

Sports Media **C.O.R.E** Exercises: **C**ombating **O**ppressive **R**epresentations
Existing in Sports Conversation to Reverse Preconceived Notions of U.S.
Professional Female Athletes

By

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Class of 2012

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 Feminist, Gender, Sexuality Studies

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

After all, progress lies in the positive collaboration of a diversity of contributors:

Coach Gale Lackey, educator in women's sports, my thesis advisor and volleyball coach, for your inspiration—often laminated on 8.5 x 11 inch cards—and your extensive knowledge of, and contagious passion for, women's sports

My research assistants, high school track stars Valerie Yarema and Samantha Speroni, for tackling the tedious task of tracking our ten professional athletes on Twitter. I can only hope you continue to pursue your interest in the matter as you go on to do great things!

The extremely busy administrators who dedicate their careers and lives to engaging with professional female athletes, for graciously lending your time to speak with me about your experiences in the sports market: Christopher Forrest of the Los Angeles Sparks, Laura Gentile of espnW, Rob King of ESPN, Andy Bark of ESPN-HS and Eric Krasnoo of the MLS

Professor Crosby and my fellow FGSS Senior majors, for challenging me in open-minded yet deeply insightful discussion

The seven other members of Desperate Measures Improv(e) Comedy, for providing me with a comedic outlet, a flexible schedule, and lots of cookie dough

My family and friends, professors, colleagues and peers for forwarding links, looking over pages and attacking Excel Pivot Tables

My favorite female student-athletes of 73b for pushing me to apply a positive competitive spirit to progress my thesis

The women of 35, for putting up with creaking floors at odd non-library hours

Becky, my editor and life counselor, for your careful and honest advice

My parents, for getting me where I stand today

All my current and former teammates and coaches, for making sport such a valuable aspect of my life, and all those who made these opportunities possible

Coach Jarrett, though unaware of your role in this project, for the positive energy, enthusiasm and fresh attitude you introduced to Chadwick Basketball that centers this entire thesis

THANK YOU FOR BEING SUCH A SUPPORTIVE FANBASE!

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“No one watches women’s sports.”

My mother looked around at the raucous crowd, brimming with enthusiasm as the freshman point guard turned her third blocked shot of the game into a breakaway reverse layup. Even had the man’s comment shown any hint of malicious intent, my mother could not have moved spots in the cramped bleachers. There were none open.

The man who made the statement perhaps did not recognize the situational irony of his claim. The comment came from a family friend, father to three basketball and football-playing sons, who took the stands next to my mother. At the Chadwick School Girls’ Varsity Basketball Semi-Finals, it was the turn of the fourth quarter. The father impatiently awaited the tip-off of the Varsity Boys’ Basketball game that followed, in which his middle son would surely be the star.

Unlike our family friend, my mother was deeply invested in the game—my game. The girls’ basketball team had taken off during my high school career, thanks to a young coach, fresh out of UCLA, who sought to rebuild the program from the bottom up. After a mere few seasons, she succeeded in doing so. I had been introduced to basketball at age five and continued to play regularly and enthusiastically as a young child—a child that grew to become one of the few remaining girls in a grueling co-ed summer league. Yet despite the time and passion I had previously dedicated to basketball, it was the five new talented freshmen that scored the assist in helping the new coach reach exceptional success. These freshmen, who often claimed all five starting positions on the court at the beginning of each game, brought with them not only skill and experience

unprecedented in the history—as I knew it—of Chadwick basketball, but also a tremendous tremor of excitement from an ever-growing fanbase as a result.

So as the father struck up conversation in the stands of this particularly crowded game, my mother applauded how much progress the girls' basketball program had made under this new coach's whistle. My mom wanted to celebrate the season by organizing a trip to see the Sparks, the professional women's basketball team of Los Angeles.

“Take our box seats,” he casually offered. “Our Lakers season tickets cover all the events at the Staples Center.”¹

My mother is not shy when it comes to lapping up such offers.

“You don't want them!?” She imagined finally bringing to life her vision of the perfect end to our successful season.

“Sure. We don't use them. No one watches women's sports.”

While we happily jumped at the opportunity to take thirteen girls, coaches and program helpers to a professional sporting event for free, we walked away with more than just complimentary box seats. The father bid us off with a clear message:

No one watches women's sports.

¹ The Lakers are a professional basketball team stationed in Los Angeles that compete for the NBA, the National Basketball Association, with which the WNBA, or Women's National Basketball Association, holds partnership. The Los Angeles Staples Center is home to both professional teams, among many more.

What does this statement mean, that, “*No one watches women’s sports?*” Where does it come from, and why does it persist in contemporary American culture? What does it mean for professional women athletes in the 21st Century United States, and how does it alter the task of marketing professional female athletes? The following thesis works to situate this popular cultural attitude that restricts the progression of women’s sport² in the United States through negative preconceived notions about the female body.

This thesis follows the premise that professional women’s sports should not be subordinate to men’s sports, nor should they be subject to preconceived notions hailing female athletes as inferior. It aims to show how each member of contemporary American society plays a crucial role in the women’s sports conversation, through media sources—both traditional and new—and in daily dialogue. Through the course of this thesis, I highlight how sports coverage gauges the manner in which female athletes are treated differently than male athletes. Visual and linguistic representations of female athletes within sports media can serve to further reinforce these preconceived notions of professional women’s sports.

Considering such predeterminations in sport³, I introduce the prominent cultural attitude that, *no one watches women’s sports*, and explore how reversing such notions might improve viewership, spectatorship and community support

² Throughout this thesis, “Sport” singular most often refers to the idea or conceptualization of sports, whereas “sports” plural most often denotes the actual physical enactment of sport. The “sporting sphere” is the area that encompasses all sporting bodies, and often the spectators as well.

for female athletes. This thesis scrutinizes this sentiment, asking and seeking answers to the following questions: What cultural attitudes does this statement reflect, and how does it hold true in the sporting arenas that display professional women's athletic contests? Where, when and how might such an attitude have formed and become popularized in North American history? How do professional women's sports, as a relatively newer popularized institution, compensate for a lack of historical tradition measured in years? How does this attitude affect spectatorship and the media's willingness to report on, and provide coverage for, women's sports, and how can it be altered to progress women's sport as an social establishment?

With this thesis I will propose that, to increase overall spectatorship and support for women's sports, this cultural sentiment that *no one watches women's sports* must gradually be reversed. My closing statements outline this process, which requires capitalizing on single shining moments of excellence that create a genuine aura of excitement surrounding professional women's sports. To captivate a fan with these distinct moments and maintain this fan support requires a consistency among sport media platforms. Presenting positive and public displays of support for professional women's sport, carefully selecting imagery and rhetoric to depict female athletes, and encouraging spectators and fans to maintain not only a lifetime, but also a lifestyle, of support for female athletes, can repeal this attitude.

The dialogue begins with my own experiences in sport, as I have learned to acknowledge my opportunities and access to sport as a privilege. Growing up

as a post-Title IX female athlete shielded certain histories of sport from my vision. I have come to appreciate the accomplishments, hard work and dedication of a number of individuals and governing bodies before me, which have brought the avenue of sport into my realm of possibilities. Yet through my experiences in the sporting world, I begin to notice the prejudices against females participating in sport, and the patriarchal forces that still so powerfully dictate operations within the sporting world. The process of recognizing the injustices that I face as a female athlete began when my elementary-school self could not understand why I was told to play tetherball with the girls rather than Knock-Out⁴ with the boys—even though I often won.

Perhaps my feminism originates on these asphalt courts with the boys. I still remember fighting just to get a pass from my teammates. One recess during a pick-up basketball game, one of my teammates was particularly hostile towards the thought of passing me the ball, and verbalized these sentiments quite willingly. Some of the other boys started giving him a hard time for it; one offered to switch teams with him, if it would make him feel better. So they did. And when, within the next few plays, I subsequently blocked one of his shots, he became irate. Standing at point blank, he hurled the basketball with all his force directly at my stomach, knocking me to the asphalt, completely winding me, and removing me from the game in order to regain my breath. An on-looking teacher

⁴ Knock-Out is a basketball game in which all players form a line with a basketball in the hands of the first and second player. The ball must be shot into the hoop before the player that follows makes it, and balls may be “knocked” away from the hoop and the key. The last player remaining “in” wins.

approached the boys and asked them all to apologize to me, taking the ball away for the rest of recess. The following day, I was not invited back to play.

This suspicion, the growing awareness that some greater force was governing my sporting actions, developed as I continued to play basketball with the boys during recess, looking around me for any sign of the other girls. My skepticism grew when I was told that I had to play softball not baseball, even though I thought the softball pitchers pitched funny, and I wanted to pitch for a *baseball* team, like I saw at Dodger games. The feeling lingered when I joined a group of friends in pressuring the Chadwick School administration to turn the new “boys” middle school lacrosse team into the only co-ed lacrosse team in the region. By the start of high school, I became one of the *two* remaining girls in a “co-ed” summer basketball league. It became clear that my gender would always accompany my presence in sports.

After bearing many “__(choose your sporting action here)__ like-a-girl” comments over the years, I reached a thorough understanding during my final year of high school basketball, when a sporting father verbalized the sentiment. The attitude towards girls in sport was not just a vehicle for boys to tease girls at recess. It affected women’s sports, too, and reflected a prominent cultural attitude: *no one watches women’s sports*. My involvement in sports, and my deep appreciation for how sports have molded who I am as an individual, informs this discussion of professional women’s sports in the United States.

This thesis is split into two parts. PART I analyzes the emergence of the female sporting body in order to contextualize professional women’s sports in

contemporary American society. PART II applies this historiography of the female athletic body to explain preconceived notions that remain stifling to female athletes today.

Yet the discussion of female participation in athletic competitions begins long ago. Chapter One points to evidence of female participants in ancient sporting events, with a brief look at murals, myths and ancient Greek competitions that arose alongside the Olympic events. Chapter Two takes a look at major cultural milestones that altered the way popular society perceives the active female body within the United States, pointing to the bicycle and war as major influences in opening the avenue of sports to girls and women. This second chapter discusses a fear of “cultural feminization” that results from the changing image of the female body, and how the popularization of sport during this Age of Reform communicates the hegemonic patriarchal powers that resist active female participation. Chapter Three continues into the early Twentieth Century, highlighting the gradual emergence of organized athletic involvement for women, beginning with “Play Days” at all-women’s colleges. It outlines major female athletes whose determination and achievements brought public awareness to the potential for female excellence in the sporting sphere. PART I ends with a brief introduction to Title IX, the government legislation that changed sports forever by seeking equal opportunities for girls and women.

PART II introduces four prominent stereotypes that depict female athletes, using knowledge from the PART I history of women’s sports to investigate how these patterns and cultural norms might have formed. PART II

draws from a variety of modern sources, including print literature, online forums and discussions with individuals whose careers require them to engage with professional athletes. PART II also introduces two sets of data from my own research conducted for this project. The first study continues an examination of *Sports Illustrated* print magazine covers for ratio of male to female features, while the second tracks ten professional female athletes on Twitter to explore the individual athlete's role in presenting herself to the public.

Chapter Four introduces the processes of doing and undoing regressive stereotypes, exploring how these negative perceptions of female athletes persist today in popular American culture, in daily conversation and in circulating images and rhetoric reporting on women's sports. Chapter Four, which commences PART II of my thesis, addresses positive and negative manners of representations, and introduces existing attempts to reverse negative notions of female athletes with messages that suggest contrary ideals. It scrutinizes ad campaigns that attempt to evolve the image of representation, yielding both positive and negative results. Chapter Five deconstructs the crucial network of viewing relationships that joins the professional female athlete as an active agent in the discussion of women's sports. This Chapter illuminates the diversity of bodies both involved in reinforcing the negative portrayal of women's sports, and also responsible for undoing this process. This portion of my thesis challenges the reporter, the journalist, the marketer, the team and league administrators, the athletes, the public and the reader to assess their own responsibility in fostering positive, supportive and sustainable communities to

back professional women's sports. This thesis concludes with how I propose American society can rework sports media representations to increase spectatorship and public support for professional female athletes.

PART I

The Rise of the Female Sporting Body: Contextualizing Professional Women's Sports in Contemporary America

CHAPTER ONE

Ancient Evidence of Female Participation in Sport: Murals, Myths and Heraean Games

To say women's involvement in sports is a recent phenomenon would greatly misconstrue the historical development of sport. The Guinness *Book of Women's Sports Records* Editor Norris McWhirter points to c. 2450 BC as, "The earliest dated evidence for sport," with murals at Beni Hansan in Egypt depicting women participating in ball games as early as 2050 BC.⁵ These murals are believed to reflect the society's standard of beauty at the time as evaluated on the basis of female strength⁶, celebrating the female's physical capacity to birth children and bear great weights in operating daily tasks.

Classical legends, too, suggest potential involvement in sports by female members of society. Homer's *Odyssey* recounts the tale of Princess Naussicaa, who throws off her veils after dinner to play ball with her maidens by the river.⁷ Roman poet Ovid writes the tale of the swift huntress, Atalanta, whose father leaves her at birth, desiring a son instead. Atalanta, found and raised by a female bear, develops keen hunting skills. When Goddess Artemis sends a monstrous boar to haunt the Kingdom of Calydon for offending the Gods, King Oeneus calls for all the greatest hunters to capture and kill the beast. Despite much

⁵ Ed. McWhirter, Norris *Guinness Book of Women's Sport Records* First Edition. 7

⁶ <http://egyptologypage.tripod.com/recreation.html> suggests, "the beauty of a girl was measured by the strength of her back--her ability to play this game, to carry another person on her back, would give credit to her beauty"

⁷ Homer, *Odyssey*. Ed. Butcher and Lang. 88

reluctance from her male counterparts, who discourage involving a woman in the dangerous hunt, Atalanta scores the first blow against the beast. For her feats, the hunter who finally lands the kill rewards Atalanta with the valuable boar's skin, infuriating many Greek men. This heated controversy over granting such a desirable item to a woman focuses a spotlight on Atalanta's athletic prowess.

When Atalanta's father hears of his daughter's accomplishments, earning Atalanta the popular title as the fastest runner in the world, he reclaims her as his daughter and proposes she marry. Yet Atalanta refuses her father's request, agreeing only to accept a suitor that first can beat her in a footrace. Those who race against her and fail, however, are put to death. She defeats many men who challenge her, until she meets a man by the name of Hippomenes, who calls upon the Goddess of Love, Aphrodite, for her aid in obtaining the fastest and most beautiful maiden in all the world.

The legend suggests that, in the crowd of spectators gathered to watch the race, many were fond of Hippomenes and cheered for him as he ran. These spectators also shouted for Atalanta to slow and allow the worthy suitor to pass. Yet as Atalanta ran on, Hippomenes pulled out the three golden apples that Aphrodite had bestowed him. Each time Atalanta pulled ahead, Hippomenes threw a golden apple out onto the track. And each time Atalanta spotted a golden apple on the track, she slowed and bent to pick it up, allowing Hippomenes to race ahead and ultimately win the race—and Atalanta's hand in marriage.

This important Greek legend tells the cosmic success of a female competitor whose athletic prowess outshined that of nearly all her challengers, male or female. It also reveals a resistance towards female athletes that persists in contemporary America, teaching that women should not compete with men. They should prioritize beauty over strength, and marriage over personal achievement. Barnard scholar Catharine Stimpson coins this condition as the Atalanta Syndrome, by which, “Reproductive sex is preferable to virginity, marriage to the independence of the wilds and of sport.”⁸ Social and familial pressures encourage powerful athletic women, much like Atalanta, to forgo their independence and feminine strength in order to fit into predetermined notions of femininity.

Similar Roman and Greek myths not only evidence female involvement in athletic competitions, but also spark it. In *Description of Greece*, the ten-book text that outlines his tour of the vast Greek landscape, Pausanias first writes about the Heraean Games, consisting only of a 160-meter footrace:

The games of the maidens too are traced back to ancient times; they say that, out of gratitude to Hera for her marriage with Pelops, Hippodameia assembled the Sixteen Women, and with them inaugurated the Heraea⁹

According to this traveler and historian, the Heraean games began in honor of Greek Goddess Hera at the Olympic stadium—on a track only slightly shorter than the men’s track—following religious rituals similar to those of the men’s

⁸ "The Atalanta Syndrome: Women, Sports and Cultural Values." *Catharine R. Stimpson*. The Barnard Center for Research on Women, 20 Oct. 2004. Web. 11 Nov. 2012.

⁹ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*: 5.16.4

games. Competitors who placed received olive-branched crowns, also mirroring those at the Olympic games,¹⁰ and a portion of the calf meat that was offered up in sacrifice to Hera.¹¹ While the Olympic games are commonly believed to have excluded female participation until the first female race in 1900 BC,¹² Second Century Greek traveler Pausanias names a Macedonian woman as the winner of an event: the race “for chariot and pair of foals.”¹³ Women in this way participated in the Olympics by owning the chariots pulled by foals, comparable to today’s horse racing. So despite the early Olympic games’ limited female participation in its races, women patterned their own games off of the Olympic games in a nearly identical fashion of sport, competition, religious celebration and festivity.

Even the earliest recorded games hint at a discrepancy in attire between male and female competitors. Pausanias describes the female participants: “Their hair hangs down, a tunic reaches to a little/ above the knee, and they bare the right shoulder as far as/ the breast.”¹⁴ Even early-recorded descriptions of athletic events hone in on the apparel, introducing the common linkage of these two subjects—female athletic bodies and their attire—prominent in contemporary sports conversation. Women exposed their ankles and left a bare breast uncovered. Some suggest this tradition tributes mythological Amazonian women believed to, “cauterize their right breasts so as to not impede their

¹⁰ Pausanias, *Description of Greece* points to the Olympic games’ origins as the race between Heracles and his brothers that “crowned the winner with a branch of wild olive” [5.7.7].

¹¹ Ibid[5.16.4]

¹² McWhirter, *Guinness Book of Women’s Sports Records*. 7.

¹³ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*. 5.8.11

¹⁴ Ibid. 5.16.13

javelin throwing.”¹⁵ Visualizing this image of a bare-breasted women flying across the track in a flowing muddle of tunic and hair proves easy. The Nike¹⁶, the Greek goddess of Victory often portrayed in art, likely took part in familiarizing this partially exposed image of female athletes. This Goddess also inspired the popular athletic apparel brand name NIKE, Inc. The image of the bare-breasted athlete demonstrates how language and imagery used to depict athletic bodies can trigger a specific imagination for contemporary readers that never attended such Greek competitions firsthand. These predetermined associations imagining athletic bodies occur when such imagery re-circulates throughout popular culture over an extended period of time.

But compare Pausanias’s description of the athletic female to Perrottet’s more modern illustration of men who competed in the early Olympic games, written in 2004:

They appeared one by one—parading like peacock, entirely unclothed and unadorned, yet dripping from head to toe in perfumed oils that flowed in rivulets from their curled black hair¹⁷

In this case, Perrottet’s imaginative language paints a sensual illustration of the men competing, seemingly sexualized in comparison with Pausanias’s record of the women. The men flock as peacocks—animals that achieve reproductive success by advertising their beautiful, flamboyant plume. We associate the word “parading” today with concepts of pride and showiness, which hints at a display

¹⁵ Perrottet, *The Naked Olympics*. 2004: 157

¹⁶ The most well known representation of the Nike is the Louvre’s “Winged Victory” by an unknown Etruscan artist.

¹⁷ Perrottet, 6

of sexuality when used to modify a naked performing body. Perrottet sensualizes the bodies by dousing them in dripping perfume to evoke both senses of touch and smell—even the detail of the “curled black hair” bolsters this provocative sketch of nude male competitors.

While a contemporary analyst might interpret the writers as sexualizing male athletes more than female athletes, we must account for, both the millennia¹⁸ that separate the two writers, and also their stylistic choices. Pausanias, a traveler and historian more than a writer, merely reports on what he sees. Perrottet, far removed from ancient times, imagines the competition based on earlier texts such as that of Pausanias. The two differing writing styles, and the nearly two thousand years that separated them, may refute the initial claim that, here, male athletes appear more sexualized. Yet what about the attire itself? Men race nude while women sport tunics, both appearances rooted in ancient tradition. What is important—and what serves as the underlying message of this thesis—is how modern¹⁹ writers such as Perrottet implant negative undertones deep within their language when describing female athletes.

Pausanias, following the sensual portrayal of male athletes as parading peacocks doused in oil, situates the male athletes:

¹⁸ Difference between C2nd AD and 2004

¹⁹ Perrottet published *The Naked Olympics* in 2004. Perrottet is referred to as modern, in this case, in comparison with the C2nd AD Pausanias

Competing nude was a time-honored tradition of ancient Greek athletics, as much a part of Hellenic culture as drinking wine, discussing Homer, or worshiping Apollo; only barbarians were ashamed to display their bodies

From these sentiments, one might deduce that, since women did not compete nude, they did not belong in athletics. At the time, women were forbidden from participating in the Olympic games. This portrayal of male athletes implies that since women did not compete nude, they were unqualified to partake in such crucial aspects of cultural tradition as “discussing Homer” and “drinking wine.” At the time, they *were* literally unqualified to do so—unable to read and considered improper for drinking wine.

Perrottet’s passage fosters two potential responses. One interpretation scorns the passage for bolstering representations of female athletes as improper and unqualified, overlooking modern interpretations to account for these attitudes. The other considers the aforementioned explanations that historically orient Perrottet’s statements to understand them in relation to the time period in which the subjects resided. Reading such a passage without situating it historically might otherwise reinforce harmful notions of women as barred from traditional cultural customs. This demonstrates how the writer, as conveyer of the message, and reader, as interpreter of the message, join in a necessarily complex dualistic relationship. They share equal responsibility to avoid the

reification of harmful attitudes, which can be accomplished by carefully creating and interpreting texts.

Those who write on female athletes bear the burden of responsibility to carefully describe female accomplishment in sports, mindfully avoiding negative undertones that perpetuate harmful stereotypes. Yet the influx of media sources, the rise of new media, and the expansion of the Internet opens access to this vital onerous task to all. Anyone²⁰ who desires can reach a worldwide audience of viewers. Simultaneously, readers who purely glaze over the content and fail to contextualize, historicize and scrutinize the subject, orienting each passage's subject with a history of knowledge, also negate their responsibility as a reader. The potential for a reader to jump to false conclusions, misconstrue a passage's meaning and reinstate misconceptions about the body being discussed threatens subjects such as female athletes that have historically faced opposition. These misconceptions can materialize as stereotypes, but can also reify, exaggerate and legitimize stereotypes. And so the meticulous task of representing female athletes²¹—the liability, the burden—lies on us all.

Author Grant Jarvie attributes misconceptions concerning women's sports to what he coins as "tunnel vision":

Contemporary 'tunnel vision' fails to acknowledge the fact that the history of sport can tell us a great deal about contemporary sport. It is often assumed that popular involvement of women in sport is relatively

²⁰ This is not to negate class. This is purely meant as an ideology. In practice, we must take into account, of course, that not all members of society have access to internet or varying means of publication

²¹ While my thesis focuses on professional female athletes within the United States, this statement applies to all subjects of class, race, age and difference, and mostly to those marginalized bodies with rocky pasts who have faced a history of oppression and inequality.

modern and yet the historiography of women's sport
has done much to alter our views about sport in
society²²

In order to analyze the current positioning of female athletes and how uniform images materialize in the depiction of female athletes, we must first expand our vision beyond the contemporary, and acknowledge the greater history of female participation in sport. PART I of this thesis serves to provide a historical contextualization of how women in Contemporary America gained access into the sporting sphere.

²² Jarvie, Grant. *Sport, Culture and Society: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2006. Print.

CHAPTER TWO:

Spoked Wheels, Cultural Feminization and War: Media and the Active Body During America's Age of Reform

A vehicle for change:

Although Samuel Thomas Weber invented a sidesaddle bike for ladies in 1870, the controversy concerning the female use of the bicycle peaked during the 1890s when the popularization of the bike took off in New York City. The bicycle, popularly referred to as the “freedom machine,”²³ altered previous views of what it meant to be a woman and dismissed traditional Victorian American ideals. Leading up to the 1860s, only men participated in the public sphere, controlling commerce and business, while the women occupied the domestic sphere.²⁴ Changes in these traditional Victorian separate-sphere ideals in urban areas such as New York City sprung from the Age of Reform.

The popularization of the bike rode into a time where social change stirred New York City's streets. The bicycle movement aligned with other reformist campaigns that contributed to altering the traditional female image. New medicine, hydrotherapeutic techniques that treated patients using water, and dress reform, the push for more functional dress, played significant roles in this process. Advocate against fashionable dress Mary Gove Nichols decried how popular fashion was an instrument of those men, “who wish[ed] women to be

²³ Smith. *Social History of the Bicycle*. 76

²⁴ Of course, only middle and upper class families could afford to uphold these ideals, yet most families were believed to desire these circumstances (hence an *ideology*)

weak, sick and dependent—the pretty slave of men.”²⁵ Fashion prior to dress reform commoditized the female body by prioritizing aesthetics over functionality, restricting women and preventing them from engaging in physical activities reserved purely for men. It condemned the immobile and passive woman that preceded the bicycle and medical reform to her proper position within the domestic sphere. On women’s health, Doctor John Wiltban stated, “Everything that is peculiar to her springs from her sexual orientation.”²⁶ Male doctors such as Wiltban had replaced the earlier midwives and began theorizing about the female body, devising devices to accommodate their theories. Yet women medical activists regained responsibility for their own health by encouraging a health regime that revolved around diet, hygiene and exercise.

This exercise fueled the medical debate surrounding the bicycle that split sides mostly on the basis of two concerns: health and image. Medical theories surrounding the bicycle diverged, splitting into those who deemed the bicycle healthy and those who rendered its affects on the female body problematic. Criticism arose that opposed the health benefits previously set forth by the alternative healers and backed by bicycle enthusiasts. Common doctors argued instead that the type of bicycle exercise they encouraged strained female bodies in a manner perilous to their health. Both doctors and regular physicians accused the bicycle of creating a plethora of health concerns including gastronomic imbalance and insanity. The seat allegedly caused chronic diseases

²⁵ Nichols, Mary Grove as cited by Whorton: 98. *Natural Cures: The History of Alternative Medicine in America*: Oxford University Press, 2002.

while the physical activity fostered heavy thirst, which led to heavy drinking, resulting in kidney stones.²⁷ Yet popular support of the bicycle from a medical standpoint persisted. Doctors recommended moderate riding for menstruating women and expecting mothers to “dissipate the ‘blues’” or female hormones.²⁸ Doctor Weller Van Hook recommended cycling for women because it would encourage them to disregard the ‘murderous corset’ and use their God given muscles instead.

The platforms of alternative medicine and dress reform both exposed the restricting corsets and multiple layers of long skirts as problematic for health reasons. These women brought into light how corsets restricted breathing, caused miscarriages from the squeezing of the stomach, and weakened the spine by causing women to rely on the corset’s harsh backbone made of whale bone, so that women could no longer walk without its support. Women layered heavy skirts that fell to the ankles, dragging on the ground accumulating dust and dirt. The skirts’ voluminous presence bumped into surrounding surfaces, gathering germs. The way the weight fell on the body even altered the way women walked, so that women had to walk using their thighs rather than their legs.²⁹ Women’s rights activist such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton aligned their causes with other prominent reforms and stepped into the streets, speaking on behalf of temperance, abolition and new fashion. This collaboration with medical

²⁷ Smith, *Social History of the Bicycle*. 63

²⁸ Smith, 66

²⁹ Cunningham, Patricia: *Reforming Women’s Fashion 1850-1920: politics, health and art*. 51-52.

reformists extended the platform for women to alter the popular Victorian image of a proper woman.

The bicycle increased this visibility of alternative dress. Clubs emerged, mandating proper uniforms for men including brown jackets, collared shirts breeches, stockings, cap and the club's monogram in silver.³⁰ Such uniforms and club exclusivity endowed cyclists with prestige, establishing the bicycle as a symbol of high status, offering another reason to preclude women from participating. Yet extending access to the bicycle to women drove revenue to the market, and those looking to capitalize on an additional consumer of sporting goods produced cycling costumes and shoes that catered to women. Stores were able to charge more money for female cycling shoes, as the equipment required extra leather for full coverage and support.³¹ On Decoration Day 1894, dress designers presented biking outfits for women that included pants that tied at the knees.³² Rather than deter female participation, establishing cycling uniforms actually paved the way for the popularization of female cycling costumes, legitimizing female cyclists as socially acceptable.

Dress regulations suggest a change in female appearance at a widely public level. The *Minneapolis Tribune* published a "Dos and Don'ts" piece, recommending female cyclists wear gloves, avoid "flaming" colors and refrain from riding tandem without a male companion."³³ Such media reports on cycling fashion evidence how the reform forced the media to address the issue.

³⁰ Smith, 94

³¹ Ibid, 95

³² Ibid, 100

³³ Ibid, 78

Every aspect of the *Minneapolis Tribune's* suggested attire reveals an attempt to salvage the proper image of the female. The gloves reclaim class; the subtle colors avoid calling unnecessary attention to the woman cyclist performing physical activity unsuitable for women; the male companions reestablish a patriarchal control over the peddling female. Various corset companies contributed to the dialogue by offering bicycle insurance along with corset sales.³⁴ The companies linked bicycle insurance and corset sales to encourage the public to continue the use of the corset with the bike. Retailers previously providing traditional apparel adapted old fashion to this new vehicle to avoid decline in retail sales, counteracting the popular reform against the bicycle. Yet the act also suggests a “proper” means to engage in cycling while retaining a sense of status, class and elegance.

Journalist Reamer, however, found an alternative means to reverse the attire controversy surrounding the bicycle. He writes, “Not the least good thing the bicycle has done has been to demonstrate publicly that women have legs. Their legs are unquestionably becoming to them.”³⁵ Reamer appealed to men in exposing how the cycling costume primarily served men by disrobing women, whose primary purpose was also to serve men. His journalistic efforts proposed that a woman who rides a bicycle does so only for sexual attention from men, rescinding a victory for women and transferring the power back into the hands of patriarchal society. Other journalists joined Reamer in employing the vast reaches of broadcast media to publicly ridicule cycling women. July 17, 1885

³⁴ Smith, 66-7

³⁵ Qtd. in Marks, 195: “17 June 1897: 512

newspapers describe Meta Boardman, considered the first to wear knickerbockers in the spring of 1893³⁶ as resembling a “plump boy [...] blessed with neat ankles and feet.”³⁷ The description satirically suggests that onlookers might have confused female cyclists in costume as boys, but for their “neat ankles and feet.” Reifying the caricature of a plump, boyish woman genders bicycling as an act reserved for men.

Some women who wore this cycling costume dismounted the bicycle seat and continued its use while engaging in non-cycling activities, sparking public outcry. The people resented those who sported the costume full time, and such deviants often encountered legal discipline. Ida Stewart, for example, was arrested for wearing trousers in a bar with her husband,³⁸ while Hattie Strage faced similar charges for disorderly conduct on the basis of her attire.³⁹ Social organizations scorned how women applied the cycling costume as casual wear. Women joined men in blaming new fashion for provoking improper sexual behavior. Groups of women formed to scoff at others clad in this new fashion and forced men to take an oath not to associate with bloomer women in “outlandish clothing,” with repercussions ranging from decreased respect to divorce.⁴⁰ The severity of the wives’ threats reflected an ever-growing hostility towards this new costume from various angles.

³⁶ Smith, 100

³⁷ Minneapolis Tribune May 24, 1894

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Smith, 105

⁴⁰ Ibid, 104

Cycling women in public areas faced humorous ridicule in the media while men who associated with them risked social repercussions. Yet bloomer women who entered more sacred grounds met a far more serious tone. An 1895 piece in the *Wichita Daily Eagle* reports on how bloomers split up religious circles, dividing churches into those that favored bloomers and those that prohibited such attire from entering sacred grounds.⁴¹ The outbreak against bloomer supporters presented the cycling costume as an act against society, patriarchal institution, and God. Such controversy ignited a surge in new fashion opponents that intensified existing criticisms of female cyclists and imagined active women as both inappropriate and offensive.

Academic institutions took an equally severe stance on the new fashion. Schoolteacher Gyda Stephenson in Chicago rode her bike to work and sported her cycling knickers in the classroom while she taught.⁴² Her colleagues attacked the costume as “improper,” while the city board backed her cause by insisting that the school no right to dictate attire of the teachers. The school responded, not by retracting their ban on the cycling costume, but instead by prohibiting all female schoolteachers from riding their bikes to class. The school, rather than reconsider their policy on dress, maneuvered around the city board’s ruling by reworking their platform. Board member Dr. A W Reimer expressed his concern to *New York Times* magazine:

How would our schoolrooms look with the lady
teachers parading about among the girls and boys in

⁴¹ <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014635/1895-09-04/ed-1/seq-6/ocr/> The Wichita daily eagle. (Wichita, Kan.) 1890-1906, September 04, 1895, Image 6

⁴² Smith, 101-2

bloomers. They might as well wear men's trousers
[...] we are determined to stop our teachers in time,
before they go that far⁴³

Reimer's statement conveys the desperation with which the school board sought to thwart the female schoolteachers, before the matter got "that far." "That far" measured a distance beyond the reach of institutional control. Ms. Stephenson's choice of practical dress shattered traditional perceptions of femininity and was therefore deemed "improper." The school ban on the bike reflected a deep-rooted fear of social change, symbolized by the new cycling costume. This case exemplifies how institutionalized powers withdraw privilege to sport, demolishing all associations with sport that jeopardize traditional ideals or signify change.

Common arguments that expressed disapproval for female cyclists extended beyond the "improper dress" that the bicycle fostered, censuring the image itself—rather than just the attire—of the female mounted atop a bicycle. This pervasive image of the cycling female met criticism that conveyed the female cyclist as improper, both for her embrace of physical activity and for the scandalous attire this activity required. During a speech in Brooklyn, bicycle supporter Marguerite Lindley cautioned, "Don't think that riding makes a graceful and symmetrical figure. It does not."⁴⁴ Lindley warned female cyclists that peddling disrupted feminine symmetry and graceful posture. Other popular views on the bicycle's harmful affect include physical strain to the face,

⁴³ *New York Times*, June 15, 1895 in *The Social History of the Bicycle*. Smith, 102.

⁴⁴ Lindley, Marguerite. *How to Choose a Wheel: Advice to Women who want to Ride Bicycles—A Caution to the Untidy*. Brooklyn: <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9F0CE1DE163DE433A2575AC1A9639C94669ED7CF>

according to media language conveyed side affects as “bicycle jerks,” “bicycle stares” and a “bigger face.”⁴⁵ This imagery endows female cyclists with menacing features that position the active women as threatening to society. Women who “stare” or make direct eye contact transgress the traditional expectations of femininity that position women as passive and non-confrontational. This media imagery discredits the active woman’s femininity, conveying cyclists with “bigger faces” to reinforce the stereotype of physical women as manly and bulky. Popular cartoons in media present enormous women on bicycles, suggesting that, “new athleticism fostered gigantic women.”⁴⁶ The bicycle entered women’s lives as one of the first popular *public* demonstrations of physical activity performed by middle class women. This physicality deemed unnatural for women as the “weaker sex,” presented unnatural consequences for the fragile female body unaccustomed to the buildup of muscle. Lindley suggested that, as the bicycle worked only the legs, women should balance out muscle by seeking exercise to stimulate the upper body.⁴⁷

Yet most of urban America disagreed, lamenting how the bicycle stripped woman of her femininity and grace, building abnormal masculine bulk. Regular physician Arabella Kenealy claimed that the bicycles tendencies to develop female muscle roughened the feminine build, resulting in “a loss of charm

⁴⁵ Smith 70-1

⁴⁶ Marks, 197

⁴⁷ Lindley, Marguerite. *How to Choose a Wheel: Advice to Women who Want to Ride Bicycles—A Caution to the Untidy*. <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9F0CE1DE163DE433A2575AC1A9639C94669ED7CF>

[...and] gentleness,” and a voice that was both “assertive” and “brusque.”⁴⁸ Such female assertiveness disobeyed governing gender expectations, which assigned men all active roles and left the passive roles to women. Criticizing muscle development in women established displays of physical strength as strictly masculine and forced women to forfeit either cycling or their femininity.

Kenealy further renders female activity as threatening the future of humanity:

[Nature] knows it is the laboriously evolved potentiality of the race they are expending on their muscles [...] Wheel of Evolution is a wheel which never stands still, except in that terrible moment when it slackens, halts, and finally whirls down the fearsome way of Devolution.⁴⁹

Kenealy introduces the claim that building muscle through physical activity destroys the female reproductive system and prevents the production of new bodies by which evolution may continue, consequently undoing the “laborious” foundation of humanity. Kenealy conveyed the bicycle as dissolving what evolution had built, bringing human progress to a standpoint by degenerating the female reproductive system and life itself.

So why, despite 19th Century medical and social criticism, were women so joyously drawn to this new sporting machine? Suffragist and lifetime women’s activist Susan B. Anthony told *New York World* that the bicycle had, “done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world.”⁵⁰ Elizabeth Cady Stanton seconded this claim, asserting, “many a woman is riding to suffrage on a bicycle.” These words evoke the image of a proud assembly of bloomer-sporting

⁴⁸ Qtd in Marks, 176

⁴⁹ Qtd in Marks, 179

⁵⁰ Anthony, Susan in “Champion of her Sex,” *New York World*, 2 February 1896, p. 10.

ladies parading on their bicycles, rejoicing the freedom that the bicycle allotted to women in a time when men guarded the legal privilege of driving. Women adapted the bicycle as a transportive means to ride *themselves*, separate from their husbands and their fathers, to suffrage gatherings. They could travel new distances and socialize with other women in locations beyond the home, breaching household confinements. The bicycle alleviated female dependency on a closely related male to navigate social interactions.

By opening strenuous physical activity to women, this instrument reworked previously conceived notions of femininity. The bicycle symbolizes how instruments can reshape gender and power relations, presenting this important idea of extending the potential—for masculinity, strength and status—through instrumentation. The bicycle extended the female’s status and physical positioning within society, which allowed women to enter a carefully guarded male arena.

The bicycle and its alignment with medicine and fashion reform addressed the rub between health, morality and aesthetics. Sparking great literary and media criticism, the bicycle paved the way for an argument supporting the athletic female as acceptable. Simultaneously, it also inflamed the attitude that such physical activity for women is “improper” in a manner that enhanced the allegation of women as weaker. The cycling woman introduced a new-fangled femininity—a radical image that shook the turn of the century. The bicycle, together with new medicine, new fashion and new reform, birthed a new

woman, for whom America was caught unprepared. This crucial vehicle for change shifted the formation of the female sporting body into high gear.

Sport within The American Industrial Period of Capitalism and Cultural Feminization

Theorists suggest that a crisis of masculinity in the 1880's leading up until the end of World War I yielded a widespread fear of cultural feminization. With a newly industrialized America, labor shifted from an emphasis on rural landscapes to urban ones, bringing work indoors. While physically demanding pre-industrialized labor in America placed strain on the male working body, this shift in industrial structure removed physical demands from the work of middle-class men. Author Andrew Doyle writes, "Unlike the urban working class and farmers of the region, young middle-class males were now coming of age in a physically undemanding world of material comfort."⁵¹ Yet, as middle-class urban men sought out jobs prioritizing education over physical dexterity, this supposed "material comfort" might have caused more stress than it alleviated. Without habitual exercise imbedded into daily labor, the middle-class capitalist man lacked this constant reaffirmation of male vitality and strength.

Hans Bonde identifies the growing female authority over the family in capitalist America as arousing fear of feminization: "With the breakthrough of industrialization and capitalism around the turn of the century the middle class in particular established a new division of labor according to sex: Mother was at

⁵¹ Doyle, Andrew. "College Football and Southern Professionalism." Miller, Patrick B: *The Sporting World of Modern South*: 112.

home and Father was away.”⁵² With the father away from home, the female domestic presence now established the mother as the predominant influence in the development of her children. War conditions further enhanced this crisis of masculinity that removed men from process of structuring the home environment. Michael Messner, analyst of gender in televised sport, attributes the passive “feminine” attitude growing in young 20th century boys to war conditions.⁵³ With men away at war, sons raised by their mothers alone in a fatherless house developed a dependency on women that threatened male masculinity in the eyes of the fighting fathers, many of whom returned from the war with a growing fear of this social feminization.

Other theorists suggest it was not women infiltrating the home that threatened masculine control. Rather, “cultural feminization was the natural consequence of cultural outsiders, the ‘others,’ whose manhood was suspect to begin with.”⁵⁴ Such theories redirect the blame of those responsible for cultural feminization from one marginalized body to another, conveying “otherness” as improper forms of masculinity. Varying forms of racial identity did not meet the standards of masculinity that reserved maleness for middle-class white men. These alleged “weaker” bodies flocked to the rising industrial workplace that offered promise of opportunity for those who sought work.

⁵² Bonde, Hans. “When Boys Become Men: The Martial Arts as Young People’s Revolt against the Youth Rebellion.” Ervø, Søren, and Thomas Johansson. *Bending Bodies: Moulding Masculinities*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003. Print: 125

⁵³ Messner, Michael. *Power at Play*. 1992

⁵⁴ Kimmel, Michael “Consuming Manhood: The Feminization of American Culture and the Recreation of the Male Body, 1832-1920.” Ed. Ervø, Søren, and Thomas Johansson. *Bending Bodies: Moulding Masculinities*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003. Print: 56.

Others lamented how women swarmed the public sphere, taking positions as schoolteachers that placed them in positions of authority. In 1892, Rabbi Solomon Schindler asserted that the, "Preponderance of women's influence in our public schools was feminizing our boys."⁵⁵ Women now presided over the youth in an influential manner, situating them as primary developers of young boys in school. Women's position in schools endeared them to the children, to whom they dedicated their teachings, in a manner that threatened hegemonic dominion.

The turn of the century stirred a fear of cultural feminization in United States middle-class male reformists that required revalidation. Entrepreneurs took advantage of rising consumerism to market an abundance of solution products, including Bernard MacFadden's Strengtho cereal and "peniscope" pump, supposed to enlarge the penis.⁵⁶ Diet and exercise regimes entered the market as products of consumerism rather than social practices. Industrialization challenged male economic independence and dominance, forcing men to find what J.P Hantover describes as a new "avenue for masculine validation in recreational pattern emphasizing [...] physical strength."⁵⁷ In this way, men were able to retake responsibilities for their bodies by establishing a "recreational pattern." Finding this replacement for their previously physically demanding labor provided men with a daily dosage of revalidation. Those who enhanced their overall fitness improved their sense of self-importance, granting

⁵⁵ Qtd. in Kimmel, 57.

⁵⁶ Kimmel 59-60

⁵⁷ Hantover, J.P. "Full-Orbed Moral Manhood." *Making Men Moral: Social Engineering during the Great War*. Ed. Nancy K. Bristow. New York: New York UP, 1996. Print.25-27

them a greater social status in their own eyes. Manufacturers recognized recreation's growing popularity and commoditized fitness and health with the aforementioned promotional strategies. A masculine backlash therefore formed against this assumed cultural feminization to reestablish vanishing Victorian ideals of masculine strength and control through the avenue of physical strength. It is perhaps this tumult of products and commoditized fitness that Steven G Kellman refers to as America going, "sports crazy—in part as a hedge against creeping fears of cultural feminization."⁵⁸ To circumvent encroaching feminine influences in the Twentieth Century public sphere, America embraced sport. Thus, sport, as a counterattack to feminization, becomes antithetical to femininity.

The search to reestablish masculinity popularized sport as a means to boost masculine dominance. Bonde suggests, "Young men might preserve a masculine body and 'firm character' through sport."⁵⁹ Sport builds both muscle and character to reinforce masculinity. By establishing "body" and "character" as separate components that mutually comprise masculinity, Bonde detects an important distinction between bodily masculinity and intrinsic masculinity. Imagining masculinity as internal as well as physical codes masculinity within the moral fibers that make up man. A "firm character" boosts masculine strength in the same way that athletic feats rear confidence in one's body, reclaiming masculine strength by intensifying the feeling of masculine worth.

⁵⁸ Kellman, Steven G. *Perception of Raging Bull*, 1994. 85

⁵⁹ Bonde, 125

Physical and emotional displays of masculinity within sport serve one another in this mutually empowering relationship.

This historical association of sport in adjunct to masculinity formation designates a particular type of body to sport, in turn labeling all other marginalized bodies as unfit for the sporting sphere. Many theorists signal to the reformation of masculinity as occurring in spheres that separate men from women. Bonde remarks that, "Through sport, boys may leave the female sphere of influence and enter a cult of manliness headed by older men."⁶⁰ Sport separates maleness from femininity, allowing men to fraternize and form close personal relationships. Masculine prowess serves as a unifying commonality that creates this "cult of manliness" or bond between athletic men. Arnold R. Beisser also observes sport as a male bonding exercise: "With the endless series of what can be likened to initiation rites [...] Sports form an elongated bridge across childhood, adolescence, and adulthood for American males."⁶¹ This unifying factor of sport allows masculinity to transcend across generations of males, situating sport within the formation of male camaraderie. If sport as an "initiation rite" grants guarded access to masculinity, then any additional bodies welcomed into sports penetrate this exclusive masculine alliance.

Women and other marginalized bodies that enter the sporting sphere disrupt this masculinizing process. Kimmel implies that for the "Marketplace Man [...] thrown into constant question in the unstable world of economic

⁶⁰ Bonde, 134

⁶¹ Beisser, Arnold R. "The Madness in Sports: Psychological Observation on Sports" (1967). *Google Books*. Web. 3 Mar. 2-12.

competition [,] Masculinity became a homosocial enactment.”⁶² This “homosocial enactment,” the performing of homogenous social practices, presents the sporting sphere as catering to a specific, undiversified body. The “Marketplace Male,” the white middle-class male that diverged from the middle-class female and working-class male, occupied this unvarying sporting body. The attempt to preserve this masculine homosociality excludes bodies of difference from sport.

These ideal masculinities celebrated both in and by sport persist today, as athletic competition becomes grounded within this overt sense of maleness around which sport became popularized. Kyle Kasz draws from Kimmel to identify Extreme sports, an alleged 1990’s response to a parallel crisis of white masculinity,⁶³ as enacting this practice of organizing homogenous masculinity:

Through the valorization of the unusual and extraordinary and athletic feats which they perform, these white males are portrayed as extraordinary and exceptional individuals who are, different from, and superior to anyone not willing to attempt such potentially dangerous athletic exploits⁶⁴

Extreme sports intensified the level of “valorization” that men receive from regular sports, by increasing the risk of these “potentially dangerous athletic exploits.” By confronting danger, men display their bravery, a traditionally male-identified trait, which distinguishes them as exceptionally male. This process of labeling through extreme sports sets participating white men apart

⁶² Kimmel, 49

⁶³ Kasz, Kyle. *Revolt of the White Athlete: Race Media and the Emergence of Extreme Athletics in America*. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2007. *Google Books*. Web. 65

⁶⁴ Kasz, 72

from other non-participating bodies. Kasz ascertains that, “Extreme sports are implicitly figured (through the absence of women and people of color) as a racially and gender exclusive place.”⁶⁵ This figuring of extreme athletic accomplishments reinforces a hierarchy of white male privilege within the sporting sphere. Kusz further accuses pop-cultural media sources as capitalizing sport to reinforce this social homogeny, referencing a social phenomenon that he coins as “Lance America—the national fantasy.”⁶⁶ Kusz presents the dozens of media sources, corporations and political campaigns featuring Lance Armstrong’s survival story celebrating his near-fatal battle against cancer, as hegemonic preservation mechanisms:

A conservative cultural politics which [...] enables a number of complex images/effects: a white male occupying the position of the ‘truly disadvantaged’ subject (with his near-fatal bout of cancer trumping all other forms of social disadvantage), the reassertion of whiteness as truly representative of America and as carefully disguised claims of white supremacy, and the unapologetic celebration of the return of an unequivocal “man’s man” masculinity⁶⁷

Kusz intends neither to trivialize Armstrong’s success nor to discount his extreme disadvantaged state as a disembodied athlete. Rather, his argument illustrates how the careful selection of stories emphasized in popular culture reflects social norms concerning embodiment. The public commotion surrounding Armstrong’s undoubtedly miraculous accomplishments reveals how American popular culture defines the ideal athletic role model as both white

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Kusz, 139-40

⁶⁷ Kusz, 139

and an “unequivocal ‘man’s man.’” Kusz therefore explores the “national fantasy of Lance America” as displacing non-white, non-male bodies in situations of disadvantage and, instead, prioritizing ideal white masculinities as romantic heroism.⁶⁸ Cultural norms and expectations structure the public vision concerning hegemonic sporting bodies as shaped by media discourses within the United States. Kusz further attributes this national fantasy as surfacing in the wake of national crisis: “The crisis of masculinity, the crisis of whiteness, and the crisis of American national Identity brought about by the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001.”⁶⁹ Similar to the 20th Century crisis of masculinity, the Lance Armstrong affair links how ideal masculinities form with war politics and media response.

The 20th Century search for masculine reinforcement united the hegemonic forces of sport and military and joined the two avenues of reestablishing masculinity in dialogue. Associating sport with military practices makes sport synonymous with masculine toughness and aggressive behavior. American armed forces placed athletic trainers in every military training camp to encourage a combative, aggressive masculine stance. US Navy Metal of Honor recipient Edward F. Allen, who fought for the United States during the Boxer Rebellion in China, explained that boxing training teaches skills directly transferable to bayonet fighting, both of which require, “an aggressive fighting

⁶⁸ Kusz laments the labeling of Armstrong as “the first true American hero of the 21st century” (Myrick, 2000) and a “Real Sports Hero” (Reaves, 2000). 139.

⁶⁹ Kusz, 141

spirit that breaks down or weakens defense.”⁷⁰ As Allen presents, sports encourage applying these combative traits to weakening an opponent. A vital tool to restoring middle-class man, sport in association with military practices makes sport synonymous with masculine toughness and aggressive behavior.

However, war’s interplay with sports dictates a complex dualistic relationship: causal both to the problem of cultural feminization and to its solution. War not only coincided with sports as a means to regain masculinity, but also established the appropriate environmental settings to cultivate sport. World War I opened the sporting sphere to women by popularizing sport in the following two ways: by giving sport its mass appeal and by expanding availability of sport. The First World War attracted a universal public appeal to sport. Pedersen outlines how, “The war functioned as a catalyst for growth of sport during the 1920s.”⁷¹ Firstly, sport revenue amplified as the military employed sport for training purposes. Secondly, the national armed forces that required sporting goods demanded a variety of athletic equipment, increasing sales at home. Lastly, the military’s exemplary turn to athletic training reinforced the public conception that sport developed ideal masculine traits. War and inclusion of sport in military camp made sport vastly more popular, encouraging athletic programs in schools.⁷² This increased demand for sporting

⁷⁰ Hantover, 27

⁷¹ Pedersen, Paul M. “Historical Aspects of the Sport Business Industry.” Ed. Parks, Janet B., Jerome Quarterman, Lucie Thibault, and Paul M. Pedersen. *Contemporary Sport Management*. Leeds: Human Kinetics, 2007. Print. 62.

⁷² Pedersen et al., 64

equipment sparked frenzy around sporting merchandise and expanded the type of outlets that provided sporting goods.

This growth in distribution introduces the second way in which war popularized sport. Infiltrating the public providers with distribution rights made sporting attire and equipment available to a wider audience, including women. Sporting goods had finally reached the common public. The cultural feminization following the First World War necessitated products to enhance masculinity, prompting entrepreneurs to market physical activity as a product and giving rise to sport as a business industry. Once treating sport as a means to create revenue, sporting companies wanted to expand their target audience to increase this product revenue. Adding woman as a potential customer bestowed her admission to the sporting sphere, accounting for the change in views identifying women as appropriately bodied for physical activity.

Contrarily, World War II had an almost inverse affect on sports and female participation. The Second World War drained the economy, exhausting all resources and funding. The vacuum of supplies decreased the number of those able to play sport due to lack of resources, in addition to drafting many professional male athletes into combat. Without financial support, college and high school athletic programs plummeted under budget cuts. Lack of physical materials reduced sporting good production.⁷³ As all sporting arenas declined, it seemed World War II might void American of sport altogether.

⁷³ Pedersen et. al, 64-5.

Though the war festered a barren life at home, military practice continued the use of sport in training. And as World War II brought women into combat, women also endured intensive athletic training: “The military developed sports programs to meet the needs of women.”⁷⁴ Within the confines of the armed forces, female physical aggression and power only strengthened national ranks. Through military training, women could therefore safely enter a competitive level of physical assertiveness. This military practice reworked conceptions of what constituted a proper sporting body at home. The war, having removed male sporting bodies from the arenas at home vis-à-vis the draft, compelled other bodies—previously uninvolved or awarded limited participation in athletics—to fill in. In the early 1940’s, resulting sports leagues opened to women such as the All American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL),⁷⁵ which lasted from 1943-1954 and, “Helped bring about the beginning of a positive change in thinking towards women in sport.”⁷⁶ While men stormed the battlefield during War II, American women charged the plate, taking over the baseball diamond. Unlike previous women who joined performing sports teams as comic entertainers, the AAGPBL women helped legitimize female participation in sport as competent players to be taken as serious athletes. America subsequently launched an era in which women could be recognized as suitable contenders in athletic arenas.

⁷⁴ Pedersen et. al, 65.

⁷⁵ The AAGPBL was the first women’s baseball league that inspired 90’s film, “A League of Their Own,” featuring Rosie O Donald and Tom Hanks.

⁷⁶ Pedersen et. al, 67

While war surfaced these small victories for female participation in professional American sport, the historical situation of these accomplishments within the context of war and masculine establishment associates female athletes within a culture of aggressive violence and masculine domination. Contextualizing women's positioning in the origin of popularized sport helps explain how patriarchal gender norms still so powerfully appropriate women's sports. Confined within her historical fixture to such hegemonic masculine powers, the contemporary American female athlete must continue to navigate these hierarchal structures within sports.

Modern sports continue to bear this military influence. Sportswriter Sally Jenkins's quick satirical read, *Men Will Be Boys: The Modern Woman Explains Football and Other Amusing Male Rituals*, addresses sport culture by mocking how men popularly view women viewing sport. Yet Jenkins buries honest speculation about sports beneath her sardonic language. She advises, "The key for women when translating football language from malespeak to femalespeak is when in doubt, to think in terms of war and sex metaphors. They are Rosetta stones of the game."⁷⁷ She points to the following war terminology evident in football alone: "bombs," "blitzes," "trenches," "drafts," "zones," "formations" and "recruits." And with over fifteen years of experience watching and participating in sport, I contribute these other violent registers evident in sport: "battle wounds" result from aggressive play, and "penetrate the inside," signals charging the key in basketball, while a "bullet pass" denotes the quick and accurate speed

⁷⁷ Jenkins, Sally. *Men Will Be Boys: The Modern Woman Explains Football and Other Amusing Male Rituals*. New York: Doubleday, 1996. Print.

of the ball. The winning team often “kills,” “smokes,” “destroys” or “massacres” its opponent that does not meet the same level of play. George Carlin compares the goals of football and baseball in military terms:

In football, the object is for the quarterback, also known as the field general, to be on target with an aerial assault [...] with a sustained ground attack that punches holes in the forward wall of the enemy’s defensive line. In baseball, the object is to go home! And be safe!⁷⁸

Even coded in military rhetoric, Carlin reveals a discrepancy between the two aims that creates a hierarchical divide, elevating football above baseball: football players attack while baseball players seek the safety of home plate. These military registers so evident in sports rhetoric resonate how sport historically coincides with major American wars. The violent rhetoric could originate from two possible arenas: the military bases that employed sport to ingrain aggressive masculine combat in military training, or back home where war had popularized sport, perhaps imitating war by providing a safe sphere in which non-fighters could enact warlike combat.

Jenkins suggests that female spectators have also recognized how sport as a reproduction of war allures the ideal aggression-crazed male: “We get the Violence and the Ballet. We get the concept of War without Death and the Lure of the Uniform.”⁷⁹ Sport creates an art form out of violence. It allows for “war without death”—a safe competitive sphere to both perceive and act upon violent aggression. The “lure of the uniform,” fortified by the helmets, echoes the sense

⁷⁸ Carlin, George. *The Best of Brain Droppings*. White Plains, NY: Peter Pauper, 2007. Print. 52-53

⁷⁹ Jenkins, 3

of nationalism that soldiers obtain in fighting for their country. When a male player dons a helmet and a uniform, he commits himself to the team. This performative act of surrendering one's individual body to the success of a team mirrors an American masculine ideal of nationalism. Author Maria Burton Nelson gives a different insight on violence in sport as former female professional athlete herself:

By creating a world where masculinity is equated with violence, where male bonding is based on the illusion of male supremacy, and where all of the visible women are cheerleaders, manly sports set the stage for violence against women⁸⁰

The male-dominant world of sports, rising in rank with military practice, exercises power through often-violent aggression. This reinforces the masculine norm of physical dominance that requires men be physically larger and stronger than women, therefore maintaining the ability to physically dominate women. The historical interplays between sports and war, power and violence, and masculinity and domination, burden female athletes with the task of breaking free from this violent rhetoric. Female athletes enter the sporting world at a disadvantage, where ideal male equates ideal athlete, and the homogeneity of traditional masculinity negates the potential for female masculinities.

⁸⁰ Nelson, Mariah Burton. *The Stronger Women Get, the More Men Love Football: Sexism and the American Culture of Sports*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994. Print. 7.

CHAPTER THREE:

Play Days, Milestones, Title IX: Rise of the popular female athlete

Although America took notice of the potential for the female sporting body during its involvement in industrial reform and the World Wars, the conception of women as physically active was far from normalized. Stigmatization of the new active woman lingered as a result of this alleged fear of cultural feminization, in addition to public difficulties conceptualizing woman's new active positioning in American society.

While women now had greater access to sporting goods, they sought out safe arenas to exercise and practice sport. Areas with few men and reduced public skepticism stood out as ideal spaces to explore sport free from criticism. Yet where were there spaces large enough to accommodate physical play that were still void of men? In 1865, Michael Vassar opened America's first all-women's college, establishing a school of physical training. Vassar claimed this school would allow women to pursue, "Physical accomplishments suitable for ladies to acquire... bodily strength and grace."⁸¹ To active American women in 1865, the establishment of Vassar College complete with a women-only area for recreation certainly was a physical accomplishment in itself. The area institutionalized how American society now accepted the potential for "bodily strength" in women.

⁸¹ Vassar, Michael. *History of Women in Sports Timeline: Part 1 - to 1899*
<http://www.northnet.org/stlawrenceaauw/timeline.htm>

However, deconstructing Michael Vassar's claim points to lingering discrepancies between the male and female active bodies and evidence of remnant discrimination against women as athletes. The primary mission of Vassar's new recreational training school as developing "grace" reflects a societal expectation for active women to maintain a proper stature that coincides with standards of femininity set forth by the elite educated society. Re-conceptualizing this labeling of women as "ladies," denoting women of class and elite status, reflects a push for active women to retain their proper image. A statement about physically active women could not emerge without words such as "ladies" and "grace" to ensure that these bodies were still suitable reflections of traditional femininity.

A decade later, Wellesley college opened a gymnasium in 1875 designed for exercise and swimming.⁸² The gymnasium encouraged women to pursue an active lifestyle, and Wellesley scholars gained access to exercise thanks to their all-female arena. All-female colleges paved the way for other institutions to followed suit. By 1891 Vassar's training school allowed for women to play against one another in basketball, but did not allow spectators.⁸³ Prohibiting spectators gave the impression that athletic women displayed improper activity, not suitable for public viewing. Vassar led the way in allowing for female participation in sport, while simultaneously cautioning against women who risked forgoing their proper image.

⁸² *History of Women in Sports Timeline: Part 1 – to 1899*
<http://www.northnet.org/stlawrenceaauw/timeline.htm>

⁸³ *Dare to Compete*

Cautious of how competitive men's intercollegiate sports turned men against one another, physical educators implemented athletic programs into women's education as anti-competitive.⁸⁴ Organized "Play Days" gathered women from various schools to engage in recreational activities in support of Vassar's aim for women to be both active and proper. Rather than creating rivalry between two opposing teams, these events required the participation of at least three schools so that, "there could be no winner, and no-one could be too competitive."⁸⁵ Play Days emerged in diametrical opposition to competition, removing all notions of "winning" or "losing." Turning away from competition shifted the focus in sports on collaboration.

In 1923, the Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation adopted the Play Day platform, formalizing the events supposed to achieve the Federation's mission of, "a sport for every girl and a girl in every sport."⁸⁶ Despite this promise of institutionalizing female athletics, Play Days did not specialize sport venues for women, but rather became an exercise of socializing that fostered camaraderie and working together to achieve the ideal image of the proper female body. Enforced tea breaks⁸⁷ stood as an ostentatious display of class—tea a valuable commodity that made for an elite activity. These respites from physical activity ensured that the women did not overexert themselves, structuring the female body as incapable of enduring extended periods of recreational activity.

⁸⁴ Davies, Richard O. *Sports in American Life: A History*. 109

⁸⁵ *Dare to Compete*

⁸⁶ Davies, 108.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Even the term “Play Days” under modern semantic analysis indicates a trivializing tone as an almost childish form of pure entertainment.

Women without the privilege of a post Title IX lens still recognized the incompleteness of Play Days in creating equal avenues for men and women in sports. University of Arizona’s physical educator Ina Gittings acknowledged the trivializing nature of institutionalized Play Days:

[Play Days] are extremely weak and offer little or none of the values of real games played skillfully, willingly, intelligently and eagerly by well-matched teams. I picture the girls in a Play Day as sheep, huddled and bleating in their little Play meadow, whereas they should be young mustangs racing together across vast prairies⁸⁸

Gittings acutely separates the values of Play Days from those of “real games.” By equating “girls” with huddling, bleating, playing sheep, Gittings renders Play Days as infantilizing and dehumanizing. Acknowledging an even greater potential for women as active and governing bodies, she seeks to correct this weak attempt at progress for women’s sports, replacing the feeble image of socializing sheep with a forceful illustration of racing mustangs. Gittings places these active bodies of immense strength and speed within “vast prairies,” expansive areas that symbolize both the open opportunities ahead and also the coinciding freedom with which to navigate these open spaces. The vast prairies embody room for improvement in women’s sports. Despite retaining these intrinsic *structural* elements that set women apart from participating men, Play Days offered an environment supportive of women staying active and maintaining a fit lifestyle.

⁸⁸ Davies, Richard O. *Sports in American Life: A History*. 106

Various forms of public media helped the notion of the active woman gain momentum. In 1908, the national anthem of baseball still echoing through American baseball stadiums today, *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*, was written from the narrative perspective of a young female's spectator and avid baseball fan.⁸⁹ The "skimpy fashions" of the 1920's allegedly, "put a new emphasis on athletic bodies and narrow[ed] the gap between health and glamour, and by 1924 The Amateur Athletic Union held the first national basketball tournament for women with six participating teams."⁹⁰

Gathering confidence as fit bodies, women boldly moved into the public eye to assert their athletic competence. A handful of women stood out above the rest as milestones of achievement for female athletes, many proving their athletic ability at a young age. Those growing up in a culture of changing views concerning the female athletic body perhaps encouraged the youth to establish themselves as competent without fear that held back older generations of women. As early as 1887, fifteen-year-old tennis star Charlotte Dodd became America's first female champion of the Wimbledon.⁹¹ In 1918 twelve-year-old Gertrude Ederle broke the 880-yard freestyle swimming record, becoming the youngest world record breaker in sports.⁹² Ederle did not stop with this title. She later became the first person ever to swim the English Channel freestyle, breaking all previous breaststroke-swimmers' records by over two hours.⁹³

⁸⁹ *History of Women in Sports Timeline: Part 2*
<http://www.northnet.org/stlawrenceaaaw/timeline.htm>

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ed. McWhirter, Norris *Guinness Book of Women's Sport Records* First Edition. 8.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Davies, 109-110.

President Coolidge celebrated Ederle's great feats by publically stating, "I am amazed that a woman... should be able to swim the English Channel."⁹⁴ Nineties documentary *Dare to Compete* cites the President as granting Ederle with the title, "Americas Best Girl."⁹⁵ This public acclaim on the part of the President of the United States gave female athletes what they needed: support from a well-respected figure whose words stood as the voice of America. Ederle's accomplishment showcased women as capable competitors. As confidence spread, women entered sporting spheres beyond swimming, gymnastics and tennis. 1979 *Guinness Book of Women's Sport Records* awards "Babe" Didrikson as "most versatile female athlete" for, "compet[ing] at the championship level in an unparallel array of sports" including basketball, javelin, hurdles, high jump, boxer and golf.⁹⁶ In addition to her accomplishments at a professional level, Didrikson established proficiency in a variety of other sports, noted by Guinness: billiards, lacrosse, swimming, diving, and placekicking.

Yet women entering the masculine-dominant sporting sphere hoping to compete alongside men still met resistance of varying degrees. Author Kathryn Jay suggests that women who displayed masculine-deemed physical strength and powerful athletic achievement put their femininity in question. Jay writes the following on a 1966 organized sportswomen group:

[The group] tread lightly in the beginning because members believed that being outspoken on issues signaled an aggressiveness that might be mistaken for sexual deviance. The fear of being labeled a

⁹⁴ Qtd. in Davies, 110

⁹⁵ *Dare to Compete*

⁹⁶ Ed. McWhirter, Norris *Guinness Book of Women's Sport Records* First Edition. 9.

lesbian also pushed female athletes to a hyperawareness about their femininity, an attitude encouraged by the physical educators, both male and female, who ran women's sports⁹⁷

Jay's statement highlights the intense fear of association with "deviant" sexualities that characterized women participating sport. The emerging sporting image of American women, still relatively new, counteracted previous standards of femininity by introducing power, strength and aggression. These masculine-deemed displays deviated from proper sexual behavior, raising suspicion. Female athletes conveying a hyper-masculine aggressiveness in sports prompted public speculation of their sexuality. In an attempt to correct such stigmatization of female athletes as lesbians, physical educators took great efforts to enforce a feminine appearance.

This act contradicts its own intent, serving to reify—rather than dismantle—the popular assumption that female athlete equates with lesbian. By promoting hyperawareness of femininity as a method of counteracting lesbian stigmatization, physical educators erroneously conceive traditional feminine appearances and heterosexuality as interchangeable. By encouraging athletes to retain the traditional image of a proper woman, these administrators presented an ironic contradiction in their aims. They sided with reigning norms of traditional feminine appearance—the same norms that expelled the idea of an active female. Physical educators who dealt with female athletes reinstated the "normal" image at a time when female athletes were still not accepted as

⁹⁷ Jay, Kathryn. *More than Just a Game: Sports in American Life since 1945*. New York: Columbia UP, 2004. Print. 160

“normal” bodies. Their efforts to retain the image of female athletes as suitably feminine proved counterproductive by negating the very potential for women’s sports.

Encouraging a feminine appearance to coincide the active female therefore reversed the very progression of women’s sports. Furthermore, the frantic efforts to correct the lesbian stigma displayed evident homophobia and resulted in three main implications. Firstly, it presented homosexuality as unacceptable. These contradictions imposed by homophobic female sporting institutions sought access for one alternative sporting body yet denied it to another. Devaluing the ability of gay women to contribute as sporting bodies jeopardizes the lesbian athlete’s self-worth. Secondly, extensive efforts to prove female athletes as heterosexual encouraged the silencing of gay women in sport. Gay female athletes bore the responsibility of both closeting themselves and their teammates. Under constant pressure to hide their own sexualities, truly lesbian athletes, if outed in public, further subjected associating sporting bodies to speculation. Lastly, homophobia in the realm of women’s sports intensified suspicion, discomfort and distrust that created a tension between teammates and competitors. Suppressing the existence of lesbianism within professional women’s sports negated the diversity of sexualities that accompany the sporting sphere, and continued to conform bodies to fit a uniform mold.

Such inhibiting social mores attempted to filter out any variety in sporting bodies. Yet a few milestone female athletes dared to expand these standard preconceptions of athletic ability. After the coordinators of the 1966

Boston marathon rejected one woman's application to enter the event on the basis of gender, the woman slipped into the pack and ran twenty-six miles in her nursing shoes—no other athletic shoes yet catered to women.⁹⁸ Runner KT Switzer entered only her initials the following year, granting her official access into the event unbeknown to the event staff. KT Switzer recounts in *Dare to Compete* how, as she ran, an official chased after her and brought her to the ground. Switzer's on-looking boyfriend and coach both intervened by holding back the official and screaming for Switzer to, "Run like hell."⁹⁹ She did. Upon crossing the finish line in only four hours and twenty minutes, Switzer was immediately disqualified on the basis that women were prohibited from competing. But Switzer had finished the race, dispelling the generalizations that the female body was too weak to perform such feats.

In one of the greatest achievements for women's sport that leveled the play between men and women, Billie Jean King prevailed in the famous "Battle of the Sexes" tennis match over male competitor Bobbi Riggs. King acknowledges that, after her rival Margaret Court had lost to Bobbi Riggs in a similar challenge recognized as the "Mother's Day Massacre," it was up to her. "It wasn't about tennis. It was about social change," King recalls in the *Dare to Compete* documentary. "And I knew that going in."¹⁰⁰ In front of the greatest crowd to ever attend an American female sporting event,¹⁰¹ Billie Jean King demonstrated to live spectators that women's play could not only equal the play of men, but

⁹⁸ *Dare to Compete*

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ *Dare to Compete*

¹⁰¹ McWhirtier, 150

also surpass it. She proved to the public that female athletes were not inherently weaker on the basis of their given genetic build, allowing female athlete's to extend their potential beyond their birth-assigned sex. The 1973 match came one year after the Title IX legislation passed, which outlawed any form of discrimination on the basis of sex. At this time, the amendment had not yet gained popularity within the sporting context. But King brought social change, spreading public awareness of what the 1972 addition to the 1964 Civil Right's Act could mean for women's sports.¹⁰²

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 mandates in Title IV that disproportionate federal funding to programs on the basis of race, color and national origin are prohibited.¹⁰³ Notably missing from this list, sex was excluded from the prohibition of such "disproportionate" funding. Title VII, however, introduced sex as a factor of social discrimination, mandating that employers consider both men and women together for positions, rather than separating men's positions from those of women during the hiring process.¹⁰⁴ Once in affect, employers allegedly could no longer gender positions as strictly "male" or "female," and had to consider all applicants equally, setting the basis for the current gender-blind application system. With Title VII in place, Title IX emerged in 1972, restructuring Title IV to include sex as a prohibited factor of discrimination against programs receiving federal funding. Title IX states, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be

¹⁰³ Ware, Susan. *Game, Set, Match: Billie Jean King and the Revolution in Womens Sports*Ware, 44

¹⁰⁴ Brake, Deborah. *Getting In the Game: Title IX and the women's Sport Revolution*. 15

denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”¹⁰⁵

While nowhere in the original 1972 Title IX regulation directly addresses sporting programs, the majority of legislation and popular dialogue surrounding the 1972 federal legislation relates to sport equality. Within the context of sport, Title IX improved opportunities for girls and women to enter high school and intercollegiate athletics, as well as any sports league or recreational center that received federal funding. This wording allowed Title IX to allowed sport to reach a larger range of girls and women. Yet the vague language of this law left many questions on how to effectively interpret and enforce it.

The Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) recognized its responsibility to provide more clarity in regards to interpreting and enforcing Title IX in 1975, before the approaching mandatory compliance date in 1978. It began drafting regulations to guide, “Exactly what would constitute sex-discrimination.”¹⁰⁶ A major section of this draft outlined providing equal accommodations, facilities and support services, published in the 1978 policy draft open to public commentary.¹⁰⁷ The final 1979 policy interpretation described responsibilities as, “1) financial assistance, 2) benefits and opportunities and 3) accommodation of interests and abilities.”¹⁰⁸ This third test splits into what is now commonly referred to as the Three Prong Test and

¹⁰⁵ Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, P.L. 92-318, 20 U.S.C. section 1681 et seq.

¹⁰⁶ U.S. Department of Education, Secretary’s Commission for Opportunity in Athletics, *Open to All: Title IX at Thirty*, Washington, D.C., 2020, 2003: 15

¹⁰⁷ *Open to All: Title IX at Thirty*: 15

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

sparks the most controversy of the three responsibilities of programs receiving federal funding.

Acosta and Carpenter point to the HEW's 1975 regulations and 1979 policy interpretations some of the most significant sources of follow-up information concerning Title IX, along with the *Investigator's Manual* in 1990 and the three letters of clarification in 1996, 1998, and 2003.¹⁰⁹ While the 1990 document carries no legal backing, institutions often consult this manual as guide to properly establish and maintain compliance with Title IX. The three clarification letters apply details on how to regulate affairs specific to athletics, including the three-prong test that emerged with the 1996 publication.¹¹⁰ The three-prong test in relation to athletics mandates that any one of the following three points may be render an institution eligible for compliance with the third test, "accommodation of interests and abilities." The test requires that any given institution must either 1) create a program with a ration of male to female participants proportionate to student enrollment, 2) have a history of adding women's teams, or, 3) successfully meet all interests and abilities.¹¹¹

Thirty years after the 1972 anti-sex-discrimination law passed, "On June 27, 2002, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige established the Secretary's Commission on Opportunities in Athletics—the first federal advisory panel created to study Title IX."¹¹² This letter of clarification again responded to public

¹⁰⁹ Carpenter, Linda Jean, and R. Vivian. Acosta. *Title IX*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2004. Print. 27.

¹¹⁰ Carpenter and Acosta, 2004: 84.

¹¹¹ U.S. Department of Education, 2003: 15

¹¹² *Ibid*, 2.

commentary, agreeing upon twenty-three points of recommendation. Of these twenty-three, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare voted upon fifteen recommendations unanimously, exposing four major themes deemed necessary to address: commitment, clarity, fairness and enforcement.¹¹³ Within the public comments published in this document that trailed Title IX by thirty years, many still voiced concern about interpretation.¹¹⁴ Public criticism today often laments how Title IX leads institutions to cut boy's and men's teams to meet with Title IX compliance rather than increasing opportunities for girls and women.

Marty Mankamyer, former president of the United States Olympic Committee, expressed concern that, "If the current trend of program elimination continues, we will suffer the consequences, as will be evidenced by the absence of American Athletes on the medals podium at future Olympic games."¹¹⁵ Eliminating programs, as Mankamayer suggests, also eliminates competitive American athletes both in Olympic contests and at a professional level, feeding into pro-leagues after college. Reducing men's programs, as a result of institutional attempts to meet proportionality requirements, dramatically hinders the United States' ability to cultivate championship programs, subordinating the US to rival international squads with sturdy training backgrounds enduring in constitution.

Many joined Mankamyer in blaming Title IX for the destruction of male

¹¹³ Ibid., 4-5.

¹¹⁴ U.S. Department of Education, 2003: 7-12

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 9

accomplishments and potential threat to United States athletic success. However, as NCAA's Judith Sweet suggests, this problem stems from how institutions *interpret* the law, not the law itself: "If the decision is made to eliminate sports for gender-equity reasons, it is because institutions have chosen this path rather than pursuing other options."¹¹⁶ Sweet's argument points to proportionality as only one of three tests that satisfy the, "accommodation of interests and abilities." Yet such institutions fail to address other means to meet eligibility. The capping of men's rosters and cutting of less popular men's sports by strict legal definition may determine a team eligible under the proportionality test, while neither improving participation for women nor benefiting male participation as a whole. Rather, this path places all of an institution's weight into its powerhouse sports, elevating hard, revenue-producing sports such as football, baseball and men's basketball above the rest. This not only deprives female participation from increased opportunity and holds other "lesser" men's programs at a standstill. This manner in which greater institutions interpret Title IX thus counteracts its very purpose at increasing equal participation opportunities for all.

Overall, reports on how Title IX has progressed female participation suggest great improvement, allowing more girls and women in the United States opportunities at equal access into the sporting sphere. Professors R. Vivian Acosta and Linda Jean Carpenter's thirty-five year longitudinal study¹¹⁷ on

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 7

¹¹⁷ Acosta/Carpenter. "Women in Intercollegiate Sport. A Longitudinal, National Study, Thirty Five

women in intercollegiate sports reports that female participation has never been higher, with 9,274 women's teams in 2012. The number of intercollegiate women athletes has grown from 16,000 in 1970, before Title IX's enactment, to about 200,000 in 2012. In high school athletics over that period, the participation of girls has grown more than tenfold.¹¹⁸

This major increase in female participation in sport fosters a generation of female athletes, commonly referred to as the "Title IX Babies." Without such vast numbers feeding into the professional sporting sphere from the collegiate level, professional women's sports in the United States would gain little momentum. The attempt at equal resources for women's collegiate teams strengthens the programs and trains the athletes at a higher level, allowing for the players to develop the skills that enter them into the professional realm. Women's sports conversation cannot exist without mention to this historic legislation that forever changed the sporting sphere. The constant flow of young female bodies entering sports begins to normalize the female body as an appropriate sporting body.

Year Update. 1977-2012". Unpublished manuscript. Available for downloading at www.acostacarpenter.ORG

¹¹⁸ Informed by my recent post on the Ms. magazine blog, reporting on ESPN's three-month initiative celebrating Title IX's 40th anniversary this June. The original post can be found at <http://msmagazine.com/blog/blog/2012/03/31/power-worth-celebrating-espn-focuses-on-title-ix/>

PART II

Image and Representation: Professional Female Athletes in 21st Century American Media

CHAPTER FOUR:

Patterns, Norms and Stereotype Formation: How History Works to Create and Maintain the Attitude that, "No one watches women's sports."

PART I of this thesis outlines the history of the female body as rising alongside the institution of sport, focusing on the major American milestones that open physical activity to women. Through the popularization of the bicycle and the absence of male bodies during war, through physical education programs and government legislation dedicated to the female sporting body, girls and women gained the opportunity to explore their sporting potential. Grant Jarvie, author of *Sport, Culture and Society*, explains that, "The history of sport helps to define and answer sporting problems, provide evidence and to illuminate the context in which sport has developed or could develop."¹¹⁹ How does the historicization of women's sports—the positioning of female athletes in their own historical contexts—help to address the problems that continue to afflict female athletes? As sport became popularized and developed into an integral part of American culture and society, ideas about the female body were also changing. The context in which the female sporting body emerged subjects the female athlete to such restricting ideas about woman's capacity to embrace strenuous activity. It divides athletic ability into a hierarchal function that plunges the female athletic body into a space regulated by patriarchal norms. The transformation of the ideal "feminine" female body through exercise and fitness from private to public, passive to active, weak to strong—and the

¹¹⁹ Jarvie, Grant. *Sport, Culture and Society: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2006. Print. 49.

rendering of this transformation as an embrace of traditionally masculine ideals—associates the female athlete with masculinity. This connection with masculinity continues to manipulate how the public views the female athletic body.

Four prominent stereotypes depicting female athletes in a negative light—women in sport as improper, manly, weaker, and hypersexual—all stem in part from, or can be traced back to, the manner in which sport altered the ideal image of womanhood. Such stigmas punish female athletic bodies for having deviated from the ideal femininity that reigned in the United States during the Victorian American Era.¹²⁰

Improper: The active woman—popularized by the bicycle—transgressed Victorian ideals guarded by America during Queen Victoria’s reign. The rise of the woman who engaged in sporting activities transformed the ideal “passive” *lady* to “active” *woman*, and shifted the ideal feminine domestic presence to a public engagement. Journalists who attacked the female cyclist illustrated the transfer from submissive to aggressive as a visible deformation of the female face, circulating the image of the “bicycle stare” as a visual code to how physical activity compromises proper female stature. Reports of and cautions against the “bicycle stare” scorned how such physical strain deformed a woman’s facial composition, hinting at an improperly confrontational appearance. These damaging reports present the female active body as one unbecoming for a lady, unfit for sporting grounds. The popularization of sport as a military tool and an

¹²⁰ The period in which Queen Victoria’s influence on proper behavior and fashion infiltrated the United States

exercise of proper masculinity further historically positions sport as opposing femininity. The very history of sport therefore renders female displays of athleticism as distasteful and improper.

Manly: As sport introduced an athletic prowess unfamiliar to traditional ideals of femininity, deviating bodies appeared more “manly,” both physically, through acquired muscle and bulk, and mentally, through masculine traits such as aggressiveness and power. As outlined in PART I, media images depicted active women with bodies so large they concealed the bicycle beneath them, and mocked female cyclists as large boys with otherwise “neat ankles.” The unusual masculine strength and appearance in sporting women calls sexuality into question. Outstanding female athletic achievement raised suspicion of true womanhood, as seen with the European Olympic competitors during the Cold War that led to gender testing. Similar public skepticism rendered accomplished female athletes as unnatural displays of female sexuality, as with Billie Jean King¹²¹ and many early established female athletes who faced extreme stigmatization, lesbian or not. The attempt to stifle the lesbian stigma only further perpetuated the linking of female athletes with the potential for homosexuality. The generalizations of female athletes as manly, butch and lesbian produce a fear of stigmatization that presents homosexuality as a negative trait plaguing female athletes. This association of homosexuality with other “negative” stereotyping of female athletes equates the diversity of sexual

¹²¹ Billie Jean King refrained from publically coming out as lesbian for many years, yet points to her victory over Bobbi Riggs as “calling sexuality into question” in *Dare to Compete*, for a woman capable of triumphing over a man in a physical manner was not a “normal woman at all.

preferences with the display of improper mannerisms, physical weakness and sexual deviance.

Weaker: The historiography of women entering sport highlights a controversy surrounding physical activity as detrimental to the more fragile feminine mold. At the turn of the nineteenth century, doctors and journalists publicly cautioned against cycling for women. By minimizing competition and maximizing resting time, Play Days join the bicycle as historical symbols of a persisting cultural skepticism of female athletic capability. Previously existing medical concerns engage the female athlete in the discussion of the female body as weaker and incapable of physical exertion, of which men were seen able. Those who stayed home from war represented the physically weaker portion of American society. Even when women entered armed forces in WWII, those members of society unwilling or unfit for combat were left behind. The women at home who gained access to sport because of war conditions were thus already labeled as weaker. Furthermore, female competitors who served as *substitutes*, filling previously male positions emptied by the draft, historically positioned themselves as secondary.

Hypersexual: The athletic, physically active female body was again an abnormal one. Early pride in the physicality of one's body subjected active women to accusations of expressing explicit sexuality. We saw this in Chapter One's media commentary that depicted female cyclists' exposed legs as sexually desirable to onlookers. Historical perceptions envisioned the active female body as emphasizing the functionality of the body, suggesting ability to perform in a

sexual sense. Media sources and public opinion criticized female cyclists for luring men, adding middle class wives to those who opposed rising female activity during the Age of Reform. Similarly, wives forbade their husbands from viewing baseball games that featured female players who replaced men at war. Displays of athleticism on the part of women were seen as displays of overt sexuality: a threat to conventional mores and power relations. Preexisting criticisms accused the active female—who valued her body’s strength and ability to perform—as advertising her sexual potential. Placing female athletes within this historical context situates the female athlete as provocative, aggressive, confrontational, and hypersexual.

So while history renders female athletes as improper, manly, weak, and hypersexual, imagery and rhetoric in popular American culture perpetuates these attitudes. Traces of such negative conceptions of female athletes in both traditional and new media platforms evidence how harmful attitudes perceiving female athletes persist.

The female athlete as antithetical to the “proper” female:

Kane and Greendorfer draw from discourse on the intersections between sport, gender hierarchies and power relations to make the claim, “It is not surprising that traditional definitions of ‘female’ have been antithetical to traditional definitions of ‘athlete.’”¹²² The term “female athlete,” presents a

¹²² Kane and Greendorfer, “Media’s Role in Accommodating and Resisting Stereotyped Images of Women in Sport.” Ed. Pamela Creedon. *Women, Media and Sport: Challenging Gender Values*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994. Print. 32

historical contradiction, as conceptions of “athlete” counteract conceptions of femaleness. Historical norms implicating proper athletic bodies, bodies acceptable to operate within the sporting sphere, stigmatize those not included in these categories. Such isolating of proper athletic bodies is evident, not necessarily in the images that pervade popular sports media, but rather in those that are absent. Reports¹²³ show that from the time *Sports Illustrated* became a print magazine in 1954 to 1978 when Title IX regulations kicked in, women made up less than 5% of the magazine’s covers. The underrepresentation of women on the Sports Illustrated covers reflects a grossly exaggerated discrepancy in participation rates between men and women prior to 1978. Such skewed ratios of women represented in sports media to women participating in sport were misleading the public to false conceptions of female participation in sport during this time period, continuing the conception that men rightfully dominated the sporting sphere.

Hoping to expose progress in the media’s representation of female athletes, I continued this study of surveying *Sports Illustrated* covers for women. I examined every *Sports Illustrated* cover produced in the decade following Title IX and compared the number of featured woman to the single most recent year, expecting to find approximately the same number of featured women in an entire decade of 1980’s covers as those published in 2011. Out of 532 covers includes the nine “Swimsuit Issue” models and two women accompanied by male kin, an additional six by unrelated males. Therefore, the total number of

¹²³ Boutilier, M. A. & San Giovanni, L. (Eds.). (1993). *The Sporting Woman*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Publishers

female athletes appearing without the presence of male accompaniment on non-“Swimsuit Issue” covers accounts to thirteen out of 532, 2.44%. The data collected from 2011 was even more striking—not at all how I imagined the progression of women’s sports coverage. What I found instead was not a progression at all, but rather a decrease in the percentage of featured women who appeared separately from men and the primarily male-pleasing “Swimsuit Issue.” *Sports Illustrated* produced eighty-one print issues in 2011. Three covers contained women. First, the annual “Swimsuit Issue” appeared on February 22, featuring Russian model Irina Shayk, squeezing her breasts with her arms to produce a greater cleavage line and crouching beneath the headline, “Paradise Found in Hawaii.” Over five months passed before the next female, soccer star Hope Solo, appeared on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. And another five months later, Volume 115, Issue 23 reached stands on December 12, 2011, honoring Pat Summit on the cover as Sportswoman of the Year. Next to her, a pinstripe-clad Coach Krzyzewski of the Duke University Blue Devils claimed the Sportsman of the Year title.

Therefore, Solo stands for the 1.23%, the *only* female athlete unaccompanied by a male counterpart represented on any one of eighty-one *Sports Illustrated* covers last year. However, the single 2011 featured female athlete *was* accompanied by the headline, “Heart and Heartbreak: Japan Shocks the U.S. in an Epic Final.” The headline accurately conveys the “heart” with which the goalkeeper and her teammates fought for the World Cup title, and the “heartbreak” that infected sports fans throughout the Nation when the women

fell short of this well-deserved goal. Yet the headline's gendered language, "Heart and Heartbreak," connects female athletic feats with the conventionally feminine-deemed trait of heightened emotionality. Authors Kane and Greendorfer argue that such underscoring of female athleticism with hints of conventional femininity reflects, "one central mechanism for accommodating and resisting women's entry into sport."¹²⁴ Kane and Greendorfer expose a potential to both "accommodate" female athletes by allotting them coverage in sports media, while simultaneously "resisting" the turn to athletic females by emphasizing the withstanding feminine attributes in such media images. Kane and Greendorfer point to *Sports Illustrated's* cover featuring Florence Griffin Junior as evidence of accommodation and resistance occurring simultaneously within sports media, "because she is primarily linked to her 'appropriate' roles as female, not athlete."¹²⁵ While the cover showcases the female track star, the image zooms in on her long and elaborately painted nails flaunted across her face, reestablishing a proper feminine appearance. Similarly, accompanying Hope Solo's image with gendered rhetoric converts the symbol of a powerful athletic female figure into a caricature of the conventional emotionally charged female.

The underrepresentation of female athleticism on 2011 *Sports Illustrated* covers again circulates the generalization that male athletes dominate the

¹²⁴ Kane and Greendorfer, "Media's Role in Accommodating and Resisting Stereotyped Images of Women in Sport." Ed. Pamela Creedon. *Women, Media and Sport: Challenging Gender Values*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994. Print. 33.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

popular sporting sphere. These print covers, though also available online¹²⁶, envelop magazines that ship off to those who still subscribe to *SI* in print, despite a proliferation of content available online at SI.com. Those subscribing to *Sports Illustrated* in 1954 represent an older generation that existed prior to the influx of new media that moves content to online sources, a generation that preexisted such unprecedented popularity of female involvement in sport.¹²⁷ If early subscribers from *Sports Illustrated*'s first years of publication still makeup a majority of the subscribers in print, then the lack of present female athletes might suggest an attempt to appeal to this original generation of consumers. Yet this lack of diversity of images generated by popular sports media sources such as *Sports Illustrated* creates a uniform standard of what athletic bodies should look like. If dominating images depicting athletes reveal an unvarying "proper" sporting body, the failure to depict the diversity of bodies within the sports realm then labels all absent bodies as "improper" within the sporting sphere. Despite a growing cultural inclination towards athletically built women, the historical association with their nineteenth-century counterparts—whose peddling through public streets counteracted conventional norms of

¹²⁶ <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/cover/select/2011-01-01/2011-12-31/dd/1/index.htm>

¹²⁷ Acosta and Carpenter report in the following longitudinal study that female participation at the collegiate level reached an all-time high in 2012: Acosta/Carpenter. "Women in Intercollegiate Sport. A Longitudinal, National Study, Thirty-Five Year Update. 1977-2012". Unpublished manuscript. Available for downloading at www.acostacarpenter.ORG

femininity—situates pervading images of female-bodied athletes in sports media as improper demonstrations of femininity.¹²⁸

Female athletes as unnatural displays of masculinity:

With proper women—passive, inactive, fragile, submissive—demonstrating proper femininity, those contrary to this norm appear absurdly masculine. Even within a 21st Century America that progresses towards welcoming the athletic female body, professional female athletes must obtain the greatest bulk in body mass to advance their profession, and, therefore, are criticized for their unnatural display of masculinity. The greatest known living example of this phenomenon is Serena Williams. Starting an early professional career alongside her sister, Venus, Serena faced the double jeopardy of a young Black athletic female, subject to both racist and sexist slurs. On the Women’s Tennis Association’s attitude towards racial diversity, her father has reportedly said, “The WTA is a close-knit community that tends to embrace its own. We've never been a part of it.”¹²⁹ Her body bears the symbol of intersecting oppressions, tripled by her extreme feminine strength. For this, Williams has sparked public controversy that probes such unnaturally masculine displays of powers for hints of drug use. The new millennium brought rise to an old means of thinking, as the early 2000’s raised a popular public opinion that still stands: that such a powerful female body can be obtained only by illegal doping. A 2011 online

¹²⁸ The prevalence of Black women in popular professional sports may also help to reassert female athletes as improper, as traditional notions of American womanhood historically excluded Black women, as proclaimed in Sojourner Truth’s 1851 “Ain’t I A Woman” speech.

¹²⁹ Samuels, Allison. “Life With Father.” Editorial. *Newsweek Magazine* 1 July 2001. *The Daily Beast*. Newsweek/Daily Beast, 01 July 2001. Web. 12 Jan. 2012.

<<http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2001/07/01/life-with-father.html>>

forum entitled, "Steroid Use Catching Up With Serena Williams" states, "Looks like steroids is finally catching up with this she-beast. Let's all pray for this guy known as Serena."¹³⁰ This statement introduces the two main bases for which Williams receives criticism. Mocking Williams as a "guy" points to the cultural attitude that bodily female power is masculine, further implicating that women cannot display physical strength. The belittling of Williams as "she-beast," not only subjugates female strength, but also reinforces the prevalent caricature of Black female sexuality as animalistic¹³¹. A popular tennis blog publicly accuses Williams of steroid use in a report announcing her defeat over Sharapova:

The thicker and more mighty Serena Williams overpowered Maria Sharapova 6-1 6-2 last night in the Australian Open Final [...] The real question is does the WTA Tour test for performance enhancing drugs? I mean Serena Williams looks like she is on a healthy diet of steroids for breakfast, lunch and dinner with animal adrenaline for dessert. I think it might be time to start the investigation¹³²

Likening the female athlete's "thick" and "mighty" body to that of an animal with imagery of animal behavior and excessive consumption, this tennis blogger attributes such unnatural power display to steroid ingestion. Continuing the attack against Williams for her unwomanly, inhuman display of power, this blog post prompted several user replies that agree:

¹³⁰ "Steroid Use Catching up with Serena Williams." *Topix*. 2 Mar. 2011. Web. 22 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.topix.com/forum/afam/TLCC8IQ2LVG2S7DON>>

¹³¹ Common Black feminist thought attributes stereotypes of Black women as sexually perverse to two main origins: the historical threat that Black sexuality represented due to interracial sexual relations, and the common misconception that all Black Americans are African Americans, linking "wild" and "animal" imagery to the continent of Africa. This untamed Black sexuality often presents itself in the symbol of the Jezebel, or Biblical fallen women, that strips Black women of both their womanhood and humanlike qualities.

¹³² "Serena Williams on Steroids?" *Sports Underground*. 7 Jan. 2007. Web. 22 Mar. 2012.

How are any of the women in the tournament supposed to match up against this she-thing? Honestly, she's got the body of a professional wrestler. And do you hear her testosterone-fueled he-man grunts during the game? I thought Bill Bixby was somewhere in the crowd hulking up

Once a person does not even look human anymore it becomes quite obvious that he/she is taking steroids.

she is abnormally and even freakishly thick.

Asymmetrical muscular development is a common problem with steroid use. Her right arm is twice the diameter of the left. She has become highly aggressive, witness the ugly display where she threatened a French opponent

And lastly:

What ever happened to playing like a human, instead of a wild animal. Test test test CATCH THOSE OFFENDER CHEATERS.

This commentary describes her powerful female body as "thick," "freakish," "abnormal" and "asymmetrical," earning Williams the labels of "wild animal," "she-thing," "she-beast," "CHEATER," "testosterone-fueled he-man" and, more directly, "this guy known as Serena." Three escalating themes describing Williams run rampant through such threads, making unqualified steroid accusations on the basis of appearance: abnormal, manly and inhuman. Accounting for an extra boost in confidence that the anonymity of Internet forums provides, such public responses to open forums and online blogs reflects the uncensored beliefs of the 21st century public. The online interactive presence that surrounds sports websites, blogs and forums conveys persisting evidence of cultural attitudes interchanging "excessive" female strength with masculinity and beastliness.

Yet such public defamation of Serena Williams for her unnatural bodily strength emerges beyond the safety of anonymous web forums. On air, Sid Rosenberg of *Imus in the Morning* recalls a story between he and a friend:

One time, a friend, he says to me, 'Listen, one of these days you're gonna see Venus and Serena Williams in *Playboy*.' I said, 'You've got a better shot at *National Geographic*.'

Both *Playboy* and *National Geographic* display subjects actively behaving in uncivilized manners to varying degrees. Popular anti-pornographic views fault *Playboy* for eroticizing bodies in a manner that solicits perverse thoughts, depicts women as sex objects, encourages sexual domination and naturalizes unrealistic perceptions of bodies and sexualities. Yet placing the Williams sisters in the pages of *National Geographic* implicates their physical displays as animalistic or even tribal, belonging in the wilderness rather than in civilized society. It is popular in sports rhetoric to consult “animal” imagery to describe an athlete’s fierce tenacity to win. Yet Rosenberg imagines Venus and Serena appearing in *National Graphic* rather than *Playboy*, suggesting they would be posing nude. These combined elements of nude, animal, and Black conjure the racist, sexist sentiments that temporarily cost Rosenberg his job. Depicting Williams as worthy of *National Geographic*, Rosenberg insults muscular, Black, athletic bodies as savage and unnatural, reducing such champion feminine strength as contrary to human understanding. Both men ban the athletes to realms outside of ordinary social approval.

Seeking to reverse such destructive stereotypes conveying muscular professional women athletes as unnaturally masculine, NIKE, Inc launched a

2005 campaign that sought to celebrate female power and strength in sports. The advertisements present images of various body parts, together with personal reflections, as a symbol of female athletic prowess. One advertisement displays a pair of black Nike shorts revealing muscular thighs, with the following words:

I HAVE
THUNDER THIGHS.

And that's a compliment
Because they are strong

And toned
And muscular

And though they are unwelcome
In the petite section

They are cheered in marathons.

Fifty years from now
I'll bounce a grandchild on my thunder thighs
And then I'll go out for a run.
JUST DO IT.

NikeWomen.com

The ad exults “thunder thighs” as a bodily symbol of strength, embracing the historical caricature of “overly large” female athletes. The reflection points to the “petite section” as representative of society, looking to fit its women into petite sizes. Female athletes with “thunder thighs” are “unwelcome” here, fitting in neither physically nor socially. The narrator therefore directly acknowledges how society popularly imagines strong women as transgressing social mores. In coupling registers that denote age—“fifty years from now” and “grandchild”—with fitness, the ad also celebrates physical activity as increasing longevity of life

and productivity. This reinstates female athletes enhanced abilities to perform proper displays of womanhood, represented in this case by the child. The athletic woman here yields not only children but also grandchildren: the “thunder thighs” literally supporting the weight of the bouncing grandchild. Immediately following the maternal act, the narrator goes for a run. Thus, the ad illustrates that strong and powerfully “large” female athletes can retain both their muscle and their womanhood, capable of such proper “womanly” demonstrations as maternal care.

Consistently throughout this Nike campaign, the ads both highlight the female athlete as falling outside the norm, while attacking the belief that strong women threaten potential male romantic powers, and thus surrender any promise of heteronormative relationships in their future. (*Introduce Atalanta syndrome? Too much?*) A second image and corresponding narrative commemorate the “big butt”:

My butt is big and round like the letter C
And ten thousand lunges
Have made it rounder
But not smaller
And that’s just fine.
It’s a space heater
For my side of the bed.
It’s my ambassador
To those who walk behind me
It’s a border collie
That herds skinny women
Away from the best deals
At clothing sales.
My butt is big
And that’s just fine
And those who might scorn it
Are invited to kiss it.
Just do it.

Again the woman with the muscular body embraces her female strength, accepting her big butt as, “just fine.” She humorously points to benefits of a big butt, in a manner that sarcastically addresses popular criticisms. The line, “Heats *my* [emphasis mine] side of the bed,” calls awareness to the *other* side of the bed where someone sleeps: presumably a romantic partner, who has been around long enough to have established a side. This mocks the stereotype of athletic women with big butts as too “manly” to attract men and thus unable to both obtain and maintain sexual or romantic relationships. The ad also compares the butt to a, “border collie that herds skinny women away from the best deals at clothing sales.” As sale items represent unwanted items by the majority of society, the ad addresses how society caters to “skinny women,” offering deals on clothing for the “unusual” or less popular body types. While the carrier of the “thunder thighs” directly acknowledges such stigmatization of muscular women, the bearer of the “big butt” proves more confrontational. The “big butt” advertisement invites those who scorn such a physical manifestation of female power to, “kiss it.” The campaign calls to notice how athletic bodies represent both unwanted traits as well as threats to cultural establishments, such as heteronormative relations and patriarchal dominance within this romantic realm. It demands female athletes embrace their own muscular bodies, and asks society to expand the notions of womanhood to include female strength.

Assumptions of “weakness” plaguing professional female athletes:

While one cultural attitude rejects female muscle, another denies its existence all together. Medical concerns cautioning risk to female reproductive tracts no longer prevent the majority of women from enjoying a joy ride on her bicycle or exclude female athletes from long distance track events. But the established relationship linking discussions of women’s sports and ideas of “weakness” persists in contemporary American popular culture. Often attitudes reflect an assumed *mental* weakness prohibiting female athletes from reaching full bodily potential. Current Head Coach Beth Torina of the Florida-based USSSA¹³³ Pride and LSU softball discusses mental barriers with espnW:

Some of my players think it's tough for women to push themselves outside their comfort zone because we're in tune with our feelings [...] I think it's important to set daily goals. After you meet them, you have increased confidence and can continue to push yourself to get better and better

Coach Torina addresses how generalizations of female athletes as carrying mental barriers plague team confidence and, therefore, performance. The high demands of competing at a professional level necessitate the completion of strenuous and often painful physical tasks. Professional athletes must consult their experience and awareness of their body and its limits to decipher when to tough out the pain to accomplish a goal, and when to stop the pain that serves as warning signal to the body, cautioning permanent damage. Yet Torina’s statements suggest that the linking of female athletes with more astute emotional concern can skew this process of deciding when to proceed. Women,

¹³³ United States Specialty Sports Association, Fast Pitch

“in tune with their feelings” carry the burden of intensified emotional receptors that prevent them from risking further exhaustion on the body. Torina describes how such assumptions, fixed by the historical rendering of women as less capable of conceptualizing toughness, serve as mental obstacles that must be dismantled. With the challenge of daily goals, the professional female athletes gain confidence in their physical ability, overcoming any lingering uncertainty of female strength that cloud their ability to perform. Yet the case of the Florida-based USSSA Pride NPF¹³⁴ Softball team demonstrates how preconceived notions can prevent female athletes from reaching their physical potential.

Other subtle messages coded within American popular culture that ties female athletes to the concept of weakness emerge in the subordination of women’s sports as a whole. Ms. magazine’s sardonic bog post entitled, “Women vs. People” organizes submissions from readers that illustrate, “the annoying habit of having products and products-for-women.”¹³⁵ One submission displays REI’s variety of bike options: “road bikes,” “mountain bikes,” “urban and commuting bikes” and “women’s bikes.” Another highlights the Adidas webpage that organizes performance wear into categories: “Basketball,” “Running,” “Soccer,” “Football,” “Baseball,” “Training,” and “Women.” The “Women VS People” Ms. blog post illuminates inherent sexism in marketing language, which blog author Lisa Wade deconstructs: “The phenomenon illustrates the way we continue to think of men as people and women as women, thereby centering

¹³⁴ National Pro Fastpitch

¹³⁵Wade, Lisa <http://msmagazine.com/blog/blog/2012/01/12/women-vs-people/> Ed. Ms. magazine. 01/12/2012.

men and men's lives as 'normal.'" As Wade suggests, such marketing language positions sports as "normal" for men, while women fall outside of that "normal" sporting category. When sporting good companies such as REI and Adidas market equipment for sports separate from equipment for women, they create a physical divide between women and the sporting sphere. The Adidas webpage tab entitled "women" following tabs containing various names of sports establishes the visual impression that "women" do not belong in these preceding sporting categories. Rather than dividing sporting goods by "equipment for men" and "equipment for women," the former manner of marketing goods implies that women's equipment does not qualify as sport's equipment. Such language apparent in sports marketing serves to normalize the way we view women's sports as inferior; there are sports, and then there are women's sports. The repetition of this attitude in popular culture justifies subordinating women's sports on the basis of their assumed "weaker" physical potential.

Ad campaigns battling this stereotype illustrate a variety of responses on the part of professional female athletes. In 2007, NIKE, Inc. launched its multi-platform ATHLETE campaign, including a series of commercial clips. The intimate feel of the clips invites the viewer into the vast open frame's expanse. Individual professional women athletes, wearing T-shirts that vary in color from pink to blue to gray to white with the word "ATHLETE" across the chest, walk up three platform steps and speak into a larger-than-life megaphone-shaped device. The platform on which they stand symbolically announces their victories and accomplishments as ATHLETES, while they too announce their accomplishments

into the oversized megaphone. In this way, the campaign creates a transparent message: it aims to emit a message both clear and loud, for all to hear. A few transcribed clips¹³⁶ demonstrate the powerful message that declares each individual woman as ATHLETE:

The halfpipe doesn't care that I'm a girl. You suck, you mess up, you get thrashed. The pipes thrash the girls just as hard as the boys. I respect that. I'm Gretchen Bleiler, snowboarder.

Gretchen relays that her sport does not treat women any differently than it does men. And she respects that. Professional Streetball player Alvina Carroll suggests differently:

I play with the men, because it makes me quicker, faster, stronger. It makes me better. They might be out there saying, "Auhh she's a girl," but give me ten minutes [laughs]. Ten *seconds!* Then they won't see a girl, or a boy. They'll just see a ball player.

Carroll admits that training at a high level of competition with the men improves her skills. But once she plays, and displays her skills, gender becomes irrelevant. All that is left to notice is her skills. Mia Hamm, professional women's soccer player for the U.S National team, gives a laundry list of titles she has won, pausing at, "All-time leading scorer of international soccer—male or female." In an informal address to the cameraman, she laughs, admitting, "I'm trying to think of what else I've won." Yet just as she trails off, this casual conversation settling a feeling of comfort with the viewer, a quick cut skirts the pause and presents the viewer eye to eye with Hamm: "I have won ZERO bake sales." Hamm

¹³⁶ NIKE, Inc. Advertisement. Web.

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FByrnI68vk4>>

confronts the tendency to “feminize” female athletes— the compulsion to defend how female athletes are both athletic *and* feminine. Hamm reverses this thinking: “I have won ZERO bake sales.” She sets herself apart as an athlete that does not fit the “proper” feminine mold. Yet she is still a woman. And she rattles off her titles for the world to hear, demanding her position in American society as ATHLETE.

Yet professional Beach Volleyball world competitor Gabrielle Reece shares a different experience:

I used to say that I did a song and dance and had my picture taken, as a *girl*, so that it enabled me to play sports, financially and otherwise. If you think the system’s unfair, don’t cry about it. Figure it out. Work the system

She cautions aspiring professional female athletes of the brutal market that forces young females towards any desperate means of coverage, recognition and sponsorship dollars. Reece’s tone when describing her readiness to perform seemingly trivializing stunts for the opportunity to play, acknowledges the less-than-ideal path she, and many struggling female athletes, had to take. She points to the system as “unfair,” and as emphasizing the “feminine” in song, dance and image. However, she advises young women to take advantage of the system, to establish the grounds, and to get to where they can actually play sports. Then, on a platform such as the one on which Reece stands, prove the body’s true ability—it’s athleticism. While Reece’s stance offers a different opinion from those of the other athletes, she highlights the fight to declare the true value of

the female athletic body, against those who wish to market and commoditize it in a manner that underscores its potential.

These clips, only a small portion of the Nike ATHLETE campaign, provide an assortment of varying images of female athletes. Some face the camera, addressing the viewer. Some face the megaphone, addressing an off-sight listener. Their sporting grounds vary from street, to snow, to field, to beach. Some are just beginning their careers as successful professionals, while others celebrate ten years of competition at the professional level. Yet despite their differing backgrounds and opinions on how to approach market consumerism, on how to confront stereotypes, and on how to manage sexism against women in sports, they all agree on two things: they are women, and they are ATHLETES. This diversity of voices representing professional women's sports shatters the misconception that female athletes fit into one uniform ideal. The variety demands, above all, a respect for women as athletes. In case the commercials, t-shirts, print advertisements and billboards do not scream, "ATHLETE," loudly enough, Nancy Monsarrat, 2007 Nike US Brand Director, lays out the campaign's message directly: "Female does not equal less than, and women in sport need to be respected for their athletic abilities above and beyond anything else."¹³⁷ This 2007 campaign offers the real voices of female athletes, voicing their own stories. Directly from them, we hear a convincing diversity of battles that female

¹³⁷ Nike Assembles All-Star Cast Calling for Equality in Women's Sports." *NIKE, Inc.* -. 24 Aug. 2007. Web. 12 Jan. 2012. <<http://nikeinc.com/nike-womens/news/nike-assembles-all-star-cast-calling-for-equality-in-womens-sports>>

athletes undertake to overcome the preexisting notion: woman athlete equals lesser.

Unlike this direct call for attention to the issue, one means of reinstating the professional female athlete as “weak” is less detectable, hiding sexism coded within altered media images. This message speaks in neither verbal nor visible cues. That which remains *unseen* in images depicting female athletes, yet exists in bodily form, reflects a cultural suppression of female strength. During espnW’s “Does Sex Sell?” summit, professional soccer player and ESPN.com’s “Hottest Female Athlete of 2004” Heather Mitts shares her experiences seeing a reproduced image of her own body. Upon viewing the resulting image of her shoot, Heather recalls being surprised at the extent to which her body had been altered, and “bummed” that she could hardly recognize the body in the image as her own: “We [female athletes] have all kinds of body types. We have muscles, and it’s a great thing. And to have that taken away just to be, basically, a sex symbol... it was disappointing for me.” Photo processing techniques, which literally rubbed away the lines of Mitts’s musculature, sculpted a reproduced image. This resulting image diminished the strength in which Mitts took pride, taking away the material proof of her rigorous training. Altering images of female athletes, and re-producing these reconstructions as natural, presents female athletic bodies as more “feminine,” and less muscular. This process of diminishing female strength occurs in a procedure nearly undetectable by public surveillance. Without athletes such as Mitts speaking out against the prioritization of feminine fragility over female strength, this process would go

completely unnoticed by someone viewing the image, further popularizing the image of women as lacking physical strength. Removing definitive lines of musculature to create a more sexy “feminine” appearance, therefore, literally erases women’s physical power and replaces muscle with sex appeal.

Female athletes hypersexualized by media images and rhetoric:

Mitts felt disappointed that the athletic body she trained so hard to build was not enough to “sell” women’s sports, according to the altered image reproduced from her shoot. Sports teach women how to exercise, train, and strengthen their bodies, providing both the knowledge and the arena to do so. They allow women to establish a body confidence that is achieved in a healthy and sustainable manner. Sport requires professional athletes to maintain a lifestyle of fitness that develops an appreciation for female strength. It creates a spiritual connection between athlete and body that guides a woman to understand and love her body. When marketing techniques focus, not on the strength, but rather on the sex appeal of the female body, it strips the female athlete of this self-appreciation. Using sex appeal as a marketing strategy enters the female athletic body into a complicated and slippery relationship that intertwines the elements of both sex and money. Stigma arises from this linking of sex and money, as the exchange of sex for monetary gain already stands as a highly controversial social taboo. Using “sex” to sell women’s sports forces the female athlete to surrender personal control over her body for industrial purposes. It transfers her own satisfaction with her beautiful body into the

hands of public consumers—strangers that most likely played no part in the grueling efforts to create such beauty. It commercializes her personal athletic accomplishments and disciplined training. Those who play sports as a profession make a career out of the entertainment aspect of sport, earning money for their athletic ability. Sponsorship dollars offer professional athletes money for that which their body symbolizes: the ability to perform incredible physical feats. It is these *accomplishments* that represent a company offering sponsorship dollars, not the physical body itself. Yet, marketing female athletes using sex appeal rather than strength commoditizes the physical body itself and not its sporting ability. Dr. LaVoi would agree with this process. When asked, does sex sell? She responds, “Sex sells sex. Sex might not sell women’s sport.”

Unsexing female athletes with multi-media campaigns:

A few prominent campaigns stand out as seeking to reverse this “sexing” of the female athletic body, with varying degrees of success. Featured on another proactive advertisement by NIKE, Inc., Serena Williams points her racket at the viewer, her eyes directly catching the central viewing point as if to call out the consumer. “Are you looking at my titles?” challenges the headline that separates the previous image from a second one, in which Williams faces the camera in profile view with crossed arms and the word “ATHLETE” across her chest. Commonly believed to be in response to the harmful comments made on the *Imus in the Morning* show, the advertisement sheds light on the tendencies to focus on the wrong assets when looking at female athletes. The word

“ATHLETE”—located on the shirt’s chest portion—redirects the gaze of any spectator whose attention drifts away from the female athlete’s accomplishments. Such messages reverse the prioritization of sexual attraction over athletic achievement within the realm of professional women’s sports.

This tendency to sexualize the female athlete, to highlight her body’s attractiveness rather than its strength, prompted ESPN to make a different kind of statement using the athletic body. ESPN noted that the *Sports Illustrated* “Swimsuit Issue” always receives a lot of media attention and stirs public dialogue. But it is just a bunch of women in bikinis. Vice President at ESPN Editorial Rob King recalls wanting to make a different statement about athletics and the athletes’, “greatest tools”: their bodies. The ESPN Body Issue displays nude—yet artfully positioned—athletic bodies, depicting both male and female professional athletes in active movements. The first ever Body Issue required a panel of diverse individuals to bring it together—a whole collection of varying genders, races and body sizes working collaboratively to gather an assorted group of athletes. On the process of preparing the issue, King and his colleagues asked, what kind of storytelling could be done to celebrate the athletic body? “How can we *surprise* people?” Athletes’ forms take a lot of shapes. The ESPN Body Issue aims to demonstrate this.

Contrary to the *Sports Illustrated* “Swimsuit Issue” that props female models in stationary inviting poses, the ESPN Body Issue seeks to celebrate the natural beauty of active and strong athletic bodies as an art form. Such displays include powerfully muscular bodies within the definition of “real beauty” for

both men and women, dispelling the notion that female musculature transgresses “real” femininity. King asserts, “The last thing we want to do is de-emphasize muscle,” disclosing that the only major editing done was to conceal genitalia that would both distract the viewers attention on strength and prove inappropriate for home settings. The image of roller derby player Suzy Hotrod—her legs and muscular body bent in a demanding derby action—exemplifies just how hard the often-underappreciated sport truly is. King—and probably many viewers—took away from this image that, “roller derby is a serious sport. It’s no wonder she is so fast and so strong.” Hotrod’s musculature allows her to navigate the treacherous territory of the derby rink, earning her title as one of the most premier athletes recognized in the sport. The ESPN Body Issue showcases her body as a testament not only to the grueling nature of derby and the strength it cultivates, but also to the art of performance. This crucial notion, that which conceptualizes the female athletic body as an art form, rearranges the ordering of the body’s functions by relative importance to establish performance and strength ahead of sexual appeal as top priority.

After each issue, a huge event brings together all athletes and contributors of the issue to celebrate the publication and reflect upon the mission of rethinking the athletic body in new ways. Figures such as Hotrod and Solo join together to share their excitement about the magazine’s results. It appears the athletes posing for the ESPN Body Issue come away with a confidence that starkly contrasts Mitt’s disenchantment with “her own” image—though altered enough she may not have claimed it using such possessive terms.

The ESPN Body Issue produces results that capture the raw essence of athletic strength: results that accurately convey the athlete's hard work in which they can take pride. One crucial dividing factor separating the ESPN Body graphics from other images of exposed female athletes is this intent. The ESPN mission is neither to construct nor to reconstruct the athletic body, but merely to display it and celebrate it in its purest form.

Yet while the images present remain true, those absent speak to how even the most diverse and scrupulous selection panel organized to gather athletes excludes certain physical attributes from traditional notions of beauty. Recognizing the diversity of athletic forms still does not entirely embrace all bodies. Nor does awarding precedence to athletic achievement totally diminish consciousness of the female athlete's potential for sex appeal. Previously serving as editor for the ESPN magazine, working to produce three consecutive Body Issues, Sue Hovey divulges to the espnW "Does Sex Sell?" summit listeners how internal discussions coinciding with the athlete selection process still evaluate on the basis of perceived levels of attraction, in a process Hovey coins as "beefcaking." To one colleague, even the smallest physical distraction such as short hair could hinder an athlete's highest potential to attract certain male supporters. Weighing in on potential athletes for the most recently published Body Issue of 2011, Hovey recalls hearing, "Guys prefer to look at women with long hair." But to Hovey, attraction is primarily gauged by achievement. She detects "something about success that changes the way people look at you [...] Results make you more attractive."

As a shifting social environment in contemporary United States welcomes the athletic mold, it becomes difficult to separate the athletes' physical attraction from their accomplishments. If results transmit beauty, as Hovey believes to be true, professional female athletes will always be conceptually linked to this aura of attractiveness. Successful marketers may seek to capitalize on this level of heightened beauty in displaying athletic bodies. But the manner in which this is done—which parts of the body are emphasized and for what function—determines the *quality* of respect that the athletic body's demands as an artistic form, and as an object of public spectacle. King reflects that sex will probably always sell, but insists upon bringing the additional power component to the forefront. Many join King in targeting the image of female power as vital to advancing women's sports as a mission. Yet even those conscious of this aim can miss the target. The Women's Tennis Association (WTA) launched a campaign in December of 2011 that sounded promising to the image of professional women's tennis players, if the campaign were to accomplish the message its very name implies: "Strong is Beautiful." The campaign, preceding the WTA Championships in Istanbul, utilizes various mediums to distribute across a number of markets, depicting professional female tennis players from the United States and around the world. What great potential to exalt the strength of a body of female athletes with such a history of stigmatization. WTA CEO Stacey Allaster speaks on the campaign's intent to the wtatennis.com news blog:

We want to develop a closer relationship with our fans and attract a new generation of fans to women's tennis, and the Strong is Beautiful campaign is one way to get it done. This campaign will serve as a creative marketing

platform for our players, tournaments, year-end WTA Championships and the entire sport¹³⁸

To “attract a new generation of fans to women's tennis,” proposes a promising goal, acknowledging the needs to readdress the way we view professional women’s tennis with a “new” type of viewership and to create a supportive community in relationship with women’s tennis—the players, the league, the Championships and the sport. And while Allaster assigns the Strong is Beautiful campaign to this worthy task, she makes no explicit mention here of establishing female muscle as beautiful. The Strong is Beautiful campaign would assumingly establish female strength as beautiful.

Dr. LaVoi¹³⁹ expresses her disappointment in the campaign, which she views as trivializing to the athletes and pushing athleticism to the back front. Images of elegant dresses, long hair and glistening skin consume the campaign—and the images *are* beautiful. The WTA posts on YouTube the campaign video clip *The Beauty of Power*, featuring Kim Clijsters, Serena Williams, and a myriad of players from varying countries. The WTA description of the campaign appears below the clip: “It draws upon their athleticism and grace and is a celebration of strong women from all corners of the world.” It accomplishes this, drawing on both athleticism and grace. The production’s artful mise-en-scène succeeds in emphasizing beauty: the music, the slow motion, the clever camera angles, the pastel colors and lightweight materials streaming from the athletes

¹³⁸ Allaster, Stacey. WTA Launches Strong Is Beautiful Campaign." *WTA News*. 12 May 2011. Web. 12 Jan. 2012. <http://www.wtatennis.com/news/20110512/wta-launches-strong-is-beautiful-campaign_2256076_2358555>

¹³⁹ Associate Director of the Tucker Center for Research on Girls and Women in Sports, panelist speaker for 2011 espnW “Does Sex Sell?” summit

bodies alongside rivulets of hair, the glittery powder substance that explodes each time racket and tennis ball meet. It paints tennis as an art form, strength as a beauty, and body as the athlete's most valuable and intricate sporting good. The athletes' movements are beautiful. Their sport is beautiful. Their strength is beautiful. But what style of beauty does the campaign stress? The continued linking of "grace" with sport, tennis in particular, seems to undo how women's sport has expanded notions of acceptable beauty away from the graceful "proper" traditional woman.

A "behind the scenes" YouTube video also posted by the WTA informs viewers of the process in filming the WTA reel. The athletes are interviewed while sitting in chairs, multiple makeup artists and hairstylists fixing up the women as they speak. *Strong is beautiful*. But perhaps bodily strength is not beautiful enough to stand alone as ambassador for the body's beauty? The focus on cosmetics, commodities and elements of unnatural beauty introduces the first of five elements in "behind the scenes" video that I detected as working against the message's potential. The second distraction, also appearing in the final cut, is how the dresses drift upward to reveal a better look at the athlete's assets—and not their accomplishments. Tennis players and fans know that skirts and dresses flip up to expose the preventative under shorts most players wear, and that this is a common occurrence in the sport. But what does highlighting this occurrence achieve for a campaign that hopes to celebrate strength as beauty? It positions female athletes as objects of sexual desire: the act of unveiling the female active body depicted as sensual, and interpreted by many as sexual. A

third moment that the video could have done without, to leave a less contradictory message, flashes to a romantic touch between player and male partner. *Strong is Beautiful*. But is single? Would strong have been beautiful enough without the romantic partner? Potentially intended to dispel the notions that strong women cannot also obtain traditional romance, the male appearance might also hint that women can be neither strong nor beautiful without this male kiss. Mostly, it distracts the attention away from athleticism and back towards feminine “appeal.” A black studded collar worn by one female pro serves as an equally unnecessary addition, unless this item is always worn as a sort of good luck token. The collar—black and studded—most frequently otherwise appears in relations to domestic pets or instruments used to extract pleasure from the combination of pain and sex. These associations bog this item with greater implications of submission and overt sexuality when placed on a woman. The last noteworthy factor trivializing the intended message is that the athletes’ bodies glisten rather than sweat. *Strong is beautiful*. Strength materializes from hard work. Also a product of hard work, sweat—not glitter—embodies the extraordinarily demanding tasks of which female athletes are capable. De-emphasizing sweat as a body of sparkles, though a striking artistic choice that paints sweats as beautiful, also makes light of female strength. Many of these components of elegance aim to emphasize the beauty inherent in the female athlete’s body, form, motion, and strength. Yet the campaign does not effectively execute this goal, producing instead a contradictory message. Rather than direct attention to the natural beauty of tennis’s strong female body, these elements

draw the attention away. However, a statement by Billie Jean King in the “making of” video redirects focus to true signifiers of natural beauty in women’s tennis players: “Athleticism, grit, and our power, and all the positive things that make up a character.” The WTA campaign exemplifies how important messages intended to advance women’s sport can also be tainted by visual representations and common associations rooted within the imagery.

This chapter outlines how historic patterns inform cultural assumption in a manner that subordinates women’s sports through repeated patterns and norms that form harmful stereotypes. Such historical situation of the female athletic body alongside resistance to the changing notions of the ideal female body affect both the attitude surrounding women’s sports, and the ability to positively represent female athletes. These preconceived notions concerning women’s sports persist in troubling female athletes today and provide current backing to the history of subordination. Such attitudes trivializing women’s sports do so, not necessarily with blatant intent, but rather with sexist undertones found in the language and imagery. Such regressive stereotyping via platforms with massive public audiences fuels the social ideology that *no one watches women’s sports*, explaining why patriarchal and heteronormative models still so powerfully reign over the sporting sphere. This attitude suggesting a lack of interest feeds lack of coverage, which in turn hinders others from becoming interested. It enters women’s sports into a vicious cycle: one that demands coverage to gain any sort of support at a greater nation level. But by undoing these normalized ideas through a similar process of repetition, by repeating

counteracting ideas of the female athletic body, the attitude that *no one watches women's sports* can be reversed. This process of positive representation necessitates a collaborative dialogue in which many active agents take part.

CHAPTER FIVE:

Viewing relationships and active agents in image and representation

The manner in which professional female athletes are represented guides the process of imagining, or creating an image of, women's sport. In this way, representation informs perception. While the previous chapter focuses on interactions between media sources and the public, there are multiple hands that operate this crucial viewing relationship. The interface between female athletes and those that reflect upon female athletes continues to determine cultural conceptions of professional women's sports. It reconstructs the image—both physical and mental—of professional female athletes. Participating members in this relationship can be categorized into three main groups: the public, the professional sporting body, and those who present the professional sporting body to the public. The groups involved in this intricate viewing relationship serve as agents with the active ability to maneuver the “attitude” surrounding women's sports. The public members of contemporary American society reflect upon professional female athletes by engaging with material that depicts the athletes via commentary, forums and blogs. Yet sports consumers also engage in the topic of professional women's sports in daily conversation, and in being present at women's sporting events. The sporting body encompasses more than just the individual athlete, including the teams, leagues and organizations that govern the individual athletes. Those who report on the sporting body to the public as their profession include all traditional and

new media sources from journalists, magazines and television to webcasts, websites, blogs and social media sites. Yet this last group connecting the female athlete to the public—providing depictions of female athletes to the masses—also consists of the athletes, the bodies governing the athletes, and the public. These three sets control the image of women’s sport, both in physical form and mental image. This chapter seeks to deconstruct this complex pluralistic operating system that underpins public conception of the female athlete.

Chapter Four presents media sources that both perpetuate and reverse repressive stereotypes of professional female athletes. Tennis blogs, Talk Show hosts, ESPN, *Sports Illustrated* and NIKE, Inc all re-present female bodies in different manners. All sources of information comment on female sports to a large audience of public consumers, highlighting a variety of focal points. “The media” represents, not a single entity, but a diversity of voices in the same way that athletes represent a diversity of bodies. There is a public tendency to generalize all media sources as one monolithic power, the looming presence of “*The Media*.” Conceptualizing media sources as such negates the responsibility of each individual source to carefully assess the manner in which it chooses to re-present its material to public consumers. This responsibility falls on all members of “*the media*.” There are many other mediators between athlete and public consumer that actively take role in conveying messages—negative, positive and neutral—about female athletes.

Previously described posts accusing Serena Williams of steroid use exemplifies how public web users can engage in destructive conversations on

blogs and public forums online. Similar ideology re-circulates in face-to-face dialogue. EspnW creates an online platform whose web presence remains consistent with its mission of advancing women's sport. As VP Laura Gentile suggested in my discussion with her, a reader will never find an advertisement from industries that historically present scantily (un)clothed women as their main subjects. A platform that remains consistent throughout encourages positive discussion and holds its users accountable for the manner in which they engage in the content and interact with one another. The average consumer can also make a statement about female athletes merely by showing up to games—where and how the consumer of sport occupies public spaces varying levels of support for and dedication to women's sports. A positive encouraging fanbase helps maintain and encourage spectatorship. Appearing at professional women's sporting event sends the message that consumers *do* watch women's sports. The spectator's presence at physical events, in public forums or in television ratings creates a community around women's sports. A Facebook group called "I pledge to attend one sporting event this year"¹⁴⁰ seems to realize how the public presence at women's sporting events holds the potential to progress women's sport. By joining the group, all members pledge to attend at least one women's event during that year. The group's page describes the community as, "This is a community of fans of women's sports who are eager to show up." This "eagerness to show up" makes an important social claim: that fans are enthusiastic about women's sports and excited to take part in the

¹⁴⁰ <http://www.facebook.com/support.womens.sports>

communities that surround women's sports. A group of individuals eager to engage creates a community of support. Such thriving communities stand as proof that *someone watches women's sports*. These communities of support are crucial to the undoing of repressive notions of women's sport, dismantling the myth that *no one* is watching.

Besides the governing agents that report on and consume sport, the leagues, teams and athletes play a crucial role in presenting themselves in both positive and negative ways. The previously discussed WTA "Strong is Beautiful" campaign indicated benevolent intentions, yet yielded both constructive and deconstructive results. Professional leagues assume the face of the professional athletes involved in their sport. They often sexualize female athletes by conveying messages indirectly placing women's sports on unequal grounds, often encoding such messages about female athletes within league-wide uniform regulations. Beach Volleyball, one of the biggest offenders of sexualizing its athletes, has seen various leagues rise and fall with the profit revenue of the sport. Some may point to the economic instability of the sport as the driving force behind the regulations that mandate highly sexual attire for women beach players. Beach "performance" wear, most-often bikinis with minimal athlete coverage, is believed to summon greater crowds to the sand to watch women perform. This failed to prevent the prior United States beach tour AVP (Association Volleyball Professionals) from folding after filing bankruptcy in August of 2010.

Yet the FIVB, international governing body of professional Volleyball both

beach and indoor, has historically presented numerous controversial restrictions concerning uniforms across all volleyball platforms that appear unequal in governing men's versus women's apparel. In 1998 the FIVB indoor championships fined several women's teams \$3,000 for refusing to wear uniforms that complied with dress codes, while awarding Cuba with \$10,000 for their fashionable attire—a full-body spandex skin-tight suit. Denouncing the offending teams' baggy attire as exhibiting a "lack of professionalism," FIVB president Acosta discourages such baggy attire seen only in the NBA. In defense of the FIVB fines and his statement likening the women to professional male basketball players, Acosta explained, "It's tough to find sponsors." With this statement the president of the international league directly assesses uniform regulations as gauging the sport's financial success. In 1999 the FIVB implemented new restrictions to bring a new market to beach volleyball, requiring swimsuits for both men and women beach players. The 2004 FIVB beach volleyball expands upon these uniform regulations, stating under code 24.2-4 that men's tank tops and shorts, as well as women's two-piece bikini bottoms, must "be fit closely to the body." Specific bikini bottom guidelines regulate *maximum* side widths and mandate that the cut must be toward the leg on an upward angle. Women's bathing suit tops must be left open with "deep, cutaway armholes" on the chest, stomach and back. One-piece suits for women are also allowed, but must be tightly fit with similar open areas on chest, back, stomach and upper leg. Regulations addressing the men's uniform merely require open arms in the top and a minimum of 15cm from the kneecap for the

bottoms. Recent resistance from countries with more conservative dress codes pressured the FIVB to allow optional tanks and shorts for women, though similar length restrictions apply. The FIVB restrictions govern the attire for international play, so while the USA Volleyball league may alter the rules slightly at a national level, it generally aligns itself with FIVB policies.

The FIVB governing body requires a more sexualized appearance to draw a greater market to the sport, discussing the athletic wear in terms of physical attraction versus functional performance. This emphasis on appearance sends the message that the league considers sexual appeal a more important aspect to the sport than the athletic performances. Furthermore, the FIVB suggests these uniform regulations cater to the desires of the spectators and sponsors, communicating that spectators of professional Beach Volleyball primarily watch to view scarcely-clothed athletic bodies—the excitement of the game appears nowhere in the dialogue. Beach volleyball demonstrates how an extreme focus on uniforms distracts from the play itself. Many wonder if permitting tanks and shorts will reduce spectatorship for women’s volleyball in the upcoming Olympics. Such discussions reveal how popular beach volleyball culture in the United States envisions the woman professional player in a bikini on instinct, and any change to this norm threatens custom. Such regulations do not originate to first professional beach competitions, but quickly followed the first Olympic event. Yet the fear that permitting shorts will drastically affect Olympic spectatorship demonstrates how large governing bodies construct hypersexualized images of athletes as a cultural norm.

Similar controversies arise all across the platform of professional women's sports, in which national leagues and international governing bodies alter women's uniforms hoping to increase spectatorship. FIFA President Sepp Blatter is known for encouraging women soccer players to wear tighter shorts for a "more feminine" appearance. Boxing and Badminton have both pushed for skirts or tighter clothing, hoping to attract attention to the less-popular spectator sports. Similarly, International Table Tennis Federation VP Claude Bergeret recommends tight clothing that fits the curves of the women's bodies, as baggier uniforms equate the female athletic form to "a sack of potatoes." Skirts and tight-fitted attire reintroduce regressive stereotypes that enforce a uniform ideal femininity. Stressing such "feminine" images trivialize the sports by underscoring the athletic rigor involved. But placing powerful, athletic women in skirts and tight clothing also indicates an attempt to reassert the athlete's traditional femininity. The clothing seems an effort to excuse the otherwise deviant and unfeminine behavior, displayed by strong professional female athletes who throw punches, take swings and exhale extreme amounts of energy with deep bellowing grunts. Leagues and governing bodies are partially responsible for constructing a positive image of the professional female athlete: an image that does not revert women's sports to Victorian America, where women are expelled from strenuous physical activity for their fragile, feminine mold.

Behind any professional sports team is a team of professionals, administrators and coaches collaborating to both promote the team and create

revenue. Yet such behind-the-scene machinery plays a fundamental role in creating an image of the athletes. Different teams take different approaches. Polish boxing coach Leszek Piotrowski requires the Poland team to wear skirts: “By wearing skirts, in my opinion, it gives a good impression, a womanly impression. Wearing shorts is not a good way for women boxers to dress.”¹⁴¹ Meanwhile, Cuba declines fielding a woman’s Olympic boxing team, as Coach Pedro Roque believes women should be “showing off their beautiful faces, not getting punched in the face.”¹⁴² Both representatives of professional boxing set back the progress of women’s sport away from such constricting ideals of proper femininity. Box Fox, leading player for the U.S. table tennis team and club coach serving on dual Advisory and Standing Committees for USA Table Tennis, has no qualms with enforcing sexier uniforms. He expresses in a New York Times interview that, “he favored spicing up the uniforms if for no other reason than it may attract new fans. ‘I mean, look at beach volleyball,’ he said. ‘I don’t think I need to say anything else.’”¹⁴³ He need not say more, for his aim is already clear: a sexy appearance means more fans. He gives the go ahead.

Director of Marketing for the WNBA Los Angeles Sparks indicates his team takes a different approach to hook new spectators. When I asked him about difficulties marketing the women’s professional basketball team, and if spectators and consumers of sport have a tendency of relying on automated

¹⁴¹ <http://espn.go.com/espnw/commentary/7174668/boxing-step-backward>

¹⁴² http://espn.go.com/olympics/story/_/id/7634854/women-boxers-wear-skirts-2012-london-games

¹⁴³ <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/21/sports/olympics/21tabletennis.html>

preferences dictated by historical tradition, he responded as follows:

The most obvious difficulties are the sexism and preconceived notions that the general public has about our sport in general. And it is not solely from the male demographic either. Unfortunately and surprisingly, we get this response from the female demo as well. People are going to be who they are and we cannot change that with words or statistics. We strongly believe that if you, the individual who has never been to a WNBA game, comes to one of our games and experiences the world-class athleticism, the passion, the excitement, the fun, it will change your perspective. No, it isn't NBA basketball and we don't set that expectation either. We brand ourselves as fundamentally sound basketball team

Affirming the link between preconceived notions and spectatorship, Forrest makes no mention of attire or beauty to draw fans. Instead, the Sparks “brand [themselves] as a fundamentally sound basketball team.” This initiative puts skills and ability first—an important contrast to the previously mentioned boxing and table tennis teams. The Sparks team works around preconceived notions by highlighting the “athleticism, passion and excitement” that can all be found at a professional women’s basketball event. In this way, the Los Angeles based women’s team hits upon an important factor of sports consumerism: the excitement of the game. Professional sports teams are entertainment enterprises, and spectators consume sport for this entertainment factor. They seek out the excitement of the event, a sensation not belonging to NBA competitions alone. Forrest suggests that personally experiencing the excitement of a WNBA game will “change your perspective,” reversing a history

of preconceived notions in a single great play, chant, or wave¹⁴⁴ taking over the sports arena. The Sparks, despite the WNBA's alliance with the NBA does not strive to *be* the NBA. The team recognizes a history of differences, choosing to establish its own expectations for success that are founded on the basis of athleticism.

This thesis so far has presented many ways in which institutions and organizations represent female athletes, and how such organizing bodies hypersexualize the female athletic body. Yet in order to fully understand how preexisting notions of women's sport continue to circulate, we must look at all bodies that perpetuate these perceptions and how. We must consider that professional female athletes also actively shape the image of women's sport, and how they choose to present their athletic abilities. If the lack of historical support for professional women's sports measured in years leads female athletes to use their bodies as a marketing tool, we must analyze *how* they present their bodies. Do they emphasize strength and ability, or traditional feminine beauty and sexual appeal? A fine line separates those who use their bodies to signal strength and those who present their bodies as a sexual object. Danica Patrick and Hope Solo stand out in my mind as straddling this fine line separated by intent. Danica Patrick has established herself as the most recognized female NASCAR driver through the medium of her sponsor Go Daddy commercials. These highly sexualized commercials consistently place Patrick in a string bikini and reveal words lined with implicit references to sexual conduct.

¹⁴⁴ The raised arms of standing spectators that circulates a sporting arena, creating the appearance of a "wave."

They show off her extraordinarily muscular body, pointing to her immense strength and signaling her athletic competence. Perhaps her raw talent may never have landed her such widespread recognition as athlete. Yet the framework of these controversial advertisement positions her primarily as a sex object. As a result, Patrick faces heightened social pressures to perform athletically. When she has a bad race or a string of unfruitful competitions, she provides no prominent image of “athlete” to counteract the overpowering presence of “sex object.” We as sport consumers hold her performance ability to greater standards and are quicker to criticize her athletic failures. But this is a choice she makes, because she selects to market her body for Go Daddy’s initiatives—initiatives that evidently do not align with the mission of advancing women’s sports in a positive and productive manner. Moreover, most viewers of Patrick’s Go Daddy commercials wishing to pinpoint the aim of these initiatives would fail altogether. What percentage of consumers who have encountered a Go Daddy commercial can actually ascertain from these commercials alone what exactly Go Daddy hopes to sell? Patrick presents her body in a manner that leaves women’s sports fans and public consumers wondering, is this productive for the image of Patrick as an athlete? Equally important, is this mode of representation productive for the image of women’s sport as an institution?

Soccer goalie Hope Solo also straddles the line of acceptability in how she presents her body, coming out on the other side of the line as Patrick in my mind. Solo won public recognition as crucial player in the exciting World Cup that directed public eye toward professional women’s soccer. Yet after scoring such

public acknowledgement of her extraordinary bodily strength and athletic competence, she sought further acclaim on popular television reality series *Dancing With the Stars*. Entering a platform of such public recognition via the medium of national coverage could go two ways. It could increase coverage of female athletes and draw more attention to women's sport for its accomplishments. Dance requires great physical demands, as Hope soon realized, setting up opportunity for someone with Solo's athletic prowess to excel. Her taking part in *Dancing With The Stars* helps to increase visibility of the professional female athlete. But does it promote awareness of female athletes in a productive manner? Or does it diminish the image of the strong female athlete, only confirming the notions that female athletes are worthy targets of sexual objectification? Solo soon admitted that despite her athletic strength, she was not equipped for the demanding motions the show and its corresponding choreographers required of her. This does not immediately do disservice to her body as athletically capable, but rather points to the diversity of abilities an athletic body can perform. It exposed dance as a serious sport. Yet while Solo's bodily strength did not go unnoticed, it hid beneath frivolous costumes. A mock soccer jersey cut off just below the breast-line and tightly hugging the bodyline, adorned Solo's body alongside coordinating booty shorts, high socks and heels. The costume resembled one that might be found at a high school Halloween party and tainted any display of athletic performance that might have previously existed. It trivialized soccer as a sport and Solo as an athlete, transforming what was previously the female athletic body most-

recognized for its strength sporting body into a tool for sexualizing professional female athletes on a larger spectrum. With such minimal coverage of women sport¹⁴⁵ as is, displays such as this may serve as the only image of women's sports a consumer sees in a season, year or lifetime.

Previous portions of this thesis point to how female athletes suffer when others report negatively on their involvement in sports. Yet the female athletes themselves must not be dismissed from the responsibility to form a positive image of professional women's sports. This would negate the female athlete's potential as an agent capable of piloting her own progression. Previously discussed modes of representation within media language and imagery suggest a process of *mediation*. The media sources do not illustrate reality, but rather present one perception of reality. In this way *media* sources *mediate* between subject and consumer. Yet when the subject and the mediator are one and the same, the process of representation assumes a far more legitimate source. The process of viewing requires a lens by which to gaze upon a subject, and each lens necessarily introduces an additional biased opinion that complicates truth. Therefore, the more we can erase the gap between subject and mediator, the greater our potential to diminish additional biases altering the authenticity of the subject being re-presented to the masses. When professional female athletes report their own activity to the general public, it decreases the potential for skewed accounts. This process of self-marketing legitimizes the voice of

¹⁴⁵ Messner and Cooky's longitudinal study on gender in televised sports points to 2009 as showing a dramatic decrease in coverage of women's sport within their sample, at a meager 1.6 percent of all TV sports-news airtime sampled

representation as trustworthy source. Yet this places even more responsibility on the female athletic, as a more authentic source of representation, to produce a positive image of professional women's sports. In choosing to participate with Dancing with the Stars, Solo offered herself as an object of spectacle. Yet while she entered the terrain of national television that few female athletes achieve, she did so in a manner that harmed the future progression of women's sport. The individual choice to navigate the sports market using the body an access code might benefit this single female athlete in public recognition or monetary gain. But as Dr. LaVoi asked in the espnW summit, does it benefit women's sport as a whole?

How do professional female athletes market themselves, and how does the manner in which they present themselves compare to the manner in which journalists, reporters and institutions present the athletes? Looking to gauge the role of the female athlete in marketing herself, I brainstormed a way to track the information that prominent figures in professional women's sport reproduce to large public audiences. Highly interested in how new media sources such as social media has altered the task of marketing female athletes, I devised a plan¹⁴⁶ to track ten professional female athletes of ten different sports on Twitter, analyzing tweets.¹⁴⁷ For a ten week span, research assistants Valerie Yarema and Samantha Speroni recorded total number of tweets and, of this total value,

¹⁴⁶ The project follows the athletes for ten weeks, recording data approximately four days each week, varying which days of the week on which data was collected. This rotating schedule circumvents the possibility for uneven results should tweeting activity fluctuate depending on the day of week.

¹⁴⁷ A message of 140 characters or less put out on Twitter

total tweets mentioning 1) sports and 2) bodies or sexual implications.¹⁴⁸

Athletes using Twitter benefit from this microblogging source, which transmits the athlete's message to a vast public audience. The sum of total tweets mentioning sporting activity versus those mentioning bodies helps to weigh the primary focus of the athletes' messages. Grouping the messages transmitted by professional female athletes via Twitter explores the athlete's role in presenting herself to the public, evaluates various approaches capitalizing on the wide reach of this broadcasting tool, and highlights a diversity of messages emanating directly from the athlete under consideration.¹⁴⁹

The group consisted of the following ten athletes and their sports:

Gretchen Bleiler, Snowboarding; Jennie Finch, Softball; Bethany Hamilton, Surfing; Carmelita Jeter, Track; Shawn Johnson, Gymnastics; Danica Patrick, NASCAR; Ticha Penichiero, Basketball; Hope Solo, Soccer; Kerri Walsh, Beach Volleyball; Serena Williams, Tennis. As a whole, the group totaled 1317 tweets over 37 days, with an average of 3.56 tweets per day per athlete. Of this 1317, 294 tweets mentioned sport or athleticism, accounting for 22% of the total tweets, while 41 mentioned body parts or sexual content, averaging over 3% of total tweets.¹⁵⁰ The ten athletes' average sport to body ratio then was 7.17.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ The "Sport" category includes tweets with mention of any sporting activity, athleticism or participation in demanding physical feats. The "Body" category counts tweets with explicit mention of specific body parts or sexual behaviors, as well as tweets that contain content that could be construed sexually.

¹⁴⁹ Twitter has a feature that confirms pages as being affiliated with the athlete (written by the athlete or someone employed by the athlete), narrowing the potential for a public user to pose as the athlete and disperse messages from a "celebrity" athlete's voice.

¹⁵⁰ Image 3 of the Appendix displays these three numbers that break down the overall tweet content into total tweets, total tweet mentioning sport, and total tweets mentioning body.

These numbers are crucial because, while Twitter presents the athletes many opportunities to promote their sport, strength and athleticism, the group of athletes only used 22% of these opportunities to do so. However, only 3% of the total group's tweets transmitted content that prioritizes the body's appearance or sexual appeal over its athletic function.

Taking Frequency, or average tweets per day (Av. t/d), into account,¹⁵² Bleiler gathered the most tweets about sport per tweet at 19.79 (23 tweets about sport divided by a 1.16 Frequency). Results, shown in *Image 2*, indicate Jeter and Johnson as holding the greatest "Body" tweets per tweeting Frequency at 2.76 and 2.20, while Finch transmitted the lowest Frequency of "Body" tweets at 0.19. Using the recorded number of "Sport" and "Body" tweets, I created a "Sport:Body ratio," measuring the total tweets that mention "Sport" against the total tweets that mention "Body." In this regard, Johnson was the only athlete that produced a "Sport:Body Ratio" of less than 1.0, meaning total number of tweets mentioning sport were *less than* total number of sexualized tweets. Finch conversely had the greatest "Sport:Body Ratio" of 45.0, with 45 tweets mentioning sport and only one tweet positioning the athletic body in a

¹⁵¹ The crossover between the two categories accounts for numerical imbalances presenting a discrepancy in the sum of the two categories and the total number of tweets

¹⁵² Results indicated that basketball player Penicheiro gathered the most total tweets mentioning "Sport," but also tied for the most total tweets mentioning "Body/sex." Without taking Frequency (Av. t/d) into account, numeric results may skew visions of actual tweeting behaviors, displaying "Total tweets" rather than percentages by allowing an athlete with high tweeting Frequency to take the position as "Most sport tweets" as well as "Most body tweets." Calculating tweeting Frequency also inserts how often each athlete tweets into the overall equation. For example, take an athlete that only tweets twice during the 10week span—both tweets containing sexual implications. The athlete's total tweets about "Body" only add up to 2, while other athletes tweeting more frequently contribute far more "Sexualized" tweets to the total group count. Yet this first athlete with low tweeting Frequency tweets "sexually" 100% of the time.

potentially sexual manner. Johnson tweets contain more sexual content than they do sporting content, engaging her followers in a discussion that centers on the athlete's sexual interactions rather than her athletic ability. Contrary to Johnson, Jennie Finch eliminates nearly all conversation that might otherwise sexualize the female athletic body by posting only one "sexual" tweet out of her total 188 messages.

Taking a look at the athletes' personal and professional backgrounds helps situate these differences. *Image 1* shows Finch and Walsh as holding the two highest "Sport:Body Ratios": Finch at 45.0 (45sport:1body) and Walsh at 39.0 (39sport:1body). The athletes' maternal positions in society, both women as mothers with at least thirty years age, might decrease their likeliness to distribute sexualized messages to public masses. Accordingly, the youngest athlete in the group, gymnast Shawn Johnson, produces the lowest "Sport:Body Ratio" by far at 0.8 (4sport:5body). Compared to the nine other sports tracked, professional Gymnastics commonly consists of younger athletes that engage in actions perceived as highly "sexualized" and traditionally "feminine." Gymnastics lays bare how these young female bodies, draped in tight leotards, bend in flexible and physically demanding positions. These elements that emphasize the athlete's body and lead public opinion to commonly associate Gymnastics with sexual conduct. Such preconceptions of Johnson's sport as essentially sexual and Johnson's younger age as denoting peak sexual maturity positions how we perceive Johnson tweets, which most freely discuss sexual content.

Yet younger age does not always indicate willingness to fill tweets with sexual content. Surfer Bethany Hamilton, only two years older than Johnson, also performs a sport that lends itself to sexualization. Surfing offers athletes the option to wear only a bikini, though they most often choose to accompany their bathing suit with a rash guard or wetsuit, depending on water temperatures. Yet Hamilton claims one of the highest “Sport:Body Ratios” (12, or 24:2) in her tweets and the second highest sport frequency next to Bleiler (11.53). Hamilton, best known for her shark attack incident in Hawaii in which she lost her arm, often advocates her Christian religious beliefs, and does so in her tweets. Surviving the attack and going on to become a top ranked female surfer internationally —despite having only one arm, Hamilton often publicizes her desire to spread the word of God, believing this His purpose in keeping her alive. As a self-proclaimed role model for young Christians, Hamilton uses Twitter as an effective means to disperse messages about God, explaining her less frequent tendencies to tweet sexualized material. In a similar manner, professional female athletes such as Hamilton can operate Twitter to broadcast positive representations of the female sporting ability.

Female athletes posting on Twitter report firsthand to the public in the very moments that the athletes navigate the sporting sphere. In this sense, Twitter “followers” literally follow the athletes into the professional sporting realm, entering the public into a direct conversation with professional women’s sports. Investigating how ten professional female athletes employ social networking tools highlights the complexity of their task. Each Twitter account

creates a string of personal anecdotes that reflect how identities as woman and as athlete intersect with a variety of other affiliations. Age, race, relationships, sport, experience and other social influences frame each individual female athlete in a different manner.

Yet together, these Twitter accounts serve to represent women's sports, revealing a diversity of processes involved in imagining professional women's sports. The process of self-representation through this medium therefore requires collaborating with a community comprised both of public followers and of fellow participants in sport. One of Hope Solo's tweets on 11/19/2011 quoted the popular sexual song lyric: "I'll take you to the candy shop." Yet when I returned to find this post within 48 hours, Solo had deleted the post. The erasure of a highly sexualized tweet indicates a consciousness of the material content distributed through this microblogging service. What led to Solo removed the tweet points to how the athlete's self-representation requires collaboration. Perhaps Solo chose to remove the tweet on her own accord, or maybe Solo received encouragement from team members, public followers or a PR agent. Someone realized the destructive potential of this sexualized tweet, causing Solo, as a spokesperson for professional female athletes, to remove it from her Twitter account. When Hope Solo engages in informal conversations on Twitter, her personal language choices reflect upon Solo as an individual athlete. Yet these choices also reflect poorly upon her team, her sport and women's sports as a whole. Preventing Solo from spreading such damaging

reports on behalf of professional women's sports requires a community—in this case symbolized by the body that triggered the removal.

This single instance demonstrates how the entire community encompassing women's sports can control an individual athlete's image, while an individual athlete can simultaneously construct an overarching image of professional women's sport. Tracking how female athletes interact with the public on Twitter highlights the complex process that forms social conceptions of women's sports. To depict professional female athletes in a positive manner—one that prioritizes the athletes' strength and skill over their sex appeal—a community must collaborate in marketing women's sports.

Closing Words on Viewership: the Gaze as Organizing Power Relations

The statement, *No one watches women's sports*, reveals a fundamental connection between the female athlete and those that “watch” or gather at the female sporting arena. The word “professional” in “professional female athletes” separates women who specialize in the activity of sport and entertain a viewer in exchange for monetary gain. This viewing relationship positions professional athletes as the objects in view. Furthermore, with female bodies as historical spectacles, objects being viewed and displayed,¹⁵³ the female athlete enters a dualistic dimension power dimension that informs spectator/athlete relations. The athlete is tethered to this organizing power of the gaze. While the female athlete would still exist and engage in an instance of sport without the spectator,

¹⁵³ Cinema theorist Laura Mulvey writes, “in their traditional exhibitionist roles women are simultaneously looked at and displayed.” Mulvey, Laura. *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*.

the origin of sport is rooted within this historical relationship to those that view the sporting activity. Even in sporting arenas void of spectators, the *gaze* that situates athletes as spectacles remains present.

Viewing relationships thus produce a natural or normalized power hierarchy that arranges the athlete and the spectator, dividing the subject of the gaze and the viewer who is performing the action of gazing upon. Tradition places power in the act of viewing. So if an athlete inherently assumes the position as the object under speculation, what is the range of the athletic body's reach? Body theorist Carol Spitzack suggests that, "Because spectator and spectacle are within the body of woman, she appears to herself another who provides and receives external evaluations."¹⁵⁴ By joining the spectator role that views and evaluates the female body, women regain control over their bodies. In this way, female athletes enter the conversation that discusses and depicts female athlete and contribute to form a productive image of professional women's sports. The joining of athletic bodies playing sports with their surrounding community turns an exercise in sporting activity into a sporting sphere. This compound of perceptions that compose the spectator gaze deepens viewing relationships to be all-inclusive. This crucial collaboration between athlete and community informs how American society conceptualizes women's sport.

No one watches women's sports is not just an attitude. It is relationship and a dialogue in which we all engage. The individual enters a day-to-day

¹⁵⁴ Spitzack, Carole. *Confessing Excess: Women and the Politics of Body Reduction*. Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1990. Google Books.

progress interacting with women's sports, collaborating with other individuals interacting with women's sports. This dialogue, this interaction and this collaboration hold the potential to advance women's sport as a whole.

CONCLUSION

The Crucial and Complex Task of Marketing Professional Female Athletes

The failure to positively represent professional female athletes in the United States discourages spectator *hype* that is vital to build and maintain a supportive community surrounding women's sports. PART I of this thesis links the preconceived notions that afflict professional female athletes today to expectations that once more-powerfully governed the female body. PART II profiles multiple agents as joint-contributors in the constructing, de-constructing and re-constructing of these manners in which popular American culture conceptualizes professional women's sports. If this complex collaborative process of representation dictates notions concerning women's sports, what specific actions can we as a society take to best serve women's sport as an entity?

The institution of sport reflects how hierarchal gender divides have organized power relations throughout the development of the United States. Preexisting gender relationships within the United States marked the female body as inactive, petite, weaker and subordinate. Yet as women gained greater access to sports, these traditional characteristics of the female body adjusted to generate a modified female body.

This new sporting female body displays increased physical activity, body mass, strength and aggression that establishes the female athletic body as a symbol of untraditional masculinity. Female involvement in sports thus introduced the potential for female masculinity. As a diversity of comprehensive

masculinities and femininities materializes within sports, patriarchal norms reorganize the bodies engaging within the sporting sphere by gender. Current media representations and depictions continue this historical subjugation of the female athletic body by gendering sports performances. Discrepancies between male and female uniforms, hair accessories and make-up, grunting and yelling, arguing and fighting all evidence how sporting traditions inadvertently continue the gendering and sexualizing of performances within the sporting sphere.

Some female athletes consciously perform femininity within sports to counteract this female masculinity, reasserting their traditional “feminine” appearance with hair ribbons, makeup, and jewelry. Some female athletes turn to new media broadcasting sources to showcase how they can maintain an otherwise-proper feminine image outside of sporting contests.¹⁵⁵ Such performing of femininity asserts, “I can be athlete, *and* I can be feminine.” This claim *intends* to show how “woman” and “athlete” can coexist, yet it divides rather than conjoins the two terms. This distinction establishes the female athlete as capable both of proper femininity and of athleticism.

But reasserting the female athlete as traditionally feminine does not reassert the woman as athlete. Female athlete does not need to be *both* strong *and* feminine, if strength *is* feminine. Athlete *is* woman. Now that the avenue of sport has opened to include women, we must open the definition of “woman” to include the diversity of athletic bodies that occupy the sporting sphere.

Using gendered and sexualized rhetoric and imagery to depict women in

¹⁵⁵ As seen with athletes such as Fowles posing for the ESPN Body Issue

sports reinforces preexisting gender hierarchies that subordinate female athletes. Distributing depictions of female athletes that neither gender nor sexualize the athletic bodies creates a new discussion entirely revolved around the sports performance.

Fans of professional women's sports watch women's sports for this raw entertainment of the sporting industry. The same elements of the game that attract spectators to men's events appeal to supporters of women's sports. We watch women's sports for the excitement, the passion, the skills, the strength and the game. These moments of excitement hook the spectator into becoming a lifetime fan. All those willing to rally around the industry of professional women's sports gather as a community of "lifers."

We watch women's sports.

As this base grows, each individual sporting moment fosters an even greater thrill. Spectacular instances of success can captivate large audiences, as demonstrated by how America rallied around the USA Women's Soccer during the most recent World Cup. As such communities build loyalty, feelings that results from these sporting moments intensify with each shared moment of success or failure. Recycling and repeating the attitude that *we watch women's sports* will replace previous notions suggesting otherwise, and help to maintain these positive and supportive energies that arise.

A whole history of support will rise, not with passing years, but with how well we as a society retain these momentous instances that drive spectators to women's sports. Prolonging this excitement necessitates engrossing

communities in these instances of success and encouraging communities to engage in constructive dialogue. Yet as one specific instance can create a tradition of support, each element that contributes to this instance must align with the mission of bettering women's sports. The message that *we watch women's sports* must remain consistent and positive across all platforms. Discussion that reflects upon these cases in a positive manner will foster a contagion that absorbs spectators forever into the realm of professional woman's sports.

When my high school basketball coach first came to Chadwick School, we went 0-12 in the first season, not winning a single game. Despite this disheartening record, my coach had brought with her a new energy and a new positive attitude that restructured the whole basketball program. Eventually, it was this attitude that turned around our program to create a history of success. She acknowledged how our classmates, teachers and competitors immediately envisioned Chadwick Girls' Basketball as a losing program, and altered this attitude. One day during practice, we finally noticed the banners that had always been hanging from the gym walls: Chadwick Girls' Basketball, CIF Championships. There were a handful of them from the decade before I entered high school. Once in the history of Chadwick Girls' Basketball, there *had* been a winning team. If we wanted a banner, all we had to do was break away from this attitude that suggested otherwise.

In writing this thesis, I began to reflect upon my coach's arrival at Chadwick School. I remembered the very first moment we gathered together as

a program. She had ordered us all t-shirts, which she handed out to the players, coaches and athletic director. The front of the shirts said, "Chadwick Basketball," while the back of the shirts read, "The tradition starts now."

The tradition starts now.

Why are sports so important to female athletes? Sports provide us with accomplishment and self-satisfaction that fosters the confidence to guide us through daily social interaction. Sports teach time-management skills and build muscle memory, offering us social structure and control over our own bodies. Sports develop social relations, power relations, and relationships that last a lifetime. Sports join camaraderie and competition, and promote fitness and health. We learn to learn to accept our bodies, value our bodies, regulate and discipline our bodies, protect and demand control over our bodies. The sporting sphere both expands our bodily potential and also defines it.

Why are sports so important to the American sporting community? Sports fans unite in camaraderie and rally around a common interest. They gather as spectators, viewers, aficionados, enthusiasts, and affiliates. These individuals parade their loyalty to an athlete, team, event, sport or organized sport as a whole. Their devotion manifests in team apparel, signs and cheers. Positive cheering includes chanting, shouting, clapping, fist-pumping, jumping and waving, gesturing how these sports enthusiasts live vicariously through the sporting bodies around which they convene. Sports fans live, breathe and crave sports. They constitute fandom, carefully selecting affiliation and applying the sports mentality. They create a subculture of sport.

What can women's sports do for us? American culture benefits from supporting women's sports. As a business, the women's sports industry expands target audiences and increases revenue, bringing in more viewers and more participants. More importantly, supporting women's sports diversifies the sporting sphere. As the sporting sphere reflects common cultural norms, values and behaviors, setting the example of how to maneuver social relationships and navigate gender relations within the avenue of sport serves as an exemplar model: one that helps to reorganize American social structures. To create a history and tradition of support for professional women's sports within the United States fosters equality and values all members of society without discriminating on the basis of gender or body. Supporting women's sports prioritizes collectivity and collaboration, and establishes the history and tradition of communal support.

The tradition starts now.

Appendix :

Image 1:
Sum of Tweets by Athlete Last Name

Last Name			Total	Sport:body
Bleiler	SUM of Total # of tweets/day	43	43	23
	SUM of Total tweets sport/athleticism	23	23	
	SUM of Total tweets body/sexualized	1	1	
Finch	SUM of Total # of tweets/day	188	188	45
	SUM of Total tweets sport/athleticism	45	45	
	SUM of Total tweets body/sexualized	1	1	
Hamilton	SUM of Total # of tweets/day	77	77	12
	SUM of Total tweets sport/athleticism	24	24	
	SUM of Total tweets body/sexualized	2	2	
Jeter	SUM of Total # of tweets/day	134	134	3.3
	SUM of Total tweets sport/athleticism	33	33	
	SUM of Total tweets body/sexualized	10	10	
Johnson	SUM of Total # of tweets/day	84	84	0.8
	SUM of Total tweets sport/athleticism	4	4	
	SUM of Total tweets body/sexualized	5	5	
Patrick	SUM of Total # of tweets/day	44	44	2.5
	SUM of Total tweets sport/athleticism	10	10	
	SUM of Total tweets body/sexualized	4	4	
Penicheiro	SUM of Total # of tweets/day	372	372	7.2
	SUM of Total tweets sport/athleticism	72	72	
	SUM of Total tweets body/sexualized	10	10	
Solo	SUM of Total # of tweets/day	74	74	7
	SUM of Total tweets sport/athleticism	21	21	
	SUM of Total tweets body/sexualized	3	3	
Walsh	SUM of Total # of tweets/day	140	140	39
	SUM of Total tweets sport/athleticism	39	39	
	SUM of Total tweets body/sexualized	1	1	
Williams	SUM of Total # of tweets/day	161	161	5.75
	SUM of Total tweets sport/athleticism	23	23	
	SUM of Total tweets body/sexualized	4	4	
Grand To	SUM of Total # of tweets/day	1317	1317	7.1707
	SUM of Total tweets sport/athleti	294	294	
	SUM of Total tweets body/sexuali	41	41	

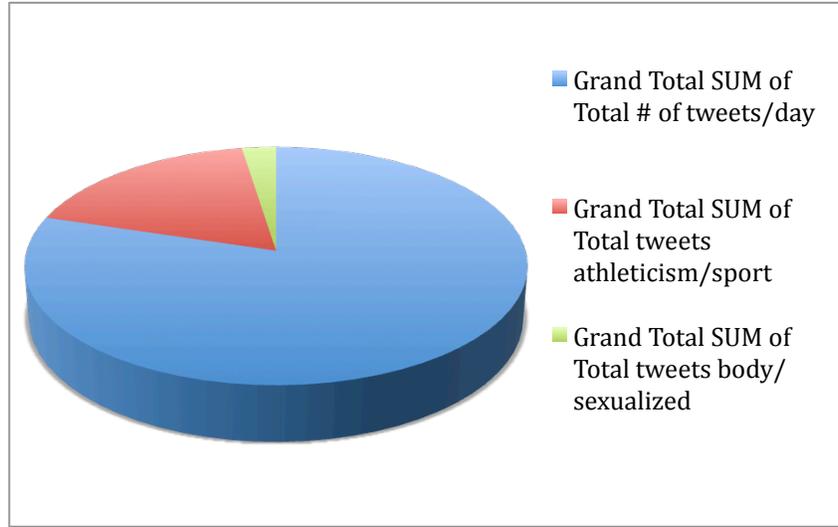
Total Tweets, Total Tweet Sport, Total Tweet Body, Sport:Body Ratio

Image 2:
Frequency of Tweets by Athlete Last Name

Last Name	Frequency (Av. t/d)	Fq. Sport	Fq. Body		
Bleiler	1.162162	19.7907	0.860465		
Finch	5.081081	8.856383	0.196809		
Hamilton	2.081081	11.53247	0.961039		
Jeter	3.621622	9.11194	2.761194		
Johnson	2.27027	1.761905	2.202381		
Patrick	1.189189	8.409091	3.363636		
Penicheiro	10.05405	7.16129	0.994624		
Solo	2	10.5	1.5		
Walsh	3.783784	10.30714	0.264286		
Williams	4.351351	5.285714	0.919255		
Grand Total	3.5595	82.597	11.519		

Frequency (Av. t/d), Fq. Sport, Fq. Body

Image 3:
Breakdown of Group Tweet Sums by Content



Total Group Tweets, Total Group Tweets Sport, Total Group Tweets Body

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