

ONLINE FANTASY SPORTS: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN TO ENTER THE  
ARENAS OF SPORTS AND TECHNOLOGY?

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## ABSTRACT

Sports and technology are two male-dominated realms, a characteristic that leaves less room for women to become involved. Fantasy sports, gaining popularity on the Internet, combine sports and technology. This thesis explores the ways online fantasy sports offer a unique playing field for both genders and an opportunity for true equality within that space. This exploration is accomplished through ideological discussion of sports and technology and rhetorical analysis of online fantasy sport websites and other online material by means of sport/gender and feminist theories.

Scholars argue that sports and technology influence gender identity development. Male hegemony continues to thrive in sports because of existing stereotypes. Fantasy sports may eliminate many of these stereotypes because they are played online and, thus, certain aspects of the physical world do not apply. Also, trends show the gender gap in technology is decreasing, which disrupts male hegemony, yet technology still remains a male-dominated world. Studies indicate that women exhibit technological competence, yet come across barriers preventing them from becoming involved in computer technologies. The barriers and stereotypes of both technology and sports may be eliminated through knowledge and education, especially by encouraging a conscious awareness of gendered-thinking and the limitations of this thinking.

Fantasy sports are currently male-dominated, yet there are few, if any, psychological or physical reasons why women cannot become involved in this activity. The exclusionary rhetoric of many fantasy sport websites hinders the involvement of women because women are often degraded or ridiculed for their interest in sports on certain fantasy sport websites. Yet many women are expressing an interest in fantasy

sports, evident through websites such as Femmefan.com. This thesis outlines proposed characteristics of a female-oriented fantasy sport website, which might foster more female participation in fantasy sports. Conscious efforts to promote fantasy sports towards the female population could help decrease the gender gap in sports and technology and provide equality in the fantasy sport environment.

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother and father, whose continued support and encouragement have enabled me to achieve this goal. Their unconditional love has meant more to me than they will ever know. I am truly blessed with the best parents in the world.

## INTRODUCTION

Sports and technology are two areas that have recently been fused together through fantasy sports. Fantasy sports create an ideal situation in which to study gender relationships because sports and technology are usually considered areas in which men hold power and influence, leaving less room for women to participate and engage in these areas. The increased popularity of online fantasy sports has produced opportunities for sport fans to become even more involved and knowledgeable about their favorite sports. A search for “fantasy sports” on Yahoo yields over four million results, proving that this fairly recent online activity is widely utilized by many. With entertainment and enjoyment aside, I cannot help but wonder what social implications and changes online fantasy sports are creating in society. Online fantasy sports combine both technology and sports; therefore, analysis of fantasy sports must overlap both realms. A key question to ponder about fantasy sports is: “Can the male domination of sports and technology ever be overcome to give women more opportunities to involve themselves in both areas?” Through ideological discussion of sports and technology and rhetorical analysis of online fantasy sport websites and other online material by means of sport/gender and feminist theories, I argue that fantasy sports offer a unique playing field for both genders and an opportunity for true equality within that space. The nature of this equality would be a pluralistic approach that recognizes the differing perspectives and characteristics of both genders and allows both genders to participate in fantasy sports on their own terms, not in a gender-neutral form.

In order to understand analysis of fantasy sports and gender relationships, it is first necessary to understand fantasy sports. Fantasy sports are interactive games that

allow people to draft and manage their own sport team. The players who fantasy sport participants manage are real-life professional athletes and how well a person's team does depends on real-life game scores. Participants are allowed to trade players with other fantasy sport participants in their league, acquire free agents, and control their own team's starting lineup. Based on who is included on a person's fantasy team roster, the fantasy sport participant decides which players he/she wants to activate. Throughout the fantasy sport season, a person's roster may change due to player trades and free agent acquisitions, usually conducted through e-mail with other participants in the fantasy sport league. Points are acquired based on how well a person's fantasy sport players perform in real life games, yet each league is different, dependent on the league type. (For a more detailed explanation of fantasy sports, see Appendix A.) Some websites offer free fantasy sports, while others charge a fee to participate but often offer cash and prizes for the winners. The sports that are available as fantasy sports depend on the website sponsoring the fantasy leagues. Common sports offered on many websites include football, baseball, basketball, golf, hockey, and NASCAR auto racing. Less frequently, websites may offer soccer, horse racing, tennis, rugby, cycling, cricket, wrestling, and others. There are hundreds of websites offering fantasy sports, making the decision of choosing a website difficult. Some of the most popular include: Yahoo, America Online, CBS SportsLine, ESPN hosted by MSN Sports, SportingNews.com, CNNSI.com, and Sandbox.com. Anyone can join a fantasy sport league, but a person has a better chance of doing well if he/she has some knowledge of the sport, teams, and individual players.

Before being available on the Internet, fantasy sports, which have been around for over twenty years, were played via mail or fax, a painstaking process. The Internet



makes fantasy sports readily available to users and can quickly compute stats, which is one reason for the increase in popularity of fantasy sports. According to “Fantasy and Interactive Sports Online,” Daniel Okrent is credited with having created the first fantasy sport league (para. 1). Okrent and a group of friends met at a New York restaurant called La Rotisserie Francaise and named their league after it – The Rotisserie Baseball League. The name of the restaurant made an impression, as a rotisserie league is now a type of fantasy sport league available to users. According to an article in *Forbes*, a Harris poll estimates that thirty million Americans, or roughly fifteen percent of the adult population, play fantasy sports (para. 2). Jim Wyatt revealed, in an Internet article “Fantasy Football is a Real Hit,” that an estimated ninety-five percent of the participants of fantasy sports are male, aged twenty-four to forty (para. 13). Based on the percentage Wyatt provides, fantasy sports seem currently overwhelmingly male-dominated. Studies indicate that baseball was the first sport available as a fantasy sport, but football is becoming the most popular fantasy sport. Jim Lachimia, in a *Pittsburgh Sports Report* article “Fantasy League Athletes,” indicated that in the year 2000 approximately three-hundred thousand people participated in free fantasy football leagues (para. 4). This number increased to one million in the year 2001 and to nearly two million in the year 2002 (para. 4). The numbers of fantasy sport participants grow exponentially each year, as fantasy sports become more pervasive and popular on the Internet.

Lachimia also points out in his article that people who participate in fantasy sports spend, on average, more time watching sporting events, increasing their involvement with sports in general (para. 5). The Internet makes this increased involvement possible for the more casual fan, who participates in fantasy sports for entertainment purposes.

Lachimia states about fantasy sport participants, “They become aware of all the players, not just the superstars. Their interest in the sport is heightened and their enjoyment of the season is enhanced” (para. 11). This behavioral change is a breakthrough in increasing participation in sports, especially for increasing the numbers of sport fans throughout society. Fantasy sports enable anyone to participate and give people a reason to gain background knowledge of the sport and players, increasing their overall interest. Fantasy sports may also provide a medium on which to decrease the gender gap in sports, by allowing men and women to have something in common, while giving neither sex a dominating physical advantage.

Fantasy sports allow anyone to participate because they eliminate barriers in the participation of sports for both genders. Physically, both men and women are equal in the realm of fantasy sports. Fantasy sports also give women a chance to become more comfortable with sports because they are able to interact with fantasy sports at their own leisure and without certain stereotypes from the physical world, such as physical appearance and athletic ability. I theorize that this increase in comfort may eventually lead to increased female participation in sports, by watching or even playing sports, thus decreasing confining gender stereotypes, such as physical appearance and athletic ability (which will be addressed in more detail later), which often exclude women from the sporting world. Fantasy sports are more likely to first increase the numbers of female sport fans because fantasy sports are more directly linked to sport fan activities. Yet the increase in sport fan behavior might also encourage more women to physically participate in sports, as a way of broadening their involvement in sports. Fantasy sports are extremely popular and widely utilized by millions, providing a possible, unexplored

avenue to help promote gender equality in the fantasy sport environment. Since fantasy sports incorporate technology and sports, it is possible that through increased participation in fantasy sports, the gender gap could be narrowed in both technology and sports.

## SPORTS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER ROLES

Male hegemony in sports has remained relatively unchallenged in society throughout history. Children learn early in life the gender constructions revolving around sports. Male superiority in sports is an attitude that starts developing during male childhood and continues to mature through adulthood. Lois Bryson explains in “Sport and the Maintenance of Masculine Hegemony” that men exclude women from the male realm of sports, often have direct control over women’s sports by occupying executive positions in sports organizations, ignore women’s sports, and trivialize women’s efforts (352-56). This male control enables male hegemony to thrive and leaves women with few options in sports participation.

The emergence of male hegemony in relation to sports is a highly developed process beginning at birth. Every male relationship a boy develops ultimately shapes his gender identity. Michael Messner describes this process in “Boyhood, Organized Sports, and the Construction of Masculinities.” Organized sport has aided in the perceived development of male superiority by valuing competition and the physical aspects of masculinity, while at the same time devaluing most aspects of femininity. Gendered thinking begins at birth and results in a combination of the internal and the social: “In short, masculine identity is neither fully ‘formed’ by the social context, nor is it ‘caused’

by some internal dynamic put into place during infancy. Instead, it is shaped and constructed through the interaction between the internal and the social” (Messner 419). Friends and family often judge a male by his involvement in organized sports. It seems natural for a male to participate in sports, yet a deeper analysis shows that the relationships a boy has with his male influences have much to do with his involvement in organized sports. During his research, Messner discovered: “The existence of older brothers or uncles who served as teachers and athletic role models—as well as sources of competition for attention and status within the family—was very common” (424). While these relationships with significant familial males are important in the establishment of gender identity in relation to sports, the relationship with the male’s father is more significant in this development. Many of the males interviewed in this study replied that it felt natural to play sports, yet at some point in their lives, they had to be exposed to sports, which is a common father/son bonding activity. Messner explains that many males use sport activities “as a means of identifying with and ‘living up to’ the power and status of one’s father” (427). Yet, as males grow older, the influence of the father diminishes and the roles of their same-sex peers become a dominant influence. This influence of same-sex peers also explains the gender development of a male without a father figure.

The institutions of education play an important role in the construction of gender identity. In schools, adults often arrange sex-segregated activities, such as organized sports, which provides an environment in which separate gender activities appear natural. Messner explains the outcomes of same-sex relationships in relation to the development of gender identities: “Girls, who tend to define themselves primarily through connection

with others, experience highly competitive situations [...] as threats to relationships, and thus to their identities. For boys, the development of gender identity involves the construction of positional identities, where a sense of self is solidified through separation from others” (430). Yet participation in organized sports also promotes unity with other same-sex members, while still allowing the male to maintain a sense of an autonomous self. The gender development that occurs in the school environment is due to the interactions males and females have with same-sex and opposite-sex peers, as well as teachers and other adults. Adults are a key component in the development of gendered thought, and one solution to alleviate the correlation between masculinity and sports is for adults to promote a correlation between femininity, or even androgyny, and sports through structured activities that do not promote sex-segregation.

The separation of the sexes due to perceived differences in behavior often leads to the development of gender stereotypes, particularly with sports. Stereotypes created by society regarding proper behaviors and appearances for men and women cause gender differences to emerge among male and female athletes. Nathalie Koivula explains the effects of gender stereotypes in “Ratings of Gender Appropriateness of Sports Participation: Effects of Gender-Based Schematic Processing.” The socially prescribed stereotypes that women are passive, submissive, and nurturing, whereas men are active, aggressive, and autonomous indicate gender differentiation (Koivula 543). These stereotypes reveal why men remain the dominant presence in sports because traits such as activeness and aggressiveness are often classified as athletic traits. Stereotypes are usually created in their general form by society, yet on a more individual and familial level, parents also influence their child’s gender-based thinking. Koivula states, “It has

further been shown that parents often have distorted perceptions of their own children in gender stereotypic activities such as mathematics and sports, and this influences the children's own self-perception and activity choices" (543-4). These parentally influenced behaviors lead to different socialization for boys and girls regarding sports.

Sports are a representation of the sociocultural system in which they occur, reflecting the attitudes and beliefs of a particular society. The role sports play in society contributes to the emergence of gender differences. Koivula discusses these particular aspects of sports in a later article "Perceived Characteristics of Sports Categorized as Gender-Neutral, Feminine and Masculine." Certain attributes classify a sport as either feminine or masculine. Sports labeled as feminine are considered appropriate for women to participate in, and enable women to conform to the stereotyped expectations of femininity. Sports labeled as feminine also generate feelings of aesthetic pleasure, which supports the idea that the female body is viewed as an object providing aesthetic pleasure based on the stereotypes of masculine culture. Koivula states, "Females are [...] socialized to use their bodies to please others, value themselves based on their passive ornamental qualities through the masculine eyes of others, and to compare their appearance with that of the dominant feminine ideal" (378). Sports that provide beauty and visual pleasure, such as gymnastics or figure skating, coincide with stereotyped expectations of femininity. Sports labeled as masculine include characteristics such as "attempts to physically overpower the opponent/s by body contact, direct use of bodily force to heavy object, projection of body into or through space over distances, and face-to-face competition in situations in which body contact may happen" (379). Sports labeled as masculine reinforce a sense of identity with other men, separating men from

women through the elitist behavior of exclusion. This elitist thinking continues online with the overwhelming amount of masculine fantasy sports offered.

Analysis of the relationship between behavior and sports involves at least two dimensions: watching sports as a fan and physical participation in sports, both producing many significant gender construction insights. The behaviors of sport fans are necessary to the analysis of fantasy sports because fantasy sports are an extension of sport fan activities. Experts have conducted numerous studies regarding the behavior of sport fans, creating considerable associations between this behavior and gender construction. Beth Dietz-Uhler, Elizabeth A. Harrick, Christian End, and Lindy Jacquemotte conducted a study on which many later studies regarding sport fan behavior are based. Their article titled “Sex Differences in Sport Fan Behavior and Reasons for Being a Sport Fan” yielded many conclusions necessary for the analysis of gender differences in the behavior of sport fans. Ultimately, the authors concluded that among the participants of contemporary society there were “an equal number of males and females [that] considered themselves to be sport fans, although males identified more strongly with being a fan than females” (219). Also, males exhibited more sport fan behaviors (such as discussing sports with someone, watching sports on television, and having the desire to attain more sport knowledge) than females. Females considered themselves fans mostly for social reasons, such as attending and watching sporting events with friends and family. Coinciding with the Dietz-Uhler, et al. research, W. Gantz and L. A. Wenner, in the article “Men, Women, and Sports: Audience Experiences and Effects,” found that women watched sports on television for social reasons – it gave them something to do with friends and family (238). Another relevant study regarding the behavior of sport

fans is reported by Jeffrey D. James and Lynn L. Ridinger in the article “Female and Male Sport Fans: A Comparison of Sport Consumption Motives,” which established results slightly contradictory to the Dietz-Uhler, et al. study, proving the uncertainty and lack of concrete conclusions in the psychological analysis of sport fan behaviors. James and Ridinger concluded that females and males were not equally likely to be sport fans (260). Males were statistically higher rated than females as fans of sports in general and for specific teams (260).

These results shed light on the motivations of fantasy sport participants. Based on their behaviors as sport fans, males might participate in fantasy sports more because they enjoy acquiring sports information, which is usually needed for successful experiences with fantasy sports. At the same time, females could develop many of the perceived masculine sport fan behavior traits (discussing sports with someone, watching sports on television, and having a desire to attain more sport knowledge) with increased participation in fantasy sports, thus decreasing the masculine correlation to these behaviors. As will be described in more detail later, numerous fantasy sport participants testify to developing a deeper interest for the same sport as their fantasy team, especially specific teams involving their fantasy players. Women may employ fantasy sports to exhibit increased sport fan behavior, thus resulting in new breakthroughs for women into the male-dominated realm of sports. Because women behave differently as fans, their reasons for enjoying fantasy sports will differ as well. Women could benefit from fantasy sports by forming a league with friends and family, which gives women a chance to participate in fantasy sports, while also socializing, thus making fantasy sports an activity in which women would enjoy participating. The sport fan behavior differences



that exist between males and females are both equally important for fantasy sport participation. Pluralistic thinking allows for the differing behaviors of males and females to be respected and included in fantasy sports.

The media has an influential role in the development of sport fan behaviors. The societal differences in perceived merit between male and female athletes are evident in the media, where females are often captured in “sexualized, stereotypical, and passive ways, while men are portrayed in strong, athletic, and agentic ways” (Dietz-Uhler, et al. 221-2). The portrayal of male and female athletes by the media often renders unsuccessful efforts to increase female sport fans. The Dietz-Uhler, et al. study also concluded that women were more likely to be fans of non-male-dominated sports, such as tennis and figure skating. Unfortunately, the media’s lack of exposure of these less popular sports means they have a smaller fan base. This fact suggests that women’s lack of traditional sport fan behavior may not be due to a lack of interest, but to a lack of opportunity to enjoy less popular sports, though sports they may have an interest in, and thus exhibit these behaviors (228).

The favoritism for certain sports is also true for online fantasy sports, evident in the attention multi-billion dollar sports, such as football and baseball, receive by being offered the most online as fantasy sports. The trivialization of women continues into the virtual world, where the small percentage of female fantasy sports offered undermines women’s achievements and interest in sports. Dietz-Uhler, et al. explain: “If female’s participation in sport is ignored and trivialized, then their participation as a sport fan may also be ignored and trivialized” (222). This idea offers a reason that explains why

women are a minority of participants in online fantasy sports because they often feel they are not welcomed in the sports realm.

As previously stated, sports have substantial impacts on the formation of identities, particularly for males. These impacts also affect people who are merely sport fans and not sport participants. Though females in the Dietz-Uhler, et al. study considered themselves sport fans, it was not an important identity for them, which may be due to the fact that sports are usually perceived as a male domain (226). The authors explain, “Males have been socialized in sport significantly more than women,” making sport an important part of their identity (226). This aspect provides yet another justification for the exclusion of women from sports because the presence of women fans in the sports realm disrupts the psychological state of “sport fans” as typically being an identity label reserved for men (226). Men might, therefore, consider it in their best interest to exclude women from participating in sports as fans. This exclusion would preserve the “manly” status of sport participation and prevent any “feminization” of this activity. Fantasy sports could encourage women to participate because women do not have to worry as much about the attitudes and opinions of men encountered in the physical world. A group of women could form their own private fantasy league and thus prevent the interference of men into their fantasy sport experience. (Private fantasy leagues prevent the intrusion of anyone not part of the league.) Fantasy sports could provide an opportunity for sports to become a significant part of a woman’s identity.

In the past, justifications for the exclusion of women from sports were relatively unchallenged. Stephanie L. Twin explains many of these justifications in the introduction to *Out of the Bleachers: Writings on Women and Sport*. The idea of female frailty was

supported by the belief that women's strengths included moral and emotional traits, not physical traits, which belonged to men (xviii). Also in the past, the belief thrived that sports were an expression of male sexuality and taught men necessary values, such as hard work, ambition, and respect for authority (xxii). These characteristics were thought to be irrelevant to women, one reason why women were deprived of the opportunity to participate in sports. Today, though, women are beginning to emerge from the sidelines, disputing the myth that sports are a masculine domain. Ann Crittenden addresses many of the biological myths in "Closing the Muscle Gap," indicating that the difference between the physical capabilities of males and females is not as vast as society has believed in the past. The greater differences lie within either sex rather than between them (6). One reason why women are not as physically strong as men is that, century after century, women never developed their bodies to their fullest physical potential. Crittenden states: "The physically inferior, it turns out, are not women, but any human beings who do not develop the body's potential—exactly what women have been taught not to do for centuries" (7). Crittenden explains that women are capable of abolishing stereotypes and lessening the inequality between men and women regarding sports participation. Crittenden concludes: "By developing her powers to the fullest, any woman, from Olympic star to the weekend tennis player, can be a match for any man she chooses to take on" (11). This attitude could be extended to the mental realm in order for women to assert themselves online through fantasy sports. If women keep believing that they have no place in the sports realm, they will continually remain outside of it and men will continually ostracize and trivialize the efforts women make to include themselves in sports.

Susan Birrell, in *The Sporting Woman*, tackles many of the more psychological issues involving the thinking of both men and women regarding their places in the sphere of sports. Sports are believed to allow men the chance to exert “masculine” traits (such as aggressiveness, power, and competition) commonly believed to be necessary for organized sports. Yet Birrell explains: “Sport need not be narrowly viewed only as an arena for the display of power and dominance behaviors; it also could serve as a showcase for other valuable traits associated more with females than males” (67). To accomplish this, females must overthrow the veil of false consciousness, which leads them to believe sports are a male domain and women have no place participating in them. False consciousness, a Marxist concept that includes any beliefs or ideas that interfere with an oppressed group being able to perceive the objective nature and source of their oppression, can be applied to gender studies. The effects of patriarchy often shroud female thinking, preventing females from being able to distinguish between the real state of affairs and the false appearances of the state of affairs. Thus, the obstacle becomes adapting and modifying society’s thinking to achieve a transformation in beliefs. One way of achieving this transformation that Birrell suggests is by eliminating confining masculine/feminine labels and opting for a more neutral method of definition. Ideally, society will increase the use of androgynous conceptualizations, thus eliminating the need for the terms masculine and feminine (68).

Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 is a concrete example of increased participation in sports among women and girls in the United States. Title IX bans sex discrimination in federally funded schools and gives women more opportunities to participate in sports. Dramatic changes have resulted since the implementation of Title

IX, evident with the thirty year “report card” on gender equity, published by the National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education, which indicated that “[b]y 2001 nearly 2.8 million girls participated in athletics, representing 41.5 percent of varsity athletes in U.S. high schools – an increase of more than [...] 847 percent from 1971 [...] Today 150,916 women compete in intercollegiate sports, accounting for 43 percent of college varsity athletes – an increase of more than 403 percent from 1971” (15). Although these statistics are incredible improvements in the area of female sport participation, “[m]uch distance remains between the current status of women and girls in sports and the ultimate goal of gender equity” (14). Yet Title IX may serve as a precedent for increased female participation in fantasy sports. The implementation of Title IX has resulted in more female sports participation than ever before in the United States, with a variety of positive effects, such as greater leadership opportunities for women, enhanced self-esteem, and health benefits. Online fantasy sports may exhibit similarities to Title IX in that they offer opportunities for women to develop knowledge of sports and agency within that environment, particularly as sport fans.

Sport participation and involvement is now, more than ever, as much a reality online in a virtual world of fantasy sports as it is in the physical world on playing fields. Data shows that fantasy sports are increasing in popularity year after year, with participants numbering well into the millions. Koivula suggests that if a sport experience is perceived to be meaningful, a person will be more likely to participate in such activities (“Sport” 362). Relating this statement to fantasy sports, if research is conducted to determine what makes an online experience, in particular an online sports experience, meaningful for women, then fantasy sport websites could be designed based on this

research to promote more participation by women. Increased participation in fantasy sports by women can help reduce confining stereotypes of sports and those who participate in sports.

## TECHNOLOGY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER ROLES

Due to rapid changes occurring in the technological domain, statistics quickly become outdated. In fact, it is difficult to locate concrete information regarding the numbers of males and females engaging in and interacting with certain technologies, such as computers, though trends indicate a steady increase of female participants in the realm of computer technology, thus disrupting, but not necessarily changing the overall masculine character of this area. Traditional binary gender behaviors, evident in everyday society, persist on the Internet, creating barriers for women. A study conducted by Charles Soukup, described in “The Gendered Interactional Patterns of Computer-Mediated Chatrooms: A Critical Ethnographic Study,” analyzed gender interactions in a male-dominated chatroom and a female-dominated chatroom. The results maintained that traditional gender behaviors endured online, even when conventional interpersonal social elements, such as physical contact and body language, were eliminated. Soukup summarizes: “Masculine participants were aggressive, argumentative, and power oriented. While feminine participants sought relationships and intimacy, they were often dominated and overpowered by the aggressive discourse of the masculine members” (169). Based on these outcomes, computer environments and cyberspace perpetuate the same stereotypical gendered behaviors and oppression found in society. When women participate in online chatrooms, or any type of cyberspace communication, they are often

forced to comply with rules established by dominant males, who tend to emit aggressive and oppressive behavior. Women have the choice to avoid this type of dominating behavior by not participating in online communication at all, but this allows the male to remain the dominant presence online.

It is the negative male behavior present online that causes women to feel unwelcome in the elite “males only” technology fellowship. Women are hesitant to participate in activities where they face the possibility of being harassed or ridiculed. Soukup asserts that “the existing social constructions of gender still guide users’ behavior in CMC [computer-mediated communication] [...] In other words, although anonymity exists on-line, users carry the socially constructed behaviors of gender into cyberspace and take on the socially constructed roles of masculinity or femininity while on-line” (170). This pattern could explain why females are reluctant to participate in online fantasy sports. Many people perceive sports to be a masculine domain, an attitude that continues online with fantasy sports, thereby excluding women.

Gender equality in online communication is difficult to accomplish because of certain masculine behavioral traits that drive men to control a conversation. Behaviors usually associated with masculine sports are also evident in online communication. Competition is a guiding force of masculine interaction, evident in chatrooms, which usually involve aggressive, confrontational and argumentative forms of interaction, as well as sexual humor as a means of degradation (Soukup 173). Male behavior in chatrooms resembles their behavior while participating in sports: “Because men seek social power by ‘winning’ arguments and games with other men, men are generally ‘fighting’ for attention by interrupting one another and ‘holding the floor’ for long

periods of time” (173). This overbearing competition occurring in chatrooms leaves sparse room for women to become involved in online communication. Men, who make their presence distinctly known through masculine-dominant behavioral traits, even invade female-dominated chatrooms that specifically address women’s issues, leaving no haven for women online.

Ann Brady Aschauer, author of “Tinkering with Technological Skill: An Examination of the Gendered Uses of Technologies,” offers a possible psychological explanation for the male domination in technology. In society, men are characterized generally as objective creatures, a behavior rooted in childhood with the male rejection of the mother, the detachment enabling them to differentiate between subject and object, which is a necessary state of mind in fields such as science and technology (13). In contrast, girls typically remain attached to their mother, which builds empathy and reduces their ability to maintain the state of mind identified with males (13). While these binary gender characteristics may exhibit some truth, we must recognize that masculinity and femininity, as well as technology, are all social constructs, which means they can be “reconstructed” (14). Technology is considered a masculine domain only because many people consider certain traits associated with science and technology as predominantly possessed by males. While females can also demonstrate these traits, they are often overlooked or ignored because it is difficult for most people to eliminate gender binaries. The male and female sexes are often defined by their differences from each other, which make behavioral and physical classifications easier, yet at the high cost of segregation, leading to subordination of the non-dominant sex. Gaining support every day, the belief grows that women are technologically competent – all they need is equal access to



technology. Yet, because men control most aspects of technology, women remain outsiders anxiously waiting for opportunities to become included.

The relationship between gender and technology is reciprocal and inseparable. Both influence how the other functions in relation to how they are perceived, developed, and constructed. Limited access and barriers to information and communication technologies, in particular the Internet, continue to be prevalent problems with regard to gender. Anne Scott, Lesley Semmens, and Lynette Willoughby, in the essay “Women and the Internet: The Natural History of a Research Project,” conclude that the Internet had “its origins in a male world with four roots: the military, the academy, engineering and industry” (5). Even today, male domination of Internet communication is still a major factor creating a barrier for women’s participation online. Sexual harassment and flaming (aggressive online behavior), examples of male-dominated online communication, reduce the numbers of female Internet users. In an international survey, the “most frequently cited barriers to women’s ICT [information and communication technologies] access were lack of training and the cost of equipment” (14). Lack of training results in uncomfortable and minimal female interactions with ICTs. Because of this barrier, ICTs are perceived and will continue to be perceived as male dominated. Though women are increasingly using the Internet, thus decreasing the gender gap, the Internet still reinforces the myth that technology is part of a male world. Support for this statement is found in basic web advertisements and spam e-mail – often sexual in subject and appealing to men. The increase in popularity of fantasy sports also supports the idea of male domination over ICTs because sports are a male-dominated realm. Until women

become more involved in these masculine territories, myths excluding women from both sports and technology will continue to thrive.

There are several reasons why people use the Internet, a major one being interpersonal communication, such as e-mail. The need for information, accomplished through Web browsing, is another major reason why people use the Internet. These two reasons – communication and information – encompass much of the gender difference in online behavior. Linda A. Jackson, Kelly S. Ervin, Philip D. Gardner, and Neal Schmitt, authors of the article “Gender and the Internet: Women Communicating and Men Searching,” discovered that females used e-mail more than males, who browsed the Web more than females (374). This coincides with research related to sport fan behavior, with females expressing a need for interpersonal communication or socialization and males expressing a need for the acquisition of sports information. Neither of the reasons for Internet usage prevails over the other, as both are equally significant uses of the Internet. In fact, both are helpful for participation in online fantasy sports. Communication among league members helps the fantasy sport experience become more personal, thus increasing the chances that the participant will enjoy it and play again. Also, acquiring information about fantasy players helps create a successful team, satisfying a need to win. Again, adopting a pluralistic approach to fantasy sports would respect both genders’ reasons for participating in fantasy sports.

The increase in the number of women using the Internet has caused an influx of feminist ideology and principles regarding technology. *Cyberfeminism* was coined by Sadie Plant and is roughly defined in Susan Luckman’s article “(En)Gendering the Digital Body: Feminism and the Internet” as “contemporary feminist intervention in

technologically mediated structures of power” (36). Many feminists recognize the need for this intervention. Luckman explains, “Computer-mediated communication, where male users traditionally outnumber women, facilitates forms of sexism and misogyny which can be far more prevalent online than in the physical world” (36). Gendered individuals create technologies, which means gender constructions can rarely be escaped online because of the gendered nature of the technology’s birth. The job becomes for cyberfeminists to circulate their viewpoints in order to change the gendered natures of these technologies exhibiting traditional masculine constructions. Luckman clarifies: “Cyberfeminisms are offered as a female-centered alternative to the overwhelming cultural dominance of men in regard to matters of technological agency” (37). The focus on communication, community, and networking makes cyberspace “intrinsically a female space” (38). Based on this idea, computers do not solely serve male interests. In fact, it is logical to conclude that the societal construction of technology as a male domain could be reconstructed to assume that technology is a female domain, based on these mentioned characteristics, as well as other significant evidence, including Donna Haraway’s ideas of the cyborg, which connects females with technology. A mesh of human and machine, Haraway’s cyborg is more a reality than society acknowledges, with cyberfeminists exhibiting many similarities with such hybrids, including possession of both virtual and physical identities.

Donna Haraway’s ideas of the cyborg are explained in “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980’s,” an influential article on which a great deal of cyberfeminist ideology is based. As is clear from this essay, Haraway’s interests are in the exploration of boundaries and borders, where identities are

constructed. The cyborg, a “hybrid of machine and organism,” proves identity is constructed through a multiplicity of factors (2269). She explains that “the cyborg is a creature in a postgender world” (2270). In a sense, it escapes all societal origins, a place where stereotypes and gender-prescribed roles result. The cyborg is usually identified as feminine, thus connecting women to technology and proving that the male domination of technology is a construct of society and not actually grounded in any innate male superiority over women.

Education plays an important role in the relationship between gender construction and technology. Technological competence is a new fundamental of education, with educational institutions often requiring students to take some type of technology course. Linda Stepulevage, author of “Gender/Technology Relations: Complicating the Gender Binary,” has studied the gender/technology relationship in education. She explains that “girls are no longer *formally* excluded from what were previously considered to be masculine technological domains. Prior to the National Curriculum (NC), it was common practice to construct a gendered technological split between girls’ ‘domestic’ subjects and boys’ ‘craft’ subjects” (326-7). The National Curriculum, a blueprint for education in England, has helped many females become involved with technology because it requires that all children become familiar with technology, especially information technologies. Despite such intervention from the government, though, technology is still generally perceived as a masculine realm dominated by male students. Girls do not always exhibit as much confidence as boys and tend to take on more passive roles than boys when interacting with technology (327). This behavior upholds traditional views of the gender dichotomy. Yet, girls have interesting perceptions

regarding the masculine dominated area of technology: “[G]irls do not perceive boys as primarily dominating in terms of subject content, but simply as persons who need to show off” (329). Girls frequently demonstrate competence when interacting with technology; yet patriarchy often chooses to repress this competence by ignoring it or not acknowledging it. At the same time, patriarchy refuses to consider males as incompetent in relation to technology, which preserves the gender dichotomy by excluding females from male domains.

Technology, much as we have seen with sports, plays a major role in identity construction. Often when young females are exposed to situations in which they are conditioned to maintain an inferior position, such as technology or sports, the result is vacillation between normality and abnormality, not necessarily liberation and oppression (Stepulevage 331). The binaries of normality and abnormality are more prevalent among the thoughts of young females than the more political binaries of liberation and oppression. Simply put, girls do not want to be labeled odd or weird for stepping too much outside of their prescribed gender roles. Stepulevage explains, “[H]eterosexual relations act as a constraint to the constitution of identity in the areas of computing expertise” (333). Girls often “act dumb” when it comes to involvement in predominantly male domains because of confining gender roles and identities. A young female risks debasement by being labeled abnormal for exhibiting too much confidence and expertise in computer operations. An increased awareness of the importance of heterosexual relations in gender construction is necessary to break down the gender dichotomy. Stepulevage offers a solution:

[W]e need to make discursive practices that constitute heterosexuality visible in our work on gender-computing relations [...] If we could recognize the heterosexual assumptions implicated in gender relations and name them when they interfere with learning, it may contribute to a transformation of both gender-technology relations and the practices of heterosexuality itself. (336)

Awareness, especially in education, is a key component in eliminating gender inequalities. Often classrooms maintain a gender dichotomy without consciously realizing it.

The stages of female gender behavior development, a crucial factor in establishing successful interactions with technology, must be taken into consideration when introducing females to technology. Melissa Koch explains in the article “Opening Up Technology to Both Genders” that girls need to be exposed to technology, especially during middle-school years, which is when they often lose interest in science, math, and technology (18). The exposure of females to technology before puberty results in an increased willingness to act outside their gender role, more so than during puberty, when girls feel the pressures of heteronormativity. Parents, in addition to educators, need to help young pre-pubescent girls become comfortable with technology by exposing them to it at home. Through exposure to technology at school and at home, young females may begin to feel more comfortable interacting with technology, promoting a more equal learning environment as they grow older.

A pluralist approach to technology creates room for both genders’ perspectives because it allows for both genders’ perspectives to be respected. Relating this pluralist approach to the classroom, technology curricula need to allow both genders to connect

personally with the content. Lesley S. J. Farmer, in the article “Empowering Young Women Through Technology,” elaborates on this point by explaining that the closer a person identifies with the content, the more easily they will learn and connect with the material (para. 6). Another way to increase the competence and personal relationships with technology for both genders is to allow males and females equal time at computers. Teaching children how to use technology will increase self-confidence, which results in increased interactions with the technology. Both males and females need adequate and equal exposure to technology, which is necessary for increased self-confidence. Current trends in technology empower the masculine perspectives, while disregarding the feminine perspectives. Adopting a more pluralist approach to technology allows room for feminine perspectives, which might even improve existing technologies.

#### RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF ONLINE MATERIAL USING FEMINIST AND SPORT/GENDER THEORIES

The rhetoric and presentation of online material is crucial in determining the interest a particular group will have for a website. Regarding gender, a website’s rhetoric and presentation determines which sex is most likely to utilize the website. Rhetorical analyses of online communication between multiple people are necessary to determine specific gender traits of cyber-communication. The rhetoric and presentation of websites differs between female-dominated websites and male-dominated websites, proving there are specific differences in the ways the genders engage in online material. These differences are imperative to an analysis of fantasy sport websites. Classifying the abundance of fantasy sport websites, I found numerous websites offering a male-dominated environment, but relatively few offering a female-dominated environment. I

am separating and defining male-dominated and female-dominated fantasy sport websites by the language, images, and perceived gender of the users for a particular website. Male-dominated fantasy sport websites include aggressive, argumentative, often degrading language, overt male-dominated images, and overwhelming numbers of male participants. Female-dominated fantasy sport websites include less aggressive and argumentative language, promote a more intimate and inclusive environment, and include overwhelming numbers of female participants.

A survey conducted by the Sports and Entertainment Academy of Indiana University's Kelley School of Business found that participants of fantasy sports are overwhelmingly male (para. 8). This information is not shocking because sports in general have always been male driven and oriented. The CBS.SportsLine.com Masterfile indicates that eighty-five percent of registered members are male (para. 3). Technology and the Internet are already male dominated, and fantasy sports seem to reinforce this aspect because women who take an active interest in fantasy sports are a minority. While browsing fantasy sport websites, I discovered that many websites are predominantly male-oriented websites. SportSkill.com indicated on their advertising page that the audience for fantasy sports is predominantly male: "If you are interested in efficiently and effectively reaching an above average income, mostly male audience, we offer a wide variety of advertising and game sponsorship opportunities. Fantasy sports players are among the most sought after demographic to market to: predominantly 18 to 59 year old males" (para. 1). Sandbox.com, one of the most popular fantasy sport websites, also indicated that their audience profile was eighty-eight percent male (para. 2). The male-domination of this particular website is evident by exceedingly large and numerous



images of male athletes, which overwhelm the home page (See Appendix B). This male-dominated imaging is not uncommon with many fantasy sport websites, as home pages picture mostly male athletes, a habit that may discourage women from choosing to participate in that particular fantasy sport website.

It is difficult to access the Internet and not encounter fantasy sports in some type of way, especially through online advertisement. This form of entertainment has increased tremendously over the past few years. The responses to fantasy sports are varied, evident from numerous blurbs and articles on the Internet. As will be explained, the rhetoric of many of these blurbs and articles is often discouraging for women, automatically excluding them from participation in fantasy sports. Yet some articles argue for the acceptance of female participation in online fantasy sports. One article from *The Falcon*, an online publication of Seattle Pacific University, dismisses female interest in fantasy sports from the beginning. The article titled “Fantasy Games: Good or Bad for Sports?” states: “Many men and a few wonderful women have been swept up by the mania of fantasy sports [...] Outsiders, especially moms, wives and people of the female gender, wonder how their significant others can get wrapped up in and devote exorbitant amounts of time to an activity as non-productive as a stupid game” (Kitson paras. 1-2). From the beginning of the article, women as participants of fantasy sports are dismissed as uninterested in this activity because participation in this activity conflicts with prescribed gender roles, such as the domestic roles of wife and mother. Women are labeled as “outsiders,” which excludes them from fantasy sports. The article also presumes that females think fantasy sports are stupid games. This is discouraging to women readers who enjoy sports, even fantasy sports. The language does not create an

inclusive environment for women, especially women who could be possible participants in fantasy sports. The article later states: “Males, as the primary citizens of the fantasy sub-culture, are seemingly always in search of ways to relate. Unlike females, men are reluctant to pick up the phone or email, but posting trash talk or bargaining a potential trade give men the excuse they need to stay in touch. Fantasy sports are an extension of the social relationships that men gravitate towards and have always enjoyed” (Kitson para. 8). Fantasy sports are identified as a sub-culture with “citizens” who are mainly males, suggesting that females cannot hold citizenship in this “sub-culture” and, therefore, have limited rights. The author lists staying in touch as a reason why men participate in fantasy sports; yet studies, as previously mentioned, show that this is a major concern for women as well, and women may also benefit from fantasy sports for the same reasons this author names. Yet the exclusive language used in this article dismisses women from the fantasy sports arena, assuming, without logical reason and evidence, that women are uninterested in fantasy sports.

An opinionated article on ESPN.com reveals ideas about why men are not interested in women’s sports. Graham Hays, the writer responsible for the article titled “Why Men Don’t Watch Women’s Sports,” explains, “[U]ntil someone finds a way to effectively market women’s fantasy leagues to a market saturated with everything from fantasy NASCAR to fantasy bass fishing [...] women’s sports won’t capture the hearts of male sports fans” (para. 5). The Internet, television, radio, and other communication mediums are dominated by male sports. When men occasionally watch female sports, their reasons for watching differ from their reasons for watching male sports. Hays elaborates on this aspect in his article: “So perhaps men don’t watch women’s sports

because they hold it to such exacting standards. Imagine if watching men's sports depended on the athlete's being both talented and attractive" (para. 11). Women athletes have two barriers to break through in order to gain attention from male counterparts: they have to be talented, strong, competitive, and possess other qualities male athletes are held accountable for, and they have to be aesthetically pleasing to the male viewer, which applies the male gaze to female sports. The pressures female athletes endure from males make it especially difficult to sustain the fight for equal playing ground and time.

Since women became involved in athletics, their bodies have been as, if not more, important than their abilities. The research of Koivula, discussed previously, reiterates the idea of the male gaze and the focus on the female body. Women are conditioned to maintain passive roles, which conflicts with the active, aggressive, and competitive nature of athletes, whether male or female. Therefore, men tend to sexualize female sports through the male gaze, which helps men maintain their distance and remain the dominant gender, while females maintain their status as an Other. Hays recognizes this Otherness as he concludes his article by declaring, "Women aren't as fast, don't jump as high and don't kick as hard as their male counterparts. After all, who would want to watch Uconn-Duke women battle for No. 1 when the Bulls and Warriors are about to tip off" (paras. 16-17). Hays's exclusionary and separationist rhetoric divides males and females and automatically assumes male sports are more interesting to watch, disregarding female sports. If women are to gain equal attention in the realm of sports, then the gender binary of the male and the Other, established by the male order, must be abolished.

Discussion forums on many fantasy sport websites provide setbacks for female participation because of the aggressive and degrading language often used in discussions occurring on these forums. The Sweetness League Fantasy Football 2002 Trash Talking Message Board included a heated debate regarding male opinions of female participation in fantasy sports. The discussion escalated to a lengthy message posted by “Son of Concerned American – Other” on December 11, 2003:

I have to admit, while I am intrigued by the idea of lesbianism, I still find that it has no place within the fantasy sports world. Unless of course it is a Fantasy Womens Golf League, in which case nearly all participants would be of lesbian origination. I feel that if the trend of women involved in fantasy sports continue [sic], then men will give up the hobby, and venture into a new realm of competition which women will not be allowed. See, I believe that football is not the driving force behind our obsession, instead it is a pure world saved from women’s incessant and pointless drivel. We pick our players based on past performance and their drive to win, not based on how ‘pretty’ their uniforms are. Men are a logical species, while women are fundamentally flawed because they cannot think with their penis. So, in conclusion, women should not be involved in fantasy franchises, and should be fetching me beers.

Any woman reading this message would be insulted at the impudence of this fantasy football participant. Not only has this person completely excluded women from the realm of fantasy sports, but this person has also resorted to insult, degradation, and ridicule of females who show interest in sports. This sexist message was posted in response to previous messages, including these:

With the infiltration of women into the fantasy football world, I find it just and extremely deserving that the woman that is in this league scored the 2<sup>nd</sup> most points throughout the season and STILL got her ass kicked. Some things are just never meant to be equal! (“Concerned American – Other”)

I have been monitoring this message board, and I am outraged that a woman even has a fantasy league [...] the idea that a woman has a fantasy team is bollocks.

But even worse, is that she was allowed to have a team. This needs to be reviewed as to not happen again. [...] It’s a sad fact, but women do not belong in sports. unless [sic] it is in a speed cupcake making contest. (“Reformed Chauvenist – Other”)

These comments seem outrageous and utterly offensive, but they are present on many fantasy sport websites (though perhaps not to this extreme degree). Often comments on fantasy sport discussion forums have the perceived male audience of fantasy sport websites in mind, which tends to exclude women as possible participants on these websites. Many *Trash Talking* forums allow participants to freely express themselves, usually about anything they desire, whether it has to do with sports or not. Negative and excluding attitudes like ones these participants possess make the possibility of a gender-equal environment for online fantasy sports highly unlikely. These attitudes also discourage women from participating in fantasy sports, which hinders the possibility to increase their interest in sports in general. Not only are female athletes dismissed, degraded, ridiculed, and sexualized, but also female sport fans, through assumptions that all female fantasy golfers are lesbians, or that women pick their favorite teams based on the team’s uniforms.

An unfortunate way women are involved in fantasy sports is by being a sexualized cheerleader, maintaining a passive role for the active male gaze. FantasyOnlineSports.com contains a page devoted to a female model, a very “special friend” of the website, Angelie Almendare, pictured in a skimpy bikini (See Appendix C). The question comes to mind: “Do fantasy sport websites need this type of sexualized identification to increase their popularity?” Another website, AlphaPlayers.com, which is a website specifically designed for men, contains an in-progress fantasy sport page and has its own personal spokesmodel April Brooke, a woman pictured in bikinis and skimpy clothes in sexualized poses (See Appendix D). It seems a connection between sports and sexualized women is fairly common on the Internet, as well as in the real world of sports, with cheerleaders and models promoting sporting events. On SportzTawk.com, a member can choose from many different sports to discuss, including baseball, football, snowboarding, tennis, boxing, in-line skating, and many others. Yet glancing at the most-viewed threads of discussion, I found that on February 21, 2004, the number one most-viewed thread was “Babes!!! Vote now for Babe 2004,” which included a discussion to determine the “hottest babe” of wrestling. The fourth most viewed thread was “Miss SportzTawk voting,” which is an annual contest to determine the hottest female athlete. A moderator for SportzTawk, “Proud American,” described the contest: “[W]e are looking for women that actually play a sport *and* look good too.” The nominees were then listed and pictured, mostly in bikinis and sexualized poses. Even on a website specifically designed for sport discussions, many of the most popular threads included discussions about females and their sexual appeal. On SportzTawk.com, the expectation that female athletes should be talented and attractive coincides with the

comments Hays makes about female athletes, indicating that this is a predominant attitude men possess regarding female athletics. Women athletes are held to a different standard, making it harder for them to excel in the world of sports. This is very discouraging to women willing to take the initiative by participating in sports.

Despite the overwhelming male-domination of fantasy sport websites and topics, women are attempting to voice their interest in the activity. Currently, the Women's National Basketball Association offers fantasy women's basketball at WNBA.com, which is encouraging for female athletes and sport fans. Also, an article on *The Bengals: The Cincinnati Enquirer* website titled "Women Love Fantasy Football, Too" indicated that women do comprise a small percentage of the population of fantasy sport participants. Paul Anthony Arco explains:

The assumption could be made that fantasy football is just for beer-guzzling, sports-crazed men, but that's simply not the case. A recent Harris Interactive Poll estimates that 30 million Americans play fantasy sports, with 6.5 million of those being women. A study done by Ipsos, a market research company, estimates that 25 percent of fantasy football players are women. (para. 5)

Although this participation does not reflect a gender-equal percentage of participants, it proves that women are interested in fantasy sports and perhaps could be even more interested if certain barriers were eliminated, such as being ridiculed and degraded by men for participating or only being able to play a limited number of women's fantasy sports. Arco also concludes that women participate in fantasy sports because they enjoy the social aspects: "[T]hey enjoy the social aspect fantasy football offers – treating the preseason draft as a housewarming party and, during the season, commiserating around

the water cooler about the lack of depth at the running back position” (para. 7). One particular female participant, the owner of an advertising firm, indicates that fantasy football “has improved her business relationships with men. ‘There are some guys who aren’t interested in working with women,’ she said. ‘This gives me an entry into a group where I can contribute to a conversation that maybe I couldn’t have before [...]’” (para. 20). Perhaps fantasy sports provide a possible connection between the sexes by giving both males and females something they can have in common, while, at the same time, giving both sexes equal ability, decreasing the chances of establishing and maintaining dominant and non-dominant groups. Physical capabilities make no difference in the world of fantasy sports, which provides both men and women with the same playing field.

The website “The Wide World of Online Sports...is it truly an online experience?” traces the steps of forming a fantasy sport team and various obstacles to overcome while participating in this environment. The author concluded that the experience gave her/him a chance to “hangout, gamble, watch sports, etc. I would say that it spills over to real life all the time and for us, it made the sports that much more enjoyable to watch” (para. 21). Later the author states, “Participating in the league has promoted friendly competition while simultaneously providing reasons to invest more interest in sports and especially into the games that they previously would have found dull to watch since they initially did not have any connections to the teams involved” (para. 22). This involvement is important for achieving female equality in athletics. If interest is not there, females have limited opportunities. The more females increase their interactions with sports, whether by playing sports, watching sports, or participating in a



fantasy sport league, the more likely they will realize they can belong and have every right to belong to this male-dominated environment.

There are many differences in rhetoric between a male-dominated communication environment and a female-dominated communication environment, which provides notable insights regarding fantasy sport communication. With the growth of innovative technologies, many feminists have held the utopian vision that gender equality was possible through certain technologies, especially the Internet, because it was/is believed by many to be a democratic environment, offering many groups a voice that is traditionally silenced. Online communication eliminates and changes many characteristics of physical communication, theoretically creating the possibility for gender-equal communication exchanges. Computer-mediated communication allows people the opportunity to express their views and voice their opinions to large audiences. This type of communication appears to give minority groups, such as women, a voice. Yet, as is evident with many online communication environments, the desired equality has yet to become a reality.

Christine Ann Nguyen Fredrick conducted a rhetorical analysis of two feminist newsgroups, *alt.feminism* and *soc.feminism*, and determined that, even in feminist environments, discrimination occurred through use of language. Fredrick determines that “sarcastic questioning, strong assertions, accusatory disagreements, and sexist comments can create a hostile and noninclusive *ethos*” (187). Online communities have many of the same power struggles as physical communities, particularly gender struggles for power, even though many characteristics of online communication are varied from the physical world. These power struggles may be the result of the differing styles of language used

between men and women. The style of language women use is “attenuated, apologetic, and personally oriented in computer conversations [...] as [it is] in face-to-face conversations [...] [which] gives women less authority in an online setting” (188). This language style seems almost polarized from the aggressive and competitive style men use, communication traits discussed in the first and second sections of this thesis in relation to sports and technology.

An example of the differences in male and female language styles and communication is present on the website Femmefan.com in a heated discussion titled “Where you at pburch522?” The conversation mainly involved two participants: “Panthersalltheway” and “\*666.\*” The rhetoric of “Panthersalltheway” was extremely aggressive and included virtual communication techniques such as underlining sentences, using extensive exclamation marks, and capitalizing words and phrases, all indicators of forceful and hostile communication. “\*666\*” responded to the sports-related comments of “Panthersalltheway,” who, in turn, responded with: “Was I talking to you 666!!!!,” and continued with aggressive and hostile language. In fact, this participant’s capitalization use, which often indicates yelling in online communication, increased from just a few words to whole sentences and paragraphs. “\*666\*” remained calm and used no exclamation points and only one capitalized word. “Panthersalltheway” still responded with argumentative and hostile language: “I just want to know one thing WHAT WILL MAKE YOU QUIET DOWN?!?!?!? [...] Now will you stop gangbangng me and move on!!!!” After several more posts, “\*666\*” asked: “why the hell are we fighting? We are a minority as women who love football. We should talk smack but not be so nasty to each other. All I was trying to say was that the Eagles lost [...].”

At this point in the discussion, another user “pburch522” becomes involved. This user replied to “Panthersalltheway:” “I agree with 666 that we shouldn’t be so nasty to each other as women who love the sport. Maybe i was a little nasty on friday but it was in response to your previous remarks [...]” “Panthersalltheway” responded: “I thought we were going to talk football...and it turned out that you don’t know enough to make a reasonable argument [...] If you want to challenge me go do some research and be prepared!!!!” The highlight of this conversation is revealed in a post by “pburch522” to “Panthersalltheway:” “Oh by the way...are you a man??” From the rhetorical techniques “Panthersalltheway” uses, it seems logical to ask this question. This user was extremely aggressive and resorted to insult and “yelling” to get his/her point across. Yet the two females (as inferred by their posts) “\*666\*” and “pburch522” made attempts to reduce the aggressiveness of “Panthersalltheway.” These two users recognized that it is possible to state opinions, maybe even “talk smack,” but also respect other users by not resorting to degradation and insult to “win” the argument. The gender of “Panthersalltheway” is never determined. Although this user exhibits many masculine communication traits, it is possible this user is female, suggesting that females may feel that the “correct” way to participate in sports discussions, evident with this example, is through a “male” rhetoric because sports are perceived to be a masculine domain. Females may feel the only way for them to participate in this male-dominated realm is through masculine communication traits. Yet a solution to this problem is to adopt more pluralistic approaches to communication regarding “gendered” realms, such as sports, which could incorporate the differing language styles of both genders.

Forming online feminist groups eliminates many of the gender power struggles because they provide an environment for women to communicate unreservedly. Though men occasionally infiltrate these groups, the majority of users are female. Online feminist groups would presumably make it a goal to eliminate inequalities and provide a space for equal interaction, yet this is not always the case. The participants and their differing personalities define the culture of the group. The numerous differing personalities increase the chances of conflict, disrupting the ethos of the group, as evident with the discussion on Femmefan.com. Fredrick explains: “The *ethos* of the group is collectively created by individual contributions to the group discussion. Each person who posts has a particular *ethos* that either builds on the collective *ethos*, is rejected, or is ignored” (188). The ethos of a group is a powerful medium, having the ability to exclude or include new participants. Fredrick found that sarcastic questioning and accusations are two types of negative communication (two techniques “Panthersalltheway” used in the previously described discussion), which create a negative, excluding ethos. This type of communication discourages people from participating in a group, particularly women, who are “less likely to join the conversation if they feel threatened” (191). “\*666\*” and “pburch522” exhibited a more inclusive rhetoric by using effective, yet positive, forms of communication to get their points across.

Women’s online resource websites, such as iVillage.com, provide valuable information regarding characteristics of online female communication. Michelle Eble and Robin Breault explored female-dominated websites and determined that they exhibit traits similar to the ancient Greek Agora, which was the market square in Athens where “people, citizens, and noncitizens alike, met to sell goods [...] It was the focal point of

life in Athens, a place where people came to eat, worship, perform, and argue” (316). The agora influenced the development of Western rhetoric, and thus female-dominated websites, such as iVillage, because they exhibit certain traits of communication exchange derived from this rhetorical ancestor. iVillage is a website that appeals to the general population of women, instead of a specialized group. Interestingly, though, this website, as well as many others that appeal to a general audience of women, tends to focus on traditional, often domestic, women’s issues. The focus on these issues seems to hinder gender equality because these websites are promoting and encouraging the same gender binaries that have always existed. Yet their ability to gather large groups of women together is what is appealing about these websites. Eble and Breault describe them as “women’s marketplaces—online, primetime agoras [...] iVillage.com and other commercial websites for women provide online marketplaces where the production, consumption, and exchange of goods, information, and knowledge take place in virtual space, providing us with a twenty-first-century vision of the Athenian Agora—the virtual agora” (317). Even though many of these websites focus on women’s domestic issues, large numbers of women are still drawn to them. Eble and Breault offer a reason why so many women choose to participate in websites that confine them to the same traditional roles they have always possessed:

Empowerment and agency through interactivity [...] the Web offers a space where women can occupy positions of agency in the production of knowledge. Following this logic, safe web spaces for and by women, or online communities where men are in the minority, provide women even greater opportunities to actively participate in the production of knowledge because they are ‘safe’ and

there is little or no competition with men to occupy positions of agency and authority. (318)

This idea suggests that the more women participate in online communities, the more comfortable they become with technology, with help and support from those with which they are interacting.

Society has linked knowledge with power, which enables female participants of websites, such as iVillage and Femmefan, to become empowered through the transmission of knowledge. Online conversations transmit knowledge by women sharing personal and cultural information with each other. Although this information is not official knowledge from experts, it becomes part of the rhetoric of the website. Eble and Breault elaborate: “[K]nowledge that was ‘unofficial’ becomes part of the sanctioned knowledge of the iVillage website; it is institutionalized as information” (324). This internalizing of information leads to empowerment because the exchange of knowledge taking place on these websites is inevitably linked to power.

Eble and Breault also acknowledge the importance of education as a building block for gender equality in technology. They explain:

Our classrooms can be sites where students question how women (and men) negotiate online communication and how the rhetoric of technology supports our theoretical and pedagogical goals and introduces students to communication technologies. They can also be forums for the dissemination of knowledge, and maybe even power, that they will need to become informed citizens who can challenge technologies that marginalize and oppress women and other groups. (327)

The future of gender equality begins in the classroom, by exposing women to technologies while, at the same time, encouraging them to question the established patriarchal theoretical practices. This questioning produces knowledge and awareness necessary in the workforce to challenge existing patriarchal practices.

The questioning of existing patriarchal traditions is what feminist Luce Irigaray advocates. Irigaray developed sophisticated ideas and beliefs regarding women and language. In her essay “When Our Lips Speak Together” she exposes the false consciousness of many women living in a patriarchal society. She explains: “On the outside, you attempt to conform to an order which is alien to you. Exiled from yourself, you fuse with everything that you encounter. You mime whatever comes near you” (262). She continues by stating that “the language we know is so limited [...] [and] if we don’t invent a language, if we don’t find our body’s language, its gestures will be too few to accompany our story” (264). Women use the language of their male oppressors and, therefore, never fully convey their thoughts and feelings. Although Irigaray never gives details regarding a female language of the body, she creates awareness among many women, causing them to think consciously about the ways they are oppressed.

Feminist online communities are moving in positive directions to eliminate gender inequalities by uniting women globally, which enable an exchange of cultural and geographic knowledge necessary to improve conditions for women. Yet the barrier to overcome is the male consumption of the Others, including women and technology, a technique men use to maintain power. In phallogocentric thinking, the body is relevant to man because he fears it. Patricia Webb, in “Technologies of Difference: Reading the Virtual Age Through Sexual (In)Difference,” explains that the body is mortal, a concept

men distance themselves from, and also differs from a woman's body because men cannot produce children (152). The dominant male order distances itself from the body, thus limiting the language of the body, which Irigaray contends is necessary for women to express themselves. Technology presents another "body" for man to attempt to control because it appears uncontrollable and uncertain. Man attempts to consume the female body, not to be connected with woman, but to control woman. The same applies to technology – man consumes technology to control it. Yet the question begins to surface through increased feminist literature, "Does man truly have control over women and technology, or is this assumed control part of the false consciousness of society?" Media often reinforces the patriarchal order, making it difficult for women to find their language of expression. Fantasy sport websites present this problem by excluding women, because of the limited number of fantasy sports websites offering a female-oriented environment, but do not necessarily have to with more conscious awareness from men and women regarding gender relations.

Femrefan.com is an example of a female-oriented sports-related environment, a rare find on the Internet. Significant differences exist between this website and other male-oriented fantasy sport websites, indicating the differences in rhetoric and communication of both genders. Femrefan.com includes a discussion forum where women engage in thoughtful discussions about sports and, as evident with the example discussion described earlier, attempt to maintain an inclusive ethos. Numerous user-written articles that discuss various aspects of women and the sports realm are also included on the website. The website was created to "provide the female [sport] fan a place on the web that covered sports from the female's unique perspective" (para. 1).



The creator, Ivette Ricco, realized there were “many women, like her, following sports on a regular basis, but nothing was available to meet their needs. Even team apparel wasn’t available in women’s sizes [...] And thus an idea was born and in March of 2000 Femmefan.com was launched” (para. 2). Ricco explains the mindset of the female fan, which differs significantly from that of the male fan, and reiterates many of the female sport fan characteristics discussed previously. Ricco states, “Women, although avid about sports, are not nearly as intrigued by the unending statistics and scores as men are. Women want to know about the people in the uniforms, their lives, their families, and what makes them tick. Women want to view their athletic ‘icons’ in a human way, ‘Up Close and Personal’” (para. 4). This statement suggests women are more interested in the social aspects of sports, which coincides with the previously discussed reasons for watching sports and participating in sports-related activities. Women value communication and connections, which allow them to personally connect with something. The characteristics of female sport fans Ricco lists enable women to personally connect with sports, which could raise their overall interest in sports.

Femmefan.com also includes another necessary feature to help promote increased involvement by females in the world of sports. Multiple pages that explain the game of football, which is the primary sport discussed on this website, are included, giving women the opportunity to gain knowledge, a key component to increase female involvement in sports. The page opens with: “Want to know more about football, but were afraid to ask? [...] Football can seem complicated and confusing for the new fan, but it is really a game of numbers, and once you learn the basics you can enjoy the game along with the rest, and the best, of fans” (paras. 1-3). Many women are often afraid or

timid to ask questions about sports in order to gain more knowledge, an aspect that continues to label them as outsiders. Femmefan.com provides a comfortable environment where women can learn about football, without having to feel “stupid” or be ridiculed by men for taking an interest in a sport of which they lack knowledge.

Femmefan.com is successful in accomplishing a “role reversal” of power, providing an environment where women feel empowered for a change. The previously described discussion finally ended with “Panthersalltheway” leaving the discussion forum and website permanently. Femmefan.com also challenges the male gaze by boldly turning the gaze upon men. A page titled “Locker Room Lookers” is devoted to attractive male football players, and the participants of Femmefan.com offer no apology for this repressive behavior. The website states, “Men don’t apologize for their oh’s and ah’s whenever cheerleaders in their scanty little outfits appear” (para. 3). Although this page does not promote gender-equal environment, it is necessary to balance the amount of sexualized and oppressive content towards women found on the Internet and, as previously mentioned, on many fantasy sport websites. The women of Femmefan.com are attempting gallant acts by applying the male gaze to men, instead of women. Femmefan.com also includes many humorous articles that empower women sport fans, for example the page “Hear Me Roar,” which features a three-part article titled “If Chicks Ran the NFL.” Women who utilize this website can feel more empowered in relation to sports because they are able to unite and communicate with other women sharing similar interests. The environment seems inclusive by encouraging women to post on the message board, providing a detailed explanation of football, and providing humor and information to give women the opportunity to unite and place men in an inferior position

for a change. Yet a role reversal of power is not what most women of this website wish to achieve. One particular user, in a discussion I started regarding fantasy sports and female participation, replied: “Be gentle with the male egos – I try not to ever make any one of them look silly in front of the other guys” (“SheFan”). This indicates a level of compassion for the male gender and proves that women just want to be included in the sports realm. Most women have no desire to reverse the male domination of sports, or feminize all aspects of sports. Women simply want men to make room for them, so they may be included in sports, including fantasy sports, as well. Pluralist approaches to fantasy sports that appreciate both genders could allow room for both genders in the sporting and technological realms.

## CONCLUSION

Knowledge and education are key components for achieving gender equality in sports and technology. This knowledge acquisition and education must begin at a young age, before males and females have been conditioned to behave and act within certain roles society has prescribed for either sex. Fantasy sports are a possibility for women to enter two male-dominated realms – sports and technology – because fantasy sports eliminate physical differences between males and females, which are often barriers preventing female participation in sports, and they are played online, which could include women in technology. Fantasy sports provide women with opportunities to learn about and participate in sports, regardless of their biological differences from men. Fantasy sports also provide women with more opportunities to engage in technology, thereby becoming more comfortable interacting with computers. By participating in fantasy

sports, women can begin to eliminate gender binaries, increasing their access and full participation in both sports and technology.

A major barrier preventing women from participating in fantasy sports is the male-domination of this activity. Fantasy sport websites that are more female-oriented, such as Femmefan.com, might increase the percentage of female participants because women would feel more comfortable interacting with a website that has eliminated overt male domination. There are few female-oriented fantasy sport websites; yet, in brainstorming characteristics of a female-oriented fantasy sport website, I discovered it is not that difficult to create. A major hindrance women first encounter on many fantasy sport websites is the overbearing images of male athletes. This automatically creates a noninclusive environment for women because they immediately feel they are not welcome or do not belong at this particular website. For a website to be female-oriented, less male-dominated images must be present. Perhaps the website could have more images of female athletes, or, if the website does not offer any female fantasy sports, as is often the situation, eliminate some of the male athlete images and opt for other sports-related images to enhance the website. In relation to noninclusive images, the advertisements a fantasy sport website includes, even if the products are not affiliated with the website, also contribute to the environment of the website and determine whether women will feel welcome at that particular website. Advertisements should appeal to both genders, rather than only to males. On many fantasy sport websites, advertisements include images of sexualized females, advertising male products, such as the male-oriented magazine *Maxim*. Any woman, conscientious of the debasement this

type of advertisement causes for women, would be reluctant to participate in the fantasy sports offered at this website.

Another characteristic of a female-oriented fantasy sport website would be that it could be accessed through a female-dominated website, such as Femmefan.com, which is currently in the process of forming a fantasy football league. This would encourage more women to participate in fantasy sports because they would be accessing them in an environment where they feel comfortable. They would also be participating in fantasy sports with other women, increasing socialization and communication, which would help unite more women globally. Society assumes that the female interest in sports is low. Yet this interest could increase the more women learn about sports. Femmefan.com attempts to increase knowledge by offering a detailed explanation of football, for people who may not know much about the sport. It is logical to assume a woman would not enjoy watching a football game if she knows nothing about the sport. She would not understand the actions of the game, thus feeling confused and perplexed about football, decreasing her chances that she would watch a football game again. Yet if she understood the game enough to follow it, she might realize this activity is fun and entertaining, increasing her chances of watching another football game or even getting more involved in the sport by playing fantasy sports. The presumed idea that females are not interested in sports is not grounded in any psychological or biological difference between women and men. Throughout history, women have been excluded from this environment, thus not being able to learn about sports. If women were able to participate more in this environment and learn more about sports, female interest would probably increase dramatically.

A female-oriented fantasy sport website would also include detailed instructions, which are easily accessed, for both men and women who do not know a great deal about fantasy sports or even sports in general. First time fantasy sport participants sometimes find it difficult to have a successful fantasy sport experience because the website they have chosen is difficult to navigate and lacks clear instructions. Again, as with sports in general, the more people understand what they are participating in, the more likely they will participate again. This applies to fantasy sports as well. People will not enjoy their fantasy sport experience if they do not understand how to have a successful fantasy sport team. This idea not only applies to women, but also to men who are first-time participants in fantasy sports.

As evident with discussion forum messages described in section three, female degradation is fairly common on fantasy sport discussion forums. This comprises a exclusive environment for women, decreasing their chances of participation in fantasy sports. A female-oriented fantasy sport website would utilize a moderator, to scrutinize and preferably eliminate gender-degrading discussions. Unfortunately, most of the time, people are freely allowed to voice their opinions in chatrooms and discussion forums. Once a comment or message is posted, it is out there for the world to read. Yet having a moderator for the discussion forum would increase the chances of denying offensive fantasy sport participants the chance to participate in the discussion forum, perhaps even the fantasy sport website. Many websites containing discussion forums explain in their disclaimer that offensive language is not allowed. A female-oriented fantasy sport website could expand this disclaimer to prohibit offensive, gender-biased comments as well. The creator of Femmefan.com explained in an e-mail communication that she was

the only person with authority to “ban, delete and moderate.” She continued by detailing: “I have chosen to ban a few folks (guys) who got out of hand and made inappropriate comments, and I deleted their posts. I keep [a]n eye on the board and check for anything offensive or inappropriate.” With the elimination of a gender-degrading environment, the anxieties and fears women have regarding fantasy sports would decrease, thus increasing their chances of participation in fantasy sports.

An increase in successful experiences with fantasy sports would, in turn, promote women to feel comfortable treading into the male-dominated areas of sports and technology, thus opening a world of possibilities for future gender equality. It is possible to change existing gender roles, as they are only constructs of society and not biologically imprinted in either sex. Women should never be satisfied with a sideline role in sports and technology, as they have every right to unreservedly participate in these male-dominated worlds. Increased female interest in male-dominated areas may encourage a crusade to destroy existing barriers women currently face in these areas.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix A. Understanding Fantasy Sports.

Every website offering fantasy sports is somewhat different. These are the basic characteristics and processes explained on YahooSports to help understand how a fantasy team works.

Step 1: Choosing what kind of league to join. You may choose to join either a public league or create a private league among friends. If you are the league founder (the commissioner), you may configure most aspects of your league, including scoring and drafting. If you choose to join a public league, you are randomly placed in one that fits with your competition level. Public leagues use default settings.

Step 2: Drafting players. Your season begins when the real-life sport season begins, whether it is football, baseball, basketball, etc. Drafting players can either be done live or automatic. During a live draft, every manager selects one player each round until they have a full roster. Draft order reverses each round, giving every manager a chance to go first. An autopick draft allows the computer to select players for you. Private leagues are also allowed to draft offline, and the commissioner submits the results.

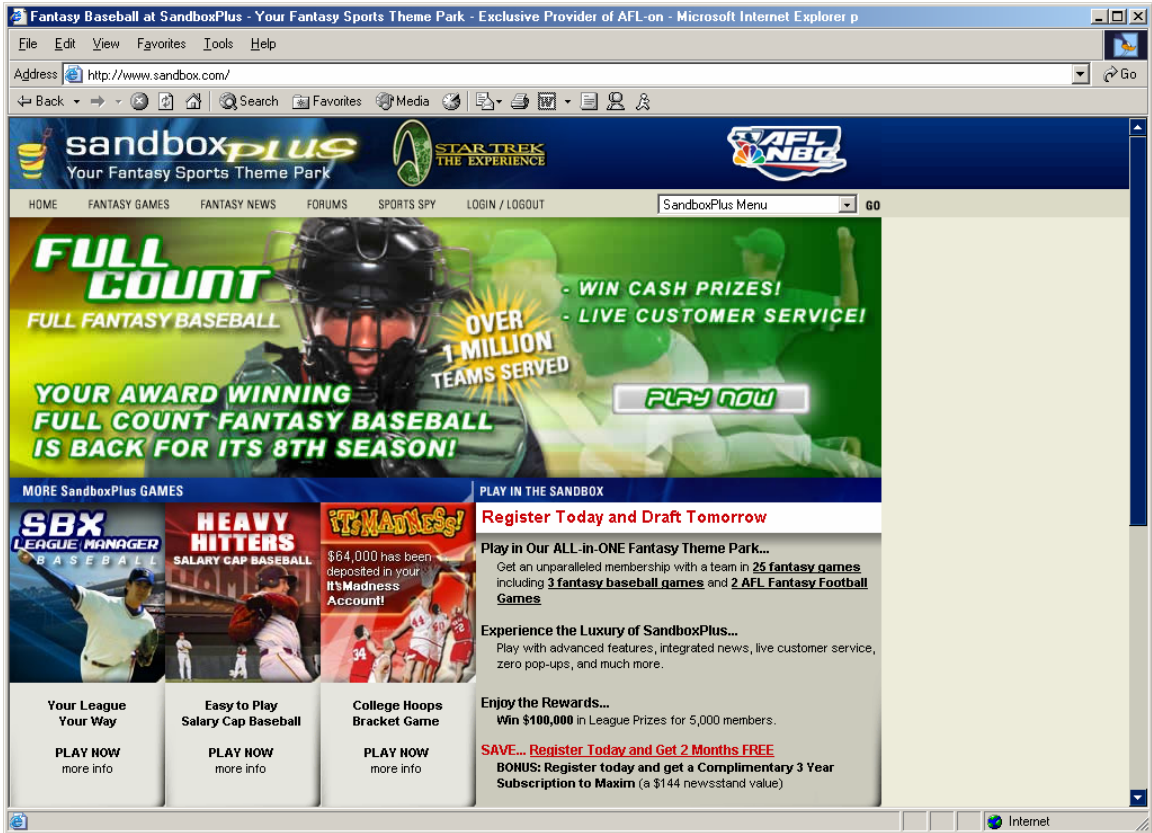
Step 3: Determining points earned. In a Rotisserie League, which is a non head-to-head public league, teams are ranked based on a number of statistical categories. Points are awarded based on which place your team ranks in a particular category. The points from each category are totaled to determine your team's overall score. In a Fantasy Points

League, which is available only to private leagues, you try to earn the most fantasy points out of everyone in your league. The team that has accumulated the most points wins. In a Head-to-Head league, which is where your team squares off with another team on a weekly basis to see who can compile the best statistics in a number of different categories, you want your team to compile a better win-loss record than all the other teams in your league. Basically, the better the real-life players do, the more points your team earns.

Step 4: Trading players and acquiring free agents. Trading players is where one manager exchanges a player or players with another manager. On your team page, click on Propose Trade, and select the team and player/players you wish to trade. E-mail will be sent to the other manager offering the trade. The other manager can accept, decline, or make a counter offer. Both managers must agree before the trade is complete. Free agents are all unowned players and are acquired on a first come basis. You can either pick up or drop players, but will not be allowed to exceed the league's roster limit.

This is simply an introduction to understanding fantasy sports. Participating in fantasy sports can get rather complicated, yet the website offering the fantasy sport usually has a help link, where you can e-mail any questions or problems. Fantasy sports have become so pervasive in the last few years that the book [Fantasy Sports Online for Dummies](#) is now available, which describes in detail most aspects of fantasy sports.

Appendix B. Male-Dominated Imaging on Sandbox.com.



Appendix C. Model on FantasyOnlineSport.com.

Fantasy Online Sports - Friends with Angelie Almendare - Microsoft Internet Explorer provided by Roadrunner

Address <http://www.fantasyonlinesports.com/general/angelie.shtml>

Back Forward Stop Refresh Home Search Favorites Media Print Mail News RSS Feeds

**Fantasy Online Sports.com** your online sports entertainment leader

click here **ROYAL VEGAS** **PLAY POKER**

Main Links »»» [Football](#) [Baseball](#) [Basketball](#) [Auto Racing](#) [Player Login](#)

**CONTESTS**

- » [Baseball](#)
- » [Football](#)
- » [Basketball](#)
- » [Auto Racing](#)
- » [Hockey](#)
- » [Golf](#)

**INFORMATION**

- » [Company Info](#)
- » [About Us](#)
- » [Advertising](#)
- » [Affiliate Info](#)
- » [Co-Branding](#)
- » [Site Creation](#)
- » [Sites for Sale](#)

**Super Model**

**Super Model - Angelie Almendare**

Visit her site at [www.Angelie.com](http://www.Angelie.com) [Click Here for Calendar](#)

**Brian and Steve**

...are the founders of Fantasy Online Sports! Angelie Almendare has worked with us on a number of football contests including our "[NFL Loser Challenge](#)" and our "[Fantasy Racing Online Challenge](#)". Not only does Angelie help promote our great contests but often participates in them. A true pleasure to work with and her "down to earth" personality is something to behold!

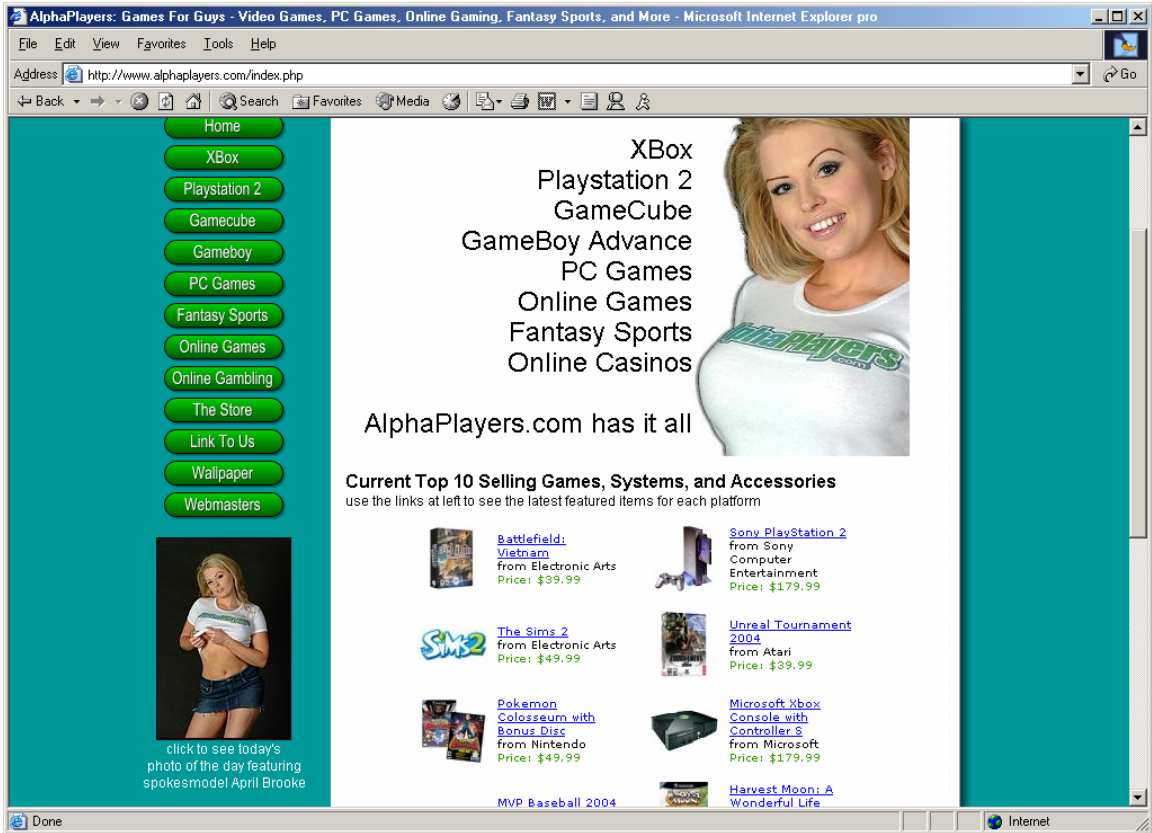
**BUY HER CALENDAR!**

[Click Here for Calendar](#)

<http://www.fantasyonlinesports.com/utills/ads/clicks.cgi?code=SLICK&network=FOS> Internet



Appendix D. Model on AlphaPlayers.com.



## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sarah R. Wright was born on August 7, 1979, in Winston Salem, North Carolina and grew up in Laurinburg, North Carolina. She graduated with honors from the University of North Carolina at Pembroke in August 2001 with a B.A. degree in English. During her undergraduate education, she had the opportunity of study abroad in Oxford, England and Paris, France, as well as travel extensively throughout Europe. She also served as a website editor for an American Literature website, created by a professor at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. In 2002, she began the graduate English program at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington and completed the requirements for her Master's degree in May 2004.