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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Susan Melanie Gutkind entitled "How can I be like Mike? : professional female athletes and the negotiation of identities in the presence of media images." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Leslee Fisher, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

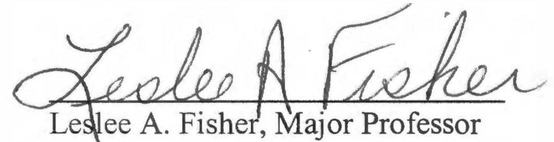
Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Susan M. Gutkind entitled "How Can I Be Like Mike? Professional Female Athletes and the Negotiation of Identities in the Presence of Media Images." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.



Leslee A. Fisher, Major Professor

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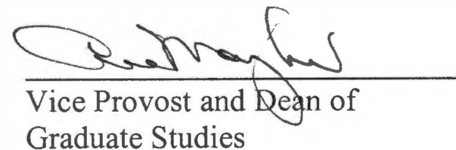

Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

HOW CAN I BE LIKE MIKE?
PROFESSIONAL FEMALE ATHLETES AND THE NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITIES IN THE PRESENCE OF MEDIA IMAGES

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Susan M. Gutkind
August 2003

Thesis
2003b
.G88

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ABSTRACT

Traditional definitions of manhood—strength, aggressiveness, power, speed—collapse almost completely into traditional definitions of sports (Kane & Parks, 1992); to be masculine is to be athletic, and vice versa. Within this ideology, the female athlete presents an incongruous blend of traits; the historically defined qualities of femininity (passivity, dependence, weakness) are exclusive to those of "traditional athletes."

When combining aspects of the self that are culturally in conflict (as in, "I am a female" and "I am an athlete"), the negotiation of identity is influenced by hegemonic discourse (Hall, 1997). That is, there are certain preferred methods and vocabularies used when discussing both gender and sports that have gained power and potentially limit the ways female athletes are thought of and described. Postmodern theories (ex., Butler, 1997) make the claim that gender positions (and, therefore, identities) are fluid and dynamic, with multiple subjectivities continuously taking the fore. Within this framework, there is no space for a "core" identity (Layton, 1998), yet media images and casual conversation suggest a strong desire for one. The present study is designed to develop a theory about how female athletes who receive national media coverage negotiate self-identities and media images.

Eight professional/Olympic female athletes who receive national media coverage were interviewed with a semi-structured protocol to provide information about negotiation of identities. Qualitative, inductive analysis revealed two emergent categories: 1) Intending to "Be Like Mike," and 2) Competing in a Business Arena. These categories, and their supporting actions are presented and explored. Also presented is an integrated identity theory that suggests female athletes who receive media

coverage employ several different strategies (often unconsciously) in negotiating the *athlete self*, the *sexed self*, *stereotypical females*, and *mediated images* as self-identities are dynamically created and recreated. Conclusions and applications for sport psychology professionals, as well as implications for future research are discussed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Lisa Leslie proudly displays her MVP trophy." This caption accompanied a photograph of the 2001 Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) MVP, Lisa Leslie (www.wnba.com/sparks, accessed August 26, 2001). That Leslie was named MVP was not surprising. She had led her team to the WNBA Finals and had dominated the league with consistent achievement in rebounds, points, and blocked shots. She had already been named MVP of the All-Star game and was named MVP of the playoffs after the Los Angeles Sparks swept through the Finals to become league champions. What was surprising was the photograph. In it, Leslie is sitting—posed, passive, and demurely holding her trophy. Her back is straight; her legs are crossed. She is wearing street clothes—a form-fitting purple sweater and a short black skirt, slit to reveal most of her thigh. She is the very model of—modeling. As a yearbook photo, the picture could win prizes; as the portrayal of an MVP caliber athlete, it prompts critical review.

The contrast between the physical strength and ability Leslie needed to earn the award and the passivity displayed in her image is shocking. The media seems to be pushing a particular image of femininity that denies the power associated with male athlete expressions of strength, speed, and power and, at first glance, it appears Leslie may have internalized this view. However, given that there are many forms resistance can take, it is likely there is more to this than meets the eye. In what ways does this picture *really* illustrate what it means to be a successful female athlete? More specifically, in what ways (if any) might the picture reflect Leslie's self-identity as a female athlete? These questions, and others like them, have prompted the present study,

which is designed to develop a theory about the ways female athletes negotiate identity formation in the presence of national media images.

The topic spans the fields of sport psychology and sport sociology and draws heavily from post-modern identity theory in an attempt to bridge internal and external worlds. This cannot always be done smoothly. Theorists within each of the specific disciplines do not always agree on what it means to be a female or a female athlete, nor do they use the same language to describe them. Therefore, in addition to the efforts made to clearly locate various theories within the appropriate field, the reader will notice that every attempt has been made to remain true to the language used by various theorists. In this chapter, I first introduce the reader to relevant topics from these different disciplines. Then, I delineate the purpose for the project as well as limitations and delimitations of the study. Finally, I provide definitions for key terms used throughout this paper.

Overview of Topics

Hegemony and Gender Ideologies in Sport

Sport sociologists such as Whitson (1994) have noted that living in a patriarchy means women as a marginalized group have generally not had the authority to determine for themselves what it means to be feminine. Rather, ideas about gender have been influenced—generally in ways that benefit male interests—by an established cultural ideology that tends to identify women as passive objects. Any discussion of female athleticism is, therefore, firmly embedded in deeper issues of hegemonic power and gender ideology. Within a sport sociology framework, female athletes are in a position to seriously challenge traditional and stereotypical beliefs about women since, as athletes,

they may be viewed as more active subjects. However, as Coakley (2001) noted, although legislation has led to increased opportunities for female athletes, until the institutions underlying gender oppression in sport are addressed, meaningful long-term change is unlikely.

Hegemony (as defined by Williams, 1976, p.118) is a set of beliefs and practices reflecting the interests of a particular (ruling) class that have gained dominance not through overt force, but through the complicit acceptance of those interests as "normal reality" by the disadvantaged group. In other words, hegemony is expressed when a group in power is able to "convince" marginalized others that the interests of the dominant group are also in the best interests of the marginalized group. Leslie's apparent internalization of and/or acquiescence to traditional standards of feminine passivity in her pose for the media as an athletic super star serves as a ready example. However, domination is not a static phenomenon; hegemonic positions are continuously negotiated and redefined, often subconsciously. Acts of resistance are commonplace, although there is seldom a simple and direct line between any particular resistant action and a counterhegemonic effect.

An example of how hegemonic positions tend to remain in negotiation involves the recent qualifying of LPGA golfer Annika Sorenstam for a PGA tournament. Although Sorenstam's decision to play (as the first woman in a PGA tour event in 50 years) may appear incontrovertibly to signal a move for women's equality, she maintained that she was not attempting to make a stand for women's rights by playing in the PGA. Rather, she professed that she was only interested in evaluating, and thereby improving, her golf skills. There are many ways to establish female athletes as powerful, and playing with

the men is not the only way to display one's strength. In this case, it is unknown whether skill-building was truly her only interest in the PGA event, yet her decision not to speak to the feminist issues of her participation reflects a process whereby resistant acts undergo negotiation even as they are engaged. While the media focused on the exceptional experience of a woman playing "men's" golf, Sorenstam focused on the need for any professional golfer to take advantage of opportunities to improve. Women's sport is enmeshed in the process of hegemonic renegotiation of potentially conflicting gender ideologies with multiple gender positions continuously being reflected and challenged. It is important, therefore, to understand the nature of gender ideologies.

Ideology, as Willis (1994) suggested:

> ...can be understood as the process of legitimation... whereby a certain social... system of order and power, and access to reward is constituted as the *only possible* or only fair, pattern of human relations (p. 36, emphasis added).

In very general terms, then, a dominant ideology can be thought of as a set of beliefs about what is just and valued in a particular aspect of society. Dominant gender ideology "is about the active construction of our 'selves' as social beings through historically specific subject positions made available through the images we actively consume" (Cole, 1994, p. 12). Dominant ideological beliefs subjugate best when they are based on available, observable "facts." In terms of gender, ideological values that are reflected in material practice (such as in media images) are more likely to be taken as "common sense" than those beliefs that are not expressed materially. Therefore, hegemonic power may become strengthened as a dominant gender ideology gains common sense acceptance. This idea is supported by Willis (1994), who indicated that gender ideologies can only gain a stronghold if their true hegemonic nature remains hidden to

those who buy into them. That is, if a particular gender value (e.g., "men are better athletes") obviously appears to serve patriarchal power interests, it can be exposed as unjust and loses its power to control.

Within the sport sociology literature, clear lines are drawn between a focus on the body and socializing information about gender that is communicated through sport and sporting practices (Kane & Parks, 1992; Messner, 1988; Whitson, 1994). It has been noted that both women and men use sport in an attempt to define what it means to be feminine and masculine (Messner, 1988), with "feminine" and "masculine" being socially constructed categories relating to being gendered (Cole, 1994). For men, this involves *reinforcement* of dominant gender values, while, for women, it seems likely the goal is *redefinition* of femininity to promote multiplicity and power. As Whitson (1994) noted, women challenge the ideological equation of physical power with masculinity when they use their bodies skillfully and forcefully (as powerful subjects rather than passive objects of the male gaze). Willis (1994) countered this claim, positing that, within sport, gender is embodied in ways that are seen as decidedly male, and biological differences clearly support male superiority. Central to these ideas is the notion of gender as a pre-existing concept that can be defined outside of the individual. In this way, where traditional definitions of manhood—strength, aggressiveness, power, speed—collapse almost completely into traditional definitions of sports (Kane & Parks, 1992); to be masculine is to be athletic and vice versa. Within this ideology, the female athlete presents an incongruous blend of traits; the historically defined qualities of femininity (passivity, dependence, weakness) are exclusive to those of "traditional athletes."

Functioning in society, then, female athletes are confronted with two potential conflicts. First, as noted, the terms *female* and *athlete* have historically and traditionally been established as binary opposites (Kane & Parks, 1992). When combining aspects of the self that are culturally in conflict (as in, "I am a female" and "I am an athlete"), the negotiation of identity is influenced by hegemonic discourse (Hall, 1997a). That is, when discussing both gender and sports, there are certain preferred methods and vocabularies used that have gained power and potentially limit the ways female athletes are thought of and described. For example, in our patriarchal society, the female athlete is often interpreted as "a less feminine female" or "a less athletic athlete." Finding personal coherence and integration in the context of this culturally determined (and psychologically internalized) exclusivity likely requires a great deal of negotiation (Layton, 1998). This leads directly to the second potential conflict in the on-going process of clarifying one's identity—namely that binaries both limit and enable identity experiences (Butler, 1990, 1997).

Identities and Binary Categories

Postmodern theories of gender formation (ex., Butler, 1997) have made the claim that identities are fluid and dynamic, with multiple subjectivities continuously taking the fore. Within this framework, there is no space for a "core" identity (Layton, 1998), yet media images and casual conversation suggest a strong desire for one. In patriarchal discourse, the dominant gender discourse normatively describes everything—even God—as male. As Irigaray (1977/1986, p. 70) noted, "Woman herself is never at issue in these statements: the feminine is defined as the necessary complement to the operation of male sexuality, and, more often, as a negative image that provides male sexuality with an

unfailingly phallic self-representation." Women, in this system, can only be described in relation to male standards. As a result, "woman" is regularly and normatively defined as "not male" and therefore, as lacking (Irigaray, 1991a). Such thought structures rely on oppositional categories and severely limit the potential identities we can have. That is, if I am female, I cannot be male (de Beauvoir, 1997).

For postmodern theorists, this is a highly inadequate system because lived culture is symbolic and discursive in ways that disallow simple binary identifications, and identities do not sit still long enough to be pigeonholed. In fact, identities are so dynamic that by the time one is even described, it has already changed (Butler, 1997). Hall (2000) acknowledged this and noted that identity, though fluid, is established through a series of arbitrary stops or closures which are "not the end, but which make both politics and identity possible" (p. 137). Therefore, asking an athlete to talk about gender identities (or asking a theorist to write about them) requires an understanding that the words used to explain the processes will be fragmentary and biased. Within the context of the current project, these limitations are sometimes reflective of the current language of sport sociology/sport psychology theories.

Within the sport sociology literature (ex., Willis, 1994), it is commonly acknowledged that hegemonic gender positions are constantly challenged, negotiated, and redefined. Because the surrounding socio-cultural environment influences one's sense of self, it is reasonable to expect that dominant gender positions will be taken up (to some degree and in some fashion) during identity formation. Less obvious, perhaps, is that *the process of negotiating* multiple gender positions will be taken up as well (Layton, 1998). That is, hegemonic struggles (not just outcomes) between conflicting gender

ideologies must be considered when exploring identities. This leaves "identity" a much more open concept than the sport sociology theories allow. If one's values are in conflict with cultural standards, the struggle between the dominant and non-dominant forms is an intrapsychic (identity) conflict, and identity processes themselves reflect that conflict (Layton, 1998). In other words, just as socio-cultural values are constantly negotiated and redefined, postmodern theorists hold that "gender identities" may be seen as both the conflict between multiple and dynamic gender standards and the individual's negotiation of these conflicts. The overall goal of both searching for and theorizing about identity(ies) is to provide for the possibility of a fluid, subjective, heterogenous self that recognizes its own gendered multiplicity and allows others to do the same (Layton, 1998). This is easier said than done.

Media Coverage of Female Athletes

Difficulties abound when the goal is leaving one's "identity" open. Most prominent for women in sport are the ways that patriarchal ideology is embedded in sporting practice and media coverage. The media plays a major role in both maintaining and resisting dominant views (Kane & Greendorfer, 1994; Kane & Parks, 1992; Messner, 1988). As early as 1983, Boutilier and San Giovanni recognized that:

> Given the dominant place of the mass media in a modern society, it is especially important to examine the treatment of women's sport by the various media. This is a critical issue because the fact remains that, regardless of what is actually happening to the relationship between women and sport, it is the media's *treatment* and *evaluation* of that relationship that will shape its direction and content (pp. 183-184).

Thus, although the media does not have ultimate power to determine gender ideologies, the images and words communicated through media sources do tend to favor

notions of specific gender practices that match pre-existing binary sex categories. In other words, the media tends to promote a particular set of norms as being "feminine" and "belonging" to females. Given the strength of media influence on the general public, the role of sport media in the exchange of gender messages should be explored more fully.

Media representations reach the public through a process of selection and framing that encode messages about object salience as well as object attributes (Ghanem, 1997). "By giving significantly greater coverage to a sportswoman's physical appearance and feminine demeanor, and/or by frequently comparing her performance to those of male athletes, the media constructs female athleticism in terms of gender difference (i.e., she may be an athlete but she is primarily a female) and gender hierarchy (i.e., even the best females can never beat the best males)" (Kane & Parks, 1992, p. 53). This mediated reality, which is generally presented to the public as "fact," serves to reinforce traditional societal values about women and sport (Duncan, 1990). This is not a stable, unidirectional influence, however. The media shapes *and is shaped by* society—cyclically, not linearly (Hall, 2000). This means that identities are potentially formed within a maelstrom of ever-changing values and images. This process has direct, though still unexplored, implications for identity formation in female athletes and those who observe them.

Messner (1988) indicated that women are not given a fair chance to identify themselves as athletes, and this limits their ability to claim some of the strength, power, and competitive dedication that are so readily attributed to their male counterparts. He concluded, "It remains for a critical feminist theory to recognize the emergent

contradictions in this system in order to inform a liberating social practice" (p. 281). Butler (1990) also noted that, although there are many unconscious forces at play, people do, in fact, have some say in the process. Because gender is "always a doing," the result of the performative actually creates the "category" into which it purports to fit (Butler, 1990, p. 25). While several studies have explored women's sports coverage in the media (see Davis, 1997, for a comprehensive review), fewer have focused on identity formation as a construction in women's sport (one example is Fisher, 1997), and there does not appear to be any research that investigates identities and media image together. The present study is designed to explore the ways female athletes who receive national media coverage negotiate the space between self-identities and media image. The literature suggests there are many interrelated and dynamic components of identity formation, including socio-cultural values and the media. It should be noted that these interact with each other, as well as with image and identity in multiple and constantly changing ways. Figure 1 presents the potential relationships between society, the media, and female athletes as suggested by the existing sport sociology and sport psychology literature. Interestingly, although the connections presented in the diagram seemed accurate when the present study began, the research revealed added dimensions that will be discussed later in this paper. Figure 1, therefore, should be thought of as a point of departure for the current project.

Summary

As women participate in sport, they potentially contest the narrowness of hegemonically defined gender norms, and media sources communicate these feats to a wider audience than just those in attendance of the event. If media portrayals of female athletes

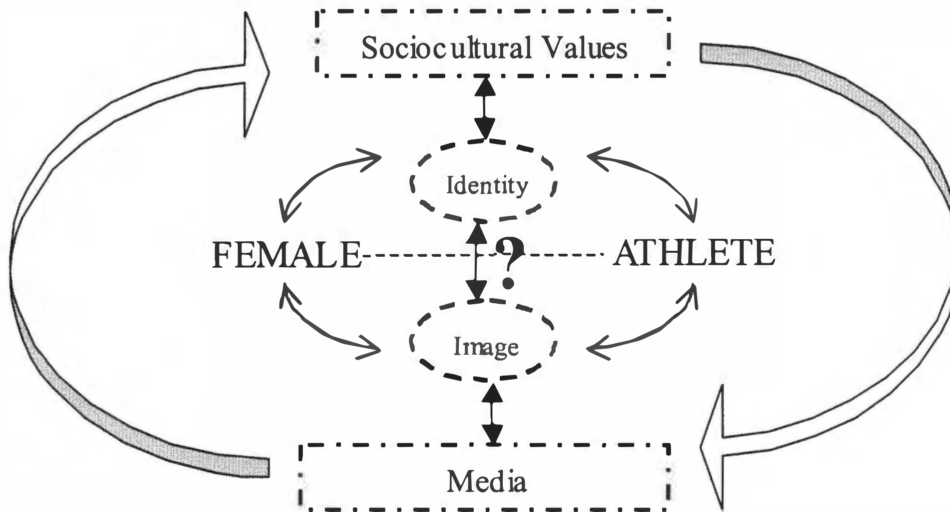

Figure 1: Socio-cultural values and media influence on identity and image of female athletes

contain ideological messages about gender and sport (Ghanem, 1997; Hall, 2000), girls and boys who observe female athletes via the media receive information about femininity and athleticism with every image. To date, the exploration of identity and media within sport through the lenses of sport sociology and sport psychology has resulted in a relatively foreclosed model of solitary and "finished identity." Exploring this issue through theory that allows for open and multiple identities may provide added understanding of the process. Female athletes potentially send messages of opportunity and empowerment to girls and boys that enable broader definitions of self-identity for all, non-athletes as well as athletes. Therefore, it is necessary to explore not only the message and content of media portrayals but also the way(s) in which media information is taken up or rejected along with other sociocultural values during the continuous, fluid process of searching for identity cohesion.

Statement of the Purpose

This project attempts to provide greater understanding about the relationship between the identities of professional female athletes and national media images. Specifically, through interviews with female athletes who receive national media coverage, the present study seeks to develop a theory that addresses the dynamic process of identity formation given the presence of national media images. To date, this relationship has not been investigated. A greater understanding of the factors involved in identity formation of female athletes and the ways self-produced and media-created images impact identities may provide all members of society with more just opportunities to seek and adopt new and more flexible definitions of what it means to be a woman (and/or a sport-participant) in our society.

Limitations

The following limitation applies to this study:

1) There is no standard of language that can adequately explain identity formation. This severely influences and restricts what we can know and say about gender identities. Although postmodernists reject the idea of fixed polarities, identity theories must take into account that internalized categories are highly resistant to change (Layton, 1998) and unconscious influences (Butler, 1990, 1993) are difficult to examine. So, while a theory might suggest binaries are untenable, it does not mean people will stop talking and thinking in terms of opposites.

Delimitations

The following delimitations apply to this study:

1) The study is designed to provide some understanding of the negotiation process as experienced by the interviewed population The participants were purposefully chosen to reflect diversity of sport and race. All of the athletes had previously participated or had contact with personnel at one NCAA Division I university in the southern United States. This means that, through their college years, these women's experiences with media and sport may have had some commonalities that would not be present in a sample that was accessed through more varied contacts.

2) It should be noted that most female athletes receiving coverage in the media are Caucasian or African-American; very few are Asian or Hispanic. The selected co-participants match this general demographic. This both strengthens and limits the study in that, although some groups are not well represented, the common themes emerging across the given lines of diversity paint a more vivid picture of the overall sport experience than would, for example, commonalities that emerged in a sample of only Caucasian soccer players. While I have chosen to specifically focus on gender, other social categories (such as race, class, sexuality, or religion) could be examined utilizing the present framework. Since race is such a large part of identity in American culture (Winant, 1995), it is likely that female athletes from races not commonly associated with widespread sports participation (i.e., Hispanics and Asians) would negotiate identity in ways worth studying in more depth than this study will allow.

Definitions

Discourse: The way in which knowledge is constructed and a particular subject is studied, discussed, and made meaningful. It includes vocabulary as well as a sense of which positions are favorable and unfavorable (Hall, 1997b, p.6).

Femininity: Traits typically associated with being female within patriarchal discourse. It has been suggested that females gain power by displaying "traditional femininity" (Krane, 2001), though, for the purposes of this study, it must be acknowledged that any single definition of femininity is impossible (Butler, 1997).

Gender: A socially constructed phenomenon that is psychologically internalized and reflects one's beliefs (shaped by cultural values) about what it means to be a female or a male (Cole, 1994; Layton, 1998; Messner & Sabo, 1994).

Gender Hierarchy: Within patriarchal discourse, differences between men and women are interpreted in a way that sets men as more powerful and "preferred" than women (Kane & Parks, 1992).

Gender Ideology: The particular set of beliefs about what it means to be female and male (Williams, 1976). Note: Gender ideology includes information about accepted norms and roles for men and women.

Dominant Ideology: A set of beliefs that have gained value as being the "only possible" reality for a particular aspect of society (Williams, 1976; Willis, 1994).

Hegemony: A set of beliefs and practices that reflect the interests of a dominant group and are so consistently taken as common sense that subordinate populations become complicit in accepting the terms of their own domination. The nature of hegemony, however, is one of constant flexibility and change because challenges

occur constantly and must be resolved (through renegotiation and redefinition of dominant values) (MacNeill, 1994; Williams, 1976).

Masculinity: Traits typically associated with being male, though, as with the term, femininity, it is impossible to supply an accurate definition of the term masculinity within a postmodern perspective (Butler, 1997).

Patriarchy: A social system in which males have and maintain hegemonic power (Whitson, 1994).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature reviewed in this section provides a background and framework for the present study. The following areas are addressed in turn: 1) gender ideologies reflected and created by sport, 2) postmodern theories of gender identity formation, 3) sport sociology work suggesting negotiation may need to occur during formation of identity as a female athlete, 4) the role of sport media in providing information about gender ideologies, 5) specific ways in which female athletes have been portrayed in sport media, especially magazine photos and televised coverage of events, and 6) feminist sport research as a model for the current project.

Gender Ideologies in Sport

It is no coincidence that the traits associated with athletic excellence in dominant sport forms allow sport to offer repeated "proof" that men are superior to women. Sport has been constructed by and for men to legitimize masculine status at the top of the gender hierarchy (Messner & Sabo, 1990). When men and women's athletic performances are measured in terms of strength, speed, and power (traits that biologically privilege men), women generally appear inferior. It is at this point that those wishing to promote an equal playing field for women athletes must work especially hard to promote an understanding that gender and sex are personal and social constructions and are not inherently linked or sequential (Butler, 1990, 1993). Additionally, it should be noted that while some sport sociology work purports a core/fixed identity, it is likely that this state is unattainable. Self-identity is more correctly termed "self-identities," as it draws attention to a dynamic and continuous *process* rather than suggesting a fixed and final

product (Butler, 1990,1997). With these thoughts in mind, there are several precepts central to sport sociology theory that must be discussed as they relate directly to a description of how sport is experienced by both athletes and non-athletes in society.

Male success in sport has been interpreted as a sign of masculine superiority in society at large (Cole, 1994). Unfortunately, when this happens, masculinity and femininity become reified and immutable as binary categories. Additionally, gender differences are established as gender hierarchy, which quickly asserts itself as male superiority (Kane & Parks, 1992). When gender ideals become equated with genetically determined traits (generally body parts), any conversation that seeks a more just and negotiated understanding of gender and the ensuing hierarchy is shut down. By ignoring the social nature and construction of gender, sport—especially socially preferred sports like football, basketball, and baseball—serve to reinforce an uncontestable biological hierarchy through which males are seen not just as oppositional but also as superior to females.

These constructions cannot be taken at face value, however, if it is acknowledged that sport is a cultural terrain in which gender ideologies are open to redefinition and continuously contested (Messner & Sabo, 1990). Feminist scholars (e.g., Creedon, 1994) realize that women athletes do not have to be aberrations or exceptions, and that male superiority should not rest on athletic success (or anything else for that matter!). From a cultural studies standpoint, sport is always already embedded in hegemonic power positions, and an understanding of sport presupposes a relationship between politics, power, and strategies of resistance and change (Cole, 1994). That is, which sports are favored and which athletes are promoted—and how and under what circumstances, etc.—

reflect the power and politics of dominant social groups (in general white, upper class, heterosexual men) that are invested in maintaining a particular dominant ideology. Female athletes present opportunities for new definitions of both femininity and athleticism; in this, they represent a challenge to dominant ideologies (and to the group(s) most served by those ideologies). Willis (1994) suggested that to counter their role as inferior, women athletes need to offer a strong version of female sports. Research has indicated that women are participating in sports in greater numbers than ever (Lopiano, 1996). While this increase in activity potentially contests hegemonic gender positions, there are factors that hinder the potential success of this challenge.

Male Hegemony in Sport

As women have gained entry into sport, male hegemony has asserted itself in ways that work very successfully to negate attempts at more gender-neutral definitions of athleticism. Kane and Parks (1992) identified two highly interdependent mechanisms by which redefinition efforts are minimized. First, women's athletic accomplishments are trivialized. Often, this is achieved by comparing female sports to male sports or by neglecting to report on female sports at all. The frequent conclusion is that women's sports (and the women who play them) are not as good or important as men's sports (i.e., men). Second, the "true nature" of the female athlete is overemphasized. She is framed first as a woman or "other" and second as an athlete. This serves the function of "confirming the femininity" of the female athlete (Hilliard, 1984, p. 260).

The September/October, 2002 issue of *USTA Magazine* can be used to illustrate how this works. The magazine featured short descriptions of underdogs who had performed well at US Open tennis competitions throughout the years. Women players,

though they had excelled athletically, were described in ways that drew attention to non-athletic traits. For example, Pam Shriver was called a "diminutive, fair-haired lass" (Drucker, 2002a), and Tracy Austin was "just a 14-year-old girl from California. She liked stuffed animals. She worried about her grades. She...was a 95-pound assassin, a Chris Evert with spunk" (Drucker 2002b). Krane (2001) echoed this finding, noting that a common theme in women's sports is that women "can be athletes and feminine, too." She went one step further, however, questioning whether female athletes would want to be both. By highlighting culturally acceptable femininity, women athletes gain acceptance; unfortunately, they concurrently lose their ability to contest male-defined gender ideals. This has important consequences for identity.

In the search for identity, hegemonic positions have power because they offer social approval (Layton, 1998). Therefore, female athletes who adopt traditionally feminine traits (ex., a pony tail and hair ribbon) potentially have more power than those who eschew stereotypical markers. An aim of many sport sociology and sport psychology feminist projects is to open up additional and multiple positions of "acceptable femininity" (Krane, 2001; Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, & Kauer, 2002; Layton, 1998; Messner, 1988); this may be accomplished by drawing attention to the ways male hegemony is contested. Increasing women's interest and participation in sports was a good first step, but unless the mechanisms that continue to support gender inequality in sport are addressed, meaningful positive change is unlikely (Coakley, 2001). Personal identities and media images, both of which shape and are shaped by society, are important factors in this renegotiation process and are discussed in the following sections.

Gender Identities in a Postmodern World

Postmodern gender identity theorists believe that identifying the body through the use of binary categories (such as "feminine/masculine") is inappropriate due to the casual foreclosure of sex, gender, and identity as fixed qualities. Butler (1990, 1993, 1997) and Irigaray (1991a, 1991b, 1997) have provided pivotal insights in this area, noting that the (often unconscious) use of binaries obscures individual differences and multiplicities, and covers up moments of resistance by linking terms (i.e., feminine and masculine) to specific, idealized, and unattainable images. Especially in sport, images and ideals serve to reinforce a power-driven hierarchy that maintains women as inferior to men. Irigaray (1986, 1991a) noted that women are often defined within male discourse through a deficit-driven model that focuses on gender differences in terms of what women lack and men possess (penis/phallus/power). The result is that women exist only as "defined for and by men" (Whitson, 1991, p. 27), and any identification outside of male discourse and representation is lost. Subsequently, the fact that women are unable to be represented as anything other than "not male" is reinterpreted so that women are seen as conflicted, confusing, or unable to make up their minds (Irigaray, 1991b). In the struggle for equality, women tend to acknowledge and acquiesce to a male standard. Men have "it," and women want it (penis/phallus versus lack), especially since those who have it also have the power to establish themselves at the top of a gender hierarchy.

Achieving new identities may be connected to realizing that gender and sexuality are not directly linked to biology (Butler, 1990, 1997; Irigaray, 1986, 1991b). Rather, they exist within culture and are expressed through discourse and symbolism. Therefore, although sport sociologists desire to locate gender identity at the intersection of various

social norms and roles, it is important to consider whether and how the regulatory practices that govern gender might also govern how identity is understood (Butler, 1990). Unfortunately, even attempting to define *women* serves to potentially reify gender stereotypes. As stable terms, *women* or *identity* are limited (and oversimplified) because they are understood and defined only within an established binary-driven discourse. Butler (1990) suggested, "One is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces the restriction of gender within that binary pair" (p. 22).

However, gender does not pre-exist its performatives. Indeed, gender identities are largely "solidified" through the *naming* of experiences, not just the experiences themselves (Butler, 1990). Since naming springs directly from individual encounters with (and within) discourse, there is ample room for multiple and dynamic gender ideologies to exist and be taken up as part of one's identities. That is, society (one aspect of which is the media) may be driven to simplify what it means to be "female," yet there are perpetual alterations and multiple gaps in identities. Therefore, being female or athlete or female athlete is not limited to any one theory. It is out of this multiplicity that the present study seeks to find coherence—possibly by using these fluctuations as openings in which new meaning(s) can be found. For example, the fact that gender traits not fitting "the mold" can be used to redefine gender identities indicates how arbitrary those molds are (Butler, 1990). This should provide an opportunity for reconsideration of identity in general and, within the scope of this project, identity of female athletes specifically. This solution is not without its complications, however, because notable contradictions are revealed in the lived experiences of female athletes.

One inherent difficulty is that patriarchal discourse is so strong and enmeshed with sport discourse that it is difficult for women athletes to be even considered "real" athletes (Messner, 1988). The language of sport clearly identifies male sport as normative and female sport as secondary. Consider the names of men and women's professional leagues—NBA/WNBA; PGA/LPGA; PBA/WPBA—in which *W*'s and *L*'s mark events as women's and ladies', while men do not need to be identified by gender. So, while athletic women by their positioning in (and by) society may attempt to work against patriarchal ideology, these moments are easily reabsorbed into the dominant discourse with their potential for counterhegemonic agency lost (Messner, 1988). This trouble is exacerbated because, as Butler (1990) noted, the "Self" unconsciously adopts the language structures that secure its own subordination. In this case, heterosexual standards establish men and women as always, normatively, in relation to each other. As long as language structures and society's desire for binary gender categories serve to maintain sharp distinctions between two (overly) identified genders, it is unlikely that a new model of gender can develop.

Problematizing Binaries

Butler (1990, 1993, 1997) has suggested that identity categories are multiple and continuous and must be kept open and in flux. Her argument centers on three interconnected points. First, she proposed that self-identities are inherently built on other-identities. That is, in forming a sense of Self, one must constantly internalize parts of the Other. Through this, the Self remains unfixed. Next, Butler troubled the previously naturalized progression from sex to gender to sexuality. This has the important effect of disrupting the claim of heterosexual originality—and, through extension, the

gender hierarchy that accompanies it. Finally, she noted that there is no stable set of meanings that can be attached to a particular sexuality or gender identity. This means there is no "proper" gender that belongs to any sex (which exists as a continuum); rather, gender is "a kind of imitation for which there is no original" (Butler, 1997, p. 306). Taken together, these ideas establish identity categories as necessarily open to multiple interpretations and, therefore, useful for resistance and redefinition. Each is discussed more fully in turn.

In terms of problematizing binaries, the most significant of Butler's (1997) arguments is the necessary incorporation of the "other." Both Butler (1997) and Irigaray (1997) have asserted that since self-identity *is reliant upon* incorporation of the Other, it is not really "self" at all. They have noted that, in forming self-identities, we incorporate traits/aspects of important others in our lives (notably parents) and specifically seek to incorporate those things we are afraid of losing. If, for example, I value my mother's loving and fear it will go away, then I will incorporate "loving" as part of my self-identity (Irigaray, 1997). The effect, from an identity standpoint, is that we become a collected composite of others rather than the independent Self we thought we were developing (Butler, 1997). Attempting to separate "us" from "them" into distinct binaries will likely prove fruitless. Another more dynamic and negotiation-based model may be more viable.

In addition to fluctuating and ever-changing meanings, a sense of "identity" is further destabilized in that there is no inherent claim to heterosexual origin, and therefore, no single, linear path from sex→gender→sexuality. This claim is vital since it is the heterosexual standard that drives the practice of defining "female" in relation to "male" and sets up many of the often unconscious processes that shape identities and experiences

(Butler, 1990). In essence, the argument is that an origin only makes sense in that it is differentiated from its derivatives. For example, it makes no sense to introduce oneself at a party—"I am Susan"—unless it is already established that there are those who exist as "not Susan." If everyone shared the same name, no one would need to use it. Similarly according to Butler (1997), to say, "I am heterosexual" only makes sense (i.e., has meaning) if it is already established that there are others who are not heterosexual. Thus, the idea of heterosexuality (as binary to homosexuality) *presupposes* the idea of homosexuality; the reverse argument is also true. No sexuality, then, has a sole claim to originality or, through extension, normativity. Just the opposite, in fact, all sexualities are inextricably co-original. If homosexuality is as normative as heterosexuality, then culturally-based gender roles and ideals lose their hold and the sexuality-gender link becomes fractured (Butler, 1997). Likewise, the hierarchy created from gender roles becomes unbalanced, and identities formed in the face of cultural approval have new spaces in which to grow.

Just as there is no stable origin to sexuality, Butler also challenged the idea that there is a fixed meaning for gender. This means there is no inherent link between a particular sex and its traditionally related gender (i.e., being female does not initiate being feminine) (Butler, 1993). Her reasoning is that gender is performative (Butler, 1990). Individuals internalize (with different degrees of acceptance) societal beliefs about gender and then reflect those beliefs through repeated performance of gender values. Gender, then, is repeated as both an imitation and an approximation of certain *ideas* about what it means to be male or female. Therefore, gender is dynamic and different for each person within different contexts, although dominant forms do become known (Butler,

1997). This suggests there can be no "proper" gender for either sex; one performance is as "accurate" as any other in a system where the only constant is repetition. Furthermore, because a specific gender is indefinable and unattainable, the "perfectly feminine" female can never exist. What are created—instead of two simple gender categories—are multiple reproductions of varied beliefs that are altered during each iteration (Butler, 1997). Wittig (1997) also cautioned against seemingly natural connections between "female" and "feminine," noting, as well, the strong role of social perception:

> What we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction, an 'imaginary formation,' which reinterprets physical features (in themselves as neutral as any others but marked by the social system) through the network of relationships in which they are perceived. (...they are seen as *women*, therefore they *are* women. But before being seen that way, they first had to be *made* that way) (p. 266).

Sport is a site where gender, social perception, and media meet head on as hegemonic gender norms are continuously contested. Like any hegemonic challenge, the results of these interactions are sometimes resistant, sometimes accommodating, and often a combination of both.

Binaries in Sport

The role of social expectation on media treatment is seen very clearly in media representation of female golfers. Crosset (1995) described the media connected to the LPGA tour as highly biased and driven by heterosexuality. Reporters often create a story before an event actually happens, and players learn that their own voices will not be heard in the reports. The frequent result is that a woman on the tour who does not appropriate traditional feminine markers in her appearance is painted as a lesbian. Again, this has the effect of reinforcing hegemonic gender images as well as maintaining both

the masculinity of sport and the gender hierarchy that sets women as inferior to men (e.g., "You're too good to be a 'real' woman."). This negative social perception must be negotiated when female athletes form gender identities.

Identity categories are both instruments of regulation and sites that can potentially disrupt that regulation (Butler, 1997). Because categories do not have one unitary set of signs or any fixed significance, identities are in a state of constant interpretation and re-interpretation (Hall, 1997a). Those outside a category have multiple ideas of what those within the category should be like. Those within a category similarly have multiple ideas; additionally, each repetition of an identity performance is different from all the rest (Butler, 1997). For example, Feinberg (1999) pointed out that identity can be located in the contradiction between sex and gender expression. She said, "My reflection [as a very butch lesbian] is a combination of both how I see myself and how the world sees me." Reflection takes on two meanings here. First is her reflection (a noun) in the sense of appearance and identities—how she performs her sexuality and gender. The other meaning deals with the verb "to reflect." Feinberg matches her identity with her ideas about what a butch lesbian is like. This is an unending interdependent chain that leads to unending and ever-changing identities, so her subjectivity is multiple and unstable. Butler (1997) also demonstrated this instability by noting that a lesbian can attempt to gain identity by coming out, but it does not work because there is no one identity called *lesbian*. Instead, the term (like any identity category) is defined and redefined by the subject's performance of her sexuality as she idealizes it. The variations are further multiplied since the act of coming out is one that must be repeated in a variety of contexts (with family, friends, co-workers, etc.).

Sexual identities, like gender identities, must be constantly performed in order to be maintained. However each performance is somewhat different than the last, so the meaning of "identity" is constantly re-worked. The only consistent thing about identities, then, is that they are forever unstable (Layton, 1998). Since everyone is engaged in this unending and ever-changing performative loop (albeit unconsciously), any idea that there is one identity that is more "natural" or ideal than any other is absurd. If the notion of a two-sex, two-gender system simply becomes the starting point for a continuum of possible identities, then female athletics becomes a rich and visible site for promoting new possibilities.

Toward a Negotiated Model of Female Athlete Identities

As a group, postmodern theorists have proposed that gender identity is unstable and dynamic. However, there is little agreement about how that might impact social dynamics. While Irigaray (1977/1986) suggested creating a new way of discussing gender that eliminates opposition and allows multiple subjectivity, Butler (1997) preferred to maintain a multiplicity of meanings for identity. For example, if there is no heterosexual origin from which "faulty" homosexual copies emerge, then one becomes as much a norm as the other. If identities are in constant flux, then unattainable ideals that result in hierarchical and oppressive categories lose their hold. This sets the stage for more inclusive standards of sexuality and gender. However, although gendered traits are in a constant state of flux and the (multiple) meanings of gender terms are constantly defined, contested, negotiated, and recreated within the context of psychological, social and cultural interactions, athlete representations within sport media adeptly serve to

normalize categorical thought, and gender definitions remain tightly linked to biological differences between two sexes.

As an example, the WNBA launched its 2002 season with a promotional ad campaign called "This is who I am." A one-hour special with the same name was aired during a WNBA game (WNBA, 2002). Although it is impossible to distinguish all the influencing factors that contributed to the finished (aired) product, the campaign provided many attempts to reaffirm hegemonic femininity and place it in direct opposition to athleticism. To illustrate this point, a description of the first few minutes of the special presentation follows.

The opening scenes are a montage of clips from various ads comprising the original promotion. Essentially, these are quick cuts from one athlete to another in various poses and activities. In some scenes, the athlete is in basketball gear, dribbling a ball, or making muscle poses (sometimes in front of a mirror). In other scenes, the athlete is in non-sport specific workout clothes—generally involving a sport bra or form-fitting crop top and pants—and is either gazing at herself in a mirror or interacting with the camera by posing, laughing, or fooling around.

After this quick review of the original ads, a voiceover announces that the hosts of the special, Lisa Leslie and Sheryl Swoopes, are cornerstones of the WNBA and have seen the league evolve. The accompanying video bills Swoopes as "The Comeback" and shows her successful return from ACL surgery the previous year. Leslie is framed as "The MVP" and game highlights emphasize her claim to that title. The voiceover continues by explaining that in the six-year history of the league, there have been only two champions—the Houston Comets (Swoopes' team) and the Los Angeles Sparks

(Leslie's team). At this point, the camera cuts to a slightly open door marked "Treatment Room 5," then pans through, allowing the audience to see that Leslie and Swoopes are sitting in spa chairs receiving pedicures. As the voiceover ends, the camera cuts once again to scenes of Swoopes, then Leslie, celebrating their respective teams' championships. A brief introduction to the league by Swoopes concludes with her remarking, "There are so many more opportunities now than there were five years ago." As she speaks, the viewer sees video footage of Leslie being still-photographed in street clothes. A song that repeats, "Hey, pretty" accompanies the scene.

The WNBA ad campaign represents female athlete identity not only in what it says ("We can be strong and pretty, too."), but also in *how* it says it. The camera creates a montage with a series of abrupt cutaways. There are no smooth transitions, nor superimposed images. Each aspect of "who she is" is shown as separate and contained, as though various components of her identity exist in isolation from each other.

From a postmodern perspective, it is unlikely this is the psychological experience of the athlete. Identities are multiple and overlapping, not only across time, but also within themselves (Butler, 1990, 1997; Irigaray, 1991b, 1997). For female athletes, gender intersects with race, class, and sexuality to influence identities and representations in ways that are not always readily definable. It is difficult, for example, "to separate race from class from sex oppression because [in life] they are most often experienced simultaneously" (The Combahee River Collective, 1997, p. 65.) However, in a more theoretically accurate advertising campaign, it is unlikely the athlete could be portrayed at all. How does one express multiple and dynamic identities with snapshots, and how can a stable language communicate a psychological experience of constant change? The

campaign, clearly, does not answer these questions, nor is that its purpose. What is important is that the media has staked an interest in promoting a generally unitary identity of the female athlete. In this way, it provides insight into the socio-cultural factors at work in identity formation. Specifically, it seems likely the ads represent the producers' ideas about an identity of a female athlete rather than any female athlete's actual (plural) self-identities. This points to a final tension of gender identity formation.

If gender is the result of personal and societal performatives, then gender definitions are constantly being reworked (Butler, 1997). The performative chain is an attempt to create what the individual believes is the appropriate gender identity based on the interaction of social and psychological information. Media images as well as past performatives contribute to this process, as do patriarchal and sport ideologies and practices. Obviously, all these interactions and iterations create very unstable gender positions. Therefore, a single idealized form (i.e., a stereotyped image) cannot actually exist, and all the performatives are in vain. There is no normative gender to be acted; rather, there is only the process of acting that yields identities (Butler, 1997). That is, identities are not a result of struggle—identities *are* the struggle. It is not surprising, however, that the media tends to ignore this process in favor of an idealized, stereotypical product.

The Role of the Media

The media determines what topics are important and "nudges" the audience towards a preferred view about those topics (Ghanem, 1997). In responding to any media portrayal, viewers' ideas about what they have seen are impacted by the presence of certain codes contained within the media message (Barthes, 1982/1985; Fiske, 2000;

Hall, 2000). Fiske (2000), referring to television, and Barthes (1982/1985), referring to photographs, have indicated that the presence of various culturally understood codes establishes a dominant reading of an image.

It is important, therefore, to consider the ideological messages about gender and sport that are transmitted through media portrayals of female athletes. Feminists have long been aware of the power of images in creating meaning and shaping our lives (Kuhn, 1999). However, meaning does not reside solely in images (or in any text). Meaning is circulated through interaction between the representation, the reader, and social norms/values with social forces acting in ways that promote certain forms of thinking over others (Hall, 2000). These preferred gender ideologies become embedded and naturalized within sport discourse and are rarely seen as socially constructed (therefore, contested and contestable). As long as the media continues to promote female athletes as "less than" and "other," attempts at true sport equity are undermined. The media serves as a site where social construction and gender ideology meet, making women's sport media, especially, a hotbed of both resistant and hegemonic representation.

Because television and magazines are the most prevalent forms through which the public receives information about female athletes, they have been chosen for the bulk of this discussion. While films about female athletes do exist, and newspapers (occasionally) provide coverage of women's sports, within the already scarce media representation given to women athletes (Daddario, 1992; Kane, 1989; Rintala & Birrell, 1984; Schell, 2000; Tuggle & Owen, 1999) film and newspaper forms are even more rare. The decision was made, therefore, to focus on the more predominant forms of

television and magazines with the expectation that the depth gained will far outweigh the breadth lost.

Television Codes

According to Fiske (2000), television "...codes are links between producers, texts, and audiences, and are the agents of intertextuality through which texts interrelate in a network of meanings that constitutes our cultural world" (p. 221). The earlier example of the WNBA (2002) "This is who I am" special can be used to provide additional understanding about what codes are and how they work to communicate meaning.

Recall that the first few moments of the special presentation—the montage of original ads—reflect the ongoing struggle about the meaning and character of women's sport that is demonstrated in the field of women's sport media. As a whole, the production suggests that being a WNBA player ("This is who I am") involves rapid shifting from active athlete to posing ("feminine") woman. The abruptness of the cuts and lack of attempt at blending (ex., through the use of dissolves) of the early montage indicates that the experience of being a female athlete is anything but smooth. The playful interaction with the camera lends an air of trivialization to the montage. That is, whether active or passive, "who I am" is not to be taken very seriously. Additionally, the juxtapositioning of athletic feats (winning a championship) with traditionally feminine glamorization (receiving a spa pedicure), as well as the discrepancy between Swoopes' final words ("there are more opportunities for players") and Leslie's actions (modeling) seem to reiterate the historic conflict in being an athlete and being feminine (Kane & Parks, 1992; Messner, 1988).

Fiske (2000) identified four general types of codes: *social, technical, conventional representational,* and *ideological.* While even Fiske acknowledged that the divisions overlap and are somewhat arbitrary, they are useful for understanding how meanings may be embedded in media. *Social codes* include such things as appearance, environment, behavior, and expression. These are the relatively untouched markers that are used to make sense of people and situations. A woman in a basketball uniform playing a game evokes a different social response than a woman in stylish clothes receiving a pedicure. In this sense, we perceive "reality" by reading social codes. When the media portrays a real-life situation, these social codes are technologically captured through the use of a particular camera at a particular angle with certain lighting, editing and, perhaps, sound accompaniment. These electronic treatments may be thought of as *technical codes.* Additionally, *conventional representational codes* are used to make the image understandable to a cultural audience. Representational codes include such things as narrative, character, action, casting, and conflict. In the above example, the narrative seems to establish a strong sense of athleticism while the two women chosen to host (both of whom have appeared repeatedly in the media in very traditionally feminine ways—Leslie as a Warner model and Swoopes as a new mom) reflect culturally acceptable femininity.

Social, technical, and representational codes "are organized into coherence and social acceptability by the *ideological codes*, such as those of: individualism, patriarchy, race, class…" and gender (Fiske, 2000, p. 222). Meaning-making involves a constant process of movement through these different levels of codes, and the more naturally they all fit together, the more "common sense" the ideological reality (in this case, as related

to sport and gender) seems to be. Thus, the montage editing of the opening sequence, the athletically-driven narrative coupled with the feminized setting of the spa, and the "Hey, Pretty" song juxtaposed next to Swoopes' comment that women players have more options now all work to normalize the opposition of "female" and "athlete." This is just one example of how the potential for female athletes to contest gender ideology has been inhibited by the media. There are, unfortunately, many more.

Sport Photography

Sports photography presents an image that generally appears unaltered and "real" (Barrett, 1999; Barthes, 1982/1985; Berger, 1973; Rowe, 1999). But photographs are not simple "messages without a code" (Barthes, 1982/1985, p.5). They are the result of particular treatments, choices, and placements that communicate cultural messages. Readers' ideas about what they see are impacted by the presence of certain codes contained within media messages (Hall, 2000). According to Barthes, cultural codes establish a dominant connotative (symbolic) reading of a photograph. Although codes are purely historical (and, therefore, in constant flux), many have become naturalized. This is especially true of those containing gender information. That is, codes produce seemingly natural connections to what is "known" about gender roles and hierarchy. As Hall (2000) cautioned, while even a naturalized code does not *determine* a specific reading of an image, naturalization does tend to heavily favor a preferred (i.e., intended by the media producers) interpretation. In this sense, analyzing codes may help to identify the underlying structures of a particular culture, just as understanding the ideology may help denaturalize the codes.

Sport photography is an especially potent source of information about dominant ideas related to women and sports. In the United States, capitalist desires greatly affect the images included in magazines (Rowe, 1999). The possibility for women in sport to open up a space for oppositional politics is tempered by a "surveillance-dominated capitalism" (Cole, 1994, p. 15) that commodifies women's bodies and exercise in ways that continue to limit gender-role contestation. It must be acknowledged that the sport photographer and magazine producer manipulate photographed subjects to offer a carefully selected, framed, and cropped expression of a worldview that is passed off to look natural while promoting magazine sales. As such, those who shoot and publish the pictures have great influence on the types of images the public sees. Even apparently natural-looking photographs need to be considered carefully because they appear realistic and straightforward, as though they have had no intervening touch-ups or decisions (Barrett, 1990). This, however, is not the case. In sport photography, the action shot, in particular, gives the appearance of untainted reality, but it, too, is subject to manipulation. Although an action shot is captured on film as it occurred, many qualities (such as focus, framing, and lighting) may be controlled by the photographer. Additionally, media producers have the final say as to whether a picture gets published. In this way, some actions are completely ignored, while others receive repeated attention (e.g., Brandi Chastain, jersey-less, after scoring the World Cup winning goal in 1999). According to Berger (1973), seeing establishes our place in the surrounding world, but the relation between what we see and what we know is always open to negotiation. Fortunately, there is space in both the production and the interpretation of women's sport images for mixed readings.

Ambivalence

Photos of women athletes are often embedded with *ambivalence*—a term introduced by Duncan and Hasbrook (1988), and later expanded by Kane and Greendorfer (1994). An ambivalent photo contains mixed and conflicting messages. For example, ambivalence is demonstrated when a woman is billed as an athlete but is selected for coverage not on this basis, but on her glamorous or typically feminine appearance (e.g., Anna Kournakova appeared on the June 5, 2000 cover of Sports illustrated posed suggestively and wearing an off-the-shoulder top). Ambivalence may also be seen when the portrayal of an athlete combines traditionally feminine attributes with those required for sport participation (e.g., wearing a uniform while holding a child). Finally, ambivalence may occur when women are shown engaging in sport with a "feminist twist." For example, one photo in *Women's Sports Illustrated* (Winter, 1999-2000, p. 84) shows Billie Jean King and Chris Evert hugging after a match. The moment captured is not one often seen within male sport photography, and serves as an example of *competing with* instead of *competing against*. The latter tends to reflect a traditional "be independently brilliant at any costs" mentality, while the former reflects more open definitions of competition called for within feminist sport studies—specifically that connection and competition are not mutually exclusive (Costa & Guthrie, 1994).

An ambivalently signified message, therefore, is any image that does not allow for a straightforward reading by the audience because the athletic characteristics of the photographed woman are obscured, subverted, or challenged by the presence of traditional markers of femininity (as seen to interrupt a traditionally athletic reading). Ambivalent photos frequently acknowledge the strides women have made into sport (and,

therefore, accommodate change), but they simultaneously resist change by perpetuating traditionally feminine norms (Kane & Greendorfer, 1994). In this way, the media's portrayal of female athletes represents a power struggle, and one that currently favors a male dominant reading. The fact that sport photography has typically been conservative additionally works to reinforce rather than challenge traditional values and male-centered power dynamics (Rowe, 1999). This can be seen in the way the media (both television and magazine coverage) represent women athletes.

Media Representations of Female Athletes

Although women's participation in sport has increased dramatically since the 1972 passage of Title IX, the media has not yet recognized a new model of the athletic female (Fink, 1998; Kane, 1988, 1989; Kinnick, 1998). Many of the findings reported by Boutilier and San Giovanni as early as 1983 continue to be found in more recent studies. Specifically, women athletes tend to receive considerably less coverage than men (Daddario, 1992; Kane, 1989; Rintala & Birrell, 1984; Schell, 2000; Tuggle & Owen, 1999). Women athletes who participate in societally-determined gender-appropriate sports (such as golf, tennis, and figure skating) are more likely to receive media attention than those who do not (Daddario, 1992; Jones, Murrell, & Jackson, 1999; Kane, 1988; Krane, 2001; Kinnick, 1998; Rintala & Burrell, 1984; Tuggle & Owen, 1999). When female athletes are covered, they are likely to be shown in stereotypical ways that discount or trivialize their athletic abilities. This occurs when the media focuses on the athlete's non-athletic roles or achievements (Daddario, 1992; Hilliard, 1984; Jones, et al., 1999; Kane, 1989; Kinnick, 1998; MacNeill, 1994), or shows her as being emotional (Duncan, 1990; Kinnick, 1998) or dependent (Hilliard, 1984).

Research repeatedly indicates that media coverage of women's sports typically reflects traditionally held values about feminine passivity, glamour, and sexuality (Kane & Lenskyj, 1998). Several studies have found that female athletes in magazines often appear in passive poses (Duncan, 1990; Kane, 1989; Lopiano, 1996). It is common for the media to focus on a female athlete's appearance (Daddario, 1992; Duncan, 1990; Hilliard, 1984; Kinnick, 1998) or to display her in sexually suggestive positions or clothing (Daddario, 1992; Duncan, 1990; Lopiano, 1996; MacNeill, 1994; Schell, 2000). This is not to imply complete manipulation on the part of the media. On the contrary, Cahn (1994) suggested that female athletes often adopt a hyperfeminine appearance to counter stereotypes that link women's physical activity to "mannish lesbians."

To help correct this trend toward inaccurate portrayal, the Women's Sports Foundation (1999) created a set of guidelines for female athletes and the media. Included in the guidelines are several questions that should be asked when reviewing images of female athletes. Included are questions like, "Is her pose or are her movements realistic?" and "Is the image something any girl could look at and feel proud of as a current or future athlete?" (p.4). Interestingly, in further explaining the former question, the authors commented that realism would be indicated if Michael Jordan were able to assume the same pose or positioning and not look "ridiculous." Apparently, even at the Women's Sports Foundation, the ideal definition of sport is male!

While the trends mentioned above have been found in a variety of studies, most have explored coverage of women in sports media intended for a male audience (e.g., *Sports Illustrated*, newspaper sport sections, and the evening sports news). For example, Kane and Parks (1992) analyzed the texts of three *Sports Illustrated* feature articles from

1989 that covered three major women and men's tennis championship matches. They separated descriptors according to gender, and then further categorized them into two dimensions—*performance-related* and *non-performance-related*—and six subcategories (*performance* was divided into athletic ability/skill, mental ability/skill, and character/intestinal fortitude; and *non-performance* was divided into emotional state of mind, physical appearance, and personal life). They found evidence that *Sports Illustrated* portrayed athletes in ways that reinforced gender hierarchy. For example, success was generally reported in terms of male-associated strength and power, while failure was ascribed to female-associated traits like vulnerability and frailness. Michael Chang was described as fighting through his obviously painful leg cramps to win the match. Graf also won her match but "fled the court in tears and was treated in the locker room" for her menstrual cramps. In contrast to straightforward positive comments about male athletes, many of the positive comments about female athletes were offset by descriptors that trivialized their efforts or undermined their success. The women players who posed a legitimate threat to the reigning Steffi Graf were described as "cherubs frolicking across the dirt paths." *Sports Illustrated*'s portrayal of women in these events clearly contained many instances of male-dominated sport ideology. This is not too surprising given that *Sports Illustrated* is as much a men's magazine as it is a sport magazine (Davis, 1997). Is there a different gender ideology represented in sport magazines designed for women?

There are few sports media sources aimed specifically at female consumers, and little attention has been given to the treatment of female athletes in such sport media. An exception is Schell's (2000) work with *Conde Nast Sports for Women/Women Sports &*

Fitness (CN/WS&F). Schell discovered that most of the magazine's covers and story photos featured "white, slender models wearing scanty fitness clothes exposing those body parts equated with feminine sexuality" (p. 25). She further found that minority women and women with disabilities were notably absent from the magazine.

A recent content analysis of women's coverage in *Sports Illustrated* and *Sports Illustrated for Women* (Fink & Kensicki, 2002) found no difference in the ways female athletes were represented in the two magazines. The investigators determined that women continue to be over-represented in traditionally female-appropriate sports or shown in non-sport settings. Furthermore, elite female athletes were repeatedly shown in sexualized or stereotypical ways—even in the magazine directed at women. These findings are especially troubling given that *Sports Illustrated for Women* purports to provide "everything that women athletes want" (Bailey, 1997, p. 8). In terms of the Women's Sports Foundation's attempt to promote pride and strengthen the role modeling options for "current or future athletes" (WSF, 1999, p. 4), there seem to be few clear resources available that counteract traditional feminine and heterosexual images of female athletes.

There are notable differences in media treatment of male and female athletes (and the sports in which they participate). Real (1989) suggested "…if one were to create from scratch a sport to reflect the sexual…and organizational priorities of the American power structure, it is doubtful that one could improve on football" (p. 107). Media treatment of the Super Bowl adds credence to this statement. The focus on strength and violence, male athletes being cheered by highly sexualized female cheerleaders, camera techniques and commentary that invite the male viewer to think of himself as a

participant while promoting the importance of sport and the size of the players, all serve to normalize sport as masculine and dominant. There is no equivalent in women's sport; indeed, portrayals are generally framed in direct opposition to this model. In summary, given the difficulty in finding unambivalent images of female athletes, it becomes especially important to explore the ways that women make personal meaning of their sport experiences. Feminist sport studies provide a strong framework for examining the negotiation of identities and image in the current project and is detailed in the following section.

Feminist Sport Research

There are many factors potentially influencing identity formation for female athletes and at least as many different lenses that might be used to study the phenomena. The current project employs a critical feminist framework for a number of reasons.

Critical Theory

According to Kincheloe and McLaren (2000), the term *critical theory* encompasses a wide variety of ever-changing theories and traditions. What binds this spectrum of beliefs together is the notion that "...a critical social theory is concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion, and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system" (p. 281). Sport is a social system in and of itself, as well as part of the larger sociocultural system in which it resides. As such, it is a site of cultural production and reflection for the greater community. Messner and Sabo (1990) noted that sport provides a location where dominant groups try to maintain and promote a particular ideological power. Women

entering the sport world provide a strong statement against traditional concepts of femininity. As such, they pose a threat to those whose interests are served by a male-dominated gender hierarchy. Sport, then, has become a site of ideological struggle related to gender.

A feminist perspective allows gender issues to be the center of attention. As Hall (1996) suggested, "...feminist research is derived from a theoretical perspective that acknowledges the pervasive influence of gender divisions on social life" (p. 74). Research that seeks to explore the ways sport is being used to reinforce patriarchal values and how it might be used as a vehicle for promoting women's interests and equality is clearly a feminist undertaking. By investigating identity formation within women's sport, it may be possible to shed light on the ways gender ideologies are created, maintained, and contested in the broader community.

In creating an "idiosyncratic interpretation" of critical theory, Kincheloe and McLaren (2000, p. 281) listed several beliefs that help to ground this study. They noted that critical theory seeks *enlightenment* by analyzing competing power interests between groups, specifically identifying who benefits and who is hurt in specific situations. Critical theory also seeks *emancipation*, a term Kincheloe and McLaren used to mean exposing the forces that prevent groups from shaping the decisions that affect their lives (p. 282). In our patriarchal society, men have typically been the ones to decide what women should be like, and women simply have not had the same chance as men to control their own definitions of femininity (Messner, 1988). Through critical study, I hope to identify the ways that women negotiate both the obstacles and stepping stones that arise as they continue to define themselves as female athletes. It seems likely that

there are a variety of power issues at play in maintaining or changing control over what it means to be a female athlete. This is another reason for incorporating critical theory in the study of identity formation. Identities are not formed in a sociocultural vacuum (Butler, 1990, 1997; Layton, 1998); therefore, it is important to be aware of and take into account how power dynamics affect all aspects of identities,and specifically how the media impacts identities in sport.

Implications for the Methodology

Providing an opportunity for female athletes to talk about their experiences and identities is one way to gain more insight into the realm of women's sports and the different ideological struggles there. To this end, the interviewed athletes will be co-participants in the study. This promotes the notion that they are the experts regarding their own knowledge and identities, and we will be exploring their ideas together (Lather, 1988). I realize that my role will not be neutral, and I will have to be aware of this so that I keep my voice out of their responses. One way to assist in this part of the process is through a bracketing interview (discussed more fully in the following chapter) (Patton, 1990). Throughout the study, the co-participants and I will be "co-generating" the information (Lock, Minarik, & Omata, 1999). Not only will each of us do a part, the idea of co-generativity further reinforces the feminist belief that we need to work together to make any significant difference while exploring what it means to be a female athlete.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The present study used semi-structured interviews and inductive, qualitative data analysis to investigate the ways that female athletes negotiate identities in the presence of media images. The chosen methodology provided the opportunity to develop theory from the experiences of the athletes themselves (as communicated through the interview process). Additionally, the format provided the co-participants the opportunity to reflect on their identities as female athletes and the meaning(s) associated with their experiences. This chapter outlines the methods and procedures used to conduct this research.

Co-Participants

Selection

As the proposed study is a feminist qualitative research project, the co-participant is seen as central to the data collection process to the extent that co-participants (including the researcher) worked together to establish an identity-formation theory during the study. The co-participants of the present study were eight Olympic and/or professional caliber female athletes who have received national media attention. Co-participants were contacted through various personnel in the Women's Athletic Department of a highly competitive NCAA Division I university in the Southern United States and voluntarily agreed to be interviewed for the project.

Demographic Information

There are relatively few female athletes who meet the criteria for inclusion in this study and, since one criterion is national media coverage, confidentiality becomes a

significant issue when it comes to revealing the demographic characteristics of the sample. Therefore, although it may be easier to display the demographic information for each co-participant in a chart or table, the information will be expressed generally rather than specifically.

Interviewed athletes were recruited on a volunteer basis and included those in both individual (tennis, golf, track, boxing) and team sports (2 each in soccer and basketball) as well as those in what Buysse (1999) determined were female appropriate (e.g., tennis, golf), female inappropriate (e.g., boxing, soccer), and gender-neutral (e.g., basketball, track) sports. One of the participants had participated in two sports as a professional, but she focused almost exclusively on her second career (as a boxer) during the interview. Additionally, the sample reflected diversity in race as much as possible. As self-reported there were four co-participants who were "Caucasian/White," two who were "Black," one who was "Hispanic," and one who declined to state her race. Co-participants ranged in age from 21-40 and had participated in sport for 11-30 years.

There was also some variation in experience with and preference for media coverage of sports. Only the golfer reported receiving less than average media coverage relative to other female athletes and most of the co-participants reported receiving "considerably more" than average. All the co-participants, except one basketball player, reported receiving roughly the same amount of print and television media coverage (she reported receiving somewhat more print coverage than television). All the co-participants reported watching or reading some sports media during a typical week, with most watching television more than reading print media. In every case, at least some of the coverage was specifically about female athletes. Two co-participants were somewhat

outside the typical responses given on the survey. The tennis player reported spending very little time watching or reading sports coverage, and the golfer expressed dislike for women's sports, preferring to spend her time reading about and watching men play.

Design

Feminist Qualitative Research

A qualitative research project can proceed through several different methods for gathering data. Among these, and the most appropriate to this study, is the interview (Patton, 1990). In sport psychology, research has tended to focus on developing new ways to assist athletes and coaches in improving performance. Many studies have relied heavily on the use of surveys and laboratory experiments to test researchers' hypotheses about performance and performance enhancing techniques (Newburg, 1994).

Significantly missing from the body of research, however, are the voices of coaches and players—people who clearly have valuable knowledge about areas of interest to sport psychology researchers. This is a central reason for the feminist framework that guides this project. Feminist research seeks to establish the voice of marginalized groups, especially women (Lather, 1988). Interviewing allows co-participants to input their ideas and perspectives about sport more freely. These perspectives, along with the sport psychology researcher's insight and knowledge, have the potential to bring the field to new levels of understanding, not just about performance but other important aspects of sport like identity, image and, ultimately, quality of life as well.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The interview allows the researcher to gather rich, thick, detail from a small sample about a very specific phenomenon (McCracken, 1988). From within the rich details, the researcher must put together themes and theories that adequately describe the phenomenon as the co-participants have expressed it. Because letting the theory emerge from the data is a central concept of qualitative research, the investigator needs a way of systematically gathering large amounts of somewhat focused data from which themes can be drawn. The semi-structured interview is ideal for this since having a standard interview protocol lets each participant into the same arena, but allows nearly infinite movement within it.

In the words of McCracken (1988), semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to enter "the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. [The interview] can also take us into the lifeworld of the individual, to see the content and pattern of daily experience" (p.9). Identity formation is an intrapsychic phenomenon (Layton, 1998) and is, therefore, somewhat difficult to study. In order to discover the process(es) by which the co-participants navigate the discrepancies between being female and being an athlete in a culture that has placed those terms in opposition, it is necessary to provide the means for personal reflection. A well-constructed interview can provide this opportunity.

Bracketing Interview

Because the cultural positioning of the researcher influences inductive data analysis, it is important to firmly establish the beliefs and biases of the investigator prior to conducting interviews. Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 87-88) identified this as an

important analytic tool that can be used to promote sensitivity toward the data, avoid bias, and overcome analytic blocks. To this end, prior to conducting interviews with the co-participants, I participated in a bracketing interview by having another qualitative researcher ask me the interview questions I planned to ask the co-participants. After transcribing the interview, I gave a copy to one of the members of the research team and the two of us analyzed my responses to see where I might be biased. Following is a summary of the results of that interview.

Bias Statement

I grew up in Los Angeles, California, and graduated from a public high school in 1984. I am the middle of three children and have two brothers. Both my parents like sports and encouraged the three of us to play as we were growing up. I was six years old when Title IX was passed, and I participated in a wide variety of sports starting about that time. My parents were supportive of my desire to play, and signed me up for various leagues throughout the year. Although I participated in gymnastics and track, I prefer team sports and quickly focused on baseball/softball and basketball. Except for two years as a cheerleader for my older brother's football team (an experience I made little effort to appreciate!), I played primarily on boys' teams until sixth grade when I joined an all girls softball league. I also played on a girls' basketball team that year, but for the most part, I remember competing against boys and not being nearly as skilled as they were.

In high school, we almost did not have a girls' basketball team because the administration could not find a coach for us. The man they eventually found for us was terrible. His idea of practice was to have us play against the jr. varsity boys. We rarely learned plays or skills, and our "scrimmages" consisted of him (the coach) playing on our

team and taking most of the shots. It was only years later that I realized how unfair that was—given that Title IX had been in effect for 10 years at that time, and our school had *five* levels of boys' teams (i.e., there were at least 10 basketball coaches at the school at the time they said they could not find one for the girls). It was in my senior year that we finally got a good coach. He had been one of the boys' team coaches for years and wanted to build the girls' program. He instituted the type of practices and game plans that I associate with competitive teams now. That is, we had a strict schedule of drills, strategy sessions, and scrimmages throughout the week that allowed us to learn and improve throughout the season. Coincidentally, right after graduation, the 1984 summer Olympics were held in Los Angeles, and I was fortunate to be able to go to several basketball games (men's and women's). The contrast between the level of play I saw there and what I had experienced in high school was stark, and recognizing that discrepancy has greatly shaped my perceptions about sport and athletes.

When I think about athletes, I think about strength and competence. I think of myself as a recreational athlete—or someone who "plays at" sport rather than being very driven about it. I think there is a difference between who I am as an athlete and "real" athletes (who are good at what they do and know a lot about their sport). I believe that sport is predominantly a male space, but that women are making strides towards carving out a space for ourselves.

As a female, I tend to view myself as "not fitting the expectation," especially for looks and size. I struggle with this, however, as my work in this area leads me to believe that there are many more definitions and possibilities that those I grew up seeing on television and believing were "the way girls were supposed to be." I acknowledge that

the concepts of *female* and *feminine* are a source of struggle for me—specifically in that I cannot quite shake the stereotypes despite knowing that they are incomplete. I find that I place a strong emphasis on relationships and making emotional connections with others. I believe this is a quality shared by females in general. I also tend to set females as being in sharp contrast to males (again, despite intellectually realizing that there is no inherent need to do this). I associate masculinity with maleness and femininity with femaleness, and I see athletes as being more masculine than feminine.

One key bias, therefore, is that I see the female athlete as living with the conflict of being both part of two worlds, and also, perhaps, excluded from each. When I consider the media influence on this topic, I believe that the media has a great deal of influence in how female athletes are shown and in what people might believe about female athletes. I do not believe there is complete control by the media, but I do think the influence is omnipresent and strong. I question whether female athletes have say in how they are portrayed, and I think that images of "femmed up" athletes undermine the potential for women to generate broader definitions of gender identities.

A qualitative study necessarily involves researcher judgments and interpretations. As such, these biases may influence the results of this study. I believe that participating in this bracketing interview, and sharing the results with two of the three people on the research team, as well as my advisor, significantly lessens the potential for my biases to negatively influence the findings of this project. Additionally, by responding to the same interview protocol I used with the co-participants, I was able to better understand some of their difficulties and hesitations when answering the questions. For example, as I answered the prompts, I found that, despite all my reading and thinking about these

topics, some of my ideas were very hard to put into words. This was especially true when it came to the questions about being and describing *female*. Finally, I paid close attention to the phrasing used by the bracketing interviewer. When I felt she had been too leading, I made mental notes about how I might get at the information in a less leading fashion. I hope this improved the quality of the interviews.

Materials

Interview Guide

The interview guide for this study was created specifically for this project and can be found in Appendix D. Several of the questions were modified, with permission, from Fisher (1997). Sample questions include:

How do you describe athletes in general? And yourself as an athlete, specifically?

How do you describe women in general? And yourself as a woman, specifically?

How do you describe female athletes?

What image(s) of you as a female athlete does the media promote? Do you promote?

The questions allowed exploration of the issues from the very general (athletes and women in society-at-large) to the more specific (the co-participant's ideas about herself as a female athlete). Patton (1990) described this as an effective technique for structuring the semi-structured interview. Within the general questions, there were 4-5 sections/topic areas. Additional prompts were used to elicit greater detail as needed (e.g., "How is being a female athlete similar to being a female?" or "How is being a female athlete different than being an athlete?"), but the co-participant was encouraged throughout the interview to discuss whatever she felt was relevant to the question.

Demographic Survey

A short demographic survey was included in the research and was either sent to the co-participant to fill out in advance or given to her just prior to the actual interview. Because most of the interviews were scheduled only days before they were conducted, there was generally not enough time to mail the survey in advance. When the survey was given at the interview, it was after we had reviewed and signed the informed consent and before I turned on the tape for the interview. This proved to be a nice bridge between the official paperwork part of the process and the interview itself. The demographic survey can be found in Appendix C.

Procedures

To determine which athletes might be eligible to participate in the research project, I first contacted athletic trainers at an NCAA Division I university's Women's Athletic Department. A list of several names was generated, and I then began contacting various university personnel who would know how to reach the athletes. This included people in Media Relations and Strength and Conditioning, as well as several coaches. The order of these contacts was based primarily on ease of access. All the personnel involved had similar knowledge of which former collegiate athletes had become professionals/Olympians. The university personnel made the first contact with the co-participant in all cases but one. This was not ideal, but, due to heavy demands on the co-participants' time, it was felt this was the best way to ensure participation. I coached each person in what to say, but I really do not know how the actual introductory conversation proceeded. In all, nine potential co-participants were contacted and all but one agreed to participate in the study. The phone numbers of those who agreed to

participate were forwarded to me, and I then contacted each athlete to explain the purpose of the study and confirm her interest in participating. Once the athlete agreed to be a co-participant, we set up an interview meeting time and place that was convenient for her. In the two instances where it was possible, I e-mailed her a standard explanatory letter, an informed consent form, and a demographic questionnaire to fill out prior to our meeting (see Appendices A, B, and C) along with a reminder of the time, date, and place we agreed upon for the interview. When the situation did not allow these materials to be sent in advance, we went over them at the start of the interview. In all cases, I communicated the information in the introductory letter over the phone as we set up the meeting time. The letter explained who I am, the nature of the research (in very general terms), and the interview format and content (also in general terms). It also explained that the interview would be audio taped, that the co-participant would be asked to choose a pseudonym to maintain anonymity, and that she would receive a copy of the transcript for review.

Most interviews were scheduled so that the co-participant had ample time to respond to the interview questions. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes, with the shortest being just under 45 minutes, and the longest being nearly 90 minutes. For the most part, the interviews were conducted in locations that afforded both comfort and privacy. One interview was conducted at the athlete's house, one was held at a restaurant (and although it was busy and loud, the co-participant did not seem at all distracted during the interview), and four interviews occurred in the researcher's office. An additional interview was held in the office of the co-participant's manager and this potentially did affect her responses. The manager was walking in and out during the interview, and she seemed to talk about her sport in much more promotional terms when

he was around. That is, it seemed that her responses shifted to "party line" talk until we were alone. The impact of this may have been minimized in that he was only present in the room during the part where she discussed being an athlete, and she brought up a few things about that after he left. The final interview was conducted over the phone since the co-participant's schedule just could not fit anything else. Unfortunately, she had friends over for dinner, and we only had 45 minutes for the interview. As she responded, she was clearly moving around the house and, occasionally, talking to people.

During each interview, the co-participant and I first reviewed and signed the informed consent, and she filled out the demographic survey (the one co-participant interviewed by phone received the forms via e-mail and faxed them back prior to the phone call). Then, each co-participant chose a pseudonym that was included on the tape and transcripts of her interview. I explained again that the interview would be recorded and that the athlete would receive a copy of the transcript to check over prior to data analysis. I also pointed out that I would remove any information that could potentially be used to identify the athlete for the final analysis of the study. This allowed each co-participant to talk freely about people, places, and situations, without negating confidentiality. Each interview concluded with several debriefing questions (located on the interview protocol in Appendix D) designed to provide closure for the co-participant and address any concerns or questions about the process.

Following each interview, the tape was transcribed verbatim by the researcher, and a copy was provided to the co-participant along with a thank-you note and a reminder that she should review the transcript and make sure it detailed what she thought she had said. In only two cases did the co-participant have anything to say about the transcripts,

and these involved minor clarifications that were subsequently addressed. Data analysis began as the first transcript was completed and continued throughout the data collection process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As is customary in qualitative research, data collection ended when saturation was reached (Patton, 1990; Straus & Corbin, 1998). That is, when no new coding categories emerged from the interviews, no more were scheduled. In this study, saturation was reached at the seventh interview, but since the eighth was already scheduled, it was conducted as well. The timing of this was somewhat fortuitous in that the eighth interview was the one conducted over the phone. At no time during the project has the co-participant's actual name been directly attached to her audiotape or transcript. Signed informed consent forms are being kept in a file cabinet for the prescribed three-year period, while the tapes have already been erased and the transcripts are being kept away from the university.

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded through methods established by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Patton (1990) to discover relationships between and among co-participants' responses. The object of the analysis was to identify the categories, relationships, and underlying assumptions of each of the co-participants in order to set forth a theory about identities. This was accomplished by reading through the interviews and trying to find matches and patterns between and within co-participants' responses. Specifically, after each co-participant approved her transcript, I read it through to get a general sense of the content and style of the co-participant. This was also the beginning of open coding, during which I began to identify key categories expressed in the interview and the actions that comprised them. This has been defined as "the process of grouping similar items

according to some defined properties and giving the items a name that stands for that common link" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 121).

Once the major categories and actions of each interview were identified, axial coding could begin (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This involved identifying the relationship(s) between various concepts and properties. Axial coding was a critical step in the analysis process. The issues of the present study require exploring the *dynamic process* of interaction involved in identity formation. As more and more patterns were observed within and among transcripts, a theory of interaction between social norms, media, image, and identities began to emerge. The relationships of categories and actions, supported by actual quotations from the co-participants, are reported in the results and discussion sections of this paper.

A research group of individuals familiar with qualitative methods and inductive analysis was used throughout the study to help achieve greater depth and breadth. As mentioned, two members of the research team participated in the bracketing interview and the analysis of it. Additionally, the research group met twice to discuss the results of the interviews. Each of the group members signed a confidentiality agreement prior to reviewing any of the transcripts (see Appendix E). At the first meeting, general categories and actions were discussed and several questions were raised relating to the interaction of certain key concepts (ex., What is the response of the female athlete to "stereotypical females"?). One week later—after reviewing the interviews with the specific questions in mind—the team met again to further refine the emerging theory. During both meetings, the researcher did not offer input until the team had shared their findings. This involved frequent questioning along the lines of, "What stuck out to you?"

and "What do you think is going on with ________?" Patton (1990) recommends this practice as a way to gather information outside of the influence of the researcher. This proved a very effective method for obtaining ideas different from my own, as well as for confirming similar ones. The results that follow clearly reflect the efforts of the entire team in identifying key themes and relationships.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to develop a theory about how female athletes who receive national media coverage negotiate the space between self-identities and media images. Based on sport sociology/sport psychology literature it appeared that this was an active space relative to identities. It quickly became apparent, however, that the female athletes interviewed for this study did not acknowledge any negotiation occurring within that space. That is, every one of the co-participants professed that the media does an accurate job of portraying "who she is." Although unconscious processes are likely at work here (acting in a way that precludes the athletes from recognizing external influences on identity), the information gathered during the interviews relates to negotiation of identities that occurred *before* the media portrayal of the athlete. This is not to say that the media is not involved in the negotiation. On the contrary, the co-participants clearly articulated several of the media's roles and influences. However, the richness of the descriptions given during the interviews requires moving a step back and, rather than looking only at the negotiation that occurs in the space *between* identity and image, looking at the dynamic processes between and among all the components of identities *given the presence of* national media images. The ensuing discussion of results is, therefore, somewhat broader in scope than originally anticipated.

Presentation of Categories

Two categories of responses emerged from the interviews: 1) Intending to "Be like Mike" and 2) Competing in a Business Arena. These reflect the co-participants'

Table 1. Major Categories and Actions

CATEGORY	ACTIONS

Intending to "Be like Mike"	▪ Searching for Role Models
	▪ Replacing Michael Jordan
	▪ "What Can You Do?"
	    ▫ Comparing Self to Other Females
	    ▫ Finding Cohesion
	    ▫ Fitting the Situation
	    ▫ Being One of the Guys

Competing in a Business Arena	▪ Adapting to Sport as Business ▪ Selling Sex ▪ Creating a Quality Product

activities related to self-identity processes. The categories and their accompanying actions are presented in Table 1. To further support and illustrate the categories and actions, quotes from the interviews are included in the ensuing discussion (Patton, 1990; Straus & Corbin, 1998).

Intending to "Be like Mike"

This category included the actions *Searching for Role Models, Replacing Michael Jordan,* and *"What Can You Do?"* A desire to be a role model was the strongest category that emerged from the data in that not only was the idea of role modeling brought up by every co-participant, each athlete also broached the topic more than once during her interview.

Searching for Role Models

The co-participants recognized that the only athlete role models available to them when they were growing up were male. This understanding was met with some detachment in the sense that they realized, while they could certainly be athletic, they could never quite "be like Mike." This action, then, refers to the lack of female athlete role models the co-participants had while growing up and the search for empowering substitutes. This appeared in a number of interviews, often quite directly:

> They (little girls) want to be stars. They want to be the next Mia Hamm, the next Kristine Lilly. And I think that's awesome...because when I was growing up, that wasn't really an option. Those people weren't out there. I wanted to be the next Michael Jordan. I can tell you right now that it wasn't going to happen—ever! (Taylor)

> ...that's back in the 70's so, I mean...you had your Africans that were running distance, but not really African women—it was men, specifically. So I had that to deal with. (Special)

For others, the lack of female athlete role models was reflected in a restricted and, admittedly, stereotypical picture of "athlete" and "sport" or as an acknowledgement of the limited opportunities available. Coupled with this negative view, however, was an acknowledgement that the number of female athlete role models has increased (especially since Title IX):

> [My definition] Of an athlete? I would picture, standardly, a black male. Well built...as a stereotype. Um...I don't know. I guess for sport-wise I would think of your more...you know, your football, baseball, basketball, that kind of thing...I guess those are the most highly recognized or profiled athletes. (Gabrielle)

> You know, to dream to be an athlete...to be an Olympic athlete...I mean, as a little girl, I wanted to do it. My mom never was able to dream about that. You know, she didn't grow up thinking, "You know, one day I can maybe go to the Olympics." It wasn't an option for her. And obviously the government has helped us out too...in this thinking with Title IX and everything. (Taylor)

In the search for inspiring role models, the co-participants' often found their mothers and coaches—notably female coaches—to be empowering for them. These role models were identified as the ones who first demonstrated to the athletes that women could step outside the norm and succeed:

> I grew up in a family where, for a long time, my dad went to work; my mom took care of the kids. And I've seen her—what's amazing to me is I've seen her become this strong, independent woman once she started working. Amazing change...I saw the roles change in my parents from a control standpoint...I saw my mom stand up on her own two feet and...it impacted me because I witnessed it myself and I took for her that, well, my mom could do it, I can do anything I want. (Mary)

> I think coming to [her university] actually was the turning point for me. Because I had all men coaches and then this was the first time that I saw women in charge and then women winning...We had women trainers. So, it was the first time being totally engulfed in the women's program and separate from the men and having women *winning*. (Special)

> I think my first role models—and probably my most significant ones—were my parents. And um, they were always, "You can do whatever you want to do." Doesn't matter your body type, your age, your gender...it doesn't matter. If you want to do it, you can do it...You know, so I think that helped me get started. I mean like, "I can do this. My mom thinks I can." (Taylor)

Replacing Michael Jordan

An oft-repeated idea was the desire to be a good role model for little girls (although little boys were also mentioned, it was much less frequently and often as an afterthought) and the awareness that role modeling was part of being an athlete. This action seemed to arise from the lack of available role models when the co-participants were growing up and was a major driving force that powered their sport experiences:

> You know, as women athletes right now, um, we're all kind of pioneers right now. I mean, we're continuing that and trying to break through in a lot of areas...And getting rid of this quote male dominated sport. Or "It's only for men" or anything like that. Anybody can do anything. And I think that's what the younger kids—especially the young kids that come to fights—I mean, for

> boys and girls it's natural for them to see. It's going to be a natural thing for them to see women in any sport. They're not going to have that old style thinking that it's only a man's sport. (Lisa)

> ...if our girls have that, it makes them better people. And that's what it's all about—even though this is about female athletes, it's about being a better person for me—as an athlete. Because I consider myself as a role model. (Special)

As a role model, the female athletes in this study wanted to show that it is possible to be a strong, attractive woman. These traits were mentioned in every interview and were described variously as physical, emotional, and/or mental:

> We want to portray this because we want little girls to grow up and see strong beautiful athletic women that are proud of their bodies; that have high self-esteem. (Mary)

> And [being strong and fit is] attractive. And I think in general, we all want to be attractive no matter how you want to look at it, that's always a positive thing. So when female sports was probably looked upon as unattractive or masculine, you know that was hard for female athletes. (Scribby)

> ...it's OK to step outside the norm. It's OK to be independent. It's OK to earn our own living. It's OK to have muscles. It's OK. And I think once society accepts that, the female athlete will grow, and the female will grow. (Dorian)

> I think, the women that I associate with, that I'm around...that I look up to...very strong willed, very dedicated, they're beautiful people inside and out...I think [inner beauty is] their outlook on life and being very optimistic and...'cuz I mean that's what it takes...to be optimistic. (Lisa)

What Can You Do?

This action represented the athletes' attempts to find coherence in their identities. In every interview, the co-participant mentioned that she had been born female and that was all there was to it—"What can you do?" From that "foundation," four identity-shaping processes emerged: 1) *Comparing Self to Others*, 2) *Finding Cohesion*, 3) *Fitting the Situation*, and 4) Being *One of the Guys*. It is very important to bear in mind that none of these actions represents a definitive end product. The co-participants all

expressed ideas relating to more than one of these processes. That is, every athlete in the study identified multiple strategies for integrating diverse identity components.

Each co-participant identified that the experiences and qualities she had developed as an athlete promoted some degree of *comparing herself to others*, generally in ways that favored the athlete. That is, the co-participants felt superior to the "average female" in many different ways. The most notable expression of this action was the frequent use of comparatives ("I am more _______ than a typical female") when describing themselves as "female":

> I think as a female athlete compared to an everyday female out there, I mean, I see myself as a little bit more…in tune with what I can do. What is possible. And a lot of times you would hear females put limits on themselves. "Well I can't do that because…" Well, yes you can. (Lisa)

> Like you learn how to become a better person I think—in a way. You get to deal with people a lot more—whether you want to or not. And you learn how to be more responsible—like I said before—just because you have to get things done. And if you're playing on a team, you're working with a team—and *for* a team. Like you, not only doing it for yourself, you have to do it for other people, too. Just like a job. So basically you, I don't know, you're prepared for whenever you get a job. That's a thing that could separate us from a regular student or a regular person. A person who's *not* an athlete, basically. (Kayla)

> You know, as a female athlete I find myself so different and so much more self-assured than most women that I meet that are not athletes. So, I think of—honestly—females in general, females as having a weaker personality and able to be controlled by a man…That's where I think being an athlete, you've got a stronger presence. (Mary)

However, while sport experiences had enhanced them as females relative to other females, many co-participants commented that, within themselves, *finding cohesion* provided a sense that there was really no separation between being female and being an athlete. This was reflected in a number of ways. One way the co-participants indicated there was no separation for them was to respond to questions about "What is female?" by

hesitating and being "stuck," or by giving answers that echoed what they had replied to "What is athlete?" The following transaction occurred immediately after Mary had completed a lengthy and energetic series of responses about being an athlete. When asked "What are females?" it took her a long time to formulate a reply, and she needed clarity regarding the question:

> Mary: Uhhhh...females...(pause)
> Interviewer: Take your time.
> Mary: (pause) I don't know how to answer that. That's an interesting question. I would describe females...(pause)...I don't know how to answer that. Not "female athletes," "females."

Special had a similar response to the same question:

> Interviewer: Let's talk about women, females, for a little while...How about, again, as a general term, how would you describe females?
> Special: (laughs) I would describe...female athletes or just women?

Dorian also elided athlete and female. When asked "How would you describe yourself as a female?" she replied:

> Me as a female just...you know, hard working, caring, loving, wife, ummm...highly competitive athlete just, you know... (Dorian)

Another method of expressing the unity of being a female athlete was to merge traits identified (by the co-participant) as female with traits identified as athletic:

> So I was basically a girl first, you know, like I was just a regular girl first and then a female athlete. And now I'm both. You know, I consider myself both. I'm a female athlete. Basically now I've learned how to balance it. I'm a female just because that's who I am, but I'm an athlete. So I've learned how to balance those things in my life. I don't separate them. I don't look at it—two different things. Me, I'm a "femaleathlete," [sic] and whether I'm a female or whether I'm an athlete, I'm still a "femaleathlete" [sic]. I don't know, to me there's not separation now. It's just one thing. (Kayla)

In stark contrast to the experience of finding cohesion between *female* and *athlete*, another action that emerged was *fitting the situation*. This referred to a sharp splitting of identities—often expressed as roles or behaviors performed in "appropriate" contexts:

> I like to think of being an athlete as what I do, but it's not necessarily who I am. Um...Because if you just think of me purely as an athlete on the field, that's a totally different person than Taylor off the field. 'Cuz on the field I'm very aggressive, very outgoing, very assertive. Off the field I'm more quiet, reserved, laid back and, just, "Oh sure, whatever, I'll do anything." But on the field I want it my way. I want to win. I want to do this; I want to do that. And I know exactly what I want. But off the field I'm much more relaxed. So to say, "Taylor the athlete", that's not *who* I am; that's what I do moreso...I think if you ask most of my friends, like, who I am, they wouldn't say "Oh, she's aggressive and outgoing" (laughs) You know what I mean. It's just... that's just not who I am, but that is who I am when I'm being an athlete. (Taylor)

Dorian expressed this process relative to being female as well as competing in a sport:

> And females are supposed to be pretty and...elegant...and all that type of stuff. And I can be all that, but there's a time and place for it. I'm not gonna be that way all the time...I mean I'm in front of the media a lot. I go to a lot of functions. Clearly I when I do that...if I'm meeting the president or whatever, yeah, I'm gonna dress nice and things. If I'm traveling to an event, I'm gonna dress nice. But just every day, I'm gonna have on some sweats, work out. Just...I'm gonna be a bum (laughs).
>
> ...Every day, I'm not gonna have on a dress, you know. I'll have on a dress when there's time to have on a dress, but I am gonna look nice when I need to look nice...But there's a time and place for everything. When I'm on the court, I'm a female, but I'm taking care of my business. Or whenever I'm in my profession, I'm doing what I need to do. After my event is over, then I'm a lady. I'm gonna present myself in a fashion where...you know you may see me this way one time but this is, you know, this is really, at the end of the day when I'm going home or whatever. This is how I am. So... (Dorian)

The fourth response to being born female and wanting to participate in sports (seen as a non-traditional activity for girls) was *being one of the guys*. There were several ways this was reported. An interesting example of how unconscious processes

influence identity was reflected in this action. Almost without exception, the co-participants named family attitudes as influencing their desire and ability to be female athletes. This often took the form of identifying male gatekeepers who "allowed" these women (as girls) to believe they could do anything the boys could. This served to establish sport as male normative while additionally linking empowerment to "being one of the guys":

> My family was huge in that because I think basically they, from the very beginning they opened the door for me. They never said I couldn't do something because I was a girl. They let me try everything and my brother pretty much let me join in any stuff that he did and he's four years older, so that was huge. So they basically opened the door and said do what you want. (Scribby)

> I tend to think that to be a successful person—athlete or business person—if you have the male ...perspective. By that I...because that's initially what we use as a parameter to judge our success...If you were aggressive. If you...uh, if you were confident. If you weren't passive. That is what...when I was growing up...we were trying to be like. Because that was success. So as a woman athlete or a person, if I was able to tap into those...things...I would be better as I got older. (Special)

> ...every day that's something that kind of drives me to get out there and prove that we can do this and train harder and try to get my skills up there...to the level of the men... (Lisa)

Several of the co-participants referred to competing with and against men as part of their development. Sometimes this was a matter of choice—as Mary noted—while sometimes it was a matter of circumstance—as in Special's experience:

> When I look back to it, to my grade school, middle school, high school days and, all I wanted to do was go outside and shoot around. Turn on my music and play one-on-one with my brother. A lot of times my friends would be going to a dance and they'd stop by—the boys would stop by—on their way to the dance and play like two-on-two with me and then they would leave and I would still be out there. (Mary)

> Men are playing those sports and doing those activities already. We weren't. So for us to do it, you were being the guys—one of the guys. (Special)

Co-participants often referred being a "tomboy" as an acceptable way for girls to be active when they were younger:

> I guess, in my mind, a tomboy...I picture as a little girl, you know, who likes to climb trees and get dirty and throw rocks in the water and build forts. And play...you know...play outside. I think a lot of young girls...they're playing house and they're playing dolls and Barbies. And, I don't know, the tomboy's going out there involved...you know, playing with the boys, basically. When I grew up, I didn't play on a girls' team until I was in 6th grade. Otherwise, I was always the *only* girl on the basketball team. I played flag football with the guys. So I guess that's what I picture as a tomboy—just...a little girl doing little boy things. (Gabrielle)

Gabrielle continued this line of thought when, in response to the question, "How would you describe yourself as a female?" she answered:

> I grew up being one of the guys, and I'm still one of the guys... And I'm glad for that. I really am. You know, I feel...I've talked to guys, too, and all my buddies hang with will say that I'm one of the guys. And they'll call me a guy-girl, you know. (Gabrielle)

Only Taylor acknowledged that, when it came to gender, being able to do anything might include the acceptability of her brothers participating in traditionally female activities if they wanted to:

> I just think growing—I have three brothers—and growing up, my parents never separated us or treated us differently. Whatever my brothers could do, I could do. You know, and if I wanted to play football—play football. If I wanted to play soccer—play soccer. If I wanted to do ballet—go do ballet. It wasn't like, "Oh, you're a girl, you can't do that" or "You're a boy, you can't go do ballet." (Taylor)

Competing in a Business Arena

This category consisted of the actions *Adapting to Sport as Business, Selling Sex,* and *Creating a Quality Product*. Frequent comparisons were made between athletes and successful businesswomen. These comparisons related to a variety of topics (for

example, businesswomen were also named as potential role models). The major traits connecting sports and business women involved competition, determination, and being successful in a "man's world."

Adapting to Sport as Business

Over time, the co-participants came to realize their participation in sport involved more than just the "fun and friends" they associated with youth sport experiences. Each of the female athletes described strategies she used as she advanced through the competitive ranks to adapt to the needs and challenges of sport as a job. Although connections were consistently made between sport and business, co-participants identified a key difference between the business world and the sport world in that sport requires physicality. In general, the co-participants noted that this feature distinguished athletes from others and strongly contributed to their sense of self as an athlete:

> I think being involved in athletics is a unique experience and you can't really…you can try to correlate it with a business person. There is a lot that you can take from a work ethic standpoint and the discipline it takes to succeed in life. But being in a competition…Competing is something that can't be—on the athletic floor, in the arena—when you're competing physically. You know, someone in the business world isn't competing physically. They might be competing with somebody in the same order, or they might be competing with someone to get a raise or to get a job and that's all, like, more a mental competition. This is mental and physical. So the physical is what makes it completely different from any business person in the entire world. (Mary)

> …And, you know, you're competing more. Not to say that you don't compete if you're a female, in the work force that you do, but it's just a difference. You're *physically* competing more, maybe. That's a big difference. (Dorian)

> And then you add in training every single day and trying to make each other better. Trying to better yourself because we're all working towards this common goal. And I think, I mean, you have that in other things. You have that in some businesses, and…stuff. But, I think in sports, you have it every single day. (Taylor)

Preparing to succeed at this physical competition was described as a full time job that required constant thinking about the body and sport throughout the day/season. Discipline, hard work, and organizational skills were named as important to meeting these full time needs:

> I think, you know, when I think about doing things in my life or everyday things, it involves making sure I'm taking care of my body. If I'm on vacation, I'm still running somehow because I know it makes me feel good, and I know I need to... to stay competitive at the level I want to play at. So it is definitely a part of me, and when I don't work out for a period of time, I can tell I'm not happy or something's not right. So I definitely think it's a huge part of my life. (Scribby)

> Um...I would describe myself as disciplined. And I think being an athlete...behind the scenes you don't realize how much work goes on behind it. I mean, there's a lot of hours that you put in and a lot of it goes unnoticed. The lower profiled athletes are putting in just as much work and energy and effort as the other people are. And it is...it's a very time consuming thing; it's a full time job. And I think that requires discipline and that requires several different things. I mean, you gotta have your sport and your strength training and your psychology behind it all and there's a lot of things that go into it. Um...you know, and in order to do that I think you have to be very disciplined and very focused on what you want to achieve. (Gabrielle)

Sacrifices were also acknowledged as part of the full time job of being a professional/Olympic athlete. The willingness to make sacrifices was one of the defining characteristics of being an athlete as compared to a non-athlete:

> I think athletes are very focused people. Very driven. And very goal oriented in all aspects in life. I know especially in sports, but I think in all aspects of our life it kind of overflows into daily life and...just as far as dedication, I mean...your true athlete...nothing's going to get in the way of your goal. You're very focused and you're willing to sacrifice. I mean, it's a daily sacrifice that you...but you're willing to do it...um...that a lot of people probably wouldn't do. (Lisa)

> Because you're getting up in the morning, and you're running or you're swimming--5:00 am...after work, you're going to the gym to workout. Weekends you're playing softball with your recreational leagues. You're buying equipment, you may not go out to dinner with your wife on Sunday because you have a game. So your energies and your...your energy is spent in that activity. (Special)

> …when I was in high school, or when I was in 8th grade, 7th grade and I wanted to go to a party…I couldn't go because I had a tournament on Saturday and I had to play at maybe 8:00. So I couldn't go out on Friday. I couldn't hang out with my friends; I couldn't be doing stuff like that. And even traveling—you know I was missing a lot of school; I had to ask permission and there's so many things that were at stake and I just think it was a lot different than…And now, I accept it. Now, it's something that I have to do. (Kayla)

The co-participants noted that this connection between sport and business was one of the primary changes that occurred over time for them. Thinking of their sport as a job helped them to meet the high demands placed on them (by themselves and others) to succeed at elite levels of competition while still enjoying the experience:

> My freshman year, I had a pretty rough year, like I wasn't…I came here playing extremely well…and, a lot of things started changing in my life. Like, I was getting a lot of pressure from being in school, traveling, missing a lot of school, like not getting enough sleep. Trying to be with my friends, you know, I was trying to do a lot of things at once and I wasn't balancing it out at all. So it affected my schoolwork, it affected everything. Like, it affected the way I played, it affected a lot of things. And, just being by myself and even my boyfriend helped me. Just, the way I started looking at it was really different. I started understanding what it was like and what I needed to do and…for some reason it became like a job, basically. Like, when you go out on the real world, you want to get a job that you love, you know? So basically, this was the job that I loved. And…it became…it…just, I took it one day at a time and everything became a lot better. (Kayla)

In some cases, co-participants revealed that they needed to develop the ability to step back from the pressures and ups and downs of competition by not making their sport job their entire identity:

> And when I became an athlete—when an athlete was all I was—and it was everything I was, life was too hard. Because who I was varied from what score I'd shot that day. And it was too extreme. And you know, it became high highs and low lows and…um…yeah, that's changed over time because last year was…my first year was great. I had a great first year on tour. I thought I was the best person ever and life was just grand. And then last year when I struggled, life was horrible. It was too hard to make that who I am. And so I've changed that. Now it's just a job, and now there's other things that I do. (Gabrielle)

Several of the co-participants mentioned that having supportive friends and parents helped them to make the sacrifices needed to be successful. Interestingly, the two married athletes in the study both noted that their husbands were very supportive of their distinct needs as athletes (for example, to train away from home) and of the fact that they (i.e., the woman) were the primary breadwinners of their families.

However, a common theme throughout the college experience of these athletes was the sense of performing for a coach and/or parent's approval. Nearly all the co-participants noticed that by the time they entered the professional ranks there was an added/returned sense of "doing it for me" that had been lacking before. This motivation from within provided both greater enjoyment and greater efforts when preparing for competition. Mary spoke of the transition:

> And I felt that my first year out [of college]. I felt like there was no…all of a sudden that family atmosphere that's surrounding a college program…you're by yourself. And so you grow up quickly. And from that point on I've just matured a whole lot from it—from six years ago to now—or seven years ago to now—in that I do things for myself now. Not for the approval or not because I've got all these support groups surrounding me—pushing me and wanting this for me. I want it for myself now. If I didn't want it for myself now, I would not be playing professionally right now—going on my seventh year. (Mary)

In short, although being an athlete was seen as a full-time, often difficult job, these women loved what they do and recognized how important an internal spark was to their happiness and success. In addition, being a female athlete appeared to differentiate them from the "normal" or "average" female and made the co-participants feel special:

> …I don't think all of them [non-elite athletes] could say they have a focus…you know… a drive. I don't think they all could say that. They're driven *if* something or if someone pushes them. I can do it without a push from outside forces. (Special)

> I wish I could do it for the rest of my life. It's a great feeling. Like, when you're...basically you're doing it because you love it. You're not just doing it just to do...just to get by... but you're just doing it because you love it. It's something that you want to do. (Kayla)

> And for those that settle, and don't have enough motivation to put themselves in a position—through athletics or through whatever—then, you just kind of become the average female...I just think society has to change, but you have to change, too. You have to want more for yourself and...that's what I always talk about when I do talk about the female athlete, or when I do talk about...you know, success in general. Desire comes from within, and you gotta be motivated in whatever you do. If you want to be a bum, you gotta be the best bum you can! If you want to be a teacher...or whatever...the motivation has got to come from within. (Dorian)

Selling Sex

The co-participants in this study were in great agreement that sex sells and attractive people draw crowds. There was a vast difference of opinion, however, about how much sex was too much. This action emerged primarily from questions that emphasized "females" (e.g., "How would you describe females?" or "How are female athletes different/similar to athletes?") and suggested some negotiation was required to balance the need to be seen as socially acceptable with the need to maintain a sense of integrity to self and sport.

The need for social acceptance and promotion emerged repeatedly throughout the study, especially as related to the idea that sport is a business. One aspect of social acceptance that emerged was the sense that, while active as little girls they had gained a level of acceptance as "tomboys," these female athletes realized that social acceptance diminished during adolescent sport participation and continued to be an issue into adulthood:

> And I think I went through a stage when I would say for at least for me as a female where females weren't looked upon as something positive as being an

> athlete. You know that whole tomboy thing you grow up with kind of when you hit high school age kinda got a little bit eerie. 'Cuz you know, it wasn't acceptable really. You know the whole female athlete, not as it is now. (Scribby)

> Before there was Title IX and then now you have...I think we still struggle, you know, our place in society. (Dorian)

> I think by society viewpoints, they're not viewed even on the same playing field. I wouldn't say that female athletes are frowned upon, but they aren't celebrated like male athletes are. It's an OK thing. And I think different sports...there's different perspectives in different sports. I think...I guess the only...I think of female Olympians as being celebrated athletes, but as far as female golfers or the WNBA players, or that kind of thing...that they don't...they're not in the same league of athletics as men are. (Gabrielle)

Another aspect of selling sex relates to socially-accepted female signifiers—especially appearance. The co-participants were highly cognizant that their sport leagues and livelihoods depended on sponsorships, spectators, and media coverage. This placed an emphasis on appearance and traditional social beauty norms that was often met with ambivalence by the athlete. Although generally professing not being all caught up in social appearance norms, these athletes were aware that they were promoting their sport/league as well as themselves, and that certain (sexual) images were better suited to that task than others:

> Sex appeal. I think that's huge these days. You know and I think that *is* what sells it though. And sad or right or wrong or whatever, you know, that's what works and...I think that's the biggest thing right now...Anna Kournakova (laughs) you know. Guys would love to watch her play tennis. It's the same thing we talked about before, people are drawn to ...you know, attractive people and that's what selling it. And if you can throw women out there in skimpy outfits and all of a sudden, you know, more people are going to watch because of it, they're gonna keep doing it. I just looked at a Sports Illustrated this week and Annika Sorenstam's in...you know, swinging a club in her bra and underwear. I mean, that's not what it was. In the past, golf's been, you know, women around with sleeves that go down past their elbow and baggy shorts. And now they're out there...last year in the Open—I can't remember who it was—the one little girl with like the little crop shirt on she's swinging and her belly's hanging out. And

> that didn't exist before. But now it's endorsed. (Gabrielle—when asked how women's sports had grown in coverage and endorsements)

> Well, it's kind of a thing that we joke about a little bit…because we've been, quote unquote sex symbols…especially the National team. You know what, we don't care why you're here, just so that you're here. You're paying...to watch us play. You know, some people come to watch us because we're pretty…And all of a sudden we became these sex symbols for women's soccer. I mean, on one level it's a little degrading because they're looking past what we're doing and the *great* things we're doing on the field but on another level, it's like what I said before. I don't care why you're coming to watch us play—come watch us play. 'Cuz you know what, you might just come because we're pretty, but you're gonna leave thinking, "Oh my God they are good. Those are athletes out there." (Taylor)

In fact, two athletes (in different sports) mentioned that their leagues had overtly communicated to the athletes that a certain image was expected and appropriate "for the benefit (read: growth) of the league." Appropriate—according to league officials—meant attire (no baggy clothes) and personal grooming (hair length, use of make-up) that fit traditional feminine standards. Despite professed rejection of traditional feminine beauty mores, several comments indicated that social standards for appearance had been internalized and accepted (even if the athlete was unaware of her complicity):

> …my mom always wanted us—my sister and me—to wear make-up. And of course, you fight it, fight it, fight it. "Wear a skirt." Fight it, fight it, fight it. And eventually you understand why. I mean, you can't fight the fact that you are who you are. I'm a female and I want to, not because of the stereotype; I want to because it makes me feel better. It makes me, different than a man—not if I wear make-up, just the whole… (Mary)

> Feminine is wearing make up; men don't wear it. That's what they plugged on us to differentiate us from [them]. But for *me* being feminine…I use that…I think it's a weakness. I use it as a weakness. And, you say, "Well, you have on lipstick." I have on eye make up right now. I do my hair. Because I think it looks good. You can look good and not…and I don't look at that as being too feminine. (Special)

"Don't cross the line" seemed to be a common admonition when determining how far to go to promote oneself or one's sport. This line was drawn by each co-

participant in various places, and involved identifying and avoiding that which was "overly sexual" and therefore distracting and detracting from the sport. This was a highly subjective and often conflicted issue, as Mary illustrated in a series of responses:

> I mean…in my opinion, you can...I think a female's body—especially an athletic woman—should show it…What's acceptable is a sports bra—those little Volleyball tights…that's what they wear so to be seen in that is fine. Lingerie is crossing over into what would be in a magazine and what men would look at in certain environments. I think that's not acceptable. I think acceptable is being in your athletic attire. Being in any kind of attire that you would be out in public in, you know.
>
> …Yeah, the Williams sisters. You know, they've got their little tutus on and their breasts are hanging out and there's nothing…that's their tennis attire. They're not doing anything that they wouldn't walk around in public. They are selling themselves, their smiles, their bodies. There's nothing…I see absolutely nothing wrong with that. Now if they were to show up on evening magazine wearing a see-through nightie and creating that image—I have a problem with that. So there is a line.
>
> …Because I think it brings the class of the sport down. I think if [an athlete poses in Playboy] in a distasteful manner, it's going to hurt the sport. Not for…it might draw some attention, from a man's perspective…but it's going to hurt the sport, the growth of the sport with kids…selling too much of the female body is off limits. Doing it tastefully, I think is absolutely fine. (Mary)

Several athletes noted that selling an image without crossing the line represented a tension that needed to be resolved as a female athlete. This tension was often revealed in the hesitation and difficulty with which the co-participants addressed the questions in this area. In addition, Lisa and Special verbally illustrated this position:

> But then, as far as marketability, you want to show more of the beauty side too. So, but I think the competition…it's not about being sexy while you're out there. It's hard to be [competing] and look sexy. But when you step out of the [competitive arena], I mean, as far as, you know, endorsements and things like that…but you don't want to take it too far either. You know, I don't know if posing in Playboy's really going to…but that's where I think the fine line is…But I don't know what's too far. I mean, right now, that's [points to a revealing publicity picture of herself] about as far as I'll take it, but, you know, that's…because I want to be shown, but in a tasteful way. In a classy way. (Lisa)

> Because once you start doing the trickery, you start selling yourself short. And your integrity, where do you cross…where's your integrity if you cross that? You know, that swimsuit in *Sport's Illustrated* that they did—I didn't like it. It's going to sell, and that's what it's about. But when you see *Women's Sports Illustrated* do you see men in there looking like that? So…the answer's no. So, if …we can sell our magazine without having that in it, you can sell your magazine. But it's up to us to say, "Hey, I'm not gonna be shot like that. I have a good body. Fine. Put me in a pose that's not compromising. (Special)

Creating a Quality Product

Placed in parallel to social acceptance, this action referred to being an athlete and arose predominantly from questions such as "How would you describe athletes?" and "How is being a female athlete similar/different than being a female?" In short, having a quality product was seen as crucial to being a professional athlete; this entailed being strong, fit, and skilled.

Sport acceptance was described as gaining respect and acceptance for one's athletic abilities. While social acceptance was sometimes met with resistance or confusion, sport acceptance was consistently viewed as positive. This seemed to be the highest standard to which the co-participants held themselves, and a desire to be the best was seen as central to being an athlete. Dorian was the clearest on this point:

> I just think the professional athlete, the college athlete…the common goal is to be the best…I may be a little biased because that's all I know, is to be the best. And plus, I've been very fortunate. I've had great coaches that I've played for that are the best. I've been on…at the Olympic level where I've competed against the best so that's all I know. For me to be the best is to compete against the best. That's what I thrive on. Yeah, I don't really get a lot of thrill if I'm not competing against someone that's on the same level as me. But at the end of the day, the athlete wants to be the best. You get into the sport for different reasons—to build self-esteem, to be more accountable, to learn about teamwork, to learn about discipline—all those things come with it, but the end result is you want to be the best. (Dorian)

Sport acceptance meant earning the respect of others within the realm of sport. This was seen as a key sign of being an athlete. It was also seen as a motivating force in that the co-participants revealed a strong desire to be seen by others as a successful athlete:

> And once I got to school—my freshman year—I didn't have the results I should have had; and...I'm sure my coaches and my teammates were a little disappointed because of my results, and now that I'm doing a lot better that has changed. So they view me completely differently, like now, I'm doing what I need to be doing. (Kayla)

> ...it's watching people really do amazing things whether it's hitting a ball far or jumping really high or running really fast. I mean, those are the things that people are drawn to. And, you know, if you go into tennis ...as far as women athletes. You know you love to watch Serena 'cuz she's so *powerful* and I mean, it's just...it's a great thing to watch. I mean, you'd always, I mean, I'd rather watch her slave than the little, you know, someone bat it back and forth. It's just more fun. And, I guess, for me, when I talk about playing with athleticism, I want to play with that same fire. (Gabrielle)

As noted earlier, the co-participants recognized that there was an inner tension in gaining social acceptance as a female athlete. This internal struggle was based, in part, on the difficulty of determining exactly how much of the female body was "for sale," and the line seemed to be drawn in a place that would allow acceptance as a female without detracting from the sport. An interconnected argument emerged relative to gaining respect as an athlete. Specifically, athletes who used sex to promote themselves were expected to "back it up" with strong, successful athletic accomplishments. The co-participants were in great and energetic agreement about this point:

> I think it's awful for someone like Kournakova to create that image. One about tennis. I know tennis hates it, and I'm sure all the tennis players that have come before her can't stand it. I'm mean, do something on the tennis court!...I mean, that's the perfect example of someone who's using sex and athleticism to sell. I have more respect for somebody that is just an incredible tennis player that comes by it naturally—doesn't seek it out. I think she has sought out the image she has

> created. It has *nothing* to do with tennis…As an athlete, you're going to respect another athlete for their work ethic (laughs) and putting it all out there on the court. With her it's more than tennis. The thing I don't like about that is she's creating that image for little girls that maybe that's not the point to tennis. Sex is not the point to tennis. (Mary)

> But when she was just Florence Griffith—not Joiner—she still was OK, wore the make-up, but she was a fierce competitor. And that fierce competitor is what she had—from the grassroots. And even though she became popular with the nails and stuff, she had that…a lot of athletes don't have that fierce competitor instinct—but she had. So what you have is the dazzle and the frazzle, but you have no…uh…not a great competitor. (Special)

Garnering society's respect for their athletic accomplishments and abilities was also important to the co-participants. This was often expressed with a sense of "we've come a long way, but there's still a long way to go":

> You have to go out there and look like an athlete. You go out there and …the crowd sees a woman that's strong and physical and athletic looking, the crowd is like, "Whoa! This is serious." You know? (Lisa)

> Now I think it's more acceptable to be a female athlete. Now, I think society has pretty much opened the door for it and we're respected as being athletes and we're respected for being fit and strong. (Scribby)

> So we still have a long way to go, but…within our sport, and, you know, you have some people who kind of follow it…But, by the masses, it's still the men…Society sees basketball as a men's sport. They may know some women who play it and they know some teams, but if you ask them to name five men's teams and five women teams the pro teams and college, they'd probably do a lot better with the pro and college than they would with the women pro and college. (Special)

Several co-participants acknowledged a discrepancy between the short-term plan "look sexy and get attention" and the (more desired) long-term need to "be good at what you do." Often expressed was the idea that having a high quality athletic product was the way to keep crowds in the seats for the long run:

> …like I said before, it's just a matter of getting *true* athletes out there. Not just these big women who can win a bar fight—like it used to be. I mean, we're

> getting true athletes in there that can master skills and go out there and show it so, you know. (Lisa)
>
> Sex may sell, but quality is what's gonna make it...make people come back...but if you don't have a quality product, you won't get a good following. And that's what women have to do. Put a product out there that's good...and then sell it. You sell it by being good. (Special)
>
> And you know what, that's OK if they come out here because they just think we're pretty. Because when they leave, they're gonna be like, "WOW! Those were amazing athletes. Those are the best soccer players this country has to offer." (Taylor)

In summary, negotiating identities revolves around the intent to be a role model (especially for future generations) and the requirements of any business to generate and maintain interest and income. The co-participants reported a variety of activities used to find coherence and self-identities. In the following chapter, the interactions of these categories and actions will be explored and a theory of female athlete identity formation will be proposed. The implications of these findings and suggestions for future research will also be discussed.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study was designed to develop a theory about the negotiation of identities for female athletes who receive national media coverage. Specific attention was given to the processes of negotiation that occur for high-profile professional female athletes as they attempt to provide internal coherency from varied, often disparate, experiences. Insight into this area was gained by interviewing eight athletes using a semi-structured protocol that allowed specific ideas to be addressed. Inductive analysis was used to identify emerging categories and actions expressed by the co-participants (Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The two categories that were revealed through the interview process were: 1) Intending to "Be like Mike," and 2) Competing in a Business Arena. Each of these categories consisted of a variety of defining actions. That each of the co-participants expressed multiple strategies, suggests that identity negotiation is dynamic and multiple—and highly contextual. Because of this, thematic analysis, while appropriate for providing insight about the building blocks of identities, does not go far enough toward explaining the *processes* that might be involved in attempting identity cohesion. To this end, the following section provides a description of the key constructs addressed by this study and an integrated theory that links them with the negotiation strategies that emerged from the data. Following this presentation, general conclusions and sport psychology applications are examined. Finally, suggestions for future research in the areas of female athletes, media images, and identities are discussed.

Key Constructs of Identities

Recall that sociocultural values and the media shape and are shaped by each other to provide a context in which identities and images are constantly created and recreated. These identities and images impact each other in ever-shifting ways, as well as influence sociocultural values and the media (which then shape and are shaped *ad infinitum* in a continuous, dynamic web of interactions). From this foundation, the interview protocol was carefully prepared to promote discussion of four key areas of importance to the identities of female athletes who receive media coverage.

As previously expressed in Figure 1, these original constructs were *female*, *athlete*, *media images*, and *sociocultural values*. Through the interviews, information about these constructs coalesced into notably consistent descriptions, which may be thought of as the *sexed self,* the *athlete self*, *stereotypical females*, and *mediated images*. In discussing these elements relative to self-identities, the categories and actions presented by the co-participants suggest multiple and fluid processes are used to negotiate self-identities. These constructs and a dynamic theory that links them are explained in the following sections.

The Sexed Self

The sexed self was described as a foundational and unchangeable "given" whereby the co-participants identified as "100% female" because they were born that way. Repeatedly mentioned were "having all the parts" and "being able to give birth" as determinants of one's status as a female. This was described as a clearly binary category. "Female" and "feminine" (generally used interchangeably by the co-participants) were described in relation to male/masculine in a traditionally oppositional fashion (Butler,

1990; deBeauvoir, 1997; Layton, 1998). The interviews suggest that female identities are created through a sense of possessing that which is "not male" (Irigaray, 1977/1986, 1991b) and this generally includes physical qualities like wearing make-up, bearing children, and being less strong. This sexed and binary foundation, while greatly influential in terms of what is taken up as desirable or rejected as undesirable, also appears to be the source of unconscious negotiation as identities are developed. That is, there are unacknowledged (perhaps unrecognized?) forces that seem to be at work, leaving the sexed self much more open and multiple than the co-participants outwardly reported.

There are several reasons to believe that the sexed self is more pluralistic than the co-participants indicated. One example is their strong desire to role model for little girls. This suggests that the sexed self is not inherently a static and fixed phenomenon. The co-participants readily acknowledged the role of significant others in their sense of self as female. Butler (1997) and Irigaray (1997) have both noted that the self is built upon the other. Given that there are a variety of others that have played a role in the co-participants' identities as "females," a stable, unitary sexed self does not seem tenable. It is possible there are multiple gaps and overlaps that are overlooked or unnoticed. In fact, given that language and thought are not identical (Butler, 1997), and language structures tend to favor hegemonic views (Butler, 1990; Hall, 2000), it seems likely there is much more to the sexed self than was reported.

Additionally, although the terms *female, girl,* and *woman* were often used interchangeably, there seemed to be a sense of chronological development attributed to *women* that *girls* did not possess. Furthermore, several co-participants mentioned that

"sorority girls" and "female athletes" were both *females* but were quite different. Despite naming many outward signs that distinguish these two "types" of females, there was also a large component that was not able to be identified. It was at these moments that the co-participant generally replied, "It's just the way it is. It just *is*." It is possible that lack of appropriate vocabulary has limited the ability to provide a name for the result of some gender performatives, and therefore, has disallowed the conscious recognition of new gender possibilities (Butler, 1990). This unnamable, yet assured difference was most dramatic between the self as female and stereotypical females, but was also present between the self as female athlete relative to other athletes. The latter was revealed most strongly in connection with media representation and the athlete's need for endorsements/sponsorship.

The Athlete Self

Where the sexed self was seen as a predetermined and immutable fact of birth, the athlete self was viewed as the result of conscious and dedicated effort. That is, one actively chooses to take up aspects of the athlete self, whereas qualities associated with the sexed self are "forced" upon one (quite literally, as Irigaray (1991b) notes, from the moment a girl child is first wrapped in a pink hospital blanket and the world begins to react to *her* rather than *it*). This construct is seen as much more nebulous and open to internal and external influences. Specifically, significant others help to groom the athlete self—the driving force of which is a desire to establish oneself as a top-quality athlete. The athlete self is heavily invested in physicality and the fully consuming work it takes to build and maintain one's fitness and skills at the highest of competitive levels. Although

not mentioned directly (perhaps because the forces are less conscious), media representation and the need to procure sponsorship also impacts this construct.

Notably, the athlete self is seen as fluctuating (in stark contrast to the imagined stability of the sexed self). Over time, the influence of others and life experiences are seen to impact the details and importance of the athlete self. Specifically, the co-participants described a childhood athlete self that was not nearly as aware of itself as the more mature athlete was. Playing was fun, social, and simply one activity among many during the day. The developing athlete self becomes more serious and job-like as the individual begins to realize her skill and potential for success. There are growing pains associated with this development. Often, the athlete self demands full time consideration and sacrifices may require other identities to be subordinated.

Stereotypical Females

This construct represents the co-participants' ideas about what it means to be female in society and was variously described as the "average," "stereotypical," "regular," or "normal" female. It is pluralized here to represent each co-participant's belief that stereotypical females are a group standing separate from herself. Like the athlete self, stereotypical females change over time and in different contexts and are influenced by others. In direct contrast to the athlete self, however, the co-participants described stereotypical females as limited and weak and, with businesswomen marking an important exception, generally failed to note any of the ways stereotypical females assert agency. Only two co-participants acknowledged any strengths in the non-business female—one comment was with respect to pain tolerance related to giving birth and the other recognized the ability of non-professional women to "make the best moms since

they don't have to worry about a career." It was noted that, based on having a physically female appearance (i.e., the foundational sexed self), others placed expectations on the female athlete to "stay in her place" in society. This is an admonition to which the co-participants feel they pose a challenge. According to the interviews, stereotypical females are overly emotional and focused on appearance (especially in regard to heterosexual relationships and the desire to attract males).

Stereotypical females is a highly relational construct. The co-participants clearly delineate between themselves (the sexed self) and others (stereotypical females) (Layton, 1998). In contrast to the active taking up of athlete self identities, the interview responses suggest that female athlete identities are shaped significantly by rejecting the traits and attitudes of stereotypical females. The co-participants commonly expressed being "100% female, but *nothing* like the normal female!" Like the athlete self, stereotypical females are seen to be in flux. The impacts of time, experience, and others on what being female might mean are readily conceded ("We've come a long way, but there's more to go"), though it is likely that there are many other impacting social forces left unrecognized (Butler, 1993; Duncan, 1994; Hall, 1997b). For example, it is not coincidental that the co-participants' description of stereotypical females closely matches the results of content analyses of various media and sport media forms (Kane & Lenskyj, 1998; Women's Sports Foundation, 1999). The media has been shown to influence perceptions (Ghanem, 1997), and this seems to be part of the co-participants' experiences—even though they did not acknowledge the influence.

Mediated Images

The athletes in this study all believe they are very much in control of the way the media portrays them and that they know how to use the media to their advantage. Given the largely unconscious influences of media, society, and language (as already discussed), this seems unlikely. In fact, as the interviews reveal, the agency claimed by the athletes seems both to stem from and reinforce certain hegemonic beauty standards much more than it promotes the desired role modeling of new possibilities. In short, the athletes tended to end up posing in ways that mimic stereotypical females. This result marks an unconscious negotiation that was resolved in nearly uniform fashion.

According to the co-participants, one's mediated image should adopt just enough of a traditional appearance (read: what men want) to draw the attention of sponsors and spectators (read: men). Often the result is a display of heterosexual credentials (Lenskyj, 1992) such as children or a boyfriend/husband, which appears traditional in terms of role, decorum, or fashion and also reinforces a hegemonic hierarchy. For the co-participants, displaying "just enough femininity" means staying clear of an arbitrary and self-identified line beyond which the sexuality of the image clearly (i.e., consciously) undermines a portrayal of strength and competence desired by the athlete. Krane, et al. (2002) suggest that female athletes actively construct this line. The co-participants in this study each drew the line in a unique place, but each athlete noted that the desire to be a role model was an important factor in determining where it should go.

Negotiation and Cohesion

The Role of Modeling

Due to the strength with which the intent to role model was expressed in the interviews and the diverse contexts in which it was mentioned, it holds a central place within developing identities. This should not be equated with a "core identity." Rather, the intent to be a role model provides a sense of agency that allows for cohesion and intelligibility during the negotiation of identities (Layton, 1998)—somewhat like the nucleus of an atom provides the attraction that keeps its electrons from flying into space. On another level, Irigaray (1991a) contends that women in patriarchal societies cannot have agency since patriarchal thought does not recognize female subjectivity. Admittedly, there are multiple forces acting to limit the agency the co-participants claim (for example, that they are "completely in control" of their media images). Still, intending to role model seems to be a method for claiming a resistant position, as is expressing the sexed self as foundational and unitary. According to Layton (1998, p. 15), this "capacity to deny their essential lack or fragmentation by identifying as whole or unitary" is precisely where ego agency is located.

Several studies have indicated that women athletes and the sports in which they compete are not promoted by media sources as vigorously as men's sports and athletes are (see Davis, 1997, pp.141-144). The athletes in this study repeatedly asserted that without media coverage, their leagues and sports would not grow. Media representation, then, is established as both important and lacking. As it emerged from the interviews, the intent to role model seems to stem directly from the lack of available role models when the co-participants were growing up and the desire to share a "new and improved' version

of what stereotypical females can be. That is, having used athletic experiences to be able to make favorable comparisons to other females, the co-participants believe it is important to make sure little girls (and boys) get the chance to see them play and know that there are additional opportunities available for girls.

The overwhelming desire of the co-participants to be strong and attractive female role models, and to provide alternative definitions and possibilities for little girls, is approached in multiple ways. Research suggests it is unlikely female athletes can work from within the system and couple strength with traditional glamour and (hetero)sexuality in a completely liberating way (Krane, 2001). However, this is not to discount the co-participants' feelings of agency. It is possible that agency, in this case, works to resolve tension between the desire to secure endorsements (as a stereotypically "weak and passive" female) and the desire to be a role model (as a strong, athletic woman). Agency, then, may be taken up in the form of a conscious belief ("Do what you have to do to get the fans in the stands") that masks an unconscious acceptance that sex is the way women "get things done" (Layton, 1998). Clearly, this is not a linear or unchallenged task.

The strategies used to bring intelligibility and cohesion to these often conflicted and variable constructs are described in the following section. As both Layton (1998) and Butler (1990, 1997) note, it is these strategies—the processes used to make sense of conflicting desires—that can be thought of as self-identities. To better understand the identities of female athletes, the constructs must be linked into some coherent explanation of the negotiation that occurs between them. The information gathered from the interviews provides first hand understanding of this process. Since feminist research is

co-participatory, it is important for the researcher to link those first hand experiences to previous research in related areas—in this case, sport sociology, sport psychology, and postmodern theory. In this way, a more powerful and inclusive theory may be advanced.

An Uncertainty Metaphor

Given that identities are a dynamic process, rather than a fixed product, it is important to consider how this fluidity between constructs might be expressed. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe *process* as:

> A series of evolving sequences of action/interaction that occur over time and space, changing or sometimes remaining the same in response to the situation or context. The action/interaction may be strategic, taken in response to problematic situations, or may be quite routine, carried out without much thought. It may be orderly, interrupted, sequential, or coordinated—or, in some cases, a complete mess. What makes the action/interaction process is its evolving nature and its varying forms, rhythms, and pacing all related to some purpose (p. 165).

The purpose, in this case, is intelligibility, and the process under investigation relates to how and under what circumstances female athletes negotiate the needs of their sport and their gender (Krane, et al., 2002). Some of the questions this theory attempts to address are: What is taken up as desirable? What is rejected? Under what conditions do these processes occur?

While a three-dimensional, fully animated model would likely provide a better depiction of the messy and dynamic interactions under investigation, words will have to suffice. An effective metaphor for understanding the overall process is the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, which is used to describe electrons in orbit around the nucleus of an atom (Stedl, 2000). In short, the principle states that one may never know with complete certainty where, exactly, any particular electron is at any particular time.

Rather, the only the certainty is that the electron is in constant movement *somewhere* within a particular space mapped out as a probability density.

In addition to my appreciation for the irresistible irony in appropriating ideas from quantum physics to explain post-modern theories, the allure of the Heisenberg metaphor lies in two places. First, the uncertainty principle relates to a highly dynamic system of intricately interrelated parts. Second, Heisenberg reminds us that there are things that simply cannot be completely known because, like electrons in an atom, the act of exploring them changes them (Stedl, 2000). This was seen throughout the interview process as co-participants demonstrated the influence and social desirability of others on self-identities, through responses such as, "Has anyone else said that?" and "I'm trying to give you good answers here."

Rather than attempt to force (mis)understanding, then, it is important to acknowledge what can be explained and what must be left a mystery. Since identities are fluid, it is impossible to pin down exactly where someone might be at any given moment, rather, we can only postulate about the nature of the process. It is also important to realize that language limitations likely affect this theorizing just as they affected the responses of the co-participants during the interviews. Regardless of the potential limitations, it is possible, at this point, to set forth a theory about professional athletes' negotiation of identities in the presence of media images.

A Theory of Negotiated Identities

The identities of the interviewed female athletes can be thought of as the constant and varied interactions between the four key constructs explored in this study, and they become intelligible around the intent to be a role model. It should be noted that

theoretically, there are infinite combinations of interactions and, therefore, infinite identities. This theory does not propose to describe any specific identities, rather, like Heisenberg and the atom, it seeks to describe the general patterns of movement within which identities likely coalesce into meaning. To be able to discuss these processes, the individual identifies an arbitrary point where identity temporarily becomes fixed and can be examined (Hall, 2000). The athletes in this study uniformly identified the sexed self as a fixed point from which discussions about identities can start.

The sexed self is seen as the foundation of female athlete identities. This sexed female self rejects stereotypical females as limited and weak and takes up the athlete self to become an "enhanced female" with the ability to show others in society (especially stereotypical females) that greater opportunities are possible. Female body builders have also expressed the belief that physical conditioning leads to a "superwoman" identity (Fisher, 1997). This sense of superiority comes with an ego cost, however. The female athlete cannot completely redefine femininity in society because she must remain traditional enough to draw the attention of those who can help her gain exposure (i.e., the media). In order to bring awareness of her enhancements to the public (a vital step given the centrality of role modeling as an intent), the athlete self must establish a mediated image that can be disseminated to potential fans and supporters. Within the current system, this is accomplished through adopting traditionally feminine sex appeal. So, although the sexed self is defined or conceived in other than stereotypical terms, the athlete self must take up parts of stereotypical females in order to successfully complete the role modeling intent. There is clearly tension in this relationship. By taking up some qualities (primarily appearance) of stereotypical females, the athlete self both strengthens

and undermines her position. She gathers endorsements and fans—seen as an important part of the job of being an athlete, but she loses some of her power as an enhanced female (Krane, 2001).

Although the discussion so far seems somewhat linear, there are jumps and retreats throughout the process. For example, as noted, the adoption of a unified "femaleathlete" self may help ease the inner tension created by the need to simultaneously reject and take up stereotypical females. The femaleathlete does not differentiate between her sexed self and her athlete self. The benefit is that the "new" self (femaleathlete) can take up needed aspects of stereotypical females without feeling she's "selling out" the sexed self that has rejected them. This position is acknowledged through a sense of self as "an exception to the rule." However, there are situations in which the femaleathlete self is bypassed and the sexed self must deal directly with the expectations placed on her as a physical female in society. Krane, et al. (2002) have noted this paradox as well. Note that *physical* here has two meanings. On the one hand, she is seen, physically, to be a female. On the other, her muscles and activities establish her as a physical/active woman. Within this context, several of the co-participants expressed that being female provided them with opportunities they would not have as men. For example, the golfer commented that she would be a completely average (non-professional) male golfer. Additionally, most of the co-participants expressed joy at being a female and noted at least some instances of taking up aspects of stereotypical females. As one noted, "I'm still a girl, you know! I still act girly; I still act normal."

The image of the strong, attractive female has potential power to redefine sport and gender values in a way that could provide greater acceptance for the athlete self and,

therefore, less adherence to the sexed self. This catch-22 has been described in both sport literature (Krane, 2001) and in identity theories (Layton, 1998). One strategy described to attend to this tension is that there is a "time and place" where the taking up of socially determined traits is appropriate. Although the co-participants relate this selective appropriation of traits as a conscious choice ("I wear make-up because I want to look good."), it is likely that unconscious forces are at greater play here (Butler, 1990). Messner (1980) is representative of the sport sociologists who also note the coercive nature of hegemonic values on the athletic female. This taking in of an unwanted gaze is a type of self-monitoring that maintains the status quo and is rarely acknowledged by those who have internalized it (Duncan, 1994).

There is tension involved in reconciling the often-conflicting needs of society and sport (Krane, et al., 2002). The athlete self is a male-driven construct (from her earliest moments as "one of the guys") and this must be reconciled. The sense of femaleathlete as a job seems to accomplish this to some degree. It may be that this provides the space needed to remain a 100% sexed female (as all the co-participants avowed) while still engaging in a gender performative they acknowledged as "not-female." Given the binary nature of the conscious sexed self (as reported by the co-participants) it may be that female athletes are "putting on drag" in Butler's (1997) sense and engaging in their idea of male performative (as seen in sport). This clearly provides spaces in which sport can be redefined. It would be tempting to take Butler's argument up completely as a challenge to male-normativity in sport. Unfortunately, unlike gender, which has no legitimate claim to a particular sexual origin, sport has its historical (and media) roots firmly planted in male ground (Messner, 1988).

The co-participants have anticipated this difficulty, however, and offer a challenge of their own in the form of determination to become quality sport products for the media to capture. In this sense, the mediated image is used by the female athlete to reflect to stereotypical females (and anyone else who might be looking) that "women can be strong and attractive." As stereotypical females accept this more broadly defined female model, the athlete self becomes more accepted and societal/intrapsychic conflict between the sexed self and the athlete self may be reduced. That is, as society becomes more accepting of women as athletes, the female athlete might not experience her sexed self as a limitation imposed by a narrow social view of what is acceptable for females. Note that this fluidity provides an ever-changing context in which female athlete identities are developed.

Conclusions

The information gathered as a result of the interviews has allowed a more refined theory of female athlete identities to be advanced than those suggested by previous research. Based on the words of the co-participants, it seems identities remain unfixed and contextual. Certainly, for these co-participants, intending to role model results in a string of challenges and needs that may not be present in an athlete who does not care about what others think of her. A role-modeling female athlete must find a way to be both agent (for herself and others) and object (of others' gazes). The external observations of others have been found to become internalized as a way of self-policing one's adherence to social norms (Duncan, 1994). Under these circumstances, it is unlikely that negotiating identities can provide completely new definitions of gender. Instead, it seems that identities will represent the appropriation and internal negotiation of

society's (often hegemonic but also sometimes resistant) gender values. What seems clear, however, is that being an athlete both causes the need to take up aspects of stereotypical females, and also justifies taking up those values by promoting a sense of agency ("I am in control of my media images; I use them for my benefit.").

Additionally, although media representations weigh heavily in favor of promoting a "core" female athlete identity (ex., Kane & Parks, 1992), these women indicate dynamic fluctuations are the norm. Since the intent to role model is central to the identity process, it seems likely female athlete identities will remain in flux (i.e., changes will continue to be made visible and taken up/rejected on a continuous basis). The themes that emerged as integral to the identity process reflect the flux inherent in forming identities. This was especially apparent in the interaction between *Selling Sex* and *Creating a Quality Product* where the co-participants readily acknowledge the struggle of drawing a line in the face of social pressure. Less readily acknowledged was the degree to which using sex to sell serves to reinforce the gender norm the athletes are trying to change. Conflict was also revealed in the need to relate the sexed self to stereotypical females (generally as a rejection of values) and to the athlete self (generally as an elision). In all, identities seem to be a way of resolving—at least temporarily—the tensions inherent between often-conflicting constructs. This is a highly contextual and specific process that is influenced by one's positioning in society as well as the significant others and experiences one has along the way.

Each of the co-participants mentioned specific characteristics that place her in unique positions in society. Some of these traits relate directly to areas explored by cultural studies like class, race, and sexuality (Hall, 1997a, 1997b). For example, some

athletes noted that they had certain opportunities because their parents were able to financially support them in youth sport participation. Others noted that the income they received as a professional athlete was an issue that needed to be negotiated with significant others (notably a husband). One athlete mentioned the "double punch" of growing up black and female at a time when opportunities for both were limited. Finally, homophobia and heteronormativity were mentioned in several cases as having an impact on the image of various sports, and, by extension, on how the co-participants saw themselves as female athletes.

Other qualities that serve to establish the place of the co-participants relate directly to their role as an athlete. The golfer specifically noted that hers was not a very exciting sport relative to others (the "run faster, jump higher" sports were more real to her) and that this allowed her, as someone who worked hard to develop athlete qualities, to stand out in her field. Of special interest were the responses of the boxer relative to those of the tennis player. The tennis player was much less aware of her potential for counterhegemony. This may be due to her age (she was the youngest in the study and had the least professional experience), but it also seems likely that her participation in a female acceptable (Buysse, 1991) sport promoted an easier integration of the athlete self and the sexed self. It is likely not a coincidence that she is the one who was most directly vocal about her experience as a femaleathlete. The boxer, on the other hand, was very aware of herself as an oddity in a decidedly male sport. The impact for her was a much greater expression of separation between her sexed self and stereotypical females. Interestingly, she had the most blatantly sexualized image of all the athletes interviewed. Her "reconciliation" of this suggestive photo revealed great conflict. While she said it

was a good thing to do, her nervous laughter and constant glance away at the mention of it suggested discomfort.

Overall, there are multiple and contextual tensions involved in the identities of female athletes. The negotiation of these tensions (which can involve strategies such as ignoring, synthesizing, or separating) provides a sense of coherence that, in turn, allows a sense of agency. There are unconscious forces at work throughout this dynamic process that tend to limit the ability of the female athletes to achieve their desired goal of role modeling a “new female” for little girls, yet it also seems that some degree of redefinition is occurring. In short, it seems these athletes are paving the way for the next generation to step in and cover even more ground in terms of providing increased opportunities for both participation and identities in the future.

Recommendations

It should be noted that the negotiation of self-identities suggested by this study has applications far beyond sport and sport psychology. There are many situations in which people need to negotiate their values and cultural views against (or within) a specific sub-culture or social context in order to achieve a desired end result (for example, children in school or adults in the work place). In addition to the need to explore identities in alternative contexts, the results of this study prompt recommendations in two areas. First, there are areas of study that still need attention. Second, there are applications for sport psychology that should be noted. These are discussed in turn.

Areas for Future Study

The intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and sport are abundant. This study, in choosing to focus on gender, not in isolation, but as central, did not attempt to explore these other positions or the intersections created by their interaction. One possible future direction, then, would be to explore these positions more fully. For example, a study might explore the identities of female athletes of color or working class female athletes.

The relationship of athletes to the media continues to be one enmeshed in power dynamics (Ghanem, 1997; Hall, 2000; Kuhn, 1999). Recent studies have shown little improvement in the ways female athletes are portrayed in sport media directed at both men and women (Fink & Kensicki, 2002). Perhaps it is time to stop doing content analyses and shift towards gaining understanding of the alternative ways female athletes might successfully present themselves as counterhegemonic role models. It is more than a little disheartening that the co-participants have so readily accepted sexualized methods of presenting themselves.

The intent to be a role model implies desire to be the object of a consistent gaze. Duncan (1994) suggests this gaze is internalized and becomes a panoptic evaluative measure. The effects of this internal/external expectation for being observed are unknown, but it is likely to impact identity in some way. Future studies are needed to determine whether such internalization does occur, and, if so, to what extent and with what effect. Additionally, Title IX legislation has recently come under fire and could someday be revoked. What will the impact of this be on both athletes and little girls/boys? That is, what happens to identities when the youth base for whom role-

modeling occurs is reduced? Research into the long-term results of removing sport opportunities for youth is warranted.

Finally, the present theory represents a first attempt at explaining a very messy and fluctuating process. Additional interviews, perhaps coupled with more systematic exploration of actual images, will likely add detail and dimension that this initial study did not provide. As a goal, developing awareness and understanding of the conscious and unconscious processes associated with being a female athlete in a media-driven society are necessary for all those who work with athletes.

Applications for Sport Psychology

Like sport, sport psychology has its roots firmly planted in male soil (Roper, in press), and sport psychology consulting has its foundations in males working with male athletes. As women participate in greater numbers, sport psychology services must be prepared to meet the specific needs of female athletes. The co-participants in this study—women who compete at the highest possible levels—have identified that there is much more to being a female athlete than performance alone. The sport psychology consultant that provides performance enhancement training to the exclusion of all else may be missing important needs of the female athlete client. A similar concern relates to the predominant whiteness of the consulting field relative to the racial diversity of the athletes served. Since many of the tensions faced by female athletes are unconscious, it is unlikely that she will bring them up directly during a consulting session. The attuned consultant must, therefore, be aware of the varied and conflicting processes at work, and use this knowledge when formulating helping strategies.

There is a potential difficulty in achieving this insight, however, since many of these conflicting processes are unique to the female athlete (though some may also be present in, for example, male dancers and figure skaters), and nearly all of the "outstanding/expert" consultants are male (Ploszay, 2003; Statler, 2001). It could, therefore, be beneficial to both educate male consultants that these tensions exist, and to work as a field to provide opportunities for more females to consult with high-level athletes. To do the latter, it may be necessary to actively promote a model of "expert" consulting that is "outstanding" yet not traditional.

When consulting with female athletes at all levels, it may be helpful to explore the tensions involved in identity cohesion, especially for those athletes who are at developmental stages (ex., adolescence) where identities seem in greater flux. As a field, sport psychology can promote models of coaching, teamwork, and competition that promote easier reconciliation of the tensions involved in being a female athlete.

Finally, any efforts to promote media coverage of female athletes not centered on sexuality will likely be well spent. This is especially important in college settings, where women's media guides often are theme-based and can be mired in traditional, oppressive images (Buysse, 1991). One recent example involves the attention given to a Manhattanville College (New York) basketball player who conscientiously objected to the presence of United States' Armed Forces in Iraq by turning away from the American flag during the National Anthem. Although this act was framed in controversy, using political values rather than sexual ones to gain exposure potentially sends a much stronger counterhegemonic message about sport and gender. It is through acts like this that female athletes may finally reach their desired goal of being strong role models,

successfully and unambivalently showing society that the "old definitions" are not appropriate. By working with professionals in sport psychology, female athletes may help others realize some of the conflicting factors involved in identity formation and the ways media images impact what is taken up and rejected by the individual. In turn, this may help all members of society identify and experience more just opportunities to discover what it can mean to be female and athlete in our society.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Hello!

Thank you for your interest in helping with my dissertation research on the identity and image of female athletes. The purpose of the study is to learn more about what it means to be a female athlete, especially in light of national media coverage. There has been very little research done in this area, and even less that has specifically asked elite female athletes to discuss their experiences. That's where you come in!

I am looking forward to talking with you and to hearing your ideas and opinions about being a professional female athlete in our culture. The interview will take about 60 minutes, and will be audiotaped and later transcribed. You will be able to review the transcript to make sure you said what you meant, and make any necessary changes. If you choose, you can receive a copy of the results after all the interviews are analyzed. **Your responses will be kept strictly confidential throughout the entire research process.** During the interview, you will be asked to invent a fake name that will be attached to all your responses in the write-up.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time; but since you a part of a very select group of athletes, I sincerely hope you will choose to fully share your experiences and insights. If you have any questions, please email me at sgutkind@utk.edu or call me at (865) 974-0601.

I will meet you for your interview at ____________ on ______________________ ______ at ________________________________.

Thank you for your time and assistance!

Susan Gutkind
University of Tennessee, Knoxville
350 HPER Bldg.
Knoxville, TN 37996-2700
(865) 974-0601
sgutkind@utk.edu

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT
Identity and Image of Female Athletes

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose is to learn more about what it means to be a female athlete, especially in light of national media coverage. Your information will not be shared with any coach, league representative, or anyone else.

To participate in this study, you will first be asked to fill out a short demographic questionnaire. Then you will be interviewed for approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be audiotaped and later transcribed. You will receive a copy of the transcript to review and approve before data analysis begins.

All responses will be kept confidential, and your name will not be connected to your responses at any time. You will provide a pseudonym on the audiotape and that is the name that will appear throughout the study. The data will be stored securely, and it will be made available only to my dissertation advisor and me unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study. Your signed consent form will be kept in a secure location for three years after your participation (as per University of Tennessee policy), after which it will be destroyed. The actual tape of your interview will be destroyed at the completion of the study.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study) you may contact the researcher, Susan Gutkind in 350 HPER Bldg. or at (865) 974-0601. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact Research Compliance Services of the Office of Research at (865) 974-3466 or my advisor, Dr. Leslee A. Fisher at (865) 974-9973.

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Co-Participant's signature ____________________________ Date _________

Researcher's signature ____________________________ Date _________

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Sport ____________

Race ____________ Age _____________

How many years have you been involved in sports (of any kind)? _______

Years in competition at the Olympic level _____________
Years in competition at the Professional level ___________

Relative to other female athletes in your sport, how much **magazine/newspaper** media coverage have you received in your professional career?

None	Less			Average			More
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Relative to other female athletes in your sport, how much **television** media coverage have you received in your professional career?

None	Less			Average			More
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

How many hours each week do you spend reading sports-related magazines/books/news articles?

0 1-2 3-4 5-6 7-8 9 or more

How much of that is specifically about **female** athletes/sports?

0 1-2 3-4 5-6 7-8 9 or more

How many hours each week do you spend watching sports or sports news on television?

0 1-3 4-6 7-9 10-12 13 or more

How much of that is specifically about **female** athletes/sports?

0 1-3 4-6 7-9 10-12 13 or more

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
(Adapted from Fisher, 1997)

1. How would you describe athletes, in general?
   - How would you describe yourself as an athlete?
   - How is the way you see yourself as an athlete similar to the way you see athletes in general? How is it different?
   - How much of being an athlete is who you really are?
   - How has this changed over time?
   - How much of a role do significant others (family, friends, coaches, etc.) have in how you see yourself as an athlete?

2. How would you describe females, in general?
   - How would you describe yourself as a female? (additional prompts as above)

3. How would you describe yourself as a female athlete?
   - How similar/different to that of athlete?
   - How similar/different to that of female?
   - Has there ever been a conflict for you about this? Describe it.
     - How did you resolve the conflict?
   - How have your ideas/experiences about this changed over time?

4. What image of yourself as a female athlete do <u>you</u> project?
   - What important features/traits do you want others to see?
   - How do you project your image?

5. What image of you as a female athlete do you think the <u>media</u> projects?
   - Examples?
   - How is that image similar/different from how you see yourself?
   - How is that image similar/different from the image you project?
   - What images of female athletes stick out to you/ have impacted you?

DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS

Is there anything else you'd like to say about the topics we've discussed?
Was there anything in this interview that made you feel uncomfortable or hesitant?
Overall, how do you feel about the interview process and your responses?
Is there anything you'd like to ask me?

APPENDIX E

Confidentiality Statement by Transcript Readers

I understand that I will be reading transcriptions of confidential interviews provided by the co-participants of the study, "Identity and Image of Female Athletes." I understand that by signing this statement, **I am agreeing to keep the information that I read in the transcripts completely confidential**. I will also not discuss the transcripts or the discussion about the transcripts with anyone outside the research group. I acknowledge that any violation of this agreement constitutes a serious breach of ethical standards.

____________________________ ____________________________

Name Date

____

Signature

VITA

Susan Melania Gutkind was born in Los Angeles, California and lived there until 1984 when she entered college at the University of California, Riverside in Riverside, California. After graduating with honors (B.S., Psychobiology) in 1988, she attended the University of Nebraska, Lincoln and earned an M.A. in Counseling Psychology in 1990. From there, she moved to Oakland, California, received her K-12 teaching credential from St. Mary's College of California in Moraga, and taught middle school for the Oakland Diocese. After nearly ten years of service, and having been a master teacher, basketball coach, and junior high coordinator for five years, she moved to Tennessee to further her education. In 2003, she earned her doctorate in sport psychology from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Gutkind currently resides in Knoxville and is pursuing dual careers in Academic Counseling for Athletes and Sport Psychology Consulting. In addition to research interests concerning female athletes and the status of women's sport in general, she is interested in athletes' psychological responses to injury and rehabilitative therapy.