secular values instilled by sports, thus helping to perpetuate the myth of sport as essentially positive. However, this study has shown that in addition to teaching children "healthy" values, sport reinforces the roles assigned to them by birth according to their social class, race and gender. In other words, sport teaches players – and particularly young, impressionable players – how to follow societal

norms according to their social classifications. Yet, it is not just the sports themselves that teach these values to athletes, and specifically to young athletes. Rather, it is the societal and the governmental institutions surrounding and supporting sport that perpetuates and characterization the categorization of people into the roles of male or female, minority or majority, and upper-, middle- or lower-class.

There are many examples of the ways in which the institutions surrounding American basketball and French soccer enforce the norms of society instead of the sports themselves perpetuating these stereotypes. For example, there is nothing inherent in the sport of soccer that makes it more conducive to male practice than female practice, as evidenced by its popularity among girls and women in the United States.ⁱ Rather, coaches using misogyny as a tactic to urge boys' compliance and the French state not offering sufficient opportunities for girls to play soccer, perpetuates the stigma of soccer as a "virile" sport. In the same fashion, there is no characteristic that makes the game of basketball inherently conducive to minority participation in America. Rather, state and private encouragement of basketball as a way to control the activities of children in black ghettos with initiatives such as "Midnight Basketball" as well as outreach programs featuring black professional "ballers" persuade minority youth to pursue basketball and thus perpetuate this identity of "black" with "basketball".

By studying two different cultures, this thesis is better able to properly assess the validity of statements such as Edwards' aforementioned quote. Many of the prior studies of socialization through sport are limited to studying the sports of one country.

ⁱ Soccer is the sixth most popular sport for girls in the United States, whereas it is the ninth most popular sport in France. (Foundation, 2007, pp. 23-24), (Moreau et al., October 2002, p. 3)

It is only by evaluating two cultures that one can accurately assess the nuances of sport as a socializing tool. Some might object to classifying sport as an agent of socialization in *societies in general* as opposed to specifically in *American society*, saying that the American obsession with sport may cause sport to be a more powerful force in the process of socialization in the United States than in other countries. The research provided in this paper, however, suggests that sport *is* a socializing agent in both countries whether or not one plays sport. Children who choose not to play particular sports in order to comply with gender, racial or social class norms indeed seem to be compliant with the very same cultural values as the children who do play these sports.

Within the nations of France and the United States, the study of exactly how sport socializes youth to be “good” classed, racial and gendered citizens of their respective countries is far from complete. The implicit sexism alive in France today has stymied the development of girls’ sports programs, as well as the study of girls’ activities in general. Additionally, France’s refusal to acknowledge racial difference, and therefore its refusal to study race, has hindered the study of not only youth sport, but also the study of integration and ethnicity in general. Ironically, it is the myth of universal equality in France that has repressed actual equality for decades, causing racial tensions both within and outside sports practice.

Similarly, the United States struggles with a myth of equality of its own: fiscal equality. The “American Dream” of social mobility through hard work has tainted the study of social class in the United States. Researchers and citizens alike are uncomfortable acknowledging discrepancies in income and expenditure within the

American populace as a whole, and thus studies of the ways in which Americans of different socioeconomic classes approach problems and participate in activities are difficult to obtain and often skirt the present issues.

It is therefore certain that children *do* interact with basketball in the United States and soccer in France in different ways depending on their socioeconomic class, their race and their gender. It is certain that these different interactions imply that children are socialized into adult citizens who continue to behave according to the norms that they learned through sport. It is further certain that by ascribing to these societal norms, the adult citizens of France and America help to perpetuate learned social divisions in each of these cultures. Yet, further study is needed. American society needs to first acknowledge that divisions based on socioeconomic class are prevalent in society in order to continue to study how basketball – and sport in general – socializes children into “good” citizens of their class. Meanwhile, the French government and scholars must begin to admit that racial difference does exist within the country in order to begin to study racial difference in relation to sport and social activities. French scholars must equally acknowledge that youth are pigeonholed into certain sports based on gender in order to combat the gender stereotyping rampant in French soccer. Both of these acknowledgements are necessary for a more nuanced understanding of how gender and race encourage French children to become gendered and racial citizens through sport. In short, scholars in France and America must learn from each other in order to fully understand how sport effects childhood development, as well as how sport

encourages children to ascribe to the class, race and gender norms appropriate to each society.

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- ¹ (Idrissi & Oblin, 2006, p. 45)
² (*Ville Vie Vacances: annexe technique*, 2005)
(Coakley, 2002)
³ (Giulianotti, 2005, p. 73)
⁴ (Hartmann, 2006)
⁵ (*Ville Vie Vacances: annexe technique*, 2005)
⁶ (Moreau, Pichault, & Truchot, October 2002, p. 3)
⁷ (Edwards, 1973, p. 145)

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