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THE NEGOTIATION OF GENDER AND ATHLETICISM BY WOMEN ATHLETES

by

ERICA N. KITCHEN

Under the Direction of Elisabeth O. Burgess

ABSTRACT

Despite significant improvements in the last thirty years, the sporting world remains a masculine domain. Women athletes continue to face inequalities and criticism for crossing traditional gender lines. This study, which was grounded in Foucauldian, postmodern and social constructionist theories and a third wave feminist perspective, examines how women athletes understand gender and how gender, athleticism and body image intersect for them. Eleven women in various stages of their athletic careers participated in in-depth interviews. Women and girls are influenced to participate in sport by family and friends, have local role models, and value the social aspect of sport. They perceive a mismatch between gender norms and their own gender identities, however this mismatch did not create conflict. The women were satisfied with their body image, and their instrumental athletic goals and their physical accomplishments helped them to build positive body image. Finally, sport empowers these athletes, who use sport as a site for resisting and transforming gender norms.

INDEX WORDS: Gender, Sports, Women athletes, Body image, Feminism

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ERICA N. KITCHEN

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2006

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables vii

List of Abbreviations viii

Chapter

1 Introduction 1

2 Literature Review 5

The Gendered Athlete 5

Sport as a Masculine Domain 8

Creating an Identity 13

Gender and the Athletic Body 15

The Intersections of Race, Class and Gender in Sport 21

Theoretical Framework 22

3 Methodology 26

Sample 26

Data Collection 29

Data Analysis 29

Limitations of the Work 30

4 Getting Involved, Staying Involved 33

Family and Friends 34

Role Models 36

Staying Involved 39

5 Understanding Gender as a Woman Athlete 43

Recognizing Social Meanings of Masculinity 44

Recognizing Social Meanings of Femininity 46

Recognizing Changing Gender Roles 47

The Value of Appearance 48

The Importance of Awareness 49

Personal Views on Gender 49

Comfort with One's Gender Identity 52

Gender as a Continuum 55

Empowerment of the Woman Athlete 57

Empowerment Beyond Athleticism 61

Empowerment, Feminism and Title IX 62

6 Women Athletes and the Body 63

Overall Bodily Satisfaction 64

The Instrumental Body and Body Image 66

Instrumental Change 70

Instrumental Ideal Bodies 71

The Body and Resisting Gender Norms 73

7 Discussion and Conclusion 76

Themes 76

Implications for Research, Policy and Practice 80

References 86

Appendices 95

A Participant Biographies 95

B Interview Script and Questions 98

List of Tables

Table 1 Participant Information p. 28

List of Abbreviations

BID	Body Image Distortion
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
NCWGS	The National Coalition for Women and Girls in Sports
WNBA	Women's National Basketball Association
WSF	The Women's Sports Foundation

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Title IX of the Amendments to the Education Act of 1972 dramatically changed the face of athletics in the United States by denying federal funding to any educational program that discriminates on the basis of sex. In 1971, fewer than 295,000 girls played high school varsity sports, comprising just 7 percent of all high school varsity athletes. In 2001, about 2.8 million girls participated in high school sports – an increase of 847 percent since 1971. At the collegiate level, from 1971 to 2001 approximately 120,000 more female athletes participated in sports, a 403 percent increase (The National Coalition for Women and Girls in Sports [NCWGS], 2002). However, women's participation in athletics continues to be met with much resistance. One of the reasons for the opposition to female athletes is that sports have historically been a masculine domain. Susan Cahn (1994) says, "The presence of powerful women athletes struck at the roots of male dominance in American society – the seemingly natural physical superiority of men" (p. 208).

The masculine model of sport has real consequences for women[1] athletes, including how women athletes perceive social expectations regarding gender, how they perceive their own gender identity, and the potential conflict they may experience between the two. Crossing traditional gender lines into the world of sport, women have been subject to accusations of manliness and lesbianism (Cahn, 1993,1994; Griffin,

[1] I have intentionally used the term "woman athlete" throughout this paper because the word "woman" better reflects how each participant identifies her gender. I am not using the term "female athlete" because that term reflects the biology or genetic make-up of the participants, which I am not concerned with here. The argument over the biological certainty of males and females is complicated and unresolved but ultimately not relevant to my study of gender identity. When the term "female athlete" is used, I have done so to accurately quote other researchers.

1998). Today, while the criticism of women athletes might not be as overt, women athletes must continue to reconcile their athletic powers with society's definition of femininity. In addition to questions about their sexuality, women athletes are subject to sexualization and intense pressure to conform to a feminine appearance (Messner, 2002).

In sport especially, the body is widely seen as a site for negotiating gender identity (Bordo, 1993; Connell, 1987, 1999, 2002; Markula, 2003). The body is central to how one displays femininity and/or masculinity, and therefore gender identity can inform how an athlete feels about her body. Christy Greenleaf (2002) defines athletic body image as "the internal image one has of his or her body and the evaluation of that image within an athletic context" (p.63). Many factors affect body image including uniforms and coaching pressures (Greenleaf, 2002). The conflict between athletic body ideals and feminine body ideals also affects the way some women athletes feel about their bodies (Duff, Hong, & Royce, 1999; Dworkin, 2003; Markula, 2001). Athletic body image has received very little attention in the literature (Greenleaf, 2002), and studies that explore the role of the conflict between ideal athleticism and ideal femininity in forming body image are even less common. Understanding how the social construction of gender and body image intersect has important implications for increasing women's involvement in sport, alleviating problems with body image, and using sport as a practice for subverting limiting cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity.

The gap in women's participation in athletics compared to men's participation has been closing, but much progress is still needed. The benefits for women and girls who play sports are physical, emotional and social. Studies have linked sports participation to

reduced rates of breast cancer and osteoporosis, reduced rates of teen pregnancy, better physical and emotional health, and reduced likelihood of participation in risky behaviors such as smoking (NCWGS, 2002; The Women's Sports Foundation [WSF], 1998). All women and girls deserve equal opportunities to become involved in sports, and achieving such a goal requires eliminating the obstacles to their participation. If women are experiencing a conflict between being feminine and being athletic or feeling that their own expression of femininity does not match social expectations for women, sports scholars, along with sports coaches, administrators, and fans have an obligation to understand this problem and make women and girls feel more welcomed as athletes.

We must understand also how gender identity and body image intersect for the woman athlete in order to reduce the prevalence of bulimia, anorexia, compulsive exercising, unsafe dieting, and body image distortion (BID) among athletes. Women's preoccupation with being trim and slender has been called the "one of the most powerful normalizing mechanisms of our century" (Bordo, 1993, p.186), but when athletes participate in these 'normal' activities they harm themselves and neutralize the subversive potential of sport. Another factor affecting body image for some women athletes is concern over appearing too masculine. Acceptable femininity should not be a deterrent for women athletes to achieve the optimal body size or shape for their sport. A greater understanding of how gender identity and body image intersect for women athletes will help us to understand what concerns women have about their place in sport and about their bodies. This knowledge will contribute to realizing the subversive power of women's sports.

The overall aim of this research was to better understand how women athletes understand gender, both social constructions of gender and their own gender identities. Eleven women in various stages of their athletic careers were interviewed about what gender means to them and what place it has in their lives as athletes. The aim was also to determine if women athletes perceive sport as a site for resisting and transforming gender norms. Another goal of the research was to better understand how athleticism, gender identity and body image intersect for women athletes. The body is a primary location for constructing gender identity and the primary tool for athletic feats. This research project is intended to determine how women athletes negotiate gender and athleticism and what that means for future women and girl athletes.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The Gendered Athlete

Gender is commonly understood to be the cultural differences between men and women based on the perceived biological differences between men and women (Connell, 2002). Gender as a social institution plays a major role in how all people organize their lives. Judith Lorber (1997) writes, "gender is so much the routine ground of everyday activities that questioning its taken-for-granted assumptions and presuppositions is like thinking about whether the sun will come up" (p. 33). However, the common belief that gender is the cultural manifestation of biological sex differences fails to explain why one gender, masculinity, is valued more, why gender is constantly changing, and why differing gender categories have existed historically and cross-culturally (Connell, 1987). Connell argues that because biological differences fail to sustain gender categories, we, in this society, exaggerate physical differences between women and men in order to erase the vast similarities between the sexes. Thus, gender is more appropriately defined as "the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices (governed by this structure) that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes" (Connell, 2002, p. 10).

Rather than speaking of gender differences, as is commonly the case, it is appropriate to speak of gender relations because relations include the differences, dichotomies, and hierarchies that make up gender as a social structure (Connell, 2002). Gender is used to rank members of society, assigning power and prestige to masculine traits, and is enforced through informal social sanctions (Lorber, 1997). In sport for

example, many men's sports are more popular and prestigious than women's sports because of the gender hierarchy. Men's sports are valued when they uphold the belief that men are physically strong and the dominant gender. Significantly, exceptions occur when men violate gender norms or when women support them, as is the case with men's figure skating and women's gymnastics respectively. Men figure skaters must exhibit the traditionally feminine characteristics of grace and flexibility, so the sport is less popular. On the other hand, women gymnasts are frequently petite and very feminine in appearance, adding to the popularity and prestige of the sport.

The reproduction of gender has been conceptualized in several ways. West and Zimmerman (1987) introduced the idea of "doing" gender. They argue:

> The "doing" of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production. Doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine "natures" (p. 131-132).

In a follow-up to the idea of doing gender, West and Fenstermaker (2002) introduced the idea of "doing difference." In this perspective gender, race and class are understood to be accomplished in social interactions, and this perspective stresses that the relevance of each of these characteristics in a social interaction cannot be understood without the others (West & Fenstermaker). Gender, race and class are understood as markers of dominance and difference, and the implications of such an approach are many. According to the perspective of "doing difference," an apparently identical action can

have completely different meanings for two women. In other words, context, background, salience and center shift for each social interaction, but all are significant when gender, race and class are considered together (West & Fenstermaker). Uniform choices, relationships with teammates, training, and dieting are all social interactions that may take on different meanings for a female athlete depending how she "does difference."

Gender has also been understood as a performance (Butler, 1999). The everyday behaviors, what Judith Butler calls the "deeds," that compose our gender cause us to mistake our performance for natural or real, however. Butler sees gender as a product of discourses that pre-exist the individual. The individual is born into a structure of femininity and masculinity and must make their body conform to either one of the matching sexes, female or male. Butler's theory of how gender is produced illuminates how a female athlete might realize a gender conflict because the body she creates as an athlete may not match the gender expectations into which she is born. From this perspective female athletes might also feel greater freedom through sports because athletics allow them to perform a wider range of femininities.

Finally, Connell (1987) explains how gender is reproduced through the creation of a specific hegemonic masculinity, which is sustained in relation to all other masculinities and to women. Hegemony is achieved through social force, not physical violence. The private, domestic, and cultural spheres are organized in such a way that the dominant masculinity appears to be the natural order. Hegemony is also based in fantasy; most men do not embody this type of masculinity (Connell). Hegemonic masculinity is

supported by emphasized femininity. Emphasized femininity is the public performance of a type of femininity that is complicit with men's power. Furthermore, emphasized femininity prevents other types of femininity from gaining power – the experiences of other women who are not complicit with patriarchy are hidden or marginalized. Many female athletes do not perform emphasized femininity, and as a result they may find their types of femininity devalued by society. On the other hand, hegemony allows for resistance (Connell, 1987), so the female athlete does have room to challenge the dominant order.

Sport as a Masculine Domain

Gender bending, or exhibiting gender characteristics that do not match one's sex category (Lorber, 1997), frequently has negative consequences, as has been the case for women breaking into the traditionally masculine arena of sport. Sport has been male territory from its inception; in fact competitive sports were first organized in response to fear of eroding beliefs about natural male superiority (Messner, 1988). Sport as an institution is a major socializing agent, much like schools, the media and the family. For men and boys, watching and playing sports teaches them how to experience their bodies, relate to women, and understand male dominance (Nelson, 1994).

About masculinity and sport, Steve Harvey (1996) writes, "Sport has helped to perpetuate the privileged status of men in Western societies by equating male attributes like strength, aggression, and competitiveness with hegemonic masculinity" (p. 131), which in turn perpetuates female subordination. Susan Cahn (1994) sees sports as a place where men "accumulate tools – physical strength, training in violence, and permission to

use space and touch as they see fit – that have been used to assert male authority outside as well as inside the realm of sport" (p. 224). Masculinity and athletics are so intertwined that it has been argued that in dualistic Western society a female cannot be an athlete without violating what it means to be a woman (Clasen, 2001). The belief that athleticism and femininity are incompatible relies on another popular belief, articulated by Connell (1987, 2002), that gender differences have a basis in biological difference.

The sex segregation of sport illustrates the cultural belief that biological differences serve as the foundation for gender differences. Such sex segregation masks evidence that sport is actually a continuum where many women athletes outperform most men in various physical tasks and sporting events (Kane, 1995). For example, in a sport like golf, the best women players are better golfers than most men are, including most amateur golfers and all non-golfers. However, the sporting world only focuses on how professional men golfers can drive the ball farther than professional women golfers. Exposing the sporting continuum would be highly transformative because it refutes the biological inferiority of women used in large part to support patriarchal institutions. As a result, sex segregation in sport suppresses evidence of a gender continuum, relegating women to gender appropriate sports and questioning the biological status of exceptional female athletes as "real" women (Kane, 1995). The gender verification testing required of women in international athletic competition is one example of how the male/female or masculine/feminine dichotomy is being upheld in sport (Hall, 1996; Kirby & Huebner, 2002). By testing the sex chromosomes of women athletes, international sports organizations reaffirm the belief that women with superior physical strength are

anomalies, and it is necessary to confirm that these women are not "biological mutants because they so deviate from patriarchal conceptions of female capacity" (Kane, 1995, p. 211).

Social anxieties over maintaining biological distinctions in sport were made obvious in the analysis of the cases of Uta Pippig (Kissling, 1999) and Renee Richards (Birell & Cole, 1994). In 1996 Uta Pippig won the Boston marathon while suffering obvious menstrual pain, bleeding and diarrhea. Elizabeth Kissling (1999) found that the media coverage of the race served to reify and reinforce the differences between male and female athletes. The focus on Pippig's obvious menstruation while winning a sporting event creates an apparent "natural" sex difference in athletes (Kissling, 1999). In 1976 Renee Richards, a male-to-female transsexual, announced her intention to play a women's professional tennis event. The opposition to Renee Richards competing in a woman's sporting event by the media was more than opposition to transsexualism. This opposition emphasized binary notions of gender (Birrell & Cole, 1994).

The structure of sport has clearly been very important for the maintenance of male dominance and female subordination in this society. As a result, perceived threats to the male center of sport have been met with attacks on female athletes. Early responses to women athletes were to view them as abnormal (Clasen, 2001; Riemer & Feltz, 1995). In the first half of the twentieth-century women athletes were labeled as mannish, "muscle molls" or lesbians (Cahn, 1993, 1994). Women gained some degree of acceptance as athletes by being portrayed as successfully heterosexual, maternal and hyper-feminine while off the playing field (Cahn, 1993). Recent advances for women in sports have not

eliminated fears of their being perceived of as masculine. As a result, the lesbian label continues to prevent women from coming together, realizing their power, and challenging hegemonic masculinity in sport (Griffin, 1998, Sabo & Messner, 1993).

The media also play a role in the maintenance of the male center of sport. The sports media create the illusion of a "shared cultural consciousness" about gender roles and relations (Sabo & Messner, 1993, p. 19). Messner (2002) has outlined four ways the media treat contemporary female athletes. First, the media are silent about female athletes, rarely covering women's sports on televised news. Second, the media portray female athletes as heterosexually attractive in order to position their roles as athletes as secondary to their roles as women. As recently as the 1996 Summer Olympic Games, media coverage of female athletes focused on activities that highlighted their femininity such as future modeling careers and plans for having children (Clasen, 2001). Clasen argues that this media coverage focuses on traditionally feminine roles and places athletic achievement second. The media also reaffirm the dominance of men in sport through verbal attacks on successful female athletes, what Messner calls backlash. Lastly, the media incorporate coverage of a few exceptional female athletes in order to disguise the real inequalities in media coverage for women (Messner).

In addition to delegitimizing their experiences as athletes, maintaining the male center of sport has several other negative consequences for women. Belief in the male domination of sport serves to justify the continuing inequalities women face in sport. Women in Division I and II National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) sports programs receive only 42 cents of every new dollar dedicated to collegiate athletics

(NCWGS, 2002). Girls receive 30 percent fewer chances to play sports in high school and college than boys (NCWGS, 2002).

The male center of sport also perpetuates violence. Michael Messner (2002) outlines the triad of men's violence in sport: violence against women, violence against other men, and violence against their own bodies. The male dominance of sport fosters the misogynist and homophobic attitudes and actions and the suppression of empathy that makes such violence allowable (Dworkin & Messner, 1999; Messner, 2002; Sabo & Messner, 1993). Finally, the male model of sport has forced emerging women's sports to conform to the ideals of violence and aggressive competition in order to be seen as legitimate athletics (Dworkin & Messner, 1999). Women are playing injured, being treated as commodities, and celebrating individualism and aggression as they try to earn a place in the center of sport.

Sport is clearly a site for the construction of gender relations, and furthermore sport is simultaneously a location for resisting and transforming gender norms and hierarchies. Sabo and Messner (1993) call sport "a social and historical theater for feminist struggle" (p. 16). Messner (1988) has shown how the female athlete is contested ideological terrain. In other words, the current wave of women entering sports represents a struggle for women's equality, bodily autonomy, and self-definition. For example, the strong, sweaty bodies of the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) players challenge the dominance of men in sport (Barnet-Weiser, 2002). The forces being struggled against on the ideological terrain of sport include the commodification and

sexualization of female athletes in the media and the continued attempts by men to retain their dominance over women (Messner, 1988).

Despite competing in an environment where men dominate and women struggle against and resist subordination, women collegiate athletes have demonstrated limited sensitivity to gender issues and have not embraced feminism (McClung & Blinde, 2002). Limited exposure to feminism, stereotypes about feminists, and a narrow focus on athletics are among the factors impeding female athletes' sensitivity to gender issues (McClung & Blinde, 2002). Such a finding attests to the power of the male center of sport – that some female athletes are not aware of the contested ideological terrain they occupy even as they may be resisting gender norms. On the other hand, while sports may not be part of a feminist consciousness for many women, Jennifer Hargreaves (2000) found that succeeding in sport despite institutional sexism and racism was of major importance in identity formation for many female athletes in several different cultures.

Creating an Identity

While society's views of women athletes and gender are well documented (Cahn, 1993, 1994; Griffin, 1998; Messner, 1998, 2002; Nelson, 1994), the relationship between the woman athlete and her own gender identity is less well understood. Gender identity is the sense of being a person with a gender, which in part creates one's larger identity, or how one names or describes who or what she is (Connell, 1999). Identities can be multiple, with more than one 'masculinity' or 'femininity' existing, and furthermore, "the concept of identity has increasingly been used, not to name a box into which society puts

us, but to name *claims made by individuals* about who or what they are" (emphasis original, Connell, 1999, p. 458).

Research findings on gender identity and athletes have been somewhat contradictory. Lantz and Schroeder (1999) found that identification with the athlete role is positively related to development of masculine traits and negatively related to the development of feminine traits. However, non-athletes were more likely to connect masculinity with athletics, suggesting the stereotypical relationship between masculinity and athletics did not originate from athletes themselves (Lantz & Schroeder, 1999). Women athletes have been found to identify themselves as more masculine than non-athletes (Lantz & Schroeder, 1999). However, this fact does not translate to increased gender role conflict, an internal conflict stemming from the personal perception that being a woman athlete and possessing feminine characteristics is somehow incompatible (Miller & Levy, 1996). Lack of gender role conflict might be surprising considering that the femininity of women athletes continues to be questioned by society and that women do not see athleticism as contributing to increased social status (Riemer & Feltz, 1995).

Additionally, putting femininity on display during sports might allow women athletes to avoid such gender role conflict. Dayna Daniels (2002), in her study of the tattoos and body piercings of women athletes writes:

> Long and/or athletically inconvenient hairstyles, hair ribbons, jewelry, makeup, and long, painted fingernails have adorned the bodies of women athletes during practices and competitions and are an attempt to display a level of femininity

> which has no contributory asset to their motor performance or athletic excellence (p. 69-70).

While Daniels seems to believe women are disciplining themselves in order to produce appropriate gender norms, other women athletes have had different experiences with their gender identity. Neverson and White (2002) observed a playful attitude about gender, femininity and bodies among members of a collegiate basketball team. For example, these young women took a Barbie doll, a representation of ideal femininity, and dressed the doll up as an injured athletic woman as a playful jab at an injured teammate. Neverson and White (2002) observed this play to be one way the athletes were able to negotiate different types of femininity without being apologetic for their athleticism.

Sexual identity is also closely related to gender identity. The use of the lesbian label as an attack against women athletes has shaped how heterosexual and homosexual women athletes choose to represent themselves. Jayne Caudwell (1999) found the actual or perceived presence of lesbian sexuality in football (American soccer) affects individual athletes' identities, and that the athletes define their sexuality as it relates to their sport, football. Sexual identity and gender identity are clearly both shaped by discourse and by experience, including the culture of sport.

Gender and the Athletic Body

In sports, gender and gender identity is constructed directly on the body. The body also can be a site of resistance to cultural norms, and therefore sport can also be a "site of cultural struggle where gender relations are reproduced and sometimes resisted"

(Hall, 1996, p. 90). The body also can be controlled and manipulated by definitions of proper femininity.

Frequently, attempts to control one's body are made in order to achieve the ideal feminine form presented in society. This ideal feminine body is not only thin but moderately toned and shapely (Bordo, 1993). The inevitable building of large muscles that results from athletic training is at odds with this ideal feminine body, which could create a conflict for women athletes. Women who lift weights are aware of standards of femininity, experience some fear over becoming too bulky, and modify their exercise routines accordingly (Dworkin, 2003). Dworkin (2003) calls the limit women place on developing physical strength due to the ideology of appropriate femininity the "glass ceiling on women's physical strength." Duff, Hong and Royce (1999) found that female athletes expressed greater concern than male athletes did over acquiring an "unattractive" physique from weight training. However, the fear did not discourage women from more rigorous weight training than male athletes. Furthermore, female athletes took pleasure in being strong, believed physical strength to be important in sports, and thought strength makes a women more feminine (Duff et al., 1999). This study suggests that female athletes may be redefining femininity for themselves rather than struggling with feminine ideals that conflict with athleticism.

Clearly building muscle does not have the same effect on gender identity for all female athletes. The same can be said for the competitive sport of bodybuilding. Bodybuilding as a sport has been studied extensively as a location for the negotiation of gender through the bodily form (Bordo, 1993; Brace-Govan, 2002; Dworkin, 2003;

Heywood, 1998; Lowe, 1998; Shea, 2001; Wesely, 2001). Bodybuilding has been held up by some as a sport where athletes are redefining femininity and challenging gender norms. Leslie Heywood (1998) perceives bodybuilding as empowering, activism, freedom from commitments to care for others, permission to focus on oneself, and a space to realize greater physical strength and confidence. Wesely (2001) found bodybuilders attribute a more fluid nature to gender identity, understanding their bodies in a way that demonstrates that they are not passively locked into one identity construction. Heywood (1998) and Wesely (2001) both see clear benefits to bodybuilding in relation to successfully negotiating gender.

Christine Shea (2001) sees bodybuilding as having more of a paradoxical nature. Shea argues that competitive bodybuilding "both blurs and demarcates the lines between femininity and masculinity … both enhances and undermines women's self-esteem … and requires competitors to have masculine attributes … yet appear feminine, attractive and 'soft'" (p. 42). Heywood (1998) acknowledges that being large is in conflict with being feminine, and that female body builders are "perpetually under the eyes of the femininity police" (p. 34), but fundamentally interprets the contradictions in bodybuilding as a technique for refuting assumptions about female inferiority and physical weakness. In sum, bodybuilding is riddled with contradiction and has been interpreted as being both subversive and oppressive.

While aerobics is not a competitive sport, studies of women who participate in aerobics classes also offer insight into how the body is a site for contesting gender. The objective of aerobics is to burn calories and tone muscles in order to achieve the ideal

female form, but aerobicizers should be viewed not only as mindlessly subscribing to patriarchal beauty ideals (Markula, 1995). In a study of women who do aerobics, Markula (1995) found these women have active voices that compete with the dominant discourse of exercise videos and magazines. These mediums sell an ideal body that the women wish to conform to, but the aerobicizers also questioned the ideal, indicating their contradictory relationship with their bodies and their own ideal body (Markula, 1995). In another study of women who participate in aerobics, Maguire and Mansfield (1998) found women began aerobics programs intending to empower themselves though exercise, but instead the women experienced negative consequences from pursuing the socially ideal female body. This study showed that the reason for exercising was central to understanding how athletes feel about their body and their exercise process. In the Maguire and Mansfield study the initial reason for exercising was bodily empowerment and improvement, but for competitive athletes the motivation for training is heightened performance in a contest. This training goal should be considered as having the potential to alleviate some of the concern with an ideal bodily form.

The goal of the bodywork, or such physical measures to shape the body, is also significant when it relates to the role of the gaze in physical activity. One feature of this phallocentric culture is that women's bodies are gazed upon as objects for the viewer's pleasure. Brace-Govan (2002) found in a study of female ballet dancers, weightlifters, and bodybuilders that the level of empowerment gained from the physical activity was related to how much the athlete was subjected to the gaze. Ballet dancers experienced minimal empowerment from their bodywork because as visible symbols of beauty and

grace they were heavily subject to the gaze. While the bodywork practiced by bodybuilders is quite different in purpose, they too experienced little empowerment because bodybuilding is a highly voyeuristic sport. Women weightlifters were most empowered by their bodywork because they were less visible to public scrutiny and because their purpose was to gain strength rather than make themselves attractive for a panel of judges or an audience. Brace-Govan (2002) writes that her findings suggest that instrumental goals and avoidance of the gaze are the keys to being empowered through physical activity. This finding creates an unclear outcome for competitive athletes because they likely have instrumental goals for their bodywork but also are subject to the gaze during competitions.

While they are very different physical activities, both bodybuilding and aerobics have been understood as forms of bodily control and discipline (Lowe, 1998; Maguire & Mansfield, 1998). Research suggests practices of bodily control and discipline in sport also affect women's body image. Women's fitness magazines cast body image distortion (BID), a serious psychological disorder, as a common illness, but one that can be avoided by choosing the healthy lifestyle the magazine sells (Markula, 2001). Markula argues that this set of complicated discourses on BID allows women to see themselves as ill, ignoring the real societal problem. Women also continue to believe that they have the power to individually choose to reject oppressive feminine ideals and to choose a healthy attitude about their bodies based on self-control. The discourse around BID reveals how effective the disciplining of women's bodies can be when women regulate their own compliance with feminine ideals.

The use of the concepts of bodily control and discipline in sports studies are in part a result of the influence of Michel Foucault on feminist thinking (Hall, 1996). Pirkko Markula (2003) has recently applied the Foucauldian concept of technologies of the self to sport. A technology of the self is a practice that transforms the body in a way that is resistive or transformative, an action that frees oneself from bodily control or discipline, or the counter of a technology of power (Markula, 2003). Markula argues that a critical self-awareness is the most crucial aspect of a technology of the self, or in other words, a female athlete would have to be aware of the negative consequences of the narrow bodily ideal in order to make sporting practices resistive or freeing. This argument has two important consequences when conducting research about female athletes. First, scholars must learn what level of self-awareness an athlete brings to a sporting practice. Second, a similar action can be a technology of the self for one athlete but not for another depending on the athlete's awareness of the consequences of bodily discipline.

Susan Bordo (1993) has also drawn on the work of Michel Foucault and feminist interpretations of Foucault in her extensive discussion of eating disorders and the desire to be thin. She outlines how slenderness is closely linked to consumer culture, but it is also a gender-coded signification, meaning slenderness is specifically part of *female* attractiveness. In the environment Bordo describes, distorted body image and disordered eating behaviors are problems for many adolescent female athletes. Reel and Gill (1998) studied disordered eating attitudes among cheerleaders. They found female collegiate cheerleaders felt pressure to lose weight and were influenced by internalized gender

stereotypes and external pressures such as try-out weight limits. Gill and Overdorf (1994) explored body image and use of weight control methods among high school female athletes. Their research subjects had similar rates of distorted body image to non-athletes, and over one half of these high school athletes had been on a diet to lose weight. Such preoccupations with thinness and bodily dissatisfaction are significantly higher for white and Hispanic female adolescent athletes than for their Black counterparts (Rhea, 1999). Studies of body image concerns in female athletes have also revealed important information about how gender norms affect an athlete's view of her body. Bodily satisfaction among female athletes depends on context. While some athletes are pleased with their bodies in the context of athletics, they experienced body dissatisfaction in other social contexts where their athletic bodies were in greater conflict with norms of femininity (Greenleaf, 2002; Krane, Waldron, Michalenok, & Stiles-Shipley, 2001a).

The Intersections of Race, Class and Gender in Sport

The race and class of a body creates different experiences for women, and in this case female athletes (Bordo, 1993). The intersections of gender, race and class for female athletes are complex. The African-American female athlete is nearly invisible in the sports media (Corbett & Johnson, 1993; Smith, 1992). When athletes of color do receive attention, the media often erase the female athlete's race until it becomes convenient or necessary to emphasis race (Barnet-Weiser, 2000; King & Springwood, 2001; Messner, 2002). Even from within the Black women's fitness movement, a major goal has been to assimilate into the larger white middle-class fitness movement (Razza, 2002). Experiencing sport in a culture that attempts to erase race may create additional

conflict for a female athlete of color as she negotiates her identity. Furthermore, the female athlete of color may face an additional conflict regarding her gendered body because the dominant beauty ideal of this culture is white (Corbett & Johnson, 1993).

Stereotypes about Black women have afforded them more room in the sporting world because sports have been seen as a "natural" activity for lower class people, who are thought to be accustomed to manual labor. While such stereotypes have created some opportunities for women of color in sport, the specific sports Black women have been associated with are generally limited to track and field and basketball (Corbett & Johnson, 1993). Despite the popular association of Black women with certain sports, women of color remain underrepresented in the sporting world. African-American women face limited financial support, lack of administrative support, lack of role models, discrimination in team selection, and intimidation from male coaches and fans, among other barriers to their achieving equality with white male athletes (Corbett & Johnson, 1993). In addition to being denied opportunities in sport, women of color in sport are misrepresented (Smith, 1992). The quantity and quality of sports participation and the experience of an athlete is influenced by race and by class relations (Jarvie & Reid, 1997; Smith, 1992). The feminist framework of this paper is well suited for uncovering such race and class influences (McKay, Messner, & Sabo, 2000; Messner, 1992).

Theoretical Framework

This study was informed primarily by feminist scholarship on the body and on sport. It is both necessary and useful to outline the theoretical frameworks that serve as the foundation for any feminist methodology (Naples, 2003). This study was grounded in

Foucauldian, postmodern and social constructionist theories. These theories suppose that identities are multiple and not absolute, that meaning is constructed by the individual, and that sport and gender are among many social constructs – or inventions of society that are dynamic and appear natural.

While the activist intentions of this research included advancing equality in sports for women, and I am a supporter of Title IX and other legislation that creates opportunities for women, a liberal feminist perspective is not adequate for creating the types of change necessary for women in sport. Liberal feminism has a long history of working within the sporting world, however liberal attempts for equal access have done nothing to transform the patriarchal and hierarchical structure of sport (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003). Advances for women in sports thus far have required women to assimilate in an arena that is masculine in nature and dominated by men. A more useful perspective for approaching this research was put forward by Leslie Heywood and Shari Dworkin (2003). They suggest the use of a third wave feminist perspective for study of the female athlete because third wave feminism is well equipped to negotiate the contradiction and multiple meanings possible in any one image or experience of the female athlete.

Third wave feminism encourages critique of the second wave of feminism while still embracing the advances of the earlier movement, and third wave feminism focuses on cultural productions and sexual politics while re-conceptualizing ways of doing activism (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003). Third wave feminism was the most useful perspective for this research because women's own interpretations of gender, gender

identity, and the body are sometimes fragmented, rapidly changing and contradictory. Third wave feminism is also able to negotiate our postmodern consumer culture, which is largely involved in gender and body image. Finally, the third wave feminist perspective is both activist in intention and sensitive to the linguistic or discursive approaches common to qualitative research. This study is distinctively third wave because I am questioning second wave feminist ways of thinking about gender and sport and their exclusion of certain groups of women.

Significantly, much of the research on athletes, gender and body image has been of a quantitative nature (Duff et al., 1999; Gill & Overdorf, 1994; Rhea, 1999; Reel & Gill, 1998). Quantitative methods of studying connections between gender, athleticism and body image cannot capture the context of women's experiences. Krane, Waldron, Michalenok and Stiles-Shipley (2001b) used questionnaires to assess social physique anxiety, body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness and bulimia, and most athletes scored in the healthy range. However, Krane et al. (2001a) found a greater incidence of disordered eating patterns in the same group of female athletes using focus groups. The authors of the follow up study write, "self-report questionnaire responses may not be an accurate indicator of women's true self-assessments, and qualitative research may provide a more complete understanding of women's eating and exercising behaviors (Krane et al., 2001a, p. 20). I utilized feminist qualitative methods to obtain a more complete understanding of the athletes' feelings about their gender and their bodies.

The sum of feminist research on gender, sport and body image reveals that gender is a central component for organizing our lives and that sport is a location for negotiating

gender. These findings drove the aims of this research project – to better understand the intersection of gender, athleticism and body image for women athletes. As a feminist, my research questions were driven by a body of research that shows gradual advances for women through sport, opportunity for broader interpretations of gender and the potential for activism through sport.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Feminist qualitative methods give voice to the research participants and seek to challenge patriarchy (Reinharz, 1992). These methods are well suited to examine the following research questions: (a) how female athletes construct their gender identities, (b) whether female athletes experience a mismatch between their personal gender identity and the social expectations for women (c) how female athletes perceive their bodies (d) how perceptions of body image intersect with gender identity for female athletes and (e) whether female athletes see themselves as subverting gender norms through sport.

Sample

Participation in this study required that the women be between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five and that they be currently active in at least one competitive sport. Additionally, the women were required to have participated in competitive sports for 4 years or more. I selected this age range for the interviewees for two reasons. First, involvement in sports has a continued impact throughout the life course for athletes. Langley and Knight (1999) contend that sports participation remains part of continuing socialization and identity development throughout adult aging and development. Second, all the women in this age range began playing sports after the passage of Title IX, a significant historical moment for women's sports. The reason for limiting this study to current competitive athletes is that gender is not fixed, and former athletes may re-negotiate their gender identities after exiting the sporting world. This study involved competitive athletes with 4 or more years of experience because these women dedicate more time to sport and are engaged with others in athletic pursuits more frequently than

non-competitive athletes or women new to competition. The athlete's level of competition is considered in the analysis of this research, but it was not part of the criteria for inclusion in the study.

Participants for this study were found through several avenues. I began selecting study participants with a network sample. However, only four study participants were located through my personal network. Two additional participants were located through snowball sampling from my network sample. The remaining five participants were located by contacting college athletic coaches and local sports team's representatives by e-mail. The coaches and team representative I contacted passed the study information on to their teams, and the athletes contacted me voluntarily for participation in this study.

In all, eleven women were interviewed (See Appendix A for participant biographies and Table 1 for brief participant information). The women range in age from eighteen to thirty-one years old, with the average age of the participants being twenty-five. The sexual orientation of these women is also very diverse. Six women identify as heterosexual, three women identify as homosexual, and two women identify as bi-sexual or other. Various socioeconomic classes, religious preferences, and occupations are represented by these women.

Table 1: Participant Information

Name	Age	Current Sport	Past Sports	Highest Level of Competition Achieved
Ashley	19	soccer		NCAA Division I
Beth	28	running, cycling		recreational
Elizabeth	18	softball, volleyball	basketball	NCAA Division III
Erin	28	triathlon	rowing	NCAA Division I
Jennifer	28	running	track, cross country, soccer, basketball, softball	NCAA Division I
Joanna	31	swimming	gymnastics	United States Age Group ; Masters National Champion
Katie	20	soccer		NCAA Division III
Margaret	25	football	softball, basketball, soccer	professional
Mary	29	running	basketball, soccer, cross country, track	NCAA Division III
Nicole	29	cycling	rowing	NCAA Division I
Sarah	27	soccer	basketball, softball	NCAA Division III

The sporting experience of the study participants is extensive and represents a wealth of different sports. Previous research on gender and female athletes has been concentrated in the extreme margins of sport such as bodybuilding and weightlifting on one end and ballet and aerobics on the other (Brace-Govan, 2002; Heywood, 1998; Lowe, 1998; Maguire & Mansfield, 1998; Markula, 1995, 2001; Shea, 2001; Wesely, 2001). In this study, participants from a variety of sports were sought in order to explore a more full range of athlete experiences. The women interviewed are currently competing in softball, volleyball, swimming, running (road races and track events), cycling, triathlon,

football and soccer. In the past these women have also participated in basketball, gymnastics, mountain biking and rowing.

Data Collection

The interviews all took place between May and September of 2004. Interviews took place in the athlete's home or another location of her choosing. The average interview length was approximately 45 minutes. I presented follow-up interviews as a possibility to all the interview participants, but no such interviews were necessary.

The interviews were moderately scheduled. As Mason and Meyers (2001) say, this interview style allows "the interviewer to add or subtract questions based on the direction of the interview and to probe for clarification or more information" (p. 809). The interview questions covered demographic information; athletic participation; general understanding of the concept of gender; the athlete's personal construction of her gender; the athlete's relationship with her body; and sport as a potentially subversive behavior (see Appendix B). The open-ended questions encouraged the participants to give open and free answers based on personal ideas and thoughts. Reinharz (1992) recognizes that this method of questioning is "particularly important for the study of women because in this way learning from women is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women" (p. 19). Neglecting women's voices is a problem with the quantitative research on athletes and gender roles, as identified above.

Data Analysis

I audio-taped the interviews, and I transcribed the audiotapes in their entirety. My method of analysis was similar to the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss,

1967). This method, also called the grounded theory approach, "requires the researcher to constantly check, readjust, and recheck categories…The continual reading and rereading of the transcripts allows classification to emerge from the data rather than letting predetermined categories or preconceived ideas establish categories" (Mason & Meyers, 2001, p. 809-810). I read and re-read the transcripts in order to identify themes and coded the transcripts for the themes that were identified. Specifically, I coded quotations by first assigning broad categories that related to my research questions, such as body image or gender identity. Then I repeatedly regrouped quotations into more specific categories, such as grouping all the quotations about role models. After grouping all the significant quotations, I analyzed the groups of quotations for specific findings and general themes that emerged from the research. I have quoted the interview transcripts extensively in the results and discussion section of this paper in order to represent the athletes as accurately as is possible.

An important aspect of feminist methodology is reflexivity, or the critical examination of the research process, including the researcher's reactions and involvement (Fanow & Cook, 1991; Naples, 2003). I am a former competitive swimmer. However, I no longer identify myself as an athlete. An education in women's studies and personal experience with the research topic reflects my awareness of and interest in athletics and gender.

Limitations of the Work

There are two limitations to this study due to the participants being a volunteer sample. First, while I made an effort to contact women athletes from all parts of the

community, ten of the eleven women in this study are white. As a result, this study represents white women's experience with gender and sport. In future research on women in sport, different strategies should be employed to recruit women of color. In addition to being under-represented in sport, there could be factors discouraging women of color from volunteering for research projects on women in sport. Women who feel discriminated against in sport are likely less willing to volunteer for an interview on the subject.

The women in this study are diverse in many other ways including sexuality, religious beliefs, and sport preference, but they are also all alike in that they had, and continue to have, every opportunity to participate in sport and their experience has been a positive one. Women who have had to struggle to play sports or are having a negative experience with sports are likely less willing to talk about these topics. Consequently, this study does not help us to understand negative or discriminatory experiences for women in sport very well. This study does, however, illuminate what about sports some women are finding positive and empowering. Also, understanding the factors that created opportunities for these women can be used to create opportunities for others.

As I've mentioned, the diverse sexual orientations of the participants is a strength of this project. The women provide a variety of experiences in terms of their sexuality. However, it was frequently difficult to engage the study participants in conversation about whether or how their sexuality is related to their athleticism. The question "how does your sexuality relate to your athleticism" inspired confusion, one word answers or no answers at all. Such limited answers do not suggest there is no link between sexual

orientation and athleticism though; it only means the method of questioning was flawed. Further research on gender, sexuality and sport should utilize a less direct line of questioning when discussing sexuality. The participants were open in their discussion of seeing stereotyping of athletes and derogatory use of the words lesbian or dyke towards other women athletes, but rarely spoke of any first-hand experiences. This discrepancy indicates that there is much more to be understood about the intersections of gender, sexuality and athleticism.

Another factor to be cautious of in this study is the possible effect of using a network sample. One surprising thing about this study is that eight of the eleven women interviewed identified as feminists. It must be considered that women athletes who identify as feminists are over-represented in this study because I am a feminist and in some cases the participants were referred to me by other feminists. However, equal consideration must be given to the fact that the statements made by the women athletes on gender, body image, resisting stereotypes, and empowering women is consistent with feminist ideology. Chapter 5 discusses these topics in depth, but because of the possible limitations of the network sample, and because there may be a real connection between athletics and feminism, the subject warrants more study.

Chapter 4 – Getting Involved, Staying Involved

I set out in this study primarily with a focus on gender identity and body image in women athletes. While the findings in these areas are significant, other finds emerged that reflect the overall aims of the study but did not emerge from a specific research question. The women athletes interviewed revealed a great deal about how they became involved in sports, the factors that kept them engaged, and some of the tough times and conflicts they have experienced during their years as athletes. Their experiences with getting involved and staying involved in sports also revealed much about gender relations in sport and some effects of the patriarchal nature of sport.

Understanding how women come to be involved in sports and what keeps them involved is important because the benefits for women from playing sports are measurable. Prior research has found better physical and emotional health in women who participate in sport (NCWGS, 2002; WSF, 1998). In later chapters I will discuss how the women in this study have a positive body image, a healthy understanding of gender, and feel empowered as women, all at least partially due to being athletes. These benefits of sports participation can be opened up to more girls and women if we better understand what gets women involved and keeps them engaged in athletics. The athletes in this study mostly became involved in sports through family or friends. The role models who guided them through the sporting world were usually local figures they know personally. Finally, a major factor in keeping these women involved in athletics is the social aspect of playing sports. In all, personal relationships are the common factor in getting involved and staying involved in sport for the participants.

Family and Friends

Women have not always been allowed to participate in sports, and even today their participation remains hindered by stereotypes and structural inequalities (Cahn, 1993, 1994; NCWGS, 2002). Since the doors to sports teams are not being thrown wide open for women and girls to walk through, it is significant to see that the women in this study, all of whom have made a place for themselves in sport, have come to athletics along much the same path.

A major factor in becoming involved in sports for the women in this study was the influence of their parents. Seven athletes spoke about one or both parents facilitating their entry into sport. Ashley and Katie both got involved in soccer because their parents' friends' daughters player soccer. Margaret said about how she became involved in sports, "my parents let me join some teams when I was like eight years old or so, and then, there, it just kind of caught on, they gave me the opportunities to play for whoever was there." While Margaret's parents gave her permission to pursue an activity that, "she just went for [her]self," other women in the study were more actively influenced by their parents.

The simplest path to sport was through family members' participation and encouragement. Erin's dad was a sports fanatic, and he started her out in several sports. "When he found out he was going to have a six-foot tall daughter he made me try basketball, volleyball, like everything, like high jump, try everything a tall woman would be good at," she said. Nicole also found her father was the biggest influence in her becoming an athlete. "He would run, when we were little, lift weights, just very active

himself, role modeled that," she explained about her father. Katie feels that having a mother, a father, and an older sister who played sports was encouragement for her to play as well. About her family she said, "They definitely do what they can to encourage me to play. They push me a lot."

Other parents were not athletes or sports fans but saw sport as a safe environment for their daughters. Joanna's mother enrolled her in sports in order to keep her out of a bad situation at home. She explained, "when I was young I had a very volatile father, and my mom needed to do something to get me out of the house, so I went to school, and then right after school I - it was made sure that I had something to do, so she put me in sports." While Joanna got her start in sports out of a negative situation, it was nonetheless her mother's decision that she play sports, and her mother chose sports over all the other possible after-school activities.

Friends also influenced some of the women in this study to take up sports. As discussed above, Ashley and Katie got their start in soccer partially because of their parents' influence, and partially because they had female friends who had started playing. Beth, who did not participate in sports until she was in her twenties, also felt a friend brought her to sport. "The biggest thing was when Linda, my friend Linda and I trained for a charity bike ride," Beth said about how she became involved in sport and progressed towards competing.

The women in this study all came to participate in sports along much the same path – the influence of those close to them. Additionally, ten of the eleven women began playing sports as young girls. These finding suggest that at an institutional level, sport

does not provide many or varying opportunities for girls and women to become involved in sport. Instead, some girls and women become involved in sports though the influence of family and friends. The key to successfully negotiating the existing gender hierarchy in sport seems to be a support system that is already invested in athletic participation.

Role Models

Nine of the eleven women in this study talked about people they had close personal relationships with – either friends or family – being a big part of why they started playing sports. Personal influences are clearly important to these women. This point is highlighted again by who the women named as their role models as athletes. While many of the women did mention famous athletes they admire, there was an overwhelming tendency for these women to name people they know personally as their role models.

Friends and older teammates were often accessible role models. Beth identified a friend as her role model because her friend is overcoming many health problems to compete in sports, and her friend does not complain about her difficulties. Sarah and Margaret, both student-athletes themselves, said that older student-athletes were frequently role models for them. "Usually they were the seniors when I was like a freshman, that were in multiple sports like I was, and just trying to model after what they did," Margaret said about her role models as athletes. Similarly, Sarah said, "my role models as athletes growing up tended to be female athletes who were older than me competing like in my high school, at the college level, the same thing, usually upperclassmen where more my role models.

Two women identified their coaches as role models. For Joanna her childhood swimming coach was her role model. She still communicates with her old coach. Even though they are now both swimming coaches, she still considers him a role model. Katie identified her club soccer coaches in her hometown as role models. She admires their accomplishments playing on their respective national teams in Hungary and England.

Many of these same women named famous athletes as people they admire, but few called famous athletes role models. Having a personal relationship with and being able to identify with the person's life seems to be criteria for a good role model for these women athletes. Beth's words illustrate the importance of being able to identify with her role model. When asked about her role models, she replied, "it's hard for me to say professional athletes because I don't know them, but I certainly admire professional cyclists because you realize what dedication they have to have and how much sacrifice, how many sacrifices they have to make to do it." Joanna, who still has a personal relationship with her coach and role model from twenty years ago, also thinks it is important to identify with her role model. About her role models she said:

> I would say for me, instead of famous people, like a [Olympic swimmer] Michael Phelps, and they're certainly people to look up to, whether it's a [Olympic swimmers] Misty Hyman or Amanda Beard or whoever, I would say they are removed from my world, so I've always sort of had local people.

Mary's role models are her partner, who also runs, and who Mary calls a "fierce competitor," and an older male friend who she sees as well balanced and wise about running. She also mentioned the famous runner Paula Radcliff, but only as secondary to

her personal relationships. Mary said, "I have a lot of respect for her [Radcliff] just because she's fast as all get out, but I don't know much about her, I would say she would be a role model, but more so local people I see all the time." As a collegiate athlete, Elizabeth finds the best the role models to be other women in her situation. "Basically, I think anyone who goes to college and is able to do sports and keep up their education is a huge role model. People who do sports for a living, they just don't impress me that much," she explained. Again, being able to identify with her role models is important to Elizabeth.

While a personal connection with a role model is important, several women in this study admire famous athletes, and others even still call famous athletes their role models. Jennifer mentioned only famous athletes as role models, including Joan Benoit, Mary Decker-Slaney, Mia Hamm, Babe Didrickson, Jackie Joyner-Kersee and Florence Griffith-Joyner. However, while these are famous women athletes, they are not household names in the same way many male professional athletes today are. Jennifer's role models as athletes demonstrate a more sophisticated knowledge of women's athletics. While her role models are not local or personal friends, her role models are definitely not media icons either. It is likely that even though her role models are not personal friends, someone in her personal life exposed her to the athletes she calls role models.

Given the lack of attention to women's sports, it is not surprising that the media did not influence their involvement in sport. In contrast, personal relationships and personal role models are a significant factor influencing women and girls in sports. The

personal, in additional to the political, can help increase the number of women and girls who benefit from playing sports. Legislation, such as Title IX, and media coverage of women's sports are essential components of achieving equality for women's sports, however these athletes highlight the value of personal connections.

Staying Involved

Women athletes developed strong social networks through participation in sport. These networks helped them enjoy sport and kept them involved year after year. Six of the women in this study reported that the social aspect of sport was one of the main, if not the primary, reason they liked participating in sports. Mary said, "I like the people. I like having a community of runners, the friends that I've made. I mean more sort of post-college, but the running community is very tight here, so having sort of a network of friends." Mary has been able to count on her friends from running throughout different phases of her life, both in school and out. Jennifer, on the other hand, felt her social networks were stronger when she participated in college sports, but nonetheless, the social aspect of sport is important to her. She said:

> I love the team atmosphere, that's probably my favorite thing and something that I kind of miss since leaving college. I like participating with other people and in groups, that sort of thing, and in running there's always a niche that you can find, there's always people you can go training with even though it's kind of like an individual racing sport. I definitely like the team atmosphere and the interaction with other people.

For Nicole and Beth, their enjoyment of their athletic friends really determines how they spend much of their free time and who they spend their time with. Nicole said:

> I love the camaraderie. I have, some of my closest friends are friends that I cycle with or work out with, so the social aspect of it. That's another, when I was a rower, we all hung out together. It was inces, it was incestuous. And when we, now as a cyclist, a lot of my social things around, go around being athletic.

Beth also talked about her training and socializing being intertwined. When asked what she likes about participating in sports, she said:

> To me a lot of it's the social aspect, like all of my good friends are runners and cyclists, and every weekend, pretty much every weekend is planned around some sort of event, a race or a training thing, like let's get together and go to this cool mountain bike trail, or lets get together and cycle some place where we hadn't before, so mostly the social aspect.

The team atmosphere of sports is important to others as well. Sarah said, "I like being part of a team," and she attributed her feelings about team to the friendships she has made on her different teams. Elizabeth said about team, "you build a support group in sports, especially when you're playing on an all girls team, and it should, an amazing relationship that you can get out of that."

The importance of a positive social network or a good team experience in enjoying athletics is also evident in how two of the women athletes talked about conflicts on their soccer teams. Although she did say she likes being part of a team, Katie reports:

> I like the girls for the most part, on my past teams I've liked them more. They're very cliquey. I actually wrote a paper about it for my social psych class. They're, majority of the team is in the same sorority. Thirteen of the twenty-three returning players are in the same sorority, and that changes the way the team functions a lot. So I don't like that sorority, that the players are, not necessarily allowed to be in sororities, but that they are allowed to acknowledge it in the fall during season because that's when it has the biggest effect.

Many of the players on Katie's team shared a different social circle from the other players, and Katie did not enjoy this team as much as she has past teams because the social aspect of the sport is missing for her.

Ashley nearly quit her soccer team after a conflict with teammates during the past season. After a conference tournament game, which her team had lost, Ashley learned that some of her teammates had been up late the night before the game smoking marijuana. The offending teammates learned that Ashley had been part of a group that discussed the drug use with an assistant coach and were considering informing the head coach. The tournament loss, which may have resulted from some players' drug use, while upsetting, was not what led Ashley to consider quitting the team. Her strained relationship with her teammates was what upset her at the time. She said:

> The other girls found out that we talked to [the assistant coach], and like I mean, we weren't tattletaling, it was just like, you know, we were looking for advice. They got really mad and then it turned out to be my fault, everything came down on me. So my teammates, like they don't want to ask me to party, they think I'm

> a narc, you know? And like, at first I really cared, and I was like 'I wish we didn't do anything,' but now I'm kind of glad because I don't want that kind of crap to happen on my team.

Ashley and Katie's conflicts with their respective soccer teams show how important team is to them both and how when teams do not provide friendships and social bonding it can be a source of stress for some players.

For the women in this study, successful sports participation over the life course involves more than physical achievement. Successful athletic participation involves the influence of family and friends, local role models, and the enjoyment of the social aspect of sport. Family or friends influenced the women in this study to become involved in sports. Their role models as athletes are people they can identify with and know personally, not celebrity athletes. Lastly, the women identified the social aspect of sport, especially being part of a team, as one of their favorite parts of sport. Girls and women have had to overcome obstacles to their participation in sport, and sexism and inequality persist in sport, so it is significant to identify what motivates women and girls to get involved and stay involved in sport.

Chapter 5 – Understanding Gender as a Woman Athlete

Three of the research questions of this study concerned gender. I wanted to understand how women athletes construct their gender identities, whether women athletes perceive a mismatch between their personal gender identity and social expectations of women, and whether women athletes see themselves as subverting gender norms through sport. These questions are significant because of the implications for achieving gender equality for women in sports and beyond.

The women in this study had very flexible personal definitions of gender, and their own ideas about gender were very different from the way they described society's view of gender or gender roles. Overall, women athletes do perceive a mismatch between their personal gender identity and society views. However, the participants in this study did not experience conflict over this mismatch. Other scholars have argued that women athletes would experience a conflict (Duff et al., 1999; Dworkin, 2003; Markula, 2001), but that is not the case for the women in this study. Instead, their more flexible and ambiguous ideas about gender helped the participants to feel empowered as women. The women in this study identified sport as a proving ground for women, as crucial to the advancement of women, and as a location for learning skills that help them as women and for resisting stereotypes about women. These findings are very exciting for feminist scholars because while it has been known for many years that playing sports is emotionally and physically beneficial for women (NCWGS, 2002; WSF, 1998), only now are we getting at why sports are helping to empower women in so many ways. As is discussed below, women athletes are very much aware of the norms and stereotypes of

the patriarchy they live in, but they also learn how to empower themselves and expand their opportunities as women through their participation in sport.

The women in this study clearly recognized the gender inequality in this society. In particular, they described social meanings of masculinity and femininity that are in line with common gender stereotypes and norms. Masculinity and femininity were perceived of as opposites with little room for overlap. Although some athletes perceived flexibility regarding femininity, they did not perceive any expansion of male roles in society.

Recognizing Social Meanings of Masculinity

The participants described masculinity and male roles primarily through talk of physical strength, power and lack of emotion. Their emphasis on physical strength reflects their shared belief that physical strength is highly valued in society. In addition, the women athletes agreed that masculinity is the dominant gender in society.

Mary said about the social definition of masculinity:

> Umm, there's like strong, strong, emotionless, not emotionless, but you know, reason, you know, intelligence, powerful, you know. I think society still is pretty stuck in the old school masculine, I mean you know, even today, athletes, you think of men, you think of, when someone says sport most people are going to think of football, you know, professional basketball, it's going to be the male athletes, strong and sexual, and reason, intelligence, all that high status sort of stuff.

Mary identified that masculinity is about strength and reason and that those characteristics hold the most social status. Furthermore, she recognized that anything

high status would be a masculine characteristic. Jennifer also talked about how more value is placed on the masculine roles:

> I think in general, society places masculinity, roles, or they think of them as I guess more, more challenging. I almost think that men are expected to be able to do more than women on a physical and mental level, and anything that's kind of rough and rugged and you know, less about make-up and hair and clothes, and more about playing in the dirt and big trucks and things like that.

Jennifer sees society assigning rough and challenging roles to men, while femininity is more about appearance than anything else.

Other participants reiterated the belief that physical strength is an important characteristic of appropriate masculinity. Elizabeth said, "basically anything that takes strength and stamina and an intense amount of intelligence to do is a male, masculine role, something that requires leadership, that's pretty much what society thinks of it as." Katie described the social definition of masculinity as "aggressive, competitive, domineering, strong, bossy." In their own words, the participants in this study are describing hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is a specific dominant masculinity, created in relation to all other masculinities and femininities (Connell, 1987). This masculinity appears to be the natural order, however it is not based in reality. Even though the women identify masculinity as aggressive, domineering and physically strong, the reality is that most men do not embody these characteristics. Hegemonic masculinity is also supported by emphasized femininity (Connell, 1987). The ways the

women described femininity are consistent with emphasized femininity and shows the women have a good understanding of gender relations in society.

Recognizing Social Meanings of Femininity

When describing what society means by feminine or by female roles, the women athletes often described femininity in reference to masculinity, either as the opposite of masculinity, as a lower status than masculinity, or as both opposite and inferior to masculinity. Additionally, according to the participants, femininity, in society, is very much about external appearance, whereas they described masculinity primarily with internal characteristics.

Beth said that society means masculinity is "strength and power and testosterone and being in control," and used opposite and less valued characteristics to describe what society means by femininity. She said the social definition of femininity would be, "secondary to [masculinity], you know, letting other people do things for you, being gentler." Erin said masculinity is defined by power in society, and that femininity means being "subdominant, inferior." Mary and Elizabeth also described femininity as subordinate to masculinity, but Ashley had the most to say about the position of female roles relative to male roles in society:

> Definitely like the guy is stronger, the guy can do whatever he wants. It's like we are a male dominated society, which is changing, but I mean still ninety percent of people probably think you know, it's male dominated. Kind of women should follow the male role kind of.

And she said about female roles in society:

> Exactly like the women can do what they want as long as it's not superior to the male role. I guess that's what I kind of think it's kind of like. A woman, a girl, can do what she wants as long as it's still under what the guy does, and she can't be the first you know, not equal I guess.

Ashley's words are a good example of three themes in the participants' perceptions of social definitions of gender: first that masculinity is about physical strength, that masculinity is the dominant gender, and that gender roles are changing.

Recognizing Changing Gender Roles

Ashley only briefly mentions that gender roles are changing, but some of the other participants talked more about changing gender roles. Masculinity was seen by the participants as the more fixed gender, while they saw the definition of femininity in society expanding. Nicole said about masculinity, "I think it's kind of the traditional messages about be strong, don't show your vulnerabilities, be tough, be heterosexual, be anything not feminine, don't be weak, they're viewed on opposite sides of a continuum, I think, in a lot of ways." So while she has very clear ideas about what society says men should be, Nicole sees the expectations for women as less rigid. She said about what society means by feminine:

> Umm, I think that's changing, cause I think the images of women in sport throughout the nineties, like the Nike ads and everything, that has really kind of challenged the traditional feminine roles, passive, weak, not physically active, kind of being the stay at home mom and all that.

Mary also thought that society's definition of femininity is changing but that society is resistant to such change. She said society means feminine to be:

> Traditionally, the opposite of [masculinity], you know weak, emotional, but I think this is changing some, maybe in subcultures more than society at large, because, shoot, you still look at TV or magazines and it's still replete with traditional pictures of girls scantily clothed and you know, just emotional, not as powerful, not as smart, not as, not as, but it's changing.

And Joanna wavered on whether definitions of gender are changing. She said:

> I'm hoping my definition isn't still stuck in the seventies because now I think the lines are getting blurred a little bit, I think it's, people are becoming more accepting, I think people are accepting more.

So while not all the participants agreed on the level of change social definitions of gender are undergoing, the participants who talked about change agreed that changes are occurring to the definition of femininity and said nothing about masculinity expanding.

The Value of Appearance

The last shared belief of the athletes in this study is that femininity has a great deal to do with physical appearance. Five women described femininity in terms of appearance. Sarah said, "to me feminine means, I guess dressing more feminine, female style of clothes, wearing make-up." Katie used the word "prissy" to define femininity, and Ashley said the idea of a girl who will not get her dress dirty is what comes to mind when she thinks of femininity. For Beth, it is someone who is feminine dresses well and takes care of her nails. Margaret simply said feminine means "pretty." It is important to

note that these women are aware of the importance of physical appearance as a part of appropriate femininity because, as will be discussed later, they are largely not concerned with their own physical appearance, and therefore are defying gender norms.

The Importance of Awareness

The result that the women in this study were so cognizant of gender norms and social definitions of gender is important because of what it means for their identity construction. These athletes recognize that physical strength is associated with masculinity, that femininity is seen as the subordinate gender, and that physical appearance is central to achieving proper femininity. However, as athletes, the women in this study have a great deal of physical strength, are empowered as women, and are less concerned with their physical appearance. The results of this study show that women athletes are aware that they are defying social norms about gender. Critical self-awareness is central to being resistive or transformative (Markula, 2003). One aim of this research is to determine if sport is a site for resisting and transforming gender norms. The results of this study show that women athletes have a level of awareness of gender norms that makes resistance possible. Their awareness of the social definitions of gender also influences how they define their own gender identity and their personal beliefs about gender.

Personal Views on Gender

The set of beliefs shared by society, those seen in the media and in social institutions, are not necessarily grounded in reality (Connell, 1987). These beliefs are also different from what an individual person perceives masculinity and femininity to be

and how that individual person embodies femininity and masculinity. The women in this study recognized social definitions of masculine and feminine as binary opposites, rigidly defined, and with only limited room to deviate from the norm. However, their own definitions of gender are much more flexible than society's definition. While the women athletes defined gender in many of the same ways as society, their personal definitions were more ambiguous and flexible. The way the athletes make gender more negotiable is very significant because the negotiation is a coping mechanism. As athletes, these women cross traditional gender lines, so they need for gender to be more flexible. There are consequences for gender bending, some overt and some very subtle (Lorber, 1997). Being flexible with gender prepares these women for any criticism or social sanctions from gender bending, so they can be confident in their gender identity and have positive self-esteem, even when their athleticism is not consistent with acceptable femininity.

Several of the women athletes renegotiated gender by expanding their definition of traditional femininity. Nicole, for example, said society means feminine to be "prissy, submissive, weak, girly, flowers, pretty things," and then adds that feminine also means, "kind of flowery, girly stuff, but also strong, independent." Margaret also incorporates more strength into her personal gender definitions. She acknowledged society's meaning of feminine to be nurturing, and that of a caregiver, but she said for her:

> Feminine means pretty, but there's also like a little more underlying strength there, like I think I see it changing because with football, they, she, our owner, our general manager always emphasizes that we're women, ladies first, so when I'm

> out there I don't see it as playing with a bunch of guys, we're all women, strong women, so with feminine there's just another side to it.

In other words, Margaret does not see herself as masculine because she needs strength and toughness to play football; she just has a more flexible understanding of femininity which encompasses strength and toughness. Joanna does not see strength and femininity to be mutually exclusive either. "It's not to say that you can't be feminine and you can't be tough and assertive and aggressive and muscular," she said.

Being an athlete requires strength and toughness and other traits that are not traditionally thought of as feminine. So, as women athletes, the participants in this study are renegotiating definitions of femininity, being more flexible and ambiguous about what femininity means, in order to include many of the traits athletic women posses in their definitions of femininity. This ambiguity is seen again in the participants' discussion of whether or not women athletes are more masculine than women non-athletes.

All the athletes were asked if they believe women athletes are more masculine than women non-athletes. Their answers varied, but all allowed for some flexibility and for the athletes to be comfortable with their own gender identities. Some of the women disassociated athleticism from gender. Elizabeth said, "I mean, once in a while you'll see a masculine female athlete, but you'll also see a masculine female that's not doing athletics. I mean it's all based on what you're interested in and whether you're masculine or feminine, you can still be an athlete." Sarah said, "I think female athletes are more athletic than female non-athletes, but not necessarily more masculine." Other women

said whether women athletes are more masculine depends on the sport and the individual athlete. Still others said that by stereotypical definitions of masculinity, women athletes are more masculine. Five of the women agreed that women athletes are aggressive and tough, so they are perceived as masculine, but women athletes do not necessarily call themselves masculine. These definitions are more flexible and emphasize gender identity consistent with their athleticism. In other words, they refuse to assign fixed gender characteristics to athletes or to stigmatize women for traditionally masculine behavior such as strength.

Comfort with One's Gender Identity

The final way the women in this study expressed their flexibility about gender was in the relatively low level of importance they placed on men being masculine and women being feminine. Many of the women are renegotiating femininity to include a wider range of characteristics, and they are also completely accepting of those who choose to cross gender lines. In response to the question, "Do you think it is important for females to be feminine and males to be masculine?" all eleven participants responded negatively demonstrating their more flexible definitions of gender.

Sarah answered:

> I think it's important for people to be comfortable in their own bodies and who they are, so I think it's okay for a man to be quote unquote more feminine, whether that means staying home and raising the kids, or he likes to cook, or he likes to spend extra time on his hair, or he likes to wear any outfit from a three piece suit to a dress, and I think, you know, he's still a man, and I think that you

> know, same thing, a woman can go from very very feminine to very very masculine. Okay, basically, anywhere in between that she feels comfortable as far as her role and her identity.

Jennifer, like Sarah, also talked about the importance of being who you are over what society expects:

> I think it's important for us to keep our identity and what we identify with more, but that may not necessarily be sticking with our traditional masculine/feminine roles. I think the main thing is to be comfortable in your skin, and if I'm a girl that likes sports, and like would rather go to basketball games than the mall, then I should do that, it's not important for me to stay within that girl box if it's not as comfortable for me, that kind of thing. But yeah, I mean it's hard to say. I think what you're comfortable with is what kind of role you should stick with , maybe not even every aspect of that role, so maybe the answer is no.

Mary was very aggressive about her stance that people should feel comfortable with any gender identity:

> You know, I think it's all crap. Because I think, I would say I'm pretty, you know, like I'm a girl, I'm a woman, I would say I'm pretty feminine, but you ask anybody, I mean, I'm not feminine according to any sort of typical gender thing. I think it's important for people to, I think gender identity is actually key, I mean it's important, but I think that it's important for people to construct it by what's comfortable for them, and the problem is other people having a problem with their own construction of it, you know…no, no, no, it's not important for females to be

> feminine and men to be masculine. I think it's important for people to construct their gender identity as they see themselves and to be comfortable with that and to have other people be cool with that, that's what I think is important.

Mary, Jennifer and Sarah all spoke about narrow social definitions of gender. Sarah listed some roles that would make a man be perceived of as feminine. Jennifer mentioned the "girl box," and Mary talked about the problems some people have when they disapprove of others' gender identities. These women all feel that instead of being limited by these narrow social definitions of gender, it is more important that people identify their gender in a way that makes them feel comfortable, whether that identity crosses gender lines or stays within traditional definitions.

While some of the women interviewed discussed the importance of being comfortable with any gender identity, others stressed the importance of being a well-rounded, whole person over the importance of traditional gender definitions. Nicole said about masculinity and femininity:

> I think it's dangerous, if you're too much to one or the other. The people that I like to have in my life are, have a great balance of both, the people I get frustrated with are more to the extreme. My mother-in-law is so feminine, and it's very difficult for me to deal with her. I would say I think it's important to have both, and if I had kids someday I would want to raise them to be a good mixture of both traits.

Joanna also talked about having the best mixture of masculinity and femininity for yourself:

> Well, I think it depends on what the heck you are doing, where you are in your life. If you're a woman ballerina, yeah I think it's helpful to have some feminine traits, same if you're a male ballerina, I think you need to have masculine and feminine traits. I mean it depends on, I think you need to have, in my opinion, you've got to have a mixture of both of those traits, if we're going on a standard definition of what society is saying right now.

And Margaret rejected the idea of all men being masculine and all women being feminine because, "that would be boring."

Gender as a Continuum

Joanna, Nicole, and Margaret all find it important for people to posses masculine and feminine traits rather than expecting all women to be feminine and all men to be masculine. These three women, like the three who talked in depth about being comfortable with one's gender identity, are also suggesting that gender is a continuum, not a set of polar opposites. Well-roundedness and comfort with one's gender identity occur for these women at any point along a range between the most masculine and the most feminine. There is no dividing line separating women and men into feminine and masculine for the participants in this study. Such a line would be inconsistent with being a balanced mixture of masculine and feminine traits or with finding comfort with any gender identity. Other participants in this study also talked about the absence of a dividing line between masculine and feminine.

Beth said:

> I think you can be female and have some more masculine traits, I think it's fine. I don't think there's a dividing line where males should and can only do masculine things and women can and should only do feminine things. It's probably along societal made-up ideals, and there's a lot of cross over.

Katie said about the importance of men being masculine and women being feminine, "it's drawing the line too much and makes it harder to cross for the rest of us. If you want to be that way, go for it, but don't force it on other people." She recognizes how social definitions of gender draw a firm line between masculinity and femininity, however she sees gender differently, as a continuum where men and women can slide along the scale of masculinity and femininity. So again, the women athletes in this study recognize gender as a continuum, and they resist the binary opposites of masculine and feminine. Katie also said this about gender being a continuum:

> I used to say when I was younger, 'I'm not a girl, I'm an athlete.' So, and I think, there were girls on my team that felt the same way. So yeah, I think girls see, female athletes see femininity and masculinity as the extreme ends of the spectrum, and that they're in the middle because, especially for women in sports like soccer and basketball and ice hockey, for women who play ice hockey, softball, more team sports that are generally male, they're crossing the gender boundary of it and taking on a new role with, by playing the sport, which are like weightlifting and training, training, like basically your life revolving around it, it's more, I would consider in the past a more male thing to do.

Understanding gender as a continuum, where a person can fall somewhere in between masculine and feminine, and move along the continuum freely is one way the women in this study have a more flexible understanding of gender than society as a whole does. The women athletes in this study also show the flexibility of their definitions of gender with their acceptance of moving from one gender to another and with their complicating definitions of femininity to include characteristics not traditionally associated with femininity.

From this discussion of the participants' views on the social definitions of gender and how they perceive of gender personally, it can be concluded that there is a mismatch between the two. Previous literature suggests that this mismatch between social expectations for women and the athlete's personal gender identities may lead to a conflict for the athletes (Duff et al., 1999; Dworkin, 2003; Markula, 2001). However, in this study I found that the women were negotiating gender in ways that were very positive for them and that they did not express any gender conflict to me whatsoever. As a matter of fact, the women athletes felt empowered because of their perceptions of gender and because of their athleticism. The empowerment the women athletes experienced and the different ways they manage gender provide new insights into why participation in athletics is beneficial to women.

Empowerment of the Woman Athlete

Empowerment through sport occurred in different ways for different women in this study. The unifying factor in their empowerment is their participation in sport. Because of sports, the participants understand women to be capable and strong, and they

are resistant to stereotypes about women being weak, frail and less capable than men. One of the women in this study found sports to be a proving ground for women. For her, sport is a place to showcase women's abilities and to disprove that women are weak or passive. Jennifer explained why she thinks women should participate in sports:

> I think one important reason is just for, just to know that they can do it, and to see how far they can go, or how well they be competing in it, or whatever, at their level of desire. I think, I hate to say that they have to prove themselves, but in some ways I think it is important to prove yourself, and especially for women, and just to be an example for girls, for little people, as they grow older, to have role models and people to say, 'oh, I knew this lady that used to run marathons, I bet I can run marathons too,' you know. I think it's just good for women to solidify their place in sports, and just to remind everybody that just because we're women doesn't mean we can't do it.

Jennifer sees the importance in demonstrating women's physical abilities, and by doing so herself, by proving herself to others, she feels empowered.

Several of the other women were most empowered by the skills they learned through sport and through the ways they became prepared for other parts of life through sport. Many of the things these women learned are not skills that all women are usually taught because the skills do not fit with society's expectations for women. For example, Katie thought women should play sports to learn about competition. She said:

> I think competition's healthy, certain aspects, especially women, because, not so much anymore, but you're not taught to be competitive, you're taught to give and

> give and give. Because you can learn to be a leader. You can learn to take criticism, you can learn to give criticism, positive criticism.

Other characteristics these women learned through sport that helped to empower them are confidence, individualism and a strong sense of self. Elizabeth said, "[sports] helps with individualism and it, you build a support group in sports, especially when you're playing on an all girls team, and it should, an amazing relationship that you can get out of that, and also it definitely helps you build self-esteem, self worth." Sarah, Margaret, and Beth all agreed that playing sports makes women more confident. Sarah said, "I think women should participate in sports because it gives them confidence, teaches them to take care of their bodies, enables you to become a leader, a good decision maker, and just to give them something that they enjoy doing." Beth said:

> Confidence would be [one reason for women to play sports]. Well, for myself and lots of other women I've met, once you, you know, complete a bike ride or complete a certain running distance, like you gain so much more confidence and independence too, like you know, I can do this all by myself, and that's a good thing.

To emphasize the importance of confidence and self-worth, Mary shared a story about her niece who, at fifteen years old, is cutting herself and huffing aerosols. Mary shared this story because she feels her niece has no identity outside of her family and peer group, which has led to her destructive behavior, and because Mary believes girls can develop a strong identity and positive self-worth by playing sports. She explained:

> Like adolescents really need a sense of identity construction that they can get outside of other, you know, just the traditional peer group. That's why I think it's so important, especially for young girls, and sport too because it helps girls build a positive body image, it gives them a sense of strength … and it builds just a positive sense of self, which is so key in my opinion, you know, especially right now when kids are onslaughted with negative images and peer pressure and everything … I mean, it's interesting because there's a lot of women in the community here who've come to running at a later age because of just in the seventies, eighties, there are women in their forties that didn't run in high school like I did, so I think it's important for them too, just sort of sense of self outside, you know, I guess family and work, for women it's good.

That the women in this study are gaining confidence; building positive self-esteem and body image; feeling like they are proving themselves, and becoming empowered through sport supports the findings of many earlier studies about women athletes (Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar & Kauer, 2004; Heywood, 1998). This study contributes to a more complete understanding of the benefits of playing sports for women because the participant's narratives include what about sports makes them feel empowered as women – learning specific skills, proving themselves, and creating a sense of self.

Empowerment Beyond Athleticism

Some of the women in this study spoke about how playing sports is helping them succeed in other areas of their lives. Erin learned teamwork from sport, which she recognizes as crucial to the workplace but not widely taught in a work setting. She said:

> I've only been in the working force for a year or so, but it's sometimes hard for a woman to get as far as men in a career situation, so sports are great I think because, you know, it's women competing against women, and it gives you a better sense of teamwork.

Joanna said:

> If I hadn't competed in sports I wouldn't have known what hit me over the head in the business world. We're not necessarily taught to be aggressive, to be assertive. It [sport] teaches you, again, in addition to competing, being aggressive, being assertive, being creative, learning how to bend the rules or sometimes break the rules.

Other skills the women learned from sport that are beneficial to their careers are time-management, stress-management and discipline. These skills, along with the confidence and empowerment these women are achieving from sport, help them achieve in their careers as well. The experiences of these women suggest that the lessons from sport translate to other areas of life. Lessons from sport are also shaping values and beliefs – the lessons are translating to a feminist consciousness for women athletes.

Empowerment, Feminism and Title IX

The women athletes in this study have a clear grasp on society's definitions of gender; have a more flexible personal understanding of gender, and feel empowered from playing sports. So while it seems surprising that nine of the eleven women in this study identify as feminist, this finding is not inconsistent with the other results of the study.

McClung and Blinde (2002) found women college athletes demonstrate limited sensitivity to gender issues and have not embraced feminism, but the majority of the women in this study were not of college age. Eight of the eleven women in this study identify as feminist, one said she does not know enough about feminism to say if she is a feminist, and only two women said they are not feminists. The two women who said they are not feminists are college students, which supports the McClung and Blinde study. Clearly more research must be done to answer what the connection is between athletics, age and feminist consciousness. Unlike the participants in the McClung and Blinde study, these women do demonstrate sensitivity to gender issues through their recognition of gender norms and their resistance to gender norms through sport. The women also demonstrate knowledge of gender issues in their discussion of Title IX. Ten of the eleven women knew of Title IX, and all ten support the legislation even though many identified drawbacks of how the legislation is enforced. The women realize that as athletes they occupy contested ideological terrain, struggling for equality and bodily autonomy (Messner, 1988). Chapter 6 covers the struggle for bodily autonomy by women athletes and further discusses how sport is involved in feminist consciousness and resistive behaviors.

Chapter 6 – Women Athletes and the Body

Due to the centrality of appearance to femininity, the body becomes a central location for negotiating one's gender, especially for women. This focus on the body is magnified by the fact that the body is the major tool for athletic performance. Sports emphasize physical accomplish through training the body to perform a specific skill. This study was designed to determine how women athletes feel about and understand their bodies. Furthermore, because the ideal feminine body and the ideal athletic body may be at odds with each other, this study was designed to determine if women athletes are experiencing conflict with their athletic bodies.

Two of the research questions of this study concerned the body. This study asked how women athletes perceive their bodies and how perceptions of body image intersect with gender identity for women athletes. The women athletes in this study did not experience a conflict between their athletic bodies and the ideal feminine body. In fact, the participants expressed overall satisfaction with their bodies. However, despite reporting that they were satisfied with their bodies, many of the participants continued to control and discipline their bodies. Feminist scholars have explored women's relationships with their bodies, and in the case of both athletes and non-athletes, control of the body is a major part of how women relate to their bodies (Bordo, 1993; Lowe 1998; Maguire & Mansfield, 1998; Markula, 2001, 2003). The women in this study talked about controlling their weight, achieving and maintaining various specific levels of muscularity, concern with physical appearance, and their opinions on what a woman athlete should and should not do with her body. However, the bodily control these eleven

athletic women exhibit has unique forms and manifestations, different from women in society as a whole, and directly resulting from their being *competitive* athletes and having goals related to athletic performance. This theme, that of bodywork directed toward a functional ideal body, different from greater society's ideal body, was repeated throughout the interviews and is a critical finding in this research.

Another critical finding is that women athletes resist and re-negotiate gender norms. Although the ways in which these women athletes resisting gender norms and stereotypes was discussed in the Chapter Five, this chapter explores how controlling reinforces gender, and how women athletes are subversive with their bodies. By building muscle and embracing muscularity, these athletes resist and re-negotiate gender norms on a daily basis. They also resist gender norms through their daily appearance off the playing field. Moreover, they resist unhealthy gender norms prevalent in larger society.

Overall Bodily Satisfaction

In general, the women in this study expressed satisfaction with their bodies. Nine of the eleven women in this study were happy or satisfied with their bodies. "I feel good about my body," said Sarah. Ashley said, "I should probably watch what I eat more, but I feel pretty good about my body." Only Nicole and Elizabeth expressed unhappiness or negativity about their bodies in direct response to the question of how they feel about their bodies. Elizabeth said about her body, "it's decent, I'm not happy with it ever, but that's another part of my nature." "I wish I felt better," said Nicole about her body. Nicole was also upset by her poor body image. "I wish I had less body fat. I'm kind of

distressed by the numbers on the scale, seem to be going up. I hate it too, it's a waste of my energy. I wish I could put my energy into other things," she said.

Some of the women who said they were satisfied with their bodies did make conflicting statements about their body image. For example, Ashley talked about wearing a t-shirt over her bathing suit when she goes to a hotel pool because she is concerned with what other people think about her body. Elizabeth mentioned disliking her volleyball uniform because it is tight-fitting spandex, and she does not think she looks good in spandex. Both Ashley and Elizabeth reported feeling good about their bodies, so their continued concern about their appearance illustrates that even women with a positive body image feel pressure to look a certain way, specifically to be thin. Also, other athletes in this study remained concerned with what other's thought of their bodies. Eight women in the study talked about the opinions of others in relation to how they feel about their bodies. Six women said that they are concerned with what others think, and only two women said they are not affected by other's opinions of their bodies. So even for women with positive body image, the social expectations of a women's appearance affects women athletes, as does the policing of these norms and expectations by people in society.

However, the women in this study mostly talked positively about their bodies. Mary loves her body for what it is capable of:

> I feel good, I love, like, I love, with training and everything, watching the physical change, you know, developing muscle and using the body, although my partner would laugh because other than sport I'm pretty lazy. I think the female

> body especially is so fantastic, and the ability for me, as an individual to be able to test that, and see what I can do, and you know, muscles man, muscles are the best.

Mary's words are representative of many of the athletes in this study in that she talks about loving her body in the context of athletics. Previous studies have shown that bodily satisfaction depends on context and women athletes are more satisfied with their bodies in the context of athletics (Greenleaf, 2002; Krane et al., 2004, Krane et al., 2001a). Mary is proud of her athletic body. Overall, the women who spoke negatively about their bodies usually did so in a non-athletic context. This study reinforces the idea that bodily satisfaction depends on context, but it also reveals the significance of the relationship between body image and athletics – that having instrumental goals for one's body leads to positive body image and empowerment.

The Instrumental Body and Body Image

In general, the women in this study were satisfied with their bodies. But what is more interesting is that all the women athletes interviewed, whether they feel good or bad about their bodies, perceived a strong connection between how they feel about their bodies and their playing sports. Training the body and using the body to accomplish an instrumental goal, like scoring a touchdown, spiking a volleyball, or going faster on a bike, makes athletes feel good about their bodies. In other words, the reason for shaping and changing one's body determines whether or not the bodywork is empowering to the woman.

Mary's quote in the previous section exemplifies the connection between feeling good about her body and being athletic. Additionally, Margaret said, "I think, I feel better about my body now that I'm playing football then when I wasn't." She adds, "so when I'm not playing sports I don't like my body, but when I am playing I feel good about it." Joanna, who left her sport of swimming for several years, reported a marked difference in her body image once returning to sport. Nicole said, "I would say, for the most part [my athleticism] is what keeps me still feeling good about myself, because I know I can go out there and physically move and be competitive, and that's a boost to self-esteem." Erin attributed her positive body image to her athleticism because it helps her see her body in a different way from how it might be seen by society. She said:

> Well, [sport] really makes me feel better about being so tall, and big, because I have, I've always just had really big legs, and some women might think that's ugly, but I think it gets me up the hills faster and makes me run faster, and I think it's kind of, I think I'm lucky.

Other women attributed less concern about weight, increased confidence and more comfort with their bodies to their participation in sports.

The women in this study reported that they feel good about their bodies because they participate in sport and that sport makes them feel good about their bodies. Women athletes feel good about their bodies because of what they are capable of doing with their bodies – the physical accomplishments associated with their sport. While women athletes work on their body a great deal, the purpose for that work is different from non-

athletes who work on their bodies so they will look good and conform to the ideal female body.

Previous research on women athletes elucidates the significance of the instrumentality of the athlete's body. Brace-Govan (2002) found that weight lifters experienced more empowerment from bodywork, measures to shape the body, than dancers or bodybuilders do. The weightlifters were most empowered by their bodywork because they had the instrumental goal of lifting the greatest amount of weight possible rather than being judged on their physical appearance like the dancers and the bodybuilders are. The studies on women who do aerobics have had similar results. Women who do aerobics have a goal of achieving a certain body type, not of achieving a specific athletic feat, and as a result aerobics are not an empowering physical activity for most women (Maguire & Mansfield, 1998).

The women in this study all participated in sports with instrumental goals for their bodies, like weightlifting. Whether the goal was running faster or scoring a soccer goal, all the women who participated in this study had objective criteria to win at their game, and the criteria had nothing to do with physical appearance. The results of this study build on previous research on sport and body image and demonstrate further how women achieve positive body image and empowerment by competing in sports with objective physical goals as the reason for their bodywork.

The results of this study also agree with another feminist qualitative study by Krane et al. (2004) about women athletes and how they manage expectations of appropriate femininity. They found that women athletes reconcile the contradiction

between being athletic and having the ideal body by focusing on the "function of their size and strength" (p. 324). Furthermore, they had similar results with women athletes taking pride in their athletic accomplishments and feeling empowered.

For the women in this study, the concrete accomplishments yielded from their bodywork made them feel good about who they are, what they are capable of, and their strength as women, rather than the primary focus being on how they look. Nicole said about sport:

> I think it can be so important to body image, to just feel in touch with your bodies… to feel your whole self doing something … but when I'm on the bike, and my legs are making me move up a mountain, because we ride up in the mountains sometimes, I've never felt such a deep appreciation for my body and what it can do.

Joanna also feels good about her body because of what it is capable of. She said, "it [training] feels great, it's a sense of accomplishment … it makes me feel pretty powerful, accomplishing things." Erin feels good about her body, even though her height and larger legs are not conventionally beautiful because she can run fast and cycle up hills quickly, because of those accomplishments. The reason these women train hard and work on their bodies is not to change their physical appearance, it is to excel at their sport, and those sporting accomplishments make them feel good about their bodies.

Instrumental Change

The athletes in this study even showed that their bodywork is motivated by athletic goals, not appearance goals, when they were critical of their bodies or expressed wanting to change their bodies. Unlike non-athletes, the women in this study were not critical of their bodies because they wanted to conform to society's ideal female body, they were critical of their bodies because they wanted to have the ideal body for performing as an athlete.

Sarah said:

> I think being an athlete has kept me in shape and allowed me to be comfortable with my body, but I also fee like I'm a lot more critical of my body than maybe a lot of non-athletes because when you participate really competitively and then you start to participate not as competitively, and you start to lose strength of muscle tone or even metabolism lowers, like I'm a lot more critical of if my body begins to change.

Elizabeth also held herself to a tough standard because she is an athlete. She said, "I think the fact that I'm athletic makes me want to have the six-pack abs and everything. I want to be strong, look strong. I don't like the layer of fat covering over because it makes me feel less like an athlete." Jennifer said:

> When I'm not training, and you know, I've noticed if I put on some weight, and I'm not running very well, I just don't feel good and I definitely feel like I can see the changes physically and I start to get uncomfortable, so maybe that's a bad

> thing, maybe it's kind of like obsessive, but I definitely feel better and feel better about myself and my appearance when I'm involved in sports and doing things.

For Elizabeth, Jennifer and Sarah, being critical of their bodies is not about physical appearance. Instead, they are critical of their bodies staying in good shape for performing as an athlete. Sarah and Elizabeth were concerned with being strong, and Jennifer was concerned with gaining weight because that slows down her running.

Several of the women in this study talked about wanting to change or improve their bodies in some way. The women were motivated to change their bodies to improve as athletes also. Katie said, "yeah, I'd like more muscle on my legs. I'd like my arms, I'd be happy with more muscle, flatter stomach, what girl doesn't want a flatter stomach, but that's more because I need to have stronger abs for my back." Katie is concerned with changing her body for peak soccer performance because she must have strong stomach muscles so her back problems are not aggravated by playing soccer. Katie wanting to build muscle also shows that her bodywork is motivated by her athleticism because being very muscular is contrary to society's ideal female body. Nicole wants to lose some weight and lower her body fat, but again her reason for wanting to change her body is to achieve her goals as an athlete. She said, "I do love my body, I just wish I had lower body fat." She later explained that she wants to lose weight because it is advantageous to be lighter in cycling so you can ride up the hills faster.

Instrumental Ideal Bodies

The women in this study also show that their bodywork is motivated by instrumental goals in how they talk about their ideal bodies. For many of the women in

this study, their ideal body is consistent with peak athletic performance and not defined by society's standards for a woman's physical appearance. Eight out of eleven women said their ideal body is an athletic body type. Of the other three women, one said she does not think there is an ideal body, one did not answer the question, and only one woman said her ideal body is consistent with the ideal body presented by society. The specific sports they play and the instrumental goals they have for their bodies each influence their feelings about ideal bodies and bodywork. The ideal body in society is smaller and less muscular than an athlete's body. If these women were very concerned with meeting society's expectations, then they would not consider the athletic body ideal.

Sarah said her ideal body is muscular, and her ideal body would be even more muscular than the ideal build for a soccer player because, "soccer players don't tend to have strong upper bodies." Margaret said, "not a supermodel, an athlete to me is the ideal body type," and Mary, said, "I would think the ideal body is the ideal body for my sport."

Some of the women listed athletes by name when asked about their ideal body. Joanna, a swimmer herself, named a few Olympic swimmers as she described her ideal body:

> I think what comes into mind is some of the swimmers' bodies I've seen at the Olympics recently, and I'm even talking about some of the ones that are six-two, and … and some are pretty muscular, and I'll be honest, but I like, I think they look good, I really do, I like those bodies.

Ashley mentioned some professional soccer players when she describes her ideal body:

> Mia Hamm, she's fit, very toned. Brandy Chastain. These are just all the people that you can see their bodies all the time. It's also like you, that their training for their body, that they're not doing the wrong things and you know drinking and smoking all the time. And they're doing the right things for their body.

Ashley reveals how important the physical abilities of her ideal body are when she talks about these soccer players. Whether or not an athlete smokes or drinks is not something you can see on her body, but Ashley says that avoiding alcohol and smoking are part of her ideal body nonetheless. She is deemphasizing what her ideal body actually looks like and emphasizing what her ideal body can accomplish physically.

From their talk of ideal body types, it is clear that these women prioritize their sports goals over conforming to society's ideal body. If these women were seriously concerned with physical appearance their ideal bodies would be smaller, less muscular, and specifically, not one of an athlete. Focusing their bodywork on athletic accomplishments translates to positive self-esteem and good body image. Their focus on athletic accomplishments is also helping the women resist dangerous gender norms.

The Body and Resisting Gender Norms

As was discussed in the previous chapter, the women in this study re-negotiated gender norms and resisted gender stereotypes through sport. These women also subvert gender norms and resist society's ideal female body through their own bodies. One way the participants resist is by striving for an athletic body instead of the more passive societal ideal. Other ways they resist include by building muscle, their daily physical appearance, and the rejection of other more dangerous gender norms.

The women in this study identified femininity as being about dressing well, wearing make-up, proper nail care and looking pretty. According to some feminist scholars, these practices are time consuming and maintain women's subordination (Bordo, 1993; Wolfe, 2002). Many of the women in this study reject these gender norms through their daily appearance. Messner (2002) has argued that women athletes remain subject to sexualization and intense pressure to appear feminine, but the women in this study are either not feeling this pressure or they are resisting it.

Seven women in this study described their daily appearance, outside of sport, in a way that suggested a low level of concern over how they look. Beth said, "I occasionally do my hair, but I still don't do make-up, and I will either do like really casual shorts and a t-shirt or you know, sometimes I'll dress up and wear a dress, but again, it's mostly about comfort." Katie described her regular look, "jeans, tank-top, t-shirt, sweater if it's cold, hooded sweatshirts … flip flops. I live in jeans though. I don't wear skirts all that often. I don't go out of my way. I don't really care." And Margaret explained, "I guess because you just exert so much when you play sports that sometimes you just really don't care afterwards, you just wear flops and a t-shirt." A few women acknowledged having to dress up more for their jobs, but overall they still did not dedicate much time to their appearance. On and off the playing field, these women dress for function. Their priorities are elsewhere, so they are not spending their energy conforming to a set standard of feminine beauty.

Krane et al. (2004) found women athletes making similar choices about their appearance. They concluded, "rather than simply being passive victims of hegemonic

femininity," women athletes are making choices about how to perform different gender experiences (p. 327). Similarly, in this study, women athletes have made choices to use sport as a site for resisting gender norms.

Several of the women rejected dangerous activities associated with ideal femininity, including dieting, eating disorders and compulsive exercising. Specifically, nine women rejected such measures to reduce body weight in their interviews. Jennifer said, "I don't agree with starving yourself … I know that ran rampant through several cross-country programs in college … and I definitely think it's important to keep up with good nutrition, and healthy eating doesn't always mean low fat or low carb or whatever else." Jennifer and Joanna also shared encounters they have had with women who have eating disorders or over exercise, and the idea of having to diet was overwhelmingly rejected by these women.

The body is central to both athletics and negotiating gender, so it is not surprising to see that these women have positive feelings about both their gender identities and their bodies. They share an overall satisfaction with their bodies because of the utility of their bodies. As competitive athletes, they focus their bodywork on instrumental goals, not physical appearance, and therefore feel good about their bodies and what they can accomplish. They reject dangerous gender norms associated with the ideal female body because of their combined positive body image and flexible ideas about gender.

Chapter 7 – Discussion and Conclusion

The goal of this research was to understand how women athletes define gender and their gender identities and to understand how gender, body image and athleticism intersect. The specific research questions I set out to answer are: (a) how do women athletes construct their gender identities, (b) do women athletes experience a mismatch between their personal gender identity and the social expectations for women (c) how do women athletes perceive their bodies (d) how do perceptions of body image intersect with gender identity for women athletes and (e) do women athletes see themselves as subverting gender norms through sport?

Themes

My first two research questions addressed how women athletes construct gender in terms of their own gender identity and in relation to social definitions of gender. The women in this study construct their gender identities in a flexible manner. This theme is consistent with previous research on athletes by Michael Messner (1998), who has said women's participating in sports represents a struggle for self-definition. The women in this study defined gender for themselves in ways that allowed them to cross traditional gender lines and re-define femininity to include the characteristics of an athlete. They did not assign fixed gender characteristics to athletes or stigmatize women with traditionally masculine traits. Also, they stressed the importance of being comfortable with one's identity over meeting traditional gender definitions. The women also perceived gender to be a continuum and that one person can have multiple gender identities.

The ideas the women had about gender reflect several different ways that gender has been conceptualized by scholars. Connell (1999) emphasized that identities can be multiple, that one person can embody more than one masculinity or femininity. Judith Butler's (1999) concept of gender as performance also allows for more flexibility and even play with gender. The women in this study performed and embraced a wider ranger of femininities, and they did so because of their athleticism.

The women athletes in this study were also able to identify society's definitions of masculinity and femininity. They recognized that masculinity is the dominant gender in society and that strength is highly valued. They recognized that femininity is seen as both opposite and inferior to masculinity. They also described social definitions of femininity largely in terms of physical appearance. Finally, they perceived that female roles, but not male roles, are expanding over time. The women's recognition of gender norms and definitions are significant because it shows that they are aware that they are defying social norms about gender. Interestingly, while there is a mismatch between the social definitions of gender and the athlete's personal gender identities, the mismatch does not appear to cause a conflict for them. Previous research on athleticism and gender role conflict has had inconsistent results (Lantz & Schroeder, 1999; Miller & Levy, 1996; Riemer & Feltz, 1995). This study suggests that gender role conflict is not a problem for women athletes, instead they enjoy having more freedom to express different gender identities.

My next two research questions addressed how women athletes perceive their bodies and how their perceptions relate to athleticism. Women athletes are satisfied with

their bodies overall. Athletes are not, however, exempt from bodywork, but athletes have different goals and motivation for working on their bodies than non-athletes. These instrumental goals, along with athletic accomplishments, help build positive body image. In sum, this study elucidates the importance of *competition* in building positive body image. Earlier studies have suggested that physical activities with instrumental goals are more empowering for women than other types of body work (Brace-Govan, 2002, Maguire & Mansfield, 1998). This study supports those earlier findings and builds on them by elucidating the importance of competition to empowerment and positive body image. Additionally, the body is an important site for negotiating gender. Another finding of this study is that the participants resisted dangerous gender norms concerning the female body such as dieting.

There were other themes that emerged from this study that did not address a particular research question, but they do address the larger aims of this study. The other themes include that women and girls are influenced to participate in sports by family and friends, that they have local role models, and that the social aspect of sport is important to successful participation. The fact that the women came to sports in similar ways confirms that women and girls have limited opportunities to become involved in sports. The athletes' desires to identify with their roles models can be attributed to the patriarchal nature of sport. Women athletes are marginalized and sexualized in the media, and they are often portrayed in a traditionally feminine ways (Messner, 2002). The women in this study found local women to be more like them, and therefore better role models, than the women athletes who are portrayed in the media. These findings about how women

became involved in sport and who their role models were are very significant because the findings can help in creating ways to increase involvement by women and girls. This study and previous research has shown that involvement in sport is beneficial to body image and positive gender identity, so it is important to increase access and participation.

My final research question addressed the potential for subverting gender norms through sport. I found women athletes resist gender norms in a variety of way – by building muscle, by concentrating on physical accomplishments over physical appearance and by rejecting measures to reduce body weight. The themes about women athletes subverting gender norms also went beyond behaviors specific to sport. The participants overwhelmingly identified as feminists, and the empowerment they experienced from playing sports translated to other areas of their lives, such as their careers. These themes support and lend explanation to previous studies that found many successful business women participated in sports, and they connected their success to lessons learned from athletics (Bunker, 1998; Game Face, 2002). My findings contradict a previous study that found women athletes have demonstrated little sensitivity to gender issues and have not embraced feminism (McClung & Blinde, 2002). In addition to identifying as feminists and resisting gender stereotypes, the women athletes even saw their sports participation as a type of activism.

This theme is one example of why it was appropriate to utilize a third wave feminist perspective for this study. Third wave feminism allows for non-traditional definitions of activism. The women in this study saw their being role models, breaking stereotypes and just participating in sports as activism. Third wave feminism was also

appropriate for this study because it embraces the multiple meanings of gender relations in daily activities, the media and elsewhere. Third wave feminism focuses on cultural productions – such as the woman athlete. Applying third wave feminism to the study of women athletes means taking into consideration the cultural phenomenon of sports, that sport is constructed to perpetuate male dominance, and that those factors mean different things to the individual women who participate in athletics.

Implications for Research, Policy and Practice

The results of this study have implications for both policy and programs concerning women and sports. Title IX has faced serious opposition in the current political climate, but this study further supports the need for the legislation. First of all, the women in this study credited Title IX for their opportunities to play sports. Second, Title IX focuses on equalizing competitive athletics, and this study has shown that competition is at the crux of the benefits for women who play sports. Lastly, Title IX has helped to improve the number of women who are coaches and administrators in competitive sports. This study has shown the importance of local role models for women and girls to become involved in sports and stay involved into adulthood.

This study also suggests that our efforts can be better directed in sports programs for women and girls. The GoGirlGo! Campaign is a national program sponsored by the Women's Sports Foundation. With demonstration communities in Atlanta and Chicago, the goal of the program is to get one million girls, ages 8-18, physically active over a three year period, beginning in 2004. The GoGirlGo! mission is to improve girls' physical and emotional health and improve their chances "of successfully navigating the

heavy emotional and social pressures of girlhood" (GoGirlGo! National Campaign, n.d.). One important strength of the GoGirlGo! Campaign is that it is increasing access to sports for girls in low income families and girls of color. However, based on the results of this study, the GoGirlGo! Campaign may be successful in improving the physical and emotional health of many girls, but it may also fall short in truly empowering girls through sport. I think the shortcomings of this program are the focus on famous role models and the lack of emphasis on *competitive* sports.

One result of this study is that the women became involved in sports and stayed involved in sports because of many personal relationships. The influence of family and friends and local role models was important to athletic participation. There is no evidence that famous women athletes are going to discourage girls from being athletic, however the GoGirlGo! Campaign would likely be more successful with more involvement from local and personal role models for girls.

In order to increase successful participation in sport for women the results of this study need to be considered by parents, coaches and supporters of women's sports. Some ways to increase women's sports participation, based on the results of this study, might include educating parents and other adults on the benefits of encouraging girls to play sport; training coaches to be sensitive to the importance of team dynamics and social interaction between players; and creating access for girls and women to positive athletic role models in the community. In sum, micro-level personal efforts are important to involving girls and women in sport, and these efforts must supplement macro-level changes, such as Title IX.

Another key result of this study is that competition is critical to empowering women athletes. Women learn many valuable lessons through competition. Also, competing in sports gives women instrumental goals. Those instrumental goals shift their focus away from physical appearance, social expectations about gender and the ideal body. Instrumental goals help women feel good about their accomplishments, feel powerful, and subvert gender norms. However, the GoGirlGo! Campaign does not have a strong emphasis on competition, therefore there is a risk that the physical activity results in a focus on physical appearance, which is not beneficial for body image and does not subvert dangerous gender norms. The women in this study have shown that competition at any level, from national championships to recreational leagues, empowers women and takes physical appearance out of physical activity. This finding should be considered when creating sports programs for women and girls in order to have the best outcome for the athletes.

The above suggestions about how to involve more women and girls in athletics are an important contribution of this research. These suggestions can help more women and girls reap the physical, emotional and social benefits of sport. This study lends further evidence of sport being a path to empower women and what aspects of sport are empowering. Not all physical activity will empower women and build positive body image. Physical activity that is not focused on physical appearance has the greatest potential to empower women. Competition helped the women in this study focus their goals, empower themselves, improve body image and learn skills that translate to other

areas of their lives. The value of competitive sports for empowering women is the single largest contribution of this study to the field of women's studies.

Another contribution of this study is that it lends understanding to how playing sports is helping women succeed in other areas of their lives. Previous research has found that highly successful women frequently have a history of sports participation. Of all the women identified as key leaders in Fortune 500 companies, 80% participated in sports during their childhood and self-identified as having been "tomboys" (Bunker, 1998). Additionally, in a national survey, 82% of executive businesswomen played sports growing up and the vast majority of those women say the lessons they learned through sport contributed to their success in the business world (Game Face, 2002). However, these studies fail to address the relationship between career success and athletic participation.

Feminist scholars have shied away from studying sport in the past because athletics is a masculine domain. However, participation in sport does not have to make women athletes complicit in maintaining patriarchy. As a matter of fact, the women in this study were resisting gender norms through athletics. Michael Messner (1988) has said women athletes occupy contested ideological terrain. Recent developments in feminist thought, such as third wave feminism and feminist cultural studies, further our understanding of gender relations in sport and in society as a whole without perpetuating male dominance. The results of this study begin to show the potential for feminist scholarship on sport.

Finally, this study elucidated more questions that should be pursued by feminist sports scholars. Further research on the topic of women athletes and gender must include greater racial diversity in the participant sample. This study was limited by using a small sample that was partially a network sample. However, the questions asked and the qualitative methods used in this study are valuable and should be repeated. Repeating the research questions from this study with younger girls and older women will be important to a more complete understanding of women athletes and gender identity. Further research should also be done to determine if sport inspires a feminist consciousness at the same rate it did for the women in this study.

This project revealed the potential for a great source of women's empowerment in sport, and that potential should be pursued. The participants in this study have translated their empowerment from sport into other areas of their lives, and more work should be done to understand the larger implications of sports participation. This study also revealed a great deal about how gender is negotiated and how women relate to their bodies. Vikki Krane and her colleges have been doing good research about athletes and gender. She has been using feminist cultural studies to ground her work, and she has had similar findings with women's empowerment from sport generalizing beyond the sport context. Feminist scholars should ask what other activities might produce similar positive results for women and also what other non-traditional forms of activism women are participating in.

Overall, this study contributes two major findings to the existing body of feminist research on women athletes. First, competition and instrumental goals are paramount for

women and girls to benefit from physical activity. Second, women athletes have more flexible ideas about gender that allow them to resist gender stereotypes and develop healthy self-images.

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Appendices

A - Participant Biographies

Ashley is a nineteen year old varsity soccer player at an NCAA Division I school. She has been playing soccer since she was seven years old when her and her neighbor joined a soccer team together. Ashley is white, says her socioeconomic class is upper class, and was raised Catholic, but rarely practices Catholicism anymore. She is heterosexual.

Beth is twenty-eight years old and competes in running races, cycling races, and duathlons. She did not participate in sports as a child. Instead, she started being athletic four years ago to prepare for a hiking trip and a charity bike ride, then continued training and began competing in her sports. Beth is white, a full-time graduate student, calls herself poor, Christian and heterosexual.

Elizabeth is an eighteen year old varsity volleyball and softball player at a small NCAA Division III college. She started playing softball in fifth grade and volleyball in seventh grade. She is white, comes from an upper-middle class family, an is Baptist. She is heterosexual.

Erin is a twenty-eight year old tri-athlete. She tried basketball, volleyball, and track and field briefly before competing as a rower during high school and college. She has been competing in triathlons for the past five years. Erin is white, upper-middle class, works as a public health scientist, and claims no religious affiliation. She is heterosexual.

Jennifer is twenty-eight years old. She began running cross-country and track in the ninth grade. She also ran cross-country and track at an NCAA Division I college. Currently, she continues to train for distance running events including marathons. Jennifer has also participated in recreational league soccer, basketball and softball teams. She is white, middle class, and works as an engineer. Jennifer identifies as agnostic and heterosexual.

Joanna is thirty-one years old, and she competes at the master's level in swimming. She was first a highly competitive gymnast from ages six through ten. She competed in swimming from age ten until she was eighteen years old, and she returned to the sport almost two years ago. Joanna struggles to label her race, she prefers to call herself Caucasian, but she also says she is officially Mexican-American because her mother is Mexican born. She is middle class and works as a swimming coach and human resources consultant. She was raised Catholic, but now calls herself more spiritual than religious, and she is heterosexual.

Katie is a twenty year old varsity soccer player at a large, highly competitive NCAA Division III school. She began playing soccer at eight years of age because a friend's dad started a recreational soccer team. Katie is white, comes from an upper-middle class family, and claims no religious affiliation. She identifies her sexual orientation as somewhere between heterosexual and bisexual.

Margaret is twenty-five years old, and she plays on a women's professional football team. She also played softball, basketball, and soccer in high school, and basketball at a junior college. Margaret is a graduate student, and working towards

becoming a police officer, in addition to being a professional athlete. She is white, says her socioeconomic class is poor, and is a non-practicing Presbyterian. She is a lesbian.

Mary is twenty-nine years old. Her athletic career began by playing church league basketball and soccer. She began running cross-country in high school, ran cross-country and track at a very competitive NCAA Division III college, and now competes in local road races. Mary is white, upper-middle class, and does not claim any religious affiliation. She works as a research analyst. She identifies as gay.

Nicole is twenty-nine years old, and she competes in road cycling races. She rowed very competitively in high school, making the Junior National Team, and in college at an NCAA Division I school. Burnt out on rowing, she took up mountain biking, then road biking, which she has been doing for about four years. She is white, middle class, and an atheist. Professionally, she is moving from public health research to counseling. While Nicole has never labeled her sexuality, she said she would call herself bi-sexual if she had to put a label on it.

Sarah is twenty-seven years old and has been playing soccer for nearly twenty years. She started playing soccer with friends, played soccer and softball in high school, and played soccer at an NCAA Division III college. She now plays on a recreational league soccer team. Sarah is white, middle class, and works as a physical therapist. She was raised Catholic, but only occasionally participates in religious practice now. She is a lesbian.

B - Interview Script and Questions

Interview Script:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study of female athletes and gender. I will be asking you a series of questions related to this topic, and your answers will be audio-recorded. Your identity in this study will remain strictly confidential. You may chose not to answer any question, and you have the right to end this interview at anytime. I would like your permission to contact you at a later date if any part of this interview needs clarification. Unless you have any questions about the interview process I will begin now.

Athletic Participation:

1. What sports do you participate in, and at what level do you compete at?
2. How long have you been involved in these sports?
3. How did you become involved in sports? Why did you start playing?
4. How much time do you dedicate to training/competing?
5. Describe what you have learned about yourself through sports.
6. What do you like and dislike about participating in sports?
7. How does playing sports make you feel?
8. Why do you think women should participate in sports?
9. Who are your role models as athletes?

General Understanding of Gender:

10. What does society mean by masculine? male roles?
11. What does society mean by feminine? female roles?

12. What does the word masculine mean to you?
13. What does the word feminine mean to you?
14. Do you think there are different meanings of masculinity and femininity? For women and for men? For athletes in different sports? For athletes from different racial or class backgrounds?

Sports and Gender:

15. Do you think female athletes are more masculine than female non-athletes?
16. Do you think it is important for females to be feminine and males to masculine?
17. Do you think muscular female bodies are feminine?
18. What does your family think of women who are athletes?
19. Have you ever encountered any obstacles to participating in sports? If yes, describe the obstacles and how you dealt with them.

Athlete's Construction of Gender

20. Describe your appearance when you train and compete in athletics.
21. Describe your appearance when you are not participating in sports.
22. Do you do anything to appear feminine while participating in sports?
23. Do you do anything to look more feminine because you are an athlete that you might not do if you were not an athlete?
24. Does your body look feminine? How? Masculine? How?
25. Have you ever heard the terms "lesbian" or "dyke" used in a derogatory manner toward female athletes?

Body Image:

26. How do you feel about your body?
27. What do you see at the ideal body? How does it compare to the ideal body for you sport?
28. Does your athleticism affect how you feel about your body? In what ways?
29. Does the way others see you affect how you feel about your body? If yes, how?
30. Can you think of an athlete that has the ideal body for performing at your sport? Can you describe her/his body?
31. How do you feel about steroid use in sports?
32. Are there things an athlete should not do to her body?
33. Have you ever been injured from playing sports? If yes, how did you handle it, and how did you feel about it?

Sport as a Subversive Practice:

34. Do you consider yourself a feminist?
35. How would you define feminism?
36. Do you think sports can be a site for resisting stereotypes about women and men or femininity and masculinity?
37. Do you know what Title IX is? If yes, how do you feel about Title IX?

Demographic Information:

Age, race, class, occupation, sexual orientation and religious affiliation