



AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Rodney C. Perry, Jr. for the degree of Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in Speech Communication, Sociology, and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies presented on March 2, 2015.

Title: Resisting Society's Influence: Selling Sex in Women's Professional Sports

Abstract approved:

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Title IX's passage into law in 1972 set women's sports on a course toward gender equity with men's sports at the scholastic and collegiate levels, leading to a definitive growth in women's professional leagues, corresponding athlete salaries, and athletic marketing and promotional prospects. However, disparities currently exist in the availability and type of marketing and promotional opportunities between male and female athletes, and more specifically, between white and black female athletes. As today's American culture has sought to reward women that push the envelope of their sexual identity and presentation, it is important to thoroughly explore the concept of selling sex in women's professional sports and then examine who is selling sex and why they are able to do so successfully. The general objective of this study is to contribute to the field of critical race theory, particularly in the area of selling sex in women's professional sports. Specifically, the aim of this study is to uncover disparities and highlight differing goals as they pertain to the commodification of white and black female athletes. In achieving that goal, this study analyzes the visual depictions of tennis stars, Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams, on *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers and in print advertising through the lens

of critical race theory to identify how these women were depicted and represented in the public eye as white and black female athletes. This study seeks to investigate, reveal, explain, and reason why white and black female athletes sell themselves differently within contemporary Western societies.

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Resisting Society's Influence: Selling Sex in Women's Professional Sports

by  
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A THESIS

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Rodney C. Perry, Jr., Author

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me along with the 'decoder lenses' that you have equipped me with through your classes. Thank you all for serving on my committee and guiding me through this process. I will forever be grateful.

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## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

With the passage of Title IX into law during the summer of 1972, women's athletics were officially put on a course toward gender equity with men's athletics at the scholastic and collegiate levels (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Frankl, 2004). Legislatively leveling the playing field in amateur sports nationwide, Title IX has produced results that have positively impacted women and young girls in areas of life beyond just the field or court (2002; 2004). Not only have women and young girls enjoyed the benefits of equal representation in scholastic athletics and athletic scholarship opportunities, but they have also seen a definitive growth in women's professional leagues, corresponding athlete salaries, and athletic marketing and promotional prospects (Lopiano, 2002; Shugart, 2003).

Women's athletics have increased in national and worldwide popularity and their professional aspirations and individual talents have been rewarded with growing financial opportunity (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Frankl, 2004; Lopiano, 2002; Shugart, 2003). While not yet approaching par with their male counterparts, scholars agree that significant growth has already been made while acknowledging that there is still a long road toward the complete realization of the goals that many women continue to express (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Frankl, 2004; Shugart, 2003). The gender equality fight of today's era in professional sports lies in the ways in which women's sporting leagues, commercial endorsers, marketing agents, corporations, and individual female athletes choose to market themselves and their respective sport in comparison to their male counterparts and with each other (Frankl, 2004; Lopiano, 2002; Lynn, Harden, &



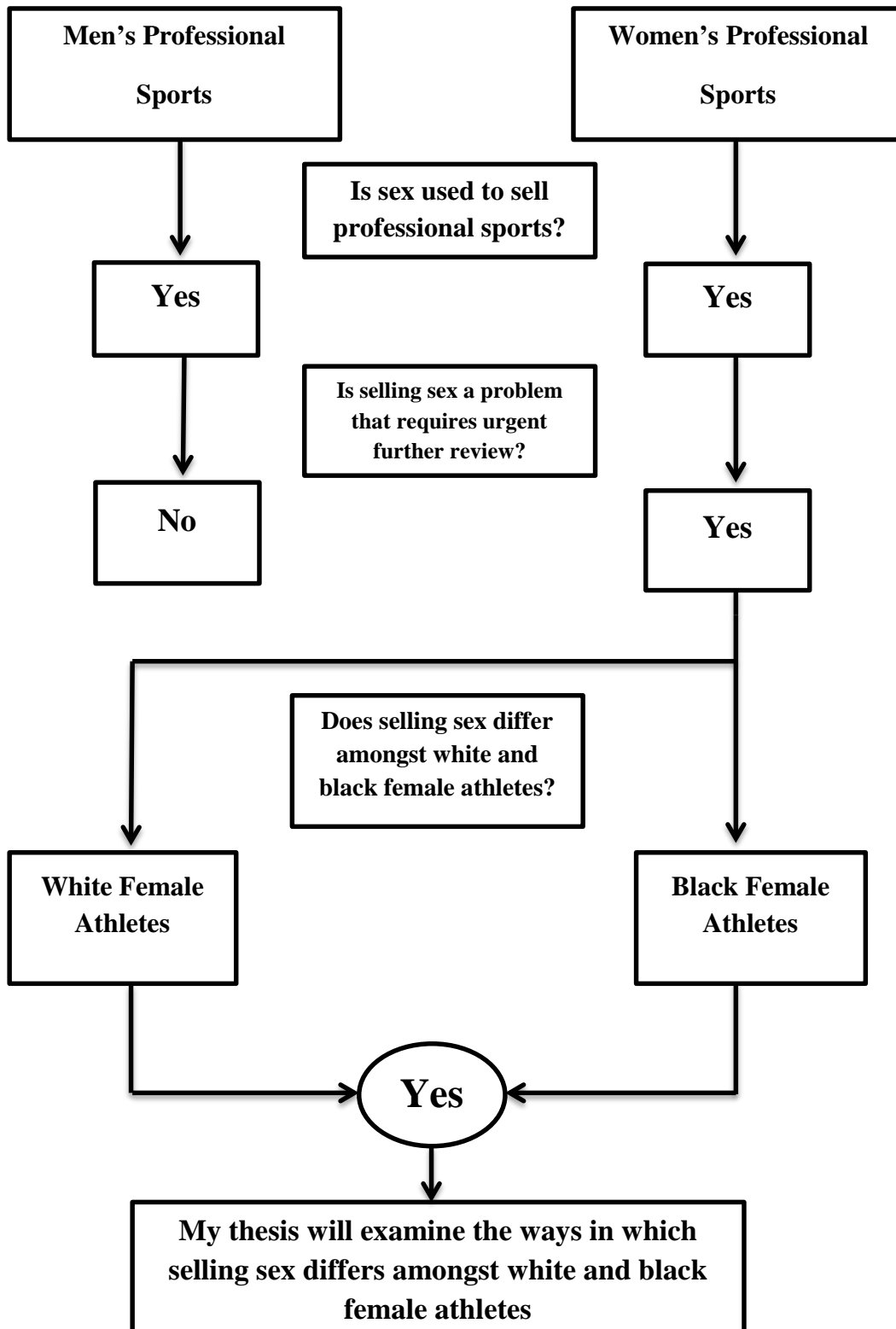
Walsdorf, 2004; Mars, 2009; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008; Shugart, 2003).

The crossroads that women's professional sports and female athletes are at today has to do with an oppressive structural system that maximizes the inequalities that women continue to face when attempting to capitalize on their marketability, increase their bankable income, and further the popularity of their respective sports (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Frankl, 2004; Lopiano, 2002; Mars, 2009; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008; Shugart, 2003). Disparities exist in the availability and type of marketing and promotional opportunities between male and female athletes, and more specifically, between white and black female athletes (Frankl, 2004; Lopiano, 2002; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008; Shugart, 2003). As today's American culture has sought to reward women that push the envelope of their sexual identity and presentation so long as it corresponds to what is considered socially acceptable in nature, it is important to thoroughly explore the concept of selling sex in women's professional sports and then examine who is selling sex and why they are able to do so successfully (Adams, 2011; Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008).

The general objective of this study is to contribute to the field of critical race theory, particularly in the area of selling sex in women's professional sports. Specifically, the aim of this study is to uncover disparities and highlight differing goals as they pertain to the commodification of white and black female athletes. A map of my thesis which explains the process that I utilized to settle on this topic is as follows (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

*My Thesis Map: The Process I Utilized to Settle on This Topic*



In this study, first, I investigated the following research question: Is sex used to sell women's professional sports? To achieve that goal, I reviewed and summarized the existing literature in my literature review chapter. Upon thorough review of the literature and as evidenced in my literature review chapter, I determined that sex is indeed used to sell women's professional sports. After concluding, through the literature, that sex is used to sell women's professional sports, I looked to further analyze just who is selling sex within our societies as female athletes and investigated a second research question: Does selling sex in women's professional sports differ amongst white and black female athletes? In my analysis chapter and to the achievement of that goal, I specifically examined and analyzed the visual depictions of two of women's tennis's most popular athletes, Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams in their respective *Sports Illustrated* cover shots and selected three print advertisements for analysis for each respective athlete to identify how these women were depicted and represented in the public eye as white and black female athletes.

My methodology chapter details the primary concepts of critical race theory, which I employed as the lens with which I analyzed my texts through, focusing on its history, practical application, and utilization in sports and through the sporting media. My methodology chapter also explains the process with which I chose the texts to be analyzed, my reasoning for choosing these texts, and how critical race theory will be utilized within my research.

First, in my analysis chapter, I documented Kournikova and Williams's pertinent biographical information regarding their upbringing, tennis career trajectories, and professional accomplishments to objectively evaluate the superiority of the two

respective athletes. In exploring my second research question, I examined both Kournikova and Williams's visual depictions in their respective *Sports Illustrated* cover shots and preselected print advertisements through the lens of critical race theory for possible explanations of the marketing differences between these two athletes. My analysis was utilized to uncover disparities between the ways in which both women were depicted in print advertisements in comparison to one another and paid close attention to the advertisement's targeted audience as well as the type of brand that each athlete was hired to endorse and represent. In accomplishing this goal, I utilized and applied the lens of critical race theory to my analysis of both women's visual depictions in print advertisements, their product endorsement types, and the advertisement's targeted audiences, which revealed important messages and values present in the commodification of white and black female athletes. Specifically, I used critical race theory to compare and contrast how each athlete was packaged, utilized, and sold to the public, and closely examined the differing manners in which each athlete was portrayed (model vs. athlete) as well as how each athlete's body was promoted through their advertisements (feminine vs. athletic strength and power). I also employed critical race theory to dissect who each respective athlete was selling their products to by examining the economic disparities between the various products' costs and the economic disparities of the intended targeted audiences.

My concluding chapter reveals the manners in which Kournikova and Williams have packaged their brands, sold themselves as endorsers of corporate products, and pinpoints the targeted audiences that each respective female athlete was utilized to reach through their respective print advertisements. I identify how these women are depicted

and represented in the public eye as white and black female athletes and uncover disparities between the ways in which both women are depicted on *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers and in print advertisements, in comparison to one another, paying close attention to the type of brands that they have been asked to endorse and represent. To accomplish this, I utilize and apply the lens of critical race theory to my analysis of both women's product endorsement types, the financial ranges of each athlete's targeted audiences, and each athlete's visual depictions on *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers and in print advertisements to investigate, reveal, explain, and reason why white and black female athletes sell themselves differently to the greater public. My concluding chapter also examines the broader race implications of selling sex in women's professional sports through the lens of critical race theory and assesses my concluding thoughts on my research from a general and overarching perspective before discussing the limitations of my study and offering suggestions toward the direction of future research in this field.

To begin my study, I will provide an overview of the academic literature concerning the selling of sex in women's professional sports to uncover some of the gaps that may exist in the literature, in addition to addressing my first research question for the purpose of this study: Is sex used to sell women's professional sports?

## **CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

As stated in the introduction chapter, Title IX legislatively put women's sports on equal footing with men's sports, leading to gender equity in amateur sports nationwide, the gradual ascent of female athletic participation, and the inspiration of women and young girls to become the future stars of tomorrow in their respective, competitive sport (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Frankl, 2004). As a result, collectively, women's athletics have continually increased their popularity and appeal, while individual female athletes have seen their achievements rewarded with growing incomes (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Frankl, 2004; Lopiano, 2002; Shugart, 2003). As women's professional sports have continued to grow since the inception of Title IX, the fight for gender equity in sports has shifted to the availability and type of marketing and promotional opportunities, not just between male and female athletes, but also between female athletes of varying physical appearances within contemporary Western societies (Frankl, 2004; Lopiano, 2002; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008; Shugart, 2003).

The crossroads that women's professional sports and female athletes are at today has to do with an oppressive structural system that maximizes the inequalities that women continue to face when attempting to capitalize on their marketability, increase their bankable income, and further the popularity of their respective sports (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Frankl, 2004; Lopiano, 2002; Mars, 2009; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008; Shugart, 2003). In short, individual superiority and team success tend to drive marketability in men's professional sports, while beauty, physique, and heterosexual flirtation, combined with minimum levels of adequate professional athletic

talent, tend to round out the package of the most marketable female athletes of this generation (Mars, 2009; Quinn, 2008).

I will begin this literature review by providing a review of the literature that studies the growth in female athletic participation and women's sports since the implementation of Title IX in 1972. After demonstrating the effect of Title IX on female athletic participation and gender equity in sports, I will examine the literature that focuses on gendered media bias. Next, I will discuss the sexualization of female athletes through the prism of the Lingerie Football League and then explore the concept of homophobia in women's sports as a cause for marketing heterosexual flirtation. Finally, I will present literature that concentrates on the marketing of women's sports and the individual female athlete, before offering my concluding thoughts regarding my first research question: Is sex used to sell women's professional sports?

### **More Female Athletic Participants Than Ever Before**

The past four decades have witnessed a steady growth in American women's sports programs along with a remarkable increase in the number of competitive female athletes (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Frankl, 2004; Shugart, 2003). In comparison to male participation, female athletes comprised 7.4 percent of all sports participants during the 1971-72 sporting season, just before the historic passing of Title IX legislation in 1972 (Frankl, 2004). Ten years after the passage of Title IX, the percent of NCAA female participants increased to 30.8 percent by the 1982-83 sporting season (Irick, 2013). Female participation has continued to model an upward trend in intercollegiate athletics, reaching 43.4 percent of all NCAA athletes by the 2012-13 sporting seasons (2013).

According to the NCAA's statistics, the proportion of females competing in Division I intercollegiate athletics increased to 46.3 percent in the 2012-13 sporting season, up from 44.1 percent in the 2002-03 sporting season and 33.2 percent in the 1992-93 sporting season (Irick, 2013). The average number of female participants per university increased to 184 in the 2012-13 sporting season, up from 156 in the 2002-03 sporting season and 116 in the 1992-93 sporting season (2013).

### **A Long History of Gendered Media Bias**

Based upon the statistics contained in the literature, Title IX appears to have achieved its desired impact in increasing female participation in sports as well as equalizing the funds provided to women's sports through its institutions. In the following sections I will present literature that explores and examines the history and means of a gendered media bias toward individual female athletes and women's sports in general. The literature suggests that oversexualizing the female athlete is a major concern and a potential root cause to the problem of gendered media bias toward individual female athletes and women's sports.

While competing at the Vancouver Winter Olympics, skier Lindsey Vonn won the downhill gold medal becoming the first American woman to achieve gold in this prestigious event (Kane, 2011). From 2008 to 2010, Vonn also won three consecutive World Cup championships, becoming the first American woman and second woman in history to accomplish such a feat (2011). As a result of her achievements, Vonn was named Sportswoman of the Year by the U.S. Olympic Committee. *Sports Illustrated* magazine, notorious for its lack of coverage toward women's sports, did not ignore Vonn's historic moment of achievement and awarded its cover to Vonn (2011).



However, *Sports Illustrated's* cover did portray Vonn as a sex object and further revealed the rampant sexual depictions of professional female athletes in the media (Kane, 2011; Lopiano, 2002; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008; Shugart, 2003). Rather than highlight and emphasize her athletic talents, *Sports Illustrated* depicted Vonn in a posed photograph while smiling at the camera in her ski regalia (Kane, 2011). "What was most visible and controversial about the pose was its phallic nature, as Vonn's backside was arched at a forty-five-degree angle while superimposed over a mountain peak" (Kane, 2011, p. 28).

As offensive as this portrayal may have been to some audience members, it came as no surprise to sports-media scholars (Kane, 2011).

"Over the past three decades we have amassed a large body of empirical evidence demonstrating that sportswomen are significantly more likely to be portrayed in ways that emphasize their femininity and heterosexuality rather than their athletic prowess"... "Newspaper and television coverage around the world routinely and systematically focuses on the athletic exploits of male athletes while offering hyper-sexualized images of their female counterparts" (Kane, 2011, p. 28).

According to Shari Dworkin & Michael Messner (2002), the sporting media provide considerably less and different types of coverage to female athletes and women's sports than to male athletes and men's sports. They further argue that sport helped create and now helps uphold a masculine hegemonic order in society, where men occupying positions of power and masculinity are more cherished than femininity (2002). In short, the old formula of building sexual attraction and selling sex to the audience remains as robust as ever (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Kane, 2011; Lopiano, 2002; Messner,

Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008; Shugart, 2003). Atlanta Beat defender Nancy Augustyniak, who recently finished third in a *Playboy.com* poll of the sexiest female soccer players, phrased the concept in simple terms: “Sex sells” (Kane, 2011, p. 28).

In 2011, major television networks in the U.S. devoted just 1.6 percent of their airtime to women's sports, down from 6.3 percent in 2004 (Adams, 2011). Across television and print media, women's sports make up approximately 8 percent of the overall sports coverage (2011). To investigate empirically whether sex truly sells women's sports, a series of focus group tests were conducted based on gender and age (18–34; 35–55) at the University of Minnesota (Kane, 2011). Mary Jo Kane spearheaded the collection of research by utilizing differentiated focus groups and their responses to debunk the common assumptions that sexualizing female athletes or downplaying their athleticism were necessary components in selling tickets, especially to the demographic group coveted by corporate sponsors who advertise to sporting audiences: young males (2011).

Study participants were shown photographs of female athletes ranging from on-court athletic competence, to wholesome girls next door, to soft pornography, and asked to indicate which images increased their interest in reading about, watching on television, and attending a women's sporting event (Kane, 2011). The findings revealed that in the vast majority of cases, a ‘sex sells approach’ offended the core fan base of women's sports, which are women and older men (Griffin, 2011; Griffin, 2012; Kane, 2011; Quinn, 2008). The representations of female athletes in sexy, pornographic, or non-athletic poses were disliked by women and older men and were more likely to turn them away from continuing their support of women's sports (Cunningham, Fink, & Kenix,

2008; Fink, Cunningham, & Kensicki, 2004; Kane, 2011; Quinn, 2008). In contrast, women and older men rated the images that portrayed athletic prowess as the ones most likely to positively influence their interest in women's sports (Kane, 2011).

Among the non-fan base participants and particularly among young men, the sexualized pictures that were viewed did not increase their interest in women's sports or in attending a women's sporting event, but did create individual fans of the sexy photographs that were viewed (Kane, 2011). Non-fan base participants and younger men who thought Serena Williams, Lindsay Vonn, and Danica Patrick's photographs were sexy did not indicate that they would become any more likely to support women's sports as fans. They did, however, just become fans of the sexy pictures that these women produced. In short, non-fan base participants liked the sexy pictures, but remained unchanged toward supporting women's sports (2011).

The widely held assumption that sexualizing female athletes is the most effective way to promote women's sports creates cognitive dissonance for those charged with marketing these sports (Cunningham, Fink, & Kenix, 2008; Fink, Cunningham, & Kensicki, 2004; Mars, 2009). Marketing campaigns for leagues, such as the WNBA, emphasize the wholesome nature of women's sports, highlighting the connection between fathers and their daughters. The underlying message is that women's athletics embrace traditional family values and their appeal cuts across generational lines, directly opposing the aforementioned assumption that sexualizing female athletes is most effective in promoting women's sports (Cunningham, Fink, & Kenix, 2008; Fink, Cunningham, & Kensicki, 2004; Quinn, 2008). Given this competing message, a 'sex sells strategy' is

highly counterproductive (Cunningham, Fink, & Kenix, 2008; Fink, Cunningham, & Kensicki, 2004; Mars, 2009).

Said one younger female in the focus group: “This image (of a WNBA player driving toward the basket) really sucked me in. I want to be there. I want to be part of that feeling” (Kane, 2011, p.29). One older male said, “If she (Serena Williams in a sexually provocative pose) was my sister, I’d come in, slap the photographer, grab her and leave” (Kane, 2011, p. 29).

However, many of those charged with covering and promoting women’s sports hold an entirely different view (Lopiano, 2002; Shugart, 2003). The ‘sex sells strategy’ remains deeply embedded among sports journalists and marketers, who also believe that reaffirming traditional notions of femininity and heterosexuality are critical sales strategies (Burroughs & Nauright, 2000; Dworkin & Messner; Lopiano, 2002; Lynn, Harden, & Walsdorf, 2004; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008; Shugart, 2003). This approach reassures male fans, corporate sponsors, and television audiences that women can engage in highly competitive sports while retaining a nonthreatening femininity (Burroughs & Nauright, 2000; Dworkin & Messner; Mars, 2009; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Shugart, 2003). Scholars have long argued that a major consequence of the media’s tendency to sexualize women’s athletic accomplishments is the reinforcement of their status as second-class citizens within the sporting world, which is one of the most powerful economic, social, and political institutions on Earth (Burroughs & Nauright, 2000; Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Lopiano, 2002; Mars, 2009; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008; Shugart, 2003).

Edward Kian (2007) argues that mass media assist in maintaining sport as a masculine hegemonic domain and contends that sport serves as a hegemonic institution to preserve the power of men over women. According to Kian (2007), the media has reinforced the differences between the sexes in at least four different ways. First, media serve to perpetuate a male-dominated sports hegemony by simply refusing to cover, or very minimally providing coverage to female athletes and women's sports. Second, the limited overall coverage of female athletes, in turn, results in the general public underestimating the number of women participating in competitive athletics. Third, the sporting media often only cover sporting events that help reinforce stereotypical feminine images and portrayals of women athletes. Finally, Kian (2007) argues that when sport media professionals do cover female sporting events, they often minimize or trivialize women's athletic accomplishments through their use of language or commentaries. In doing so, media images that emphasize femininity and sexuality or trivialize the accomplishments of female athletes actually suppress interest in, not to mention respect for, women's sports (Kane, 2011). The key takeaway: Sex sells sex, not women's sports (Cunningham, Fink, & Kenix, 2008; Fink, Cunningham, & Kensicki, 2004; Kane, 2011; Lopiano, 2002; Mars, 2009; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008; Shugart, 2003).

### **Resisting the Urge to Pander to the Key Sporting Audience Demographic:**

#### **Men Aged 18-35**

Given this long and extensive history of gendered bias in sport, I will explore the link between common sporting audience viewing demographics and their relationship to the marketing of women's sports. In the following section I will present literature that

explores the pursuit of the prime targeted audience demographic, which are men aged 18 to 35, and link the sexualization of female athletes to the pursuit of that specific audience demographic.

Christine Brennan, a sports columnist for *USA Today* and a consultant for *ABC News*, says women's sports need to progress in their marketing approach: “We seem to be still pandering to the frat house when many viewers of women's sports are 12-year-old girls with their 40-year-old dads” (Donvon, 2012, p. 2).

The Ladies Professional Golf Association offered appearance training to about sixty of its members in 2002, stating that appearance is one pillar of their five-point plan, meant to attract more fans to their sport (Donvon, 2012; Isidore, 2002). The full day of instruction included aid from fashion designer and hair-stylist John Barrett and makeup artist Trish McEvoy, who helped give the athletes beauty tips, such as how to make their hair appear more touchable, for example. LPGA commissioner Ty Votaw insists that, first and foremost, his sport emphasizes athletic performance, but that athletic performance alone is not enough to build strong ties between the league's players and its fans (Donvon, 2012; Isidore, 2002). While some executives worry about a backlash from families and young female fans if the promotion of a player's sexuality goes too far, others see sex appeal as an important component of the product that they have to sell, in a market where competition with other sports for the attention of fans is always intense (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Isidore, 2002; Lopiano, 2002; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008; Shugart, 2003).

Women's United Soccer Association President Lynn Morgan has been pleased but not surprised that none of her players have agreed to pose for *Playboy* (Isidore, 2002).

Morgan has concerns that if a female soccer player posed nude it would cause a backlash with parents and young female fans, which make up a majority of ticket buyers and subsequently, would not attract any additional male fans to the games, stating: “If we market ourselves as anything other than what we truly are, we become a one-hit wonder with the fans we do attract” (Isidore, 2002, p. 1).

*Playboy.com* sports editor, Blair Fischer, had a different take: “If we had gotten a soccer player to pose, I think privately the league would have said it was a great thing, while publicly they would have said it was a bad thing. The average person doesn't know who Heather Mitts is. If she poses, it makes news, and people are going to have interest in that person” (Isidore, 2002, p. 2).

According to the study conducted by the *Tucker Center for Research of Girls and Women in Sport* at the University of Minnesota, sexualized photos of female athletes do not necessarily promote or encourage people to follow women's sports and they do not make anyone more likely to attend a women's sporting event or boost ticket sales (Kane, 2011; Quinn, 2008). Researchers at the University of Minnesota concluded that sexualized photos are actually undermining women's sports because most women are turned off by them (Kane, 2011; Quinn, 2008). Women who become active and involved in sports respond to images of strong, competent women, and the sexualized pictures actually turn them away from sports (Cunningham, Fink, & Kenix, 2008; Fink, Cunningham, & Kensicki, 2004, Kane, 2011; Quinn, 2008). The young men who do like the sexualized photos are not any more likely to attend a women's sporting event (Cunningham, Fink, & Kenix, 2008; Fink, Cunningham, & Kensicki, 2004; Kane, 2011; Quinn, 2008). Pat Griffin, professor emeritus in the social justice education program at

the University of Massachusetts Amherst, argues that exciting competition, whether the athletes are men or women, is what definitively sells sports (Griffin, 2011). The portrayal of athletes in the media as the strong, tough, talented, competitive people that they are, sells sports (2011).

### **Media Patronization of Women's Sports**

Due to the importance of proper portrayals of female athletes and women's sports through the media, it is also important to examine the ways in which female athletes are patronized and women's sports are trivialized through the media. Therefore, in the subsequent section I will present literature that focuses on the patronization of female athletes and women's sports through the media.

The real problem of bias against women reveals itself through further examination of examples on television (Abraham, 2004). Zennie Abraham, Chairman and CEO of Sports Business Simulations and a former economic advisor to the mayor of the city of Oakland, conducted a study that examined the different ways that male and female athletes were talked about and visually portrayed through the media (2004). The general results of Abraham's 2004 study add to earlier findings that the media continues to reinforce the categorization of sports according to traditional views on gender-appropriateness, which in turn affect the female athlete's attitudes regarding her own, as well as others', sports participation (2004). The overarching finding from this study was that the news media consistently contributed to the reproduction of traditional expectations for men and women, while also contributing to the construction of a social stratification that enhances and naturalizes gender differences (2004). Subtle habits, such as calling female athletes by their first name (Anna), where male athletes are called by



their last name (Jordan), causes the marginalization of female athletes, especially in sports regarded as masculine (Abraham, 2004; Frankl, 2004). However, failing to give significant coverage to women's sports on news telecasts are the underpinnings of the true bias against women's sports (Abraham, 2004).

Abraham goes on to make a corresponding point that fixating upon hiding women's bodies will not save women's sports either (Abraham, 2004). Asking Brandi Chastain to not remove her soccer jersey during the next World Cup celebration or preventing Anna Kournikova from shooting sexually suggestive music videos, ultimately, will not alter women's sports in the long run (2004). In fact, Abraham believes that in the widespread pursuit for the attention of the consumer, well-timed, sexually suggestive acts committed by physically fit, attractive women may cause women's sports to explode in popularity (2004). Athletes, in general, command endorsement dollars to market their sports and related products and have two corresponding avenues to increase their earnings; being good or being sexy (Abraham, 2004; Lopiano, 2002; Quinn, 2008).

The 'good or sexy approach' yields new avenues for sports marketers, provided they can successfully produce an argument to corporations that female athletes are bankable (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000). To do this, more, not fewer, male consumers must be captured (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000). To offer proof to Abraham's point, she cites the cancellation of the magazine, *Sports Illustrated for Women*. Abraham reasoned that the magazine's content was targeted solely at a female audience, rather than both male and female groups of casual sports consumers (Abraham, 2004). The problem is that women's sports and women's sports content cannot count on an exclusively female audience to consistently

generate profit (Abraham, 2004; Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000). An approach that appeals to both men and women is the key to success and, as a result, notions of conventional masculinity and femininity persist (Dworkin & Messner, 2002). Dworkin & Messner contend that sport, as a cultural and commercial production, constructs and markets gender, arguing that besides increasing profit, defining and highlighting gender may be sports' primary functions (2002).

But as *Playboy* magazine on its web-site now holds polls for the sexiest women in soccer, basketball, golf, and tennis, and as the organizations that run these sports seem to be enthusiastic about anything that will get more men to watch the games, there is an evident backlash from athletes who say that this approach is misguided (Roenigk, 2009). The sexualization of women's sports disregard women's athletic talent in favor of forcing them into competition for the sexiest photograph pose (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Lopiano, 2002; Mars, 2009; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008; Shugart, 2003).

Mariah Nurton, an author who as Mariah Burton Nelson, played basketball professionally and for Stanford University said, "There's no evidence that it has ever helped a sport to expose women or to sexualize women. Women have always been degraded by being disrobed and that option will always be open to women. And women will be offered a lot of money to take their clothes off. But what happens when they do is that they lose respect. It's a mistake for female athletes to agree to do that and it can be damaging to all of women's sports when female athletes are seen as sex objects rather than as athletes" (Donvon, 2012, p. 2).

World Tennis Organization CEO Kevin Wulff does not apologize for the marketability of their players off the court, stating, “They are attractive and they are fit. They are recognized as some of the greatest athletes in the world” (Donvan, 2012, p. 1). Wulff summarizes that other magazines show anorexic women and celebrities like Paris Hilton, but this is about showing off our athlete’s athleticism and how fit they have to be to play at this level (Roenigk, 2009).

### **The Lingerie Football League Effect**

Given the history of female athlete patronization and the general trivialization of women’s sports, I look to a specific example in the form of the Lingerie Football League since it appears to be the most egregious example of selling sex in women’s professional sports, to date. In the following section I will present literature that focuses upon The Lingerie Football League, or LFL as it is commonly referred to, which is a fledgling women’s football league that explicitly markets sex to its audience, as its female participants play American-style, tackle football wearing nothing but protective padding and lingerie.

LFL founder Mitchell Mortaza believes that selling sex may be the only way for women's professional sports to survive, and points toward recent history to reinforce his theory (Businessweek.com, 2010). Despite the rising popularity of the sport, the Women's United Soccer Association disbanded in 2003. The Women's National Basketball Association, while heavily subsidized by the National Basketball Association, has seen several franchises fold. In recent years, prize money for the Ladies Professional Golf Association, which has never equaled that of the men's tour, has fallen (2010). Professional Women's Beach Volleyball folded in 1998 before being restarted again in

2001. Women's tennis has come close to rivaling the popularity of its male equivalent, but sex appeal is a major part of the marketing and promotional package (Businessweek.com, 2010; Lopiano, 2002). Anna Kournikova, once among the sports' highest endorsement earners, regardless of gender, never won a Women's Tennis Association professional singles tournament (Businessweek.com, 2010). As Serena Williams alluded to during a 2009 Wimbledon press conference while wearing a t-shirt with the phrase, Are You Looking At My Titles?, printed across her chest, sex does indeed sell in women's professional sports (Businessweek.com, 2010; Mars, 2009; Roenigk, 2009). And if sex truly sells, then perhaps that is why the LFL is continuing to grow (Businessweek.com, 2010).

LFL player contracts stipulate that players must cope with the possibility of accidental nudity during competition and it is a risk that many women are willing to take (Businessweek.com, 2010). Mortaza claims that upcoming seasons, which culminate on Super Bowl Sundays in Las Vegas, are projected to be even better than previously expected. By 2010, the LFL was 260 percent more profitable than at the same point in 2009 and Mortaza is projecting continued growth beyond the U.S. market in the future. The LFL has held games in Mexico City and Tokyo while maintaining immense popularity in Australia (2010).

Academic scholars have quite an opposite viewpoint of the LFL and what it represents for women's sports and female athletes (Businessweek.com, 2010; Mars, 2009). Michael A. Messner, a professor of gender studies at the University of Southern California, and colleagues, call the LFL a setback to both sports and society, as leagues like the LFL trivialize the totality of women's sports and work to reinforce and further

normalize the objectification of women in current society (Businessweek.com, 2010). Kane (2011) claims that the LFL is primarily packaging and selling sex to the younger male audience demographic group, to the general detriment of women's sports and female athletes in totality (Businessweek.com, 2010; Kane, 2011).

### **Homophobia as the Cause for Marketing Sex and Heterosexual Flirtation**

In the subsequent section I will present literature that explores the concept of homophobia as a root cause for individual expressions of heterosexual flirtation in women's sports, especially amongst female athletes competing in sports that have traditionally been regarded as masculine in nature.

In May 2011, the World Badminton Federation, hoping to raise the sport's popularity, proclaimed that starting June 2011, all female players must wear skirts on the court to ensure the attractive presentation of badminton (Adams, 2011). Widespread outrage from both players and fans forced the federation to review its decision (2011). However, it is not only organized sporting bodies that try to capitalize on notions of femininity (Adams, 2011; Mars, 2009; Quinn, 2008). Mindful that they need to establish their personal brands while they are competitive athletes, and that those brands must last long after they have decided to retire from their sport, a number of current female athletes portray themselves less as athletes and more as pinups (Adams, 2011; Burroughs & Nauright, 2000; Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Mars, 2009; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008). For example, five of Germany's professional soccer players posed in German *Playboy* in their underwear just before the commencement of the Women's World Cup (Adams, 2011). German midfielder Kristina Gessat said, "We want to

disprove the cliché that all female footballers are butch. The message is: look, we are very normal, and very lovely, girls!” (Adams, 2011, p. 3).

Marie Hardin, associate director of the *John Curley Center for Sports Journalism* at Penn State, claimed “That [homophobia] is a huge part of this. There's this idea of the lesbian bogeywoman; the predatory lesbian in sports. Unfortunately, there's a real fear mongering that doesn't help women's sports at all” (Adams, 2011, p. 3). Also that fall, U.S. skier Lindsay Vonn re-created Sharon Stone's infamous crossed-legs scene in *Basic Instinct* on the cover of *ESPN the Magazine* (Roeningk, 2009). In response to Vonn's cover, Hardin of Penn State commented, “[That] there's a real tension there. What female athletes choose to do to empower themselves personally, does oftentimes chip away at the collective power of female athletes and of women's sports” (Adams, 2011, p. 3).

There are very real connections between homophobia and sexism in sport and how they affect the ways that female athletes try to counteract the masculine and lesbian associations that are placed on them because of their athleticism (Burroughs & Nauright, 2000; Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998; Hudson, 2011). Treading a step further than the connections made in the A.B. Hudson article, *The “selling of Candice Parker” and the diminishment of women's sports*, regarding how homophobia and sexism lead many female athletes, particularly straight female athletes, to defend themselves from the lesbian label, leads to a central point asserted by Pat Griffin. Griffin (2012) asserts that homophobia and sexism in women's sports are at the root of on-going discrimination and harassment of all female athletes who are perceived to be, or who actually are, lesbians.

According to Griffin (2012), in short, homophobia and fear of being perceived as a lesbian athlete can influence the individual female athlete into choosing to market herself through heterosexual flirtation techniques, such as objectifying herself in ads to reinforce her sexuality and flirt with the assumed heterosexual audience, for example. Since the sporting world has traditionally been viewed as masculine territory, the female athlete can feel alienated by false perceptions of masculinity or homosexuality, thus perpetuating a cycle of self-objectification in women's sports (Burroughs & Nauright, 2000; Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998; Griffin, 2011; Griffin, 2012). Ultimately, the controversy surrounding the portrayal of female athletes comes down to the context in which society is comfortable looking at women (Adams, 2011; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Shugart, 2003).

### **The Marketing Trap**

Given the history of female athletes marketing heterosexual flirtation to a predominantly male sporting audience, it is important to examine the literature pertaining to the marketing of women's sports. In the following sections I will present literature that examines the marketing of women's sports and explores the use of female athletes as endorsers of corporate products.

No matter the reason, a female athlete's willingness to openly display her beauty and flaunt her body is a marketer's dream (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008; Shugart, 2003). After all, sports, including women's sports, are an industry run by and geared toward men (Adams, 2011; Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008; Shugart, 2003). Neal Pilson, a former president of CBS Sports who now works as a television consultant to the LPGA, and

whose own audience is estimated to be 57 percent male, agrees with the assertion that the vast majority of the audience for sports is male (Adams, 2011; Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000). By comparison, the Women's Tennis Association is estimated to have a 60 percent male audience and the Women's National Basketball Association's audience is estimated to be 66 percent male (Adams, 2011). Sports executives calculated long ago that the draw for women's sports (great athletes who are great-looking) is different from that of men's sports (great athletes in great games) (Burroughs & Nauright, 2000; Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Lopiano, 2002; Roenigk, 2009; Shugart, 2003). While analysts comment about what is just and fair, contending that women deserve more airtime and that advertisers are too shallow, however, their words seem to go unnoticed (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Roenigk, 2009). In the sports world, ticket sales, demand for the product, and ratings drive everything else (Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Roenigk, 2009; Shugart, 2003).

The marketing of sports is no different than the marketing of movies, music, or any other form of entertainment (Roenigk, 2009). However, the women's leagues that struggle, such as the LPGA and the predominantly female-run WNBA, cling to the idea that, because women have fought long and hard to even the playing field, they have moved past the need to use sex appeal to sell their game, instead relying predominately upon the talent of their athletes and the maintenance of a wholesome family image (2009). WNBA president Donna Orender defends the league's strategy, saying, "Since the inception of our league, we have presented talent first. Our players have incredible appeal based on their athleticism, passion, and personalities" (Roenigk, 2009, p. 1).



Nonetheless, the WNBA's regular-season ratings have remained largely flat in recent years, hovering around a .2 television rating, in part because the WNBA is repeating the mistake that women's pro soccer made earlier this decade; failing to adequately market their sport and their athletes to men (Roenigk, 2009). League executives survey the attending crowd and market a wholesome image to the few thousand fans they see at the events (women, children, families) instead of a more provocative and potentially compelling message to the many thousands of observers that they don't see who are watching the games on television from their homes (men) (2009). Former executive Neal Pilson comments, "The women and kids in the stands are not watching on TV. There is the potential to reach many more men watching from home" (Roenigk, 2009, p. 2).

Jason Hodell, CEO of the Association of Volleyball Professionals, represents a different marketing strategy that utilizes what he believes are his league's assets and defends his league's provocative advertising campaign, saying, "Part of what makes pro beach volleyball special is the beautiful nature of the sport. We have the beach, the sun, and amazing athletes who are fit and tan. Our current ad campaign takes advantage of that" (Roenigk, 2009, p. 2). The ads, most of which feature close-ups of male and female players' shoulders, abdominal muscles, and buttocks are meant to draw fans to the beach and to their television sets (Bessell & Duke, 2007; Roenigk, 2009). Once the audience's attention is grabbed, they theorize that the action will keep them there (Bessell & Duke, 2007; Roenigk, 2009). The AVP is proud of their marketing campaign and the woman responsible for it, Kristine Lefebvre, VP of business development and legal affairs for the AVP, who also posed naked for the June 2007 issue of *Playboy* (Roenigk, 2009).

### **Taming the Marketing Beast**

Women's tennis has produced some of the most successful and financially lucrative endorsers of corporate products. In the following section I will present literature that further explores the use of female athletes as endorsers of corporate products, by specifically examining the strategic successes of current women's tennis stars Maria Sharapova and Serena Williams.

Marketing and endorsement strategists tend to operate by their own rules (Abraham, 2004; Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Lopiano, 2002; Lynn, Harden, & Walsdorf, 2004; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008; Shugart, 2003). The athletes and leagues that understand how to combine achievement with savvy public relations reap the rewards of their work (Abraham, 2004; Roenigk, 2009). In recent years, some of the biggest success stories have come from women's tennis, where Serena Williams and Maria Sharapova are as prosperous off the court as they are gifted on it (Lopiano, 2002; Roenigk, 2009). They both know that with captivated audiences surveying them in outfits that leave little to the imagination, female athletes do not need to try hard to package and market their attractiveness (Roenigk, 2009). In fact, they use the stage (field, court, etc.) to craft their own personal images. Serena Williams promotes her body as an instrument of empowerment, sending an appealing message to big brands such as Nike, Gatorade, and Tampax. Sharapova, who has repeatedly turned down *Playboy* offers, sells polish and refinement on the court, making her a magnet for high-end sponsors like Cole Haan, TAG Heuer, and Tiffany & Co. Sharapova's agent, Max Eisenbud, does not want to associate her brand with sex. Both Williams and Sharapova's levels of success make it difficult to argue with either approach. Each woman earns more

per year in endorsements, an estimated \$22 million for Sharapova and \$14 million for Williams, than male NFL or NBA stars Peyton Manning, Tom Brady, or Kobe Bryant (2009).

Linda Blum, a sociology professor at Northeastern University, comments, “It is a very contradictory time. On one hand, women having opportunities to market their [own] bodies represents their achieving a new role as respected athletes who are in control. But those opportunities can also be seen by some to reinforce old-fashioned, negative ideas of women as sex objects” (Roenigk, 2009, p. 4). One women’s volleyball great, who wanted to remain anonymous, said “I was the best in the world, but never the most famous in my sport. It kicked sand in my face. The beautiful model got the attention. To this day, people think Gabby Reece is the best who ever played. She was bigger than volleyball, and I don't blame her for it. But if you are the best in your sport and the hot girl with average talent gets all the attention, then that is really frustrating” (Roenigk, 2009, p. 5).

The applicable lesson is that the marketing of sports is not fair (Abraham, 2004; Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Lopiano, 2002; Lynn, Harden, & Walsdorf, 2004; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008; Shugart, 2003). The athletes who accept that fact and figure out how to use it to their benefit are the athletes that people remember (Roenigk, 2009). Olympic swimmer Amanda Beard phrased her thoughts and approach to self-promotion in the following: “To be marketable is to be memorable. Some people will remember me for my swimming, and some will remember me for my *Playboy* shoots. But either way, they will remember me” (Roenigk, 2009, p. 5).

### **Conclusions Moving Forward**

First, this literature review studied the growth in female athletic participation and women's sports since the implementation of Title IX legislation in 1972, demonstrating the positive effect of Title IX on female athletic participation and gender equity in sports. Subsequently, I presented literature that focused upon gendered media bias in sports from various angles, perspectives, and viewpoints, and discussed the pursuit of the key sporting audience viewing demographic; men aged 18-35. Next, I presented literature that explored the media's patronization of women's sports and looked to a specific example in the form of the Lingerie Football League to examine the sexualization of female athletes. The ensuing section explored the concept of homophobia in women's sports as a cause for marketing heterosexual flirtation. Finally, I presented literature that concentrated on the marketing of women's sports and the individual female athlete, specifically examining the use of female athletes as endorsers of corporate products and the strategic successes of women's tennis in producing financially lucrative endorsers of corporate products.

After thorough review of the literature pertaining to the selling of sex in women's professional sports, I can confidently answer my first research question (Is sex used to sell women's professional sports?) by asserting that sex is undoubtedly used to sell women's professional sports. As women's professional sports have continued to grow since the inception of Title IX, the selling of sex has been utilized in the process to expedite that growth. As a result, certain individual female athletes have been elevated in stature based primarily upon their physical appearances, and our society's acceptance of their physical appearances, rather than their athletic prowess in their sport. While

individual superiority and team success tend to drive marketability in men's professional sports, beauty, physique, and heterosexual flirtation, combined with minimum levels of adequate professional athletic talent, tend to be enough to package and sell the most marketable female athletes of this generation (Mars, 2009; Quinn, 2008). The crossroads that women's professional sports and female athletes are at today has to do with an oppressive structural system that maximizes the inequalities that women continue to face when attempting to capitalize on their marketability, increase their bankable income, and further the popularity of their respective sports (Dworkin & Messner, 2002; Frankl, 2004; Lopiano, 2002; Mars, 2009; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Quinn, 2008; Shugart, 2003).

Since an oppressive societal structural system ultimately causes some women to use sex to increase their personal marketability and further the popularity of their sport, the availability and type of marketing and promotional opportunities between female athletes of varying physical appearances, and more specifically, varying races and ethnicities, should be further examined. Therefore, since the literature confirms that sex is used to sell women's professional sports, I looked to closely examine that process and how it differs along racial lines according to the societal definitions of beauty that Western societies apply.

Consequently, media and race will be addressed in the next chapter, where I will begin working towards answering my second research question: Does selling sex in women's professional sports differ amongst white and black female athletes? To accomplish this goal, my analysis chapter will analyze the visual depictions and representations of women's tennis athletes, Anna Kournikova (white) and Venus

Williams (black), on their respective *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers and in print advertising to uncover how these female athletes are packaged, marketed, and sold to the greater public.

The type of endorsement opportunities available to both women along with the manner in which they are depicted in *Sports Illustrated* and in print advertisements will reveal important messages and values present in the commodification of white and black female athletes and further illustrate just who is allowed to sell sex within our societies as female athletes. Since beauty is subjective to the observer and a society collectively defines who and what are deemed beautiful and desirable within that society, important cultural and societal messages and values will also be revealed and highlighted in regards to the female athletes it chooses to sexualize and lust over. In order to further analyze the selling of sex in women's professional sports, I will apply and utilize the lens of critical race theory to my analysis.

However, in the next chapter, I will first thoroughly explain critical race theory, its primary concepts, history, and practical application before presenting a comprehensive explanation of how critical race theory will be applied in my study. I will also explore how critical race theory has been utilized in sport and detail how critical race theory will be used within my research. Also in the next chapter, I will detail the process in which I chose the print advertisements to be analyzed and thoroughly explain my reasoning for choosing those advertisements.

## **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

In order to further investigate the selling of sex in women's professional sports, I am analyzing the visual representations of women's tennis athletes, Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams, on *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers and in print advertising. Since the literature suggests that sex is not only used to sell women's professional sports, but that selling sex is also a prominent theme in women's professional sports, I will analyze the *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers and print advertisements featuring Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams to uncover how these female athletes are depicted and represented in the public eye, as well as the implications of their depictions in comparison to one another.

The type of endorsement opportunities available to both women along with the manner in which they are depicted on *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers and in print advertisements will reveal important messages and values present in the commodification of white and black female athletes. In order to further analyze the selling of sex in women's professional sports, I will utilize and apply the lens of critical race theory to my analysis of both women's product endorsement types and visual depictions on *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers and in print advertisements. Prior to a comprehensive explanation of how critical race theory will be applied in my study, critical race theory must be thoroughly explained. The next section of my methodology chapter will explain the primary concepts of critical race theory, focusing on its history and practical application. In the following section, I will also discuss how critical race theory has been utilized in sport and detail how critical race theory will be used within my research.

Later in this section, I will detail the process in which I chose the advertisements to be analyzed and thoroughly explain my reasoning for choosing those advertisements.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory was born as part of the resistance to retrenchment following the Civil Rights Movement, but “the genealogy of critical race theory reveals a contextual and historical relationship to critical legal studies and ethnic social movements that date back to W.E.B. Dubois, Sojourner Truth, Fredrick Douglas, Cesar Chavez, and the Black Power and Chicano Movements of the 1960s and 1970s” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. 2). However, credited with the genesis of critical race theory, Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman argued that the traditional approaches of combating racism were producing only incremental gains in comparison to previous years. Critical race theory emerged out of radical developments in critical legal studies and education in North America, but now contributes perspectives to other areas such as history, disability studies, critical race feminism, whiteness studies, and sport and leisure studies (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; 2002; UCLA School of Public Affairs, 2012). “The emergence of critical race theory in the legal academy of the United States during the late 1980s has had a galvanizing effect not only within the narrow world of legal academia, but also on the public discourse on race more generally” (Valdes, Harris, & Culp, 2011, p. 1).

Critical race theory rejects the basic premises of American legal liberalism (UCLA School of Public Affairs, 2012). Instead, critical race theorists assert that both the procedures and the substance of American law, including American anti-discrimination law, are structured to maintain white privilege, and as a result, ultimately reject the neutral procedures and substantive doctrines of formal equality (UCLA School



of Public Affairs, 2012; Valdes, Harris & Culp, 2011). Scholars in critical race theory believe that neutrality and objectivity are unattainable ideals that obscure the normative supremacy of whiteness in American law and society. Critical race theory recognizes that institutional and societal power structures are based on white privilege and white supremacy, which act to perpetuate the marginalization of people of color (UCLA School of Public Affairs, 2012). Critical race theory also recognizes that the idea of American meritocracy is often used as a vehicle for self-interest, power, and privilege, since stories of such a meritocracy are usually told by those with wealth, power, and privilege (2012). Critical race theorists believe that these meritocracy stories paint a false picture of American meritocracy while ignoring the systematic inequalities that institutional racism provides (2012). To counter the false narratives of meritocracy in American society, elements of critical race theory may also utilize counterstories told by people of color in order to give a voice to the marginalized and challenge the narrative of white supremacy by exposing racism as a main thread in the fabric of the American foundation (2012). Critical race theorists recognize the importance that retelling oral histories have in preserving the culture and history of marginalized groups of people whose experiences have yet to be fully legitimized in American culture (2012).

As it is used today, critical race theory continues to reject at least three socially entrenched, mainstream beliefs about racial injustice. First, critical race theory rejects the notion that color blindness, or blindness to race, will eliminate racism (Valdes, Harris & Culp, 2011). Instead, critical race theorists assert that self-conscious racial identities are the source of incisive policymaking, collective strength, and individual fulfillment. Second, critical race theory rejects the notion that racism is a matter of individuals, not

systems (2011). Instead, critical race theorists have identified racism within the daily functions of our institutional and societal structures (UCLA School of Public Affairs, 2012). Critical race theory critiques a world “in which all of us are more or less complicit in socio-legal webs of domination and subordination” (Valdes, Harris & Culp, 2011, p. 2). Finally, critical race theory rejects the notion that racism can be fought while ignoring other forms of oppression or injustice, such as sexism, homophobia, and economic exploitation (UCLA School of Public Affairs, 2012; Valdes, Harris & Culp, 2011). Critical race theory seeks antiracist social transformation through an intersectional or multidimensional, anti-subordination analysis that takes into account “the complex layers of individual and group identity that help to construct social and legal positions” (Valdes, Harris & Culp, 2011, p. 2).

According to Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2000), the “critical race theory movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. 2). Further, critical race theory emphasizes the importance of perspective and historical context in analyzing phenomena, while claiming that race is a central, not a marginal, element in understanding individual experiences of societal structures and identity (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; 2002). Although race is a socially constructed idea, it impacts everyday people who may not always be aware of or understand the extensive implications that accompany their designation as ‘other’. Thus, critical race theory uses a number of lenses to acknowledge race, class, and power structures in American society. Since its inception, critical race theory has branched out into sub-frameworks which look critically at issues of social inequality, such as Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit),

Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), Queer Critical Race Theory (QueerRaceCrit), and Critical Race Feminism (FemCrit) (Zaragoza, 2013). In short, “critical race theory scholars challenge those who are unwilling to value experience as a research method or theory to examine challenges people of color face in a society where racism, sexism, and classism are normalized as a way of life” (Zaragoza, 2013, p. 43).

### **The Utilization of Critical Race Theory in Sport**

Since critical race theory is suspicious of segments of any society that claim to be blind to color, accessible to all, and fair across ethnic and racial divides, it is appropriate to look to the sporting world and apply critical race theory to an industry that markets itself as the ultimate meritocracy. The subsequent sections will focus on the utilization of critical race theory in sports.

“In terms of sport, it is commonly accepted that this physical realm is a colorblind meritocracy where a ‘level playing field’ operates” (Hylton, 2010, p. 336).

Consequently, the centrality of sport as a global entity and the manifestation of racism within its realms can reveal more about racial inequalities in society than many other arenas (Hartmann, 2000). Viewed as a contested terrain by many sport sociologists, sport therefore requires a critical lens from which to view it (Hartmann, 2000; Hylton, 2009; 2010).

According to Hartmann (2000), the sporting arena has the potential to resist or reinforce inequalities in a dynamic environment and therefore becomes a useful litmus test of cultural cohesion and togetherness for most societies. The “recognition of racialized processes obviates the necessity for a critical race consciousness that draws upon the everyday knowledge that structural inequalities find their expression in sport”

(Hylton, 2010, p. 337). In short, the sporting world provides the potential for racism, but also provides the potential for resistance through anti-racism interventions. “Critical race theory presents anti-racists with a framework to challenge orthodoxies, narrow race thinking and under-theorized approaches in sport, and thus to enable their praxis to be strengthened in what critical race theorists view as a fundamentally racist world” (Hylton, 2010, p. 336).

### **Sport as a Politicized Discourse**

In contrast to the popular depiction of sports as a colorblind meritocracy where tolerance and fairness exist, a number of scholars have drawn attention to the political nature of sport (Birrell, 1989; Brown, 2005; Butterworth, 2007; Carrington, 1998; de B’beri & Hogarth, 2009; Delgado, 1997; 2005; Ferber, 2007; Griffin, 2012; Leonard, 2006; Oates, 2007; Trujillo, 1991). According to Griffin (2012), sport is positioned in the realm of politicized discourses “where black athleticism is often depicted as a symbol of equality despite the omnipresence of racialized histories, tensions, and stereotypes” (Griffin, 2012, p. 162). In order to understand the histories, tensions, and stereotypes of the black athlete, a look back is required.

During the period of slavery, blacks were ideologically fixed as animalistic, dangerous, and hypersexual (Baynton, 2001; Fanon, 1967; Griffin, 2012; Hooks, 2004). These stereotypes have been reproduced and/or simultaneously contested by black athletes through the history of their participation in sports (Griffin, 2012). The victories of the black athlete in sport have worked to affirm assumptions of natural strength, physicality, and violence (2012). However, although powerless in many other social realms, black athletes have been able to assert their power, pride, and humanity by

displaying their athletic talents on the field or court (Rhoden, 2006). Despite the successes of the black athlete in sport, the vast majority of power and control in the sporting world continues to reside with white males in the evaluated positions of ownership and management.

The integration of sports has been widely viewed to have been progressive in nature by both blacks and whites. However, critical race theorists have also critiqued integration as a vehicle of white supremacist persistence (Griffin, 2012; Rhoden, 2006). For example, at the time the National Basketball Association integrated their league, they were struggling to maintain consumer interest and generate profits (Griffin, 2012). NBA franchises were in dire economic circumstances, losing fans and money in the process, because the games were slow. “To revive the game, the style of basketball played by African Americans surfaced as a potential means to increase league popularity and revenue” (Griffin, 2012, p. 163). Similar to the Negro Leagues of baseball, the style of play that black athletes utilized in their games came to be characterized by their speed, energy, and creativity, which was notably distinct in comparison to their white counterparts (2012). Therefore, white power holders were able to protect their interest, increase the popularity of their league, and generate profit through integration, directly benefiting from black athleticism while maintaining their power base as owners, management, and coaches (2012). As a consequence to this form of interest convergence, integration also caused the collapse of independent black leagues, in which African Americans controlled the means of production (Rhoden, 2006).

### **Critical Race Theory and the Sports Media**

Primarily due to the immense popularity of sports in American culture, the sports media play a key role in the expression of meanings given to race and ethnicity (Bruce, 2004). Athletes have been able to use the media as a positive platform to further their interests, develop their brand, or establish themselves as role models to the greater public. As their respective sport garners more collective interest and gains increased numbers of fans, the athlete is able to reach more people and establish a greater market for themselves and the products that they endorse. In this manner, the relationship between the athlete and the sporting media is valuable in amplifying the message that the athlete wants to communicate.

However, critical race scholars have suggested that the sporting media also portray racial and ethnic minorities in stereotypical ways, which reinforce and confirm racial and ethnic inequalities in greater society (Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers & De Leeuw, 2010). Bruce (2004) suggests that sport commentators working under the high pressure circumstances that accompany live television may often unconsciously draw on widely circulating racial ideologies, as they have limited time to contemplate their reactions to what is taking place on the field or court. For example, white NFL quarterbacks, such as Peyton Manning and Tom Brady, are commonly and unconsciously referred to as 'smart' or 'aware' football players, while black NFL quarterbacks, such as Michael Vick and Cam Newton, are commonly and unconsciously described as 'athletic' or 'physical' football players. "The societal consequences of this stereotyping are often ignored in public discourse about the sport media, since televised sport programs and

discussions are generally not recognized as having broader societal implications” (Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers & De Leeuw, 2010, p. 820).

The categorizing practices that the sporting media may use are central to the ways in which the sporting media construct and represent ideas about racial and ethnic groups (Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers & De Leeuw, 2010). According to Hall (1995), the media have the potential to render certain racial and ethnic categorizations more salient than others, thereby shaping or reifying the racial and ethnic categories that people use to structure and order the world around them. Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers & De Leeuw (2010) consider sport and media as aspects of culture through which people formulate and put into action ideas about skin color and cultural heritage that are then carried over into the rest of society. According to Feagin & Vera (1995), race and ethnicity are social phenomena that are constructed and reconstructed in and through discourses, and that these discourses reflect inequalities of power in which powerful groups in society have more power to label, categorize, and define than less powerful groups. In short, the white ethnic majority tends to label blacks as others through categorization, thus keeping them in their place through the ways in which they are stereotypically depicted (Dyer, 1997). This is a process that can be rapidly accelerated by the sporting media given their reach and collective power in American culture.

Media bias in the form of stereotyping can be seen in the manner in which black athletes are categorized in comparison to white athletes. Sports reporters typically refer to black athletes in regards to their physicality, brute strength, and natural ability while white athletes are commonly categorized in relation to their intelligence, decision making ability, and strong work ethic (Mastro, Seate, Blecha & Gallegos, 2012; Van

Sterkenburg, Knoppers & De Leeuw, 2010). Such stereotypes are not racially or ethnically neutral since people attach superior and inferior values to their meanings (Long, Carrington & Spracklen, 1997). These stereotypes work to form a mind-body dualism, in which black athletes are explicitly associated with superb bodies and implicitly associated with unstable minds (Carrington, 2001; Fleming, 2001). According to Sabo & Jansen (1998), the mind-body dualism acts as enlightened racism as black success is framed as achievable and acceptable in sports, but not in other social domains such as academia, business, or politics. Due to the categorization of intellectual qualities and their superiority in Western societies over physical qualities, this discourse mainly serves the status quo that privileges white men over black men (Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers & De Leeuw, 2010). As this may not be a conscious process for the sporting media, many sports reporters may reproduce and strengthen the status quo without knowing it or intentionally doing so.

### **Analyzing the Depictions of Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams in Print**

#### **Advertisements**

The following sections will detail the process in which I chose the print advertisements to be analyzed for my analysis of Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams in print advertising. Subsequently, I will thoroughly explain my reasoning for choosing those print advertisements.

Applying an analysis to the visual representations in print advertisements featuring women's tennis athletes Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams, I plan to identify how these women are depicted and represented in the public eye. In addition, I will utilize my analysis to uncover disparities between the ways in which both women are



depicted in print advertisements in comparison to one another, paying close attention to the type of brand that they are asked to endorse and represent. In order to accomplish this, I will utilize and apply the lens of critical race theory to my analysis of both women's product endorsement type and visual depictions in print advertisements to reveal important messages and values present in the commodification of white and black female athletes. Specifically, I will use critical race theory to compare and contrast how each athlete is packaged, utilized, and sold to the public, and closely examine the differing manners in which each athlete is casted (model vs. athlete) as well as how each athlete's body is promoted through their advertisements (feminine vs. athletic strength and power). I will also be employing critical race theory to dissect who each respective athlete is selling their products to, examining the economic disparities between the various products' costs and the economic disparities of the intended targeted audiences. First, I will detail the process in which I chose the advertisements to be analyzed and thoroughly explain my reasoning for choosing those advertisements.

### **Choice of Print Advertisements for Analysis**

I chose the advertisements for my analysis by performing a thorough internet search of Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams in print advertising, using Google, Yahoo, and Bing as my preferred search engines. Then, I collected Kournikova and Williams's print advertisements through my internet search and built a database to save each athlete's individual ads. Next, I researched both women to find the various corporations that they have represented during their playing careers and the various products that they have endorsed. Since Anna Kournikova turned professional in October 1995 and retired from the Women's Tennis Association due to injury in 2003,

and Venus Williams turned professional in October 1994 and continues to be a force on Tour in the WTA, I only chose advertisements that ranged when both women were competing at simultaneous times in the WTA. As a result, the print advertisements eligible for my analysis ranged from October 1995 to December 2003. After limiting my print advertisement search to the aforementioned time frame and viewing each advertisement through my internet search, I selected three advertisements apiece, featuring each athlete, respectively.

After establishing a common range of circulation dates for each print advertisement of each athlete, I selected three advertisements apiece that were comparable in nature. I searched for print advertisements where a common product was marketed (ex. athletic apparel) or a specific price range within that product type was represented (ex. high class watch), paying close attention to the visual depictions of each athlete in those print advertisements. The print advertisements that I considered were indicative of common themes that each athlete utilized to endorse and market their products (ex. selling sex vs. selling athletic achievement). Additionally, the print advertisements that I considered were representative of the economic affordability levels of each athlete's intended targeted audience, showing the economic disparity between the potential consumers that each athlete's print advertisement was meant to reach.

In order to limit my personal bias during the final selection process of Kournikova and Williams's print advertisements for analysis, I let the retail cost of the product that each athlete promoted through their advertisement, take the lead. After narrowing my list of potential print advertisements from October 1995 to December 2003, I viewed each athlete's eligible advertisements independently and removed any outliers from my

selection pool. Then, I selected Kournikova and Williams's three respective final print advertisements for my study according to the represented products' retail cost. Finally, I chose Kournikova and Williams's least expensive product endorsed through their respective ads, a product with an average retail cost for each athlete that was comparable in nature, and Kournikova and Williams's most expensive product endorsed through their respective ads. The order in which I will compare the advertisements will start with the least expensive products and progress to the most expensive products. The three brands represented in my final selection for Anna Kournikova were Berlei (sports bra), K-Swiss (shoes), and Omega Watches while the three brands represented in my final selection for Venus Williams were Tide (detergent), EA Sports (Active 2), and Kia Motors.

I believe it is important to study the *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers and print advertisements featuring Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams to gauge how white and black female athletes are visually presented to the public via the media, corporate sponsors, and independent corporations. Since magazine covers and print advertisements are utilized to catch the attention of the consumer and ultimately sell the consumer magazines or products, both forums have a distinct self-serving interest in appealing to the desires of the greater public, preserving the status quo in society, and maintaining a business plan that has been proven financially successful in the market. Therefore, studying female athletes' visual depictions on magazine covers and in print advertisements will not only tell us about the individual athletes and corporations behind those depictions, but will also tell us about our culture and societies which consume those images and reward the media and various corporations by purchasing their products. While advertisements may veer out of the mainstream of society from time to time in

order to shock the consumer as a means of grabbing their attention, I chose *Sports Illustrated* magazine to balance my analysis since the magazine has a vested interest in preserving and promoting the sports and the athletes that it covers.

In the next chapter, I will first present pertinent biographical information on both Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams to illustrate their respective backgrounds and tennis career trajectories. Subsequently, my analysis will begin with a comparative look at the depictions of Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams on two respective *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers before analyzing the print advertisements that I selected for both Kournikova and Williams. The *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers that I chose, dated June 2000 for Anna Kournikova and September 1997 for Venus Williams, were the only full cover shots produced by each respective athlete for *Sports Illustrated*. Similar to the print advertisements that I will utilize for analysis, I will be analyzing each respective *Sports Illustrated* magazine cover, paying close attention to the visual depictions of each athlete as well as the captions that accompany those depictions. Next, I will then comparatively analyze the three respective print advertisements that I selected for both Kournikova and Williams in ascending order according to product cost. Finally, I will offer my summary of analysis and initiate my concluding thoughts toward my second research question: Does selling sex in women's professional sports differ amongst white and black female athletes?

## **CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents my analysis of the *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers and print advertisements featuring Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams as stated in the methodology chapter. This chapter is divided into six sections that discuss, respectively, these female athletes' visual depictions in *Sports Illustrated* and in print advertisements during their World Tennis Association playing careers.

In the first section, I will present some pertinent biographical information on Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams to illustrate their respective backgrounds and tennis career trajectories. My analysis will begin in the second section where I will analyze the visual depictions of Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* magazine. The *Sports Illustrated* covers that I chose for analysis, dated June 2000 for Anna Kournikova and September 1997 for Venus Williams, were the only full cover shots featuring each athlete for *Sports Illustrated* magazine.

My analysis will turn to print advertisements in sections three, four, and five. Section three will examine a Berlei print advertisement that features Anna Kournikova endorsing sports bras and a Tide print advertisement that features Venus Williams endorsing laundry detergent. Section four will examine a K-Swiss print advertisement featuring Anna Kournikova endorsing women's footwear and an EA Sports print advertisement featuring Venus Williams endorsing their Active 2 gaming system. In the fifth section, I will analyze an Omega print advertisement that features Anna Kournikova endorsing watches and a Kia print advertisement that features Venus Williams endorsing the Kia brand of automobiles.

Since the literature suggests that sex is used to sell women's professional sports, I will be scrutinizing the visual depictions of these female athletes through their cover shots and advertisements. In addition, the lens of critical race theory will be applied throughout my study as I compare and contrast the visual depictions of Anna Kournikova (white) and Venus Williams (black), as well as the economic affordability levels of the products being endorsed by each athlete and the intended audiences of the advertisements. I will offer my summary of analysis and initiate my concluding thoughts toward my second research question (Does selling sex in women's professional sports differ amongst white and black female athletes?) in the sixth, and final, section of this chapter.

## **SECTION I**

### **Anna Kournikova: Biographical Information**

Anna Kournikova was born June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1981 in Moscow, Soviet Union (now Russia). Kournikova first took up tennis at age five and by age ten had signed a management deal that took her to Bradenton, Florida to train at Nick Bolletieri's tennis academy (Kournikova, 2014). Kournikova turned professional at age fourteen in October 1995 and was the youngest player ever to participate, and win, a Fed Cup tennis match (2014). At age fifteen, Kournikova made her grand slam debut, reaching the fourth round of the 1996 US Open before being named the World Tennis Association's Newcomer of the Year (2014). Kournikova made her Wimbledon debut in 1997 and became the second woman ever to reach the semifinals in her first trip to Wimbledon (2014). At the 1998 Miami Open, Kournikova reached her first WTA Tour singles final and lost to

Venus Williams in the championship round, but by the end of that year had broken into the WTA top twenty rankings for the first time in her career (2014).

As promising as Kournikova's tennis career began, she was never able to win a WTA singles tournament, but did experience success in doubles tournament play.

Teaming with Martina Hingis in 1999, the duo finished the season with the number one ranking in the world (Kournikova, 2014). However, the public's focus on Kournikova's career remained fixated on her inability to fulfill her promise as a singles player and win singles tournaments. Kournikova's career best WTA ranking as a singles player came in 2000 when she was ranked number eight in the world (2014). Injuries plagued her final years on tour and forced her into retirement at the conclusion of the 2003 season at age twenty one.

Despite her lack of success as a singles champion, Kournikova's appearance and celebrity status made her one of the best known female athletes in the world and her image became one of the most commonly searched images on Google (Google Press Center, 2001; 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005; 2006). Due to her perceived beauty, Kournikova has appeared in movies, television shows, music videos, and graced the covers of numerous magazines worldwide, as well as had video games, computer viruses, and alcoholic drinks named after her (Kournikova, 2014). Kournikova was named one of *People* magazine's fifty most beautiful people in 1998 and was voted the hottest female athlete on ESPN.com (ESPN.com, 2009; People Magazine, 1998). *Men's Health* magazine ranked Kournikova number twenty-nine on their one hundred hottest women of all-time list (Men's Health, 2011). Kournikova placed first in *FHM's* top one hundred sexiest women in the world list in both the United States and the United Kingdom

editions and her image continued to be one of the most commonly searched images in the world until 2007, four years after her retirement from professional tennis (FHM, 2002; Google Press Center, 2001; 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007).

However, her lack of accomplishment as a singles player in comparison to her publicity and hype led ESPN to rank her the eighteenth biggest sports flop in the past twenty-five years (ESPN, 2004). ESPN Classic ranked Kournikova the number one most overrated athlete in sports (2004). Even the popular poker game, Texas Hold'em, refers to the hole cards, Ace-King (unsuited), as an Anna Kournikova because it looks great but never wins (Pokernews.com, 2009). Anna Kournikova's career win-loss record, world rankings in singles and doubles play, and career prize money earnings on tour are shown in Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3.

Table 1

***Anna Kournikova - Career Win-Loss Record***

Total Matches	310
Wins	186
Losses	124

*Note.* Adapted from <http://www.kournikova.com/about/bio>. Copyright 2014 by Anna Kournikova. Reprinted with permission.

Table 2

***Anna Kournikova - World Rankings***

Ranking	Singles	Doubles
1995	285	Not Ranked
1996	58	67
1997	32	41
1998	13	10
1999	12	1
2000	8	4
2001	74	26
2002	35	11
2003	305	176

*Note.* Adapted from <http://www.kournikova.com/about/bio>. Copyright 2014 by Anna Kournikova. Reprinted with permission.



Table 3

***Anna Kournikova – Career Prize Money Totals***

Career Prize Money Earnings on Tour	\$3,584,662
----------------------------------------	-------------

*Note.* Adapted from <http://www.kournikova.com/about/bio>. Copyright 2014 by Anna Kournikova. Reprinted with permission.

**Venus Williams: Biographical Information**

Venus Williams was born June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1980 in Lynwood, California, but grew up in nearby Compton, California. At age ten, Williams and her sister, Serena, moved to West Palm Beach, Florida to train at Rick Macci's tennis academy (Kaufman, 2007). By age eleven, Williams had amassed a perfect record of sixty-three wins and zero losses on the United States Tennis Association Junior Tour before Williams's father pulled her off the tour so that she could focus on school and enjoy her childhood (Kaufman, 2007; Williams, 2014). However, another motivation for pulling Williams off tour at age eleven was to protect her from the negative and racist comments that other parents were directing at her (Peysner & Samuels, 1998). By 1995, Williams's father had taken her out of Rick Macci's tennis academy and assumed all coaching responsibilities for both Venus and her sister, Serena (Kaufman, 2007).

Venus Williams turned professional at age fourteen in October 1994 and beat her first top twenty ranked opponent in 1995 (Williams, 2014). By any standard, Williams has had one of the greatest careers in the history of women's tennis and continues to be a force on tour. Williams has won forty-five career singles tournament titles, second only to her sister, Serena, amongst active WTA players (2014). Williams has won seven Grand Slam singles titles, twelfth all-time, winning five championships at Wimbledon and the US Open twice (2014). She also has won a total of twenty-two overall Grand

Slams, which consist of thirteen women's doubles titles and two mixed doubles titles in addition to her seven singles titles (2014). Williams has won an Olympic gold medal in singles tournament play and three Olympic gold medals in women's doubles tournament play (2014). Williams has recorded the fastest serve ever by a woman and her thirty-five match winning streak still holds as the longest WTA winning streak since 2000 (Cuenco, 2014; Williams, 2014).

Williams has also taken a stand in the fight for gender equality in tennis. In 2005, the French Open and Wimbledon still refused to pay men and women equally through all rounds of competition. Williams met with the top officials from both tournaments and argued that women should be paid as much as men on tour. On the eve of the 2006 Wimbledon tournament, Williams published an essay in *The Times* that highlighted her arguments for equal pay (Williams, 2006). As a result, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and members of Parliament publicly endorsed Williams's arguments, leading to a joint campaign by the WTA and UNESCO for gender equality in sports (BBC Sport, 2006). Under immense pressure by 2007, both Wimbledon and the French Open finally agreed to award equal prize money to all competitors in all rounds of their tournaments (Williams, 2014).

Williams is the CEO of her interior design firm, V Starr Interiors, and in 2001 was named one of the thirty most powerful women in America by the *Ladies Home Journal* (Cuenco, 2014; Williams, 2014). Williams joined with retailer Steve & Barry's to launch her 'EleVen' fashion line in 2007 and in 2009 was named the seventy-seventh most powerful celebrity by *Forbes* magazine (Cuenco, 2014; Williams, 2014). Later that year, Venus and Serena became part-owners of the Miami Dolphins football team, which

made them the first black women to obtain ownership in an NFL franchise (Cuenco, 2014; Williams, 2014). *Tennis Magazine* ranked Williams the twenty-fifth best player in the last forty years and *Time* magazine named her one of the thirty legends of women's tennis: past, present, and future (Cuenco, 2014). Venus Williams's career win-loss record, world rankings in singles and doubles play, and career prize money earnings on tour are shown in Table 4, Table 5, and Table 6.

Table 4

***Venus Williams - Career Win-Loss Record***

Total Matches	869
Wins	684
Losses	185

*Note.* Adapted from <http://venuswilliams.com/>. Copyright 2014 by Venus Williams. Reprinted with permission.

Table 5

***Venus Williams – World Rankings***

Ranking	Singles	Doubles
1995	204	Did Not Compete
1996	216	Did Not Compete
1997	22	121
1998	5	36
1999	3	10
2000	3	54
2001	3	54
2002	2	Not Ranked
2003	11	Not Ranked
2004	9	Not Ranked
2005	10	Not Ranked
2006	48	Not Ranked
2007	8	Not Ranked
2008	6	23
2009	6	3
2010	5	11
2011	103	Not Ranked
2012	24	31
2013	49	63
2014	20	132

*Note.* Adapted from <http://venuswilliams.com/>. Copyright 2014 by Venus Williams. Reprinted with permission.

Table 6

***Venus Williams – Career Prize Money Totals***

Career Prize Money Earnings on Tour	\$30,739,202
-------------------------------------	--------------

*Note.* Adapted from <http://venuswilliams.com/>. Copyright 2014 by Venus Williams. Reprinted with permission.

A comparative look at Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams's Women's Tennis Association career wins, career losses, career winning percentage, top ten world ranking finishes in singles play, top ten world ranking finishes in doubles play, career prize money earnings on tour, richest endorsement contract, rank among richest endorsement contracts signed by professional athletes as of 2014 (male or female), estimated net worth as of 2014, and rank among richest tennis players of all-time according to net worth as of 2014 (male or female) are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

***A Comparative Look at Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams's Tennis Success***

<b><i>Anna Kournikova</i></b>		<b><i>Venus Williams</i></b>
186	Career Wins	684
124	Career Losses	185
.600	Career Winning Percentage	.787
1	Top Ten World Ranking Finishes in Singles Play	11
3	Top Ten World Ranking Finishes in Doubles Play	2
\$3,584,662	Career Prize Money Earnings on Tour	\$30,739,202
6 years / \$50 Million (with Performance Incentives)	Richest Endorsement Contract	5 years / \$40 Million
#11 Richest Endorsement Contract Ever Signed	Rank Among Richest Endorsement Contracts Signed by Professional Athletes as of 2014 (Male or Female)	#12 Richest Endorsement Contract Ever Signed

\$50 Million	Estimated Net Worth (2014)	\$62 Million
#9 Richest Tennis Player of All-Time	Rank Among Richest Tennis Players of All-Time According to Net Worth as of 2014 (Male or Female)	#7 Richest Tennis Player of All-Time

*Note.* Adapted from <http://www.kournikova.com/about/bio>. Copyright 2014 by Anna Kournikova. Reprinted with permission.

Adapted from <http://venuswilliams.com/>. Copyright 2014 by Venus Williams. Reprinted with permission.

Adapted from <http://www.complex.com/sports/2014/01/riches-athlete-endorsement-deals/>. Copyright 2014 by Doug Sibor. Reprinted with permission.

Adapted from <http://www.therichest.com/sports/tennis-sports/the-richest-tennis-players-of-2014/4/>. Copyright 2014 by Heather Billington. Reprinted with permission.

## **SECTION II**

### **Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams: *Sports Illustrated* Magazine Covers**

The first two artifacts for analysis come from *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers, where Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams were depicted in differing manners. The two *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers that I selected were the only full cover shots featuring Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams by *Sports Illustrated* during their professional tennis careers.

Anna Kournikova graced the cover of *Sports Illustrated* in the June 2000 edition (see Appendix A for Kournikova's *Sports Illustrated* cover shot) (Beford, 2000). Kournikova was photographed laying on a bed in a prone position while resting on her elbows and a pillow for support. The full cover shot shows only Kournikova's upper body as she lies, wearing a peach colored shirt that is pulled down to reveal her bare shoulder and clavicle area. Kournikova's hair is let down, draping over the pillow and partially covering the corners of her eyes and cheeks. Kournikova has only a slight smile on her face, but the focal point of the photograph, however, frames around her bright blue 'bedroom eyes' and suggestive look at the camera. The camera is slightly higher than her

prone lying position, so Kournikova's look at the audience is upward, seductive, and heteronormative. The caption is concise, simply stating, 'Advantage Kournikova'.

The Kournikova cover shot connotes feminine beauty and vulnerability as she lies on the bed suggestively gazing upward at the assumed heterosexual male audience. Kournikova's heteronormative gaze at the camera is meant to be seductive in nature, appealing to *Sports Illustrated's* predominantly male, and assumed heterosexual, sporting audience. Noticeably absent from *Sports Illustrated's* cover is any visual depiction of Kournikova's sport of tennis, or any other sport for that matter. Kournikova was only nineteen years old at the time of publication and *Sports Illustrated* appeared to highlight her youth in the photograph, accentuating the notion that a young, pretty, heterosexual, white girl lying on a bed while gazing suggestively at a predominantly male audience contains all of the necessary components to sell magazines in contemporary Western societies (Harris and Clayton, 2002).

Venus Williams graced the cover of *Sports Illustrated* magazine in the September 1997 edition (see Appendix B for Williams's *Sports Illustrated* cover shot) (Manfra, 1997). In this cover shot, Williams was photographed while competing in her sport of tennis. Williams is wearing her regular athletic apparel, a white tee shirt and tennis skirt, while returning volley with a two-handed, backhand stroke. Williams's face and braided hair are in focus as she grunts with power and determination during this action shot. Cleverly playing on Williams's youth and race, *Sports Illustrated's* caption read, 'Party Crasher, Venus Williams shakes up tennis'.

Although only seventeen years old at the time of publication, Williams's cover shot connotes strength, power, and athleticism. Williams's eyes are not focused on the

camera, but rather, fixated upon the tennis ball that she just made contact with as it is leaving the frame of the picture. Williams's muscles are tensed and flexed and her face is scrunched with might as she appears to be attacking the tennis ball as hard as she possibly can. *Sports Illustrated's* photo of Williams, displaying her wildly flailing, braided hair, flexed muscles, and grunting facial expression reinforces and perpetuates the stereotypical ideal of the brute black athlete in sports. Feminine beauty is not the focus of Williams's cover shot as it was with Anna Kournikova's cover shot. *Sports Illustrated* instead chose to sell Williams's athletic dominance as a young black phenom in her predominantly white sport, directly contradicting the manner in which they chose to sell Anna Kournikova as a young and beautiful, white model, who also happens to play professional tennis.

Analyzing the Kournikova and Williams *Sports Illustrated* cover shots through the lens of critical race theory, it is noticeably different how these two female tennis athletes were portrayed at the genesis of their respective professional careers. Kournikova, who was only nineteen years old at the time of publication and enjoying what would be her most successful year as a professional on the WTA tour, was portrayed as a young model by *Sports Illustrated* rather than a professional athlete. Although *Sports Illustrated's* Kournikova cover shot was not overtly sexual and was relatively modest in nature, the ambiance of the photograph was unnecessarily suggestive and missing any visual depictions of Kournikova's sport, instead accentuating her beauty and heterosexual appeal to the male consumer as the focal point of the photograph. On the other hand, the seventeen year old Williams, who was just beginning to make her

mark as a professional on the WTA tour, was photographed in an action shot for the cover of *Sports Illustrated*, displaying her strength and athleticism at a very young age.

The two *Sports Illustrated* cover shots devoted to the young female tennis prodigies represent greater disparities in the depictions of white and black female athletes. The social construction of whiteness within American culture has allowed Kournikova the flexibility of being portrayed as an athlete or as a model, as beauty has traditionally been defined through the prism of whiteness (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; 2013; Valdes, Harris, & Culp, 2011). Kournikova began her tennis career with more marketable options available to her because of her beauty, but also because of the prism of whiteness in which her beauty is viewed within American culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; 2013; Valdes, Harris, & Culp, 2011). Williams, however, did not begin her professional tennis career with the same personal marketing flexibility as Kournikova, as young black girls with braided hair have not traditionally been seen as beautiful when viewed through the same prism of whiteness within American culture (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; 2013; Valdes, Harris, & Culp, 2011). Instead, black athletes have had to achieve groundbreaking victories in sport, which have worked to affirm cultural assumptions of natural strength and physicality (Griffin, 2012). *Sports Illustrated* chose to accentuate this notion by placing Williams on its cover depicted in a live-game action photograph. Williams certainly broke ground for young black women and girls in the predominantly and traditionally white sport of women's tennis, asserting her power, pride, and humanity by displaying her athletic talents on the court (Rhoden, 2006).



In short, *Sports Illustrated* magazine made conscious decisions to depict the nineteen-year-old Kournikova and the seventeen-year-old Williams in differing manners according to their audience and what they believed would sell the most copies of their magazines. Although both athletes were very young professional tennis players at the time of their *Sports Illustrated* cover shot publications, the magazine recognized the self-serving benefits of depicting the pretty, white athlete as a heterosexual model, selling Kournikova's attractiveness to their predominantly male, and assumed heterosexual, sporting audience, while depicting the athletic, black athlete as a young, brute, black tennis phenom, selling Williams's groundbreaking talent in her predominantly white sport. Since both athletes were so young at the time of their respective *Sports Illustrated* cover shot publications, essentially, both Kournikova and Williams were blank marketing and promotional slates. However, *Sports Illustrated* seemed to choose the path of least resistance by sexualizing the pretty white girl and selling the athletic feats of the talented black girl, ultimately sticking to the script of a proven and financially successful business marketing strategy.

### **SECTION III**

#### **Anna Kournikova (Berlei) and Venus Williams (Tide): Print Advertisements**

In sections III, IV, and V of my analysis, I will critically analyze three print advertisements featuring Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams, respectively. The first print advertisement for analysis is a Berlei's sports bra ad that features Anna Kournikova (see Appendix C for Kournikova's Berlei sports bra print advertisement). In this Berlei advertisement, Kournikova is standing upright while leaning her right shoulder up against a wall. Her left hand is on her hip and she is wearing only a white Berlei sports bra and

white matching underwear. The photograph, taken from Kournikova's pelvic area, upward, focuses upon the white Berlei sports bra as the camera is leveled chest-high. Kournikova's hair is pulled back into a pony tail, revealing her entire face to the camera as she suggestively gazes downward at the audience. Also a focal point in this advertisement is Kournikova's toned athletic body and bare midriff. Berlei's Kournikova sports bra advertisement fixated upon Kournikova's breasts contained in Berlei's white sports bra, with the caption, 'Only the ball should bounce'.

Berlei's advertisement utilizes Kournikova's toned athletic body and general beauty to sell their sports bras. This advertisement connotes feminine delicacy and softness as Kournikova's body, suggestive gaze, and bare skin are used to frame Berlei's sports bra in the photograph. The photograph's framing around Kournikova's bare skin, coupled with her seductive heteronormative gaze into the camera, assumes that the women meant to be reached through Kournikova's sports bra advertisement will desire to immolate Kournikova's aspirational picture of beauty, and therefore, purchase Berlei's sports bras because they are attractive to heterosexual men. Berlei's caption, 'Only the ball should bounce', is a sexualized allusion to Kournikova's sport of tennis, likening the bouncing of tennis balls to the unwanted bouncing of women's breasts while competing in sport. However, other than the clever allusion to bouncing balls in Berlei's caption, there is no direct mention of Kournikova's sport of tennis or any corresponding photographs that would link Kournikova to her sport. Instead of a professional tennis athlete, the consumer sees an assumed heterosexual, tall, beautiful, blonde woman with a toned athletic body wearing nothing but her underwear and a Berlei sports bra; all of the

necessary components to sell Berlei's product in contemporary Western societies (Harris & Clayton, 2002).

According to Berlei's web page, the cost of a Berlei sports bra ranges from a low of \$44.95 to a high of \$89.95, placing Berlei sports bras at the higher end of the sports bra market spectrum according to consumer/product cost (Berlei, 2014). As a result of Berlei's high cost within the sports bra market, the consumers most likely to be affected through Berlei's advertisement featuring Kournikova, and ultimately purchase Berlei's sports bras, are women with disposable income from upper-middle class backgrounds, ranging to the affluent.

The first Venus Williams print advertisement for analysis was produced by Tide for their Tide Sport laundry detergent (see Appendix D for Williams's Tide Sport laundry detergent print advertisement). In the photograph, Williams is smiling victoriously and waving to the crowd as she walks across the tennis court at the conclusion of a match. Williams is wearing a sleeveless pink and black, one-piece tennis outfit and has her tennis bag draped over her left shoulder as she walks and waves in victory. Williams's right arm is elevated while waving to the audience and her left hand is clutching the strap on her tennis bag revealing her flexed biceps. Williams's eyes are focused in the crowd as she waves at fans seated upward and to her left from her physical position on the tennis court. Her hair, which was pulled back into a pony tail during competition, reveals her face and bright smile to the camera. The camera angle of the photograph appears to be level to Williams's body position on the court, also capturing a Tide Sport sponsor's advertisement on the padded wall behind the baseline of the tennis court. Tide Sport's caption read, 'Unbeatable Style. Championship Clean'.

Tide Sport's advertisement utilizes Williams's grace and prestige in her sport to draw a parallel to the performance level of their product. The image of Williams standing alone in victory, waving to the crowd in triumph, and smiling in satisfaction signifies that Williams is on top her game, the best of the best, and as an elite player, she also endorses a superior product in Tide Sport. Tide Sport's caption, 'Unbeatable Style. Championship Clean', also helps the consumer draw a straight line from Williams's success on the tennis court to Tide Sport's performance as a laundry detergent.

Williams's physical strength and power, displayed in the photograph through her flexed biceps and chiseled shoulders, are also utilized to connote Tide Sport's strength and power in removing tough stains obtained through sporting competition. Tide Sport's advertisement communicates to the consumer that one of tennis's best players, Venus Williams, also uses the best detergent, Tide Sport, to clean her sporting apparel with the same strength and power that she utilizes in her tennis game.

According to Tide's web page, the cost of a 46 oz. bottle of Tide Sport laundry detergent is \$12.99, placing Tide Sport laundry detergent at the higher end of the laundry detergent market spectrum according to consumer/product cost (Tide, 2014). Although Tide Sport has a relatively high cost within the laundry detergent market, Tide Sport's overall cost of \$12.99 is still low enough to accommodate most male and female consumers of diverse economic backgrounds affected through Tide Sport's advertisement featuring Williams.

Analyzing the Berlei/Kournikova print advertisement and the Tide Sport/Williams print advertisement through the lens of critical race theory, it is possible to recognize the differing manners in which these two female athlete's bodies are being promoted through

their ads. Berlei chose to sell feminine delicacy, softness, and bare skin with their print advertisement featuring Kournikova because they recognized her selling power as a tall, beautiful, blonde, heterosexual woman promoting intimate apparel, such as sports bras (Harris & Clayton, 2002). Although Kournikova's Berlei sports bra print advertisement was targeted at women, Berlei utilized Kournikova's suggestive heteronormative gaze at the audience to communicate seductive beauty, associated with wearing Berlei's sports bras, to the potential female consumer. Kournikova's body was also utilized to paint an aspirational picture of delicate feminine beauty for the potential consumer. On the other hand, Tide Sport chose to utilize Williams's physical strength and manipulated her body language in the advertisement in such a way that her strength portrayed prestige, grace, and achievement through winning. Williams's body language was utilized to communicate her status as a champion, leaving the consumer to conceptually draw a parallel from Williams's status and success to Tide Sport's status and success. For Kournikova, status can be achieved athletically or aesthetically while Williams's status must first be established and maintained through athletic success before it can be projected onto a potential product (Rhoden, 2006).

The type of endorsement opportunities available to both women will also reveal important messages and values present in the commodification of white and black female athletes. The economic affordability levels of the intended targeted audience uncover the economic disparity between the potential consumers that Kournikova and Williams are meant to reach through their respective print advertisements. Since Berlei sports bras retail cost places their product line at the higher end of the sports bra market spectrum, the consumers that Kournikova is utilized to reach through Berlei's advertisement are

more likely to be upper-middle class women ranging to the affluent. Tide Sport, while maintaining a higher retail cost within the laundry detergent market, has a low overall retail cost which allows most male and female consumers of diverse economic backgrounds the opportunity to purchase Tide's product promoted through Williams. For this set of print advertisements for analysis, Kournikova is utilized to sell an aspirational vision of beauty, at a higher cost, to the upper-middle class and affluent consumer while Williams is utilized to sell a conceptual vision of individual achievement, at a relatively low cost, to the greater masses of consumers.

#### **SECTION IV**

##### **Anna Kournikova (K-Swiss) and Venus Williams (EA Sports):**

##### **Print Advertisements**

The second set of print advertisements for analysis begins with a K-Swiss tennis shoes advertisement featuring Anna Kournikova (see Appendix E for Kournikova's K-Swiss tennis shoes print advertisement). In this elaborate photograph, Kournikova has just landed at her destination via helicopter and is being greeted by the valet as she exits the passenger side door. The right side of Kournikova's body is in view as she is helped out of the helicopter by the valet. Kournikova is wearing a glamorous silver sleeveless one-piece dress that is hewn to her upper thigh. Her hair is worn straight, but pulled back behind her right shoulder exposing her face and partial smile as she looks to her right, just above the level of the camera's sight lines. The left side of Kournikova's face is partially covered by her straight blonde hair as it drapes over her left shoulder. Kournikova's right hand is grasping the edge of the helicopter's cockpit and her right leg is leveraging herself against the legs of the helicopter's landing skids, providing

Kournikova with graceful angular modeling lines in the photograph. Kournikova's bare arms and legs are exposed in the sleeveless, high-cut dress that she is wearing. The white K-Swiss shoe being promoted rests against the black leg of the helicopter landing skid. The valet, also a prominent figure in the photograph, is opening the helicopter's passenger side door for Kournikova with his right hand while holding an umbrella for Kournikova in his left hand, even though it does not appear to be raining. The valet is wearing all black (except for his white K-Swiss tennis shoes) and gazing into the eyes of Kournikova as she exits the helicopter. K-Swiss framed their Kournikova print advertisement in a heteronormative fashion, as the male valet opens the helicopter door for Kournikova and shields her from the sunlight with his umbrella, while simultaneously gazing deeply into her eyes. Kournikova, however, is not fixated upon him or the audience directly; instead, she gazes slightly above the sight lines of the camera, appearing too glamorous to connect with any one subject. K-Swiss's caption read, 'Keep it Pure', in white lettering through the upper-middle portion of the photograph.

K-Swiss utilizes Kournikova's stunning beauty in this photograph to sell glamour, prestige, and status in their tennis shoe advertisement. Although shoes are being marketed in the K-Swiss/Kournikova advertisement, the elaborate layout of the photograph functions as a brand booster for K-Swiss, primarily, and as a tennis shoe advertisement, secondarily. Kournikova, exiting the helicopter in extravagant fashion with the assistance of a valet, is the focal point of the advertisement instead of K-Swiss's shoes. Underneath the white lettering of K-Swiss's caption, 'Keep it Pure', the consumer can trace Kournikova's bare thigh and lower leg down to the K-Swiss shoe in the bottom third of the photograph. The signifier in K-Swiss's advertisement is Kournikova in the

helicopter with the paid assistance of a valet, signifying glitz, glamour, and model-like high fashion, that the consumer can then project onto the K-Swiss tennis shoes that Kournikova is wearing. K-Swiss communicates a heteronormative message to the potential consumer that beauty, glitz, and glamour, coupled with K-Swiss shoes, will raise their status level and attract potential suitors with elevated levels of income. K-Swiss does not allude to Kournikova's sport of tennis in any way through their advertisement, instead K-Swiss chose to visually depict Kournikova as a heterosexual, high fashion model rather than an athlete. K-Swiss utilizes the tall, pretty, angular blonde to sell model-like glamour instead of utilizing Kournikova's athletic prowess as a tennis player to sell tennis shoes.

According to K-Swiss's web page, the cost of K-Swiss women's footwear ranges from a low of \$55.00 to a high of \$150.00, placing K-Swiss women's shoes in the middle of the women's shoe market spectrum according to consumer/product cost (K-Swiss, 2014). As a result of K-Swiss's relatively average cost range within the women's shoe market, the consumers most likely to be affected through K-Swiss's advertisement featuring Kournikova are women with disposable income from moderately diverse economic backgrounds, particularly ranging from the middle class to the affluent.

The second Venus Williams print advertisement for analysis was produced by EA Sports for their Active 2 fitness program gaming system (see Appendix F for Williams's EA Sports Active 2 print advertisement). Williams is centered in the photograph, standing with her feet slightly wider than shoulder's length apart and crossing her arms in front of her. Williams's head is tilted and slightly turned to her right and her hair is pulled back into a pony tail, exposing the left side of her face as she glares into the



camera with athletic confidence and minimal facial expression. Williams is wearing a black, spandex, sleeveless, one-piece workout outfit that is hewn to her upper thigh and black cross-training shoes. Williams has EA Sports's Active 2 monitoring straps fastened around her left forearm and right upper thigh and is holding the gaming controller in her right hand, while crossing her arms in front of her and flexing her biceps as she does. The photograph is taken straight-on and the camera angle appears to be level to Williams's body position. EA Sports appeared to stage the advertisement in a fitness center with ceiling to floor windows prominently displayed in the background. In white lettering above Williams's head are 'EA Sports' and 'active 2'; the names of the company and their product.

EA Sports's photograph utilizes Williams's athletic confidence, competitive flair, and toughness to sell their Active 2 fitness program gaming system. Williams's competitive glare at the camera, crossed arms, and body positioning connotes athletic confidence that seems to challenge the consumer to a game on EA Sports's Active 2 gaming system. In the photograph, Williams's body and facial expressions appear to be almost taunting the consumer to try to beat her in EA Sports's Active 2 fitness program. As Williams glares at the camera, she communicates to the consumer that she is on top of the mountain and is almost daring someone to attempt to take her spot there. EA Sports utilized Williams's positioning on top of the tennis mountain to draw a parallel to a champion who is ready to take on all challengers and communicated the message of athletic competitiveness to their potential consumers, stoking their intrapersonal competitive drive in the process.

Williams's flexed muscles and muscle definition connotes toughness and work ethic through the photograph, signifying the notion that hard work is the cornerstone of a champion. Accordingly, Williams's choice of clothing in the advertisement, a black, spandex, workout outfit and cross training shoes, communicate to the consumer that EA Sports's Active 2 gaming system will provide a vigorous workout that develops toughness and builds work ethic. EA Sports's monitoring straps, fastened around Williams's left forearm and right thigh, show the consumer that their Active 2 gaming system monitors and records their hard work, and therefore pushes the user to break through workout plateaus by holding the user accountable to their previous workout data. EA Sports's advertisement captured Williams's intimidating demeanor on the tennis court to challenge its consumers to a workout on their Active 2 fitness program gaming system.

According to EA Sports's web page, the original cost of EA Sports's Active 2 gaming system upon first release was \$99.89, placing EA Sports's Active 2 gaming system slightly above the cost norm on the video game market spectrum according to consumer/product cost (EA Sports, 2014). As a result of EA Sports's slightly higher than average cost for Active 2 within the video game market, the consumers most likely to be affected through EA Sports's advertisement featuring Williams ranges from middle class men and women with disposable income to the affluent.

Analyzing the K-Swiss/Kournikova print advertisement and the EA Sports/Williams print advertisement through the lens of critical race theory, it is noticeably different how K-Swiss and EA Sports chose to package and sell each respective female athlete to the public. K-Swiss chose to package Kournikova as a

celebrity and sold her glitz, high-status, and glamour with their print advertisement because they recognized her selling power as a heterosexual, high-fashion model within Western societies (Harris & Clayton, 2002). Kournikova's celebrity as a high-fashion model was utilized to create a vision of extravagance, glamour, and luxury for the potential consumer. Conversely, EA Sports chose to utilize Williams's gritty competitiveness, toughness, and athletic confidence to package with their gaming system, communicating to the potential consumer that Active 2 is just as tough and competitive as Williams. Williams was also portrayed as an athlete willing to work hard to achieve her goals, a theme that EA Sports projected onto their potential consumers through their print advertisement. Williams's body language was used to communicate athletic confrontation and competition where Kournikova's body language communicated a heteronormative ideal for women and their traditional social roles within Western societies and displayed a fragility reserved for the elite in society.

When analyzing the economic affordability levels of the intended targeted audience, disparities do not arise with this particular set of products, although the manners in which both women were packaged and promoted through the print advertisements of those products were unmistakably different. Since K-Swiss women's footwear retail cost places their product line in the middle of the women's shoe market spectrum, the consumers that Kournikova is utilized to reach through K-Swiss's advertisement are more likely to be women with disposable income from moderately diverse economic backgrounds, particularly ranging from the middle class to the affluent. EA Sports's Active 2, while maintaining a slightly higher than average retail cost within the video game market, also allows for middle class men and women from moderately

diverse economic backgrounds, ranging to the affluent, to be reached through Williams's advertisement. For this particular set of print advertisements for analysis, both Kournikova and Williams are utilized to sell relatively affordable products to a wide swath of consumers, however, the manners in which they are portrayed and promoted communicate diverging goals for K-Swiss and EA Sports in regards to how each athlete would ultimately be utilized.

## **SECTION V**

### **Anna Kournikova (Omega) and Venus Williams (Kia): Print Advertisements**

The final set of print advertisements for analysis begins with an Omega watch advertisement featuring Anna Kournikova (see Appendix G for Kournikova's Omega Watches print advertisement). In this plush photograph, Kournikova is seated in a chair surrounded by expensive pieces of furniture in what appears to be the lobby of a wealthy hotel. The chair is positioned on the left side of the picture frame and tilted at a forty-five degree angle so that Kournikova's right side is fully visible to the camera. Kournikova is sunken in the chair as she sits on its edge with her legs extended and rests her shoulders and head against the back of the chair. Mindful of her angular modeling lines, Kournikova points her toes towards the floor and places her right elbow on the hand rest while caressing the top of the chair with her fingers. Kournikova is wearing a luxurious white dress that is hewn just above her knees, lavish silver high heels, and an Omega watch on her right wrist. Her hair is worn straight and is draped down the sides of her face, just past shoulder level, exposing the right side of her face as she gazes across the camera and out into the distance. Kournikova's facial expression and body positioning are suggestive in nature. The background of the photograph is filled with plush chairs,

couches, lamps, windows, and drapes as the hotel lobby where Kournikova is seated is obviously expensive and visually glamorous. In the bottom right-hand corner of the advertisement is a superimposed picture of a silver Omega watch and Omega's emblem in white lettering, without a caption.

Omega's photograph utilizes a combination of Kournikova's glamour, beauty, and feminine seduction to sell their high-class watches. Omega capitalizes on a commonly used heteronormative theme to grasp the attention of the consumer, that of the beautiful, yet mysterious, female seductively waiting for a stranger to approach her in the lobby of a lavish hotel. Kournikova's heteronormative gaze into the distance connotes a level of unapproachability and suggests that she is unwilling to connect with just anyone. As the signifier, Kournikova's beauty, expensive attire, location, and body positioning in the chair signifies a mix of wealth, sophistication, mystery, and seduction. There is no visual depiction or printed reference to Kournikova's sport of tennis in Omega's advertisement, instead, Omega utilizes Kournikova in their photograph as a heterosexual, high-fashion model rather than an athlete. In order to sell their pricey watches, Omega chose a high-fashion, angular, blonde beauty as their vehicle of promotion instead of a professional tennis athlete.

According to Omega's web page, the relative cost of an Omega watch ranges from a low of \$2,750.00 to a high of \$35,000.00 (however, Omega has a specific watch model priced at \$150,000.00), placing Omega watches at the highest end of the watch market spectrum according to consumer/product cost (Omega Watches, 2014). As a result of Omega's very high cost within the watch market, the consumers most likely to be affected through Omega's advertisement featuring Kournikova, and ultimately

purchase Omega watches, are limited to affluent men and women with disposable incomes.

The final Venus Williams print advertisement for analysis was produced by Kia Motors (see Appendix H for Williams's Kia Motors print advertisement). In the action photograph, Williams is running the baseline while returning volley using a one-handed forehand stroke as Kia logos fill the background. Williams is wearing a patterned, multi-colored, sleeveless, one-piece tennis outfit cropped to her upper thigh with white spandex compression shorts underneath her tennis skirt. Williams has her hair pulled up into a bun and is wearing a black visor and white tennis shoes as she runs the baseline of the court from the right side of the picture frame to the viewer's left. Williams's eyes are fixated upon the tennis ball and her face strains with determination as she stretches her right hand, which is holding her tennis racquet, toward the ball. Williams's legs and right arm are flexed as she stretches toward the ball, showing her long arm span, flexibility, and balance. The camera appears to be courtside and is level to Williams's body positioning, also framing four Kia advertising logos, a backcourt judge, and a ball boy in the background of the photograph. Kia's brand-boosting print advertisement featuring Venus Williams has no caption.

Kia's photograph utilizes Williams's tennis success as a champion to build a parallel association to their automobiles with the consumer, ultimately boosting the image of their Kia brand. Kia makes no mention of their automobiles in their advertisement, instead opting to raise the visibility of their brand through their association with Williams and the Australian Open (where the advertisement was shot). As the signifier, Williams displays balance, body control, and most evidently, determination in the photograph

signifying the quiet determination of Kia to move up from the rigid, lower end of the automobile market into its more flexible and option-friendly center (Kiamedia.com, 2014; Woodyard, 2013). Since Kia is attempting to raise their profile and boost their image from an inexpensive, safe, and reliable brand of automobiles, to a brand that connotes quality and affordable luxury, it is beneficial for Kia to associate itself with Williams's success and stature in her traditionally wealthy sport of tennis (Kiamedia.com, 2014; Woodyard, 2013). Rather than market their automobiles in this advertisement, Kia chose to show the consumer that they support and associate themselves with Williams, and in return, Williams supports Kia and associates her tennis success with Kia's brand.

According to Kia Motors's web page, the cost of a Kia automobile ranges from a low of \$13,900.00 to a high of \$59,500.00, although only two models are priced above \$26,000.00 and the great majority of Kia's automobile fleet are priced under \$22,000.00, placing Kia Motors at the lower end of the automobile market spectrum according to consumer/product cost (Kia Motors, 2014). As a result of Kia's relatively low cost within the automobile market, the consumers most likely to be affected through Kia's advertisement featuring Williams are working class men and women with some levels of disposable income.

Analyzing the Omega/Kournikova print advertisement and the Kia/Williams print advertisement through the lens of critical race theory, it is possible to recognize the differing manners in which these two respective female athletes were utilized by Omega and Kia to reach specifically targeted audiences according to class. Omega chose to package heterosexual feminine seduction and mystery with beauty, glamour, and luxury

in their print advertisement featuring Kournikova because they recognized her selling power as a heterosexual, high-fashion model to the affluent in Western societies (Harris & Clayton, 2002). Kournikova's visual appearance within Omega's luxurious advertisement setting was utilized to paint a high-class picture of mystery and elegance through the male gaze of Western eyes.

On the other hand, Kia chose to utilize Williams's athletic determination and status as a tennis champion to connect with their working class consumers, who, like Kia, aspire to climb the social class ladder of perception. Kia recognized that Williams's life story as a young, black, female tennis player from Compton, California, who rose to become one of the best tennis players of this generation (in a predominantly white sport), was a compelling promotional narrative that signified the potential for upward mobility in those with determination and persistence (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; 2013; Valdes, Harris, & Culp, 2011). Although critical race theory would dispel the accuracy of the notion that upward mobility is available to everyone through hard work and determination (ex. meritocracy or the American dream), nonetheless, Williams's narrative creates a compelling aspirational marketing package for Kia and its prospective goals (Hylton, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; 2002; UCLA School of Public Affairs, 2012; Valdes, Harris & Culp, 2011).

The economic affordability levels of the intended targeted audience reveal financial disparities between the potential consumers that Kournikova and Williams were utilized to reach. Since Omega watches retail cost places their product line at the very highest end of the watch market spectrum, the consumers that Kournikova is utilized to reach through Omega's advertisement are more likely to be limited to only affluent men



and women with significant amounts of disposable income. Conversely, because Kia Motors maintains a lower retail cost within the automobile market, the consumers affected by Williams through Kia's advertisement are more likely to be working class men and women with varying degrees of disposable income. For this final set of print advertisements for analysis, Kournikova is utilized as a heterosexual, high-class model to sell luxury to the luxurious in contemporary society, while Williams is utilized to sell a conceptual vision that reflects the aspiration of American meritocracy to the greater masses of working class consumers.

## **SECTION VI**

### **Summary of Analysis**

This analysis begins to shed light on how selling sex in women's professional sports differs amongst white and black female athletes. This section will specifically examine, highlight, and summarize those differences as they relate to my study of Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams's visual depictions on *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers and in print advertisements to further explore the commodification of white and black female athletes.

My analysis revealed that both Kournikova and Williams had remarkable starts to their respective tennis careers (Kournikova, 2014; Williams, 2014). Both women displayed incredible promise on the tennis court at a very young age and turned professional while they were barely into their teenage years (Kournikova, 2014; Williams, 2014). There is no disputing the extremely high level of talent that each athlete possessed to achieve professional status in a sport where competitors are attracted from nations spanning the entire globe. With that point being made, the career

accomplishments of Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams while on WTA tour speak for themselves, and by any standard used to measure success in the sport of women's tennis, Williams is unquestionably the superior player between the two.

While maintaining superiority in her sport, this analysis revealed the ways in which Williams has packaged her brand as an athlete and sold her personal culture of winning to the greater masses of economically diverse consumers. Williams's personal story as a poor, young, black phenom from Compton, California, rising to become one of the best women's tennis' players of this generation, certainly communicates a message of American meritocracy that corporations can utilize, repackage in association with their own brands, and then sell to potential working class consumers at a lower cost (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; 2013; Valdes, Harris, & Culp, 2011). Williams's own personal narrative and success allow her to effectively communicate through her advertisements with other hard-working gritty competitors in contemporary societies also attempting to climb the social ladders of perception. However, Williams's branding coupled with her blackness also works to pigeonhole her according to advertisement message and the advertisement's specific targeted audience (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; 2013; Valdes, Harris, & Culp, 2011). Williams must affirm cultural assumptions of black strength, physicality, and athleticism and be a success on the tennis court, first, in order to project her status onto an adjoining company or product (Griffin, 2012; Rhoden, 2006). Unlike Kournikova, who would still claim status within contemporary Western societies based upon societal definitions and public perceptions of her beauty, without the sport of tennis, Williams is not afforded a comparable vehicle in contemporary Western society that would allow for her rapid ascension up the social ladders of perception and prestige.

Consequently, in affirming her strength, physicality, and athleticism on the tennis court, Williams is viewed through Western eyes as a phenomenal black athlete, limiting her promotion and marketing opportunities to projections of athletic success (Griffin, 2012; Rhoden, 2006).

This analysis also revealed the ways in which Kournikova has packaged her brand as a heterosexual, high-fashion model and celebrity and sold her beauty as a reflection of glamour and prominence to the more affluent populations in Western societies (Harris & Clayton, 2002). Although a professional tennis player on the world stage, Kournikova instead packaged her brand around her beauty and implemented heterosexual flirtation techniques to utilize the male gaze of Western eyes to her benefit. Since beauty, glamour, and elegance have traditionally been seen through the prism of whiteness in contemporary Western societies, Kournikova is able to utilize feminine seduction, mystery, and delicacy to sell an image of wealth and extravagance to the fragile elite in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; 2013; Valdes, Harris, & Culp, 2011). Kournikova's appearance as a tall, angular, beautiful blonde allows her to sell luxury to the luxurious at an increased cost and keeps her relevant long after her tennis career has ended (Harris & Clayton, 2002). Kournikova's perceived beauty within Western culture has afforded her the flexibility of options regarding the ways in which she is marketed and promoted to the public (2002). In short, Kournikova possesses the capability of being viewed as an athlete or as a model due to the privilege that whiteness provides, and thus, can be utilized to reach the full spectrum of audiences regardless of their economic makeup. However, for the purposes of this analysis, Kournikova was utilized to target the more affluent in Western societies through her perceived beauty and celebrity while Williams

was utilized to target the working class in Western societies through her athletic prowess and achievement.

In the next chapter, I will examine the broader implications of selling sex in women's professional sports through the lens of critical race theory and discuss my concluding thoughts on my research from a general and overarching perspective concerning the ways in which selling sex in women's professional sports differs amongst white and black female athletes. Subsequently, I will also discuss the limitations of my study and offer suggestions toward the direction of future research in this field.

## **CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION**

### **Introduction**

The general objective of this analysis is to contribute to the field of critical race theory, particularly in the area of selling sex in women's professional sports. Specifically, the goals of this study were to uncover disparities and highlight differing goals as they pertain to the commodification of white and black female athletes.

In this study, first, I investigated the following research question: Is sex used to sell women's professional sports? According to the literature and as summarized in my literature review chapter, I determined that sex is indeed used to sell women's professional sports and that the overarching issue of selling sex in women's professional sports required further attention, an increased scrutiny, and continued review. After concluding, through the literature, that sex is undoubtedly used to sell women's professional sports, I investigated a second research question: Does selling sex in women's professional sports differ amongst white and black female athletes? To begin to answer this question, I specifically examined the visual depictions of two of women's tennis's most popular athletes, Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams, in their respective *Sports Illustrated* cover shots and selected three print advertisements for analysis for each respective athlete.

After documenting Kournikova and Williams's pertinent biographical information in my analysis chapter regarding their upbringing, tennis career trajectories, and professional accomplishments, I can impartially state that both athletes possessed incredible talent on the world stage, but Williams emerged as the unequivocal superior player between the two. In exploring my second research question (Does selling sex in

women's professional sports differ amongst white and black female athletes?), I examined both Kournikova and Williams's visual depictions through the lens of critical race theory for possible explanations of the result of my analysis.

My analysis revealed the manner in which Kournikova has packaged her brand as a high-fashion model and celebrity and sold her beauty as a reflection of glamour and high status to the more affluent members of Western societies (Harris & Clayton, 2002). While a professional tennis player on the world stage, Kournikova packaged her brand around her beauty and used it to capitalize on the male gaze of Western eyes. Kournikova utilized feminine seduction, mystery, and delicacy to sell an image of wealth and extravagance to the elite in society since beauty, glamour, and elegance have traditionally been seen through the prism of whiteness in contemporary Western societies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; 2013; Valdes, Harris, & Culp, 2011). Due to Kournikova's appearance as a tall, angular, beautiful blonde, she was afforded the opportunity to sell luxury to the luxurious at an increased cost and continued to stay relevant long after her tennis career had expired (Harris & Clayton, 2002).

Kournikova's perceived beauty within Western culture granted her flexibility in regards to the ways in which she marketed and promoted herself to the public (2002). Although Kournikova was portrayed as a model in the print advertisements that I analyzed and was utilized to reach the affluent in society through her portrayals of extravagance and glamour, she could also choose to be casted or portrayed as an athlete, which would allow her to reach greater masses of consumers hailing from much more modest economic backgrounds. As a professional tennis athlete with a career .600 winning percentage in a global sport (albeit no singles tournament titles), Kournikova has

always held the option of casting and portraying herself as the world class athlete that she once was. Instead, Kournikova and her marketing team chose to stick to the script of proven financial success, maintaining the status quo by selling sex, opulence, and status within Western societies. In short, Kournikova was capable of being viewed as an athlete or as a model due to the privilege that whiteness provides, and thus, could be utilized to reach the full spectrum of audiences regardless of their economic makeup, dependent upon the manner in which she chose to be casted or portrayed.

My analysis also revealed the manner in which Williams has packaged her brand as an athlete and sold her personal culture of winning to the greater masses of economically diverse consumers. Williams's unique personal story as a poor, young, black tennis phenom from Compton, California, who rose to become one of the best women's tennis players of this generation, communicates a message of American meritocracy that corporations can utilize, repackage in association with their own brands, and then sell to potential working class consumers at a lower cost (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; 2013; Valdes, Harris, & Culp, 2011). Williams's uncommon personal narrative and individual success allow her to effectively communicate through her advertisements with other working class consumers in contemporary Western societies, also attempting to climb the social ladders of perception.

However, the combination of Williams's blackness coupled with her athletic branding constrain her according to the advertisement's specific targeted audience and corresponding advertisement message (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; 2013; Valdes, Harris, & Culp, 2011). According to the unwritten rules that govern Western societies according to race, Williams must affirm cultural assumptions of black strength, physicality, and

athleticism, and be a success on the tennis court, first, in order to project her status as an overcoming champion onto an adjoining company or product (Griffin, 2012; Rhoden, 2006). Consequently, in affirming her strength, physicality, and athleticism on the tennis court, Williams is viewed through Western eyes as a phenomenal black athlete, limiting her promotional and marketing opportunities to projections of athletic success (Griffin, 2012; Rhoden, 2006).

In contrast with each other and for the purposes of this specific analysis, Kournikova was utilized to target the more affluent in Western societies through her perceived beauty and celebrity while Williams was utilized to target the working class in Western societies through her athletic prowess and achievement. In the next section, I will examine the broader race implications of selling sex in women's professional sports through the lens of critical race theory and discuss my concluding thoughts on my research from a general and overarching perspective concerning the ways in which selling sex in women's professional sports differs amongst white and black female athletes. Later in this chapter, I will also discuss the limitations of my study and offer suggestions toward the direction of future research in this field.

### **Broader Implications**

The broader implications of my analysis regarding the selling of sex and how it differs amongst white and black female athletes reinforce the central tenets maintained through critical race theory. The white privilege that Anna Kournikova specifically enjoys, as evidenced in my analysis, extends itself to all white female athletes participating in sports glorified by Western culture. Thus, the concept of white privilege continues to aid the white female athlete while simultaneously hindering the female



athlete of color. Like Kournikova, white female athletes have multiple avenues available to them, providing various access points to the endgames of fame, wealth, celebrity, public adoration, and ultimately, success, as it is defined within Western societies. Kournikova's white privilege granted her flexibility in reaching her endgame goals. If she flamed out as an athlete on the tennis court (which she did), then her perceived beauty and celebrity, as interpreted through the male gaze of Western eyes, would carry her over the top. In theory, the same privilege extrapolates and applies to all white female athletes perceived to be beautiful within Western societies.

Therefore, the pathways that female athletes of color can utilize to reach the identical theoretical endgames of success are consequently restricted. Black female athletes have a much narrower pathway to fame, wealth, celebrity, public adoration, and success, as it is defined within Western societies, and the majority of those pathways are substantially blocked if athletic success is not first achieved on the field or court. Thus, white privilege puts additional constraints on the black female athlete and requires her to perform at a near perfect level to reach comparable exposure and financial attainment.

As shown earlier in Table 7, for example, Venus Williams won four hundred and ninety-eight more matches than Anna Kournikova over the length of their respective WTA professional careers (Kournikova, 2014; Williams, 2014). Williams has finished in the top ten world rankings eleven times in singles play, compared to Kournikova's one (Kournikova, 2014; Williams, 2014). Williams has won forty-five singles tournaments and seven Grand Slam titles, while Kournikova did not win a single WTA tournament (Kournikova, 2014; Williams, 2014). Williams also earned more than twenty-seven

million dollars more than Kournikova earned in prize money as a professional tennis player on tour (Kournikova, 2014; Williams, 2014).

When comparing the on-court success of both Kournikova and Williams, even the most casual tennis observers would conclude that Williams was not only far more successful than Kournikova, but that the comparison was not even close. However, the endorsement figures that Kournikova and Williams have earned over the course of their careers tell an entirely different story.

Also shown earlier in Table 7, Kournikova's richest endorsement contract was signed with Adidas in 2000 for six years at fifty million dollars (with incentives), ranking Kournikova's contract as the eleventh richest endorsement contract ever signed, while Williams's richest endorsement contract was signed with Reebok, also in 2000, for five years at forty million dollars, ranking Williams's contract as the twelfth richest endorsement contract ever signed (ABC News, 2000; Sibor, 2014). In 2000, Kournikova earned an estimated ten to fifteen million dollars per year in endorsements, second only to Williams after she signed her forty million dollar Reebok contract, but Kournikova soon overtook Williams when she signed her fifty million dollar Adidas contract later that same year (Conrad, 2011). In 2003, Kournikova earned more in endorsements than Williams's sister, Serena (2011). As of 2014, Kournikova had an estimated net worth of fifty million dollars, ranking her the ninth richest tennis player of all-time (male or female), and Williams had an estimated net worth of sixty-two million dollars, ranking her the seventh richest tennis player of all-time, regardless of gender (Billington, 2014; Forbes, 2014).

When analyzing the on-court success and correlating endorsement salaries of both Kournikova and Williams, it is striking to see the gap in their achievement be so wide, yet the endorsement earnings that each athlete collected, be so comparatively close. Kournikova's ranking as the ninth richest tennis player of all-time (male or female), only two slots behind Williams, should give us pause as a society and attract further investigation in regards to the commodification of white and black female athletes within our society. In short, the black female athlete is required to be a 'Superwoman' in her sport before she can realize the type of success that can parallel an average white female athlete who is perceived to have model-like beauty. White privilege not only provides the white female athlete with certain significant advantages off of the field or court, but it also directly handicaps the female athlete of color as she competes for the same marketing and promotional opportunities.

Scholars in critical race theory believe that neutrality and objectivity are unattainable ideals that obscure the normative supremacy of whiteness in American law and society (UCLA School of Public Affairs, 2012; Valdes, Harris & Culp, 2011). For the male and female athlete, neutrality and objectivity may exist while competing on the field or court. However, the meritocracy that applies in professional sports disappointingly ends when the competition has concluded. Sports are governed by rules that apply to each competitor or team, and while subjective means of judging or officiating may be impacted by race, the rules and regulations of the sport are not altered according to race. For example, an all-white basketball team will not gain an extra timeout or be handed an extra possession of the ball when facing a team that is comprised of racial minorities. From that standpoint, professional sports are as close to a

meritocracy as we have in Western culture, but sadly, that level of neutrality and objectivity ends when the match is completed or the game clock expires. My analysis revealed that professional sporting competition will designate a winner and a loser, but that designation, on the field or court, means little in the competition for endorsement opportunities between athletes of different races. The idea of a black female athlete that does not dominate in her sport is a nonstarter as an endorser of a corporate product, while a white female athlete deemed a beautiful loser in her sport can sit atop worldwide lists of female endorsers and command top marketing dollars. Neutrality and objectivity in Western societies begin when the athlete steps on the field or court, crossing the white lines of athletic competition, and abruptly ends when those same athletes cross back over those same white lines of athletic competition and reenter society.

My analysis revealed the institutional and societal power structures that are based upon white privilege allowed Anna Kournikova to package her perceived beauty and correlate her appearance with wealth and extravagance. Kournikova, like many other white female athletes perceived to be beautiful, was able to utilize her beauty in correlation with her whiteness as societal markers for high class. Contemporary Western societies tend to intertwine beauty with class, and as a beautiful, white, female athlete, Kournikova was utilized to reach a predominantly white targeted audience with enough wealth to purchase the expensive products that Kournikova was paid to endorse. My analysis demonstrated that white female athletes are much more likely to be deemed by society as beautiful and wealthy since beauty and wealth are seen through the societal lens of white privilege and protected by institutional and societal power structures.

Consequently, the perpetuation of societal correlations of whiteness, beauty, and wealth also act to perpetuate the marginalization of people of color, and of course, female athletes of color (UCLA School of Public Affairs, 2012). Systematic inequalities continue to tip the balance in favor of the white female athlete and against the female athlete of color. This was evidenced in my analysis by the corporations and products that Venus Williams represented, the manner in which she was depicted, and the intended audience of the print advertisements that featured her. Williams's blackness limited her range in the print advertisements that I analyzed to projections of athletic success and Williams was utilized to reach consumers that were much more likely to look like her and identify with the struggle for upward social mobility. As a result, Williams represented affordable products that were to be sold to the average working class consumer, but not the wealthy in contemporary Western societies. Based upon these systematic and structural inequalities determined by race, and in comparison to white female athletes, female athletes of color have much smaller ranges and scopes of audiences that they are hired to appeal to.

### **Limitations to My Study**

While I believe that my study has value, there are some limitations concerning this analysis. First, I studied the print advertisements featuring Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams during their professional tennis careers, which ranged from 1995 to 2003 for Kournikova and from 1995 to present day for Williams. Since Kournikova's professional tennis career was significantly shorter than Williams's professional tennis career, Kournikova's time range of print advertisements were limited by comparison. It could be argued that Kournikova did not have enough time to mature and grow from her

sex-selling persona as an endorser of corporate products, and because Kournikova was able to sell sex effectively at a young age, it was difficult for her and her marketing team to deviate from that path of proven financial success. For example, many music artists in our societies sell sex to get noticed, and once successful, redefine themselves to speak to a wider range of consumers. It could be argued that Kournikova's professional tennis career ended before she could effectively shift directions and redefine herself off the court as something other than a sex symbol as she got older and matured. Her proven success in the sex-selling market could have prevented her from expanding her horizons before an injury cut short her athletic playing career.

Second, women's professional tennis is a sport that has traditionally been dominated by white women, and by comparison, has seen few black women compete professionally at a sustained high level. Venus Williams and her sister, Serena, have taken black women to new heights in the sport and are regarded as generational superstars in women's professional tennis. Due to the very historical nature of Williams's success, it is entirely possible that her image has been managed in a careful manner, reflecting the enormity of her success in the sport and what it means to young black women desiring to follow in her footsteps. It could be argued that Williams's projected image as a champion was the most viable and sellable image for a black woman of her stature in the predominantly white sport, and due to the historical nature of Williams's success, comparing Williams with any white female tennis player would make for a somewhat uneven comparison by nature. However, merely arguing that point also speaks volumes regarding the overarching racial inequity of opportunity in women's

professional tennis, which in part, is also why I believe that my study and others like it, have value.

Third, there are always variances among readers of images and how they interpret the connotations of those images. One person may interpret an image's connotations in one way while another person may have a completely separate interpretation of the same image's connotations. While the signifier in the print advertisements that I chose for analysis should remain consistent between various readers, the signified might fluctuate according to the educational level and personal, lived experiences of those readers. People with different racial, cultural, geographical, social, class, or gender backgrounds, by nature, interpret things differently. Although I tend to analyze the *Sports Illustrated* covers and print advertisements based upon the literature and my education, my racial, social, and gender background will unconsciously influence my analysis.

I am a male, who was born and raised in a middle-class family. My mother is one-half Latina and one-half White and my father is Black. I received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Telecommunications at the Pennsylvania State University in State College, Pennsylvania, and am currently pursuing my Master's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon. Therefore, my interpretation of the *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers and print advertisements in my study may differ with people from dissimilar racial, social, class, educational, cultural, or gender backgrounds.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Despite these limitations, this study has its merits. My study provides detailed analysis of Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams's visual depictions on *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers and in print advertisements according to critical race theory.

Since Venus Williams's high level of achievement in women's tennis is racially groundbreaking for the sport, I suggest future studies to comparatively explore the visual depictions of the next black women's tennis sensation to measure growth in endorsement opportunities and advertisements' targeted audience range from this point. Future studies should also further explore into capitalism and the ideology of corporations when they utilize and portray female athletes in photographs. Finding out how corporations choose and manipulate photo images of female athletes in relation to capitalism could lead future research in a helpful and positive direction. In addressing the ideologies of the corporations that are promoting the advertisements, additional research should cover aspects of the photograph's production. Interviews with corporate marketers, female athlete marketing agents, photographers, and photo editors would be helpful in discerning how and why female athletes, and more specifically, white and black female athletes, are utilized and portrayed in the manners that they are.

### **Conclusion**

The general objective of this analysis was to contribute to the field of critical race theory, particularly in the area of selling sex in women's professional sports. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to uncover disparities and highlight differing goals as they pertain to the commodification of white and black female athletes.

This study was ultimately led by two prominent research questions. First, I explored the concept of selling sex in women's professional sports by investigating the following research question: Is sex used to sell women's professional sports? After reviewing the literature and summarizing its findings in my literature review chapter, I concluded that sex is undoubtedly used to sell women's professional sports and that the



overarching issue of selling sex in women's professional sports required further attention, and increased scrutiny, and continued review.

Since the literature confirmed that sex is unquestionably utilized to sell women's professional sports, I proceeded to investigate a second research question: Does selling sex in women's professional sports differ amongst white and black female athletes? In answering my second research question, I specifically scrutinized the visual depictions of Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams, two of women's tennis's most popular athletes, on the covers of *Sports Illustrated* magazine and selected three print advertisements for analysis for each respective athlete.

I documented both Kournikova and Williams's pertinent biographical information regarding their early life development, tennis career trajectories, and professional achievements in section I of my analysis chapter to objectively display each athletes' individual on-court tennis success. My analysis revealed that both Kournikova and Williams displayed incredible promise on the tennis court at a very young age and turned professional as teenagers on the world stage (Kournikova, 2014; Williams, 2014). Without dispute, both Kournikova and Williams possessed an incredibly high level of natural talent, which allowed each athlete to compete professionally against competitors representing nations from all over the world. However, Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams's career accomplishments while on WTA tour objectively speak for themselves through the statistics that I have provided in this study. After thorough review of both Kournikova and Williams's career accomplishments, I can impartially conclude that by any standard utilized to measure success in the sport of women's tennis, Williams emerged as the unequivocal superior player between the two.

In investigating my second research question (Does selling sex in women's professional sports differ amongst white and black female athletes?), I applied the lens of critical race theory to my analysis of Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams's visual depictions on *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers and in print advertising to better understand the commodification of white and black female athletes.

This analysis revealed the ways in which Kournikova has packaged her brand as a heterosexual, high-fashion model and celebrity and sold her beauty as a reflection of glamour and prominence to the more affluent populations in Western societies (Harris & Clayton, 2002). Even though Kournikova was a professional tennis player on the world stage, she instead packaged her brand around her beauty and implemented heterosexual flirtation techniques to utilize the male gaze of Western eyes to her benefit. Kournikova utilized feminine seduction, mystery, and delicacy to sell an image of wealth and extravagance to the elite in society since beauty, glamour, and elegance have traditionally been seen through the prism of whiteness in contemporary Western societies (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; 2013; Valdes, Harris, & Culp, 2011). Due to Kournikova's appearance as a tall, angular, beautiful blonde, she was afforded the opportunity to sell luxury to the luxurious at an increased cost and continued to stay relevant long after her tennis career had expired (Harris & Clayton, 2002).

Kournikova's perceived beauty within Western culture granted her flexibility in regards to the ways in which she marketed and promoted herself to the public (Harris & Clayton, 2002). Although Kournikova was portrayed as a model on *Sports Illustrated's* cover and in the print advertisements that I analyzed, and was utilized to target the wealthy in society through her portrayals of celebrity and opulence, Kournikova could

also choose to be casted or portrayed as an athlete, which would allow her to reach greater masses of more economically diverse consumers. Kournikova possessed the capability of being viewed as an athlete or as a model due to the privilege that whiteness provides, and thus, could ultimately be utilized to reach the full spectrum of audiences regardless of their economic makeup.

Since Kournikova was a professional tennis athlete with a career .600 winning percentage in a global sport, such as tennis, she has always held the option of casting or portraying herself as a world class athlete. However, Kournikova instead chose stick to her script of proven financial success and maintained her status quo by selling sex, opulence, and high status within Western societies. In short, Kournikova's white privilege provided her multiple avenues toward the endgame of financial success and granted her flexibility in regards to the ways in which she chose to portray herself to the public. However, for the purposes of this analysis, Kournikova was utilized to target the more affluent in Western societies through her perceived beauty and celebrity.

My analysis also revealed the ways in which Williams has packaged her brand as an athlete and sold her personal culture of winning achievement to the greater masses of economically diverse consumers. Williams's unique individual narrative as a poor, young, black phenom from Compton, California, who rose to become one of the best women's tennis' players of this generation, surely communicates a strong message of American meritocracy that corporations can utilize, repackage in association with their own brands, and then sell to potential working class consumers at a lower cost (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; 2013; Valdes, Harris, & Culp, 2011). Williams's uncommon personal narrative and individual success allowed her to effectively communicate through her

advertisements with other working class consumers in contemporary Western societies, also aspiring to climb the social class ladders of perception.

However, the combination of Williams's blackness, coupled with her athletic branding, constrain her according to the advertisement's specific targeted audience and corresponding advertisement message (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; 2013; Valdes, Harris, & Culp, 2011). Williams must affirm cultural assumptions of black strength, physicality, and athleticism and be a success on the tennis court, first, in order to project her status onto an adjoining company or product (Griffin, 2012; Rhoden, 2006). Unlike Kournikova, who would still claim status within contemporary Western societies based upon societal definitions and public perceptions of her beauty, without the sport of tennis, Williams is not afforded a comparable vehicle in contemporary Western society that would allow for her rapid ascension up the social class ladders of perception and prestige. Consequently, in affirming her strength, physicality, and athleticism on the tennis court, Williams is viewed through Western eyes as a phenomenal black athlete, limiting her promotion and marketing opportunities to projections of athletic success (Griffin, 2012; Rhoden, 2006). For the purposes of this specific analysis, Williams was utilized to target the working class in Western societies through her athletic prowess and achievement.

My analysis of Anna Kournikova and Venus Williams's visual depictions on *Sports Illustrated* magazine covers and in print advertisements revealed that, first, not only is sex used to sell women's professional sports, but the concept of selling sex in women's professional sports is very much alive, robust, and interwoven into the fabric of our culture in a somewhat complicated manner. Women's bodies have been coveted throughout the history of humanity and today's time and era provide no alterations to that

overarching cultural narrative. However, my analysis revealed discrepancies between the ways in which white and black female athletes are allowed to sell themselves to the public. Since a society identifies, describes, and defines, who and what is deemed beautiful and desirable, it comes as no surprise that that same society would perceive beauty to be a reflection of itself. Therefore, white female athletes, such as Kournikova, are viewed and sexualized through this prism of whiteness in contemporary Western societies, ultimately giving the attractive white female athlete a dual track towards achieving her individual marketing goals; she can either be good or be sexy.

Conversely, my analysis revealed that the black female athlete must first gain recognition as a superstar in her sport before she is allowed to sell herself in correlation with any corporate products. Our Western culture and society does not naturally view the female athlete of color through the same lens of beauty that it uses to evaluate other white female athletes. As a consequence, female athletes of color must achieve greatness in their individual sport to sell themselves as champions and gain greater public recognition. In doing so, the female athlete of color tends to typecast herself as a strong or powerful athlete, therefore further limiting her ability to be perceived as beautiful within our Western societies.

In summary, selling sex in women's professional sports does differ, quite significantly, amongst white and black female athletes. Female athletes of color do not have the luxury of being average in their sport, while maintaining a broad commercial appeal. There are no black equivalents to Anna Kournikova in women's sports today. No such black female athlete exists, where she is allowed to be average in her individual sport, yet simultaneously command elite marketing and promotional money for

commercial endorsements. Corporations do not attach themselves to female athletes of color unless they are dominant on the field or court in their individual sport. Western society judges beauty through its societal lens of whiteness and concludes that beautiful black female athletes do not reach the same level of mass commercial appeal as beautiful white female athletes within Western society. Since they are not automatically viewed as beautiful through the Western societal prism of whiteness, female athletes of color tend to market their athletic achievement and sell themselves as athletes to the working class consumer, while white female athletes have significantly more flexibility regarding the audiences that they appeal to and the manners in which they choose to market, package, and sell themselves within Western societies.

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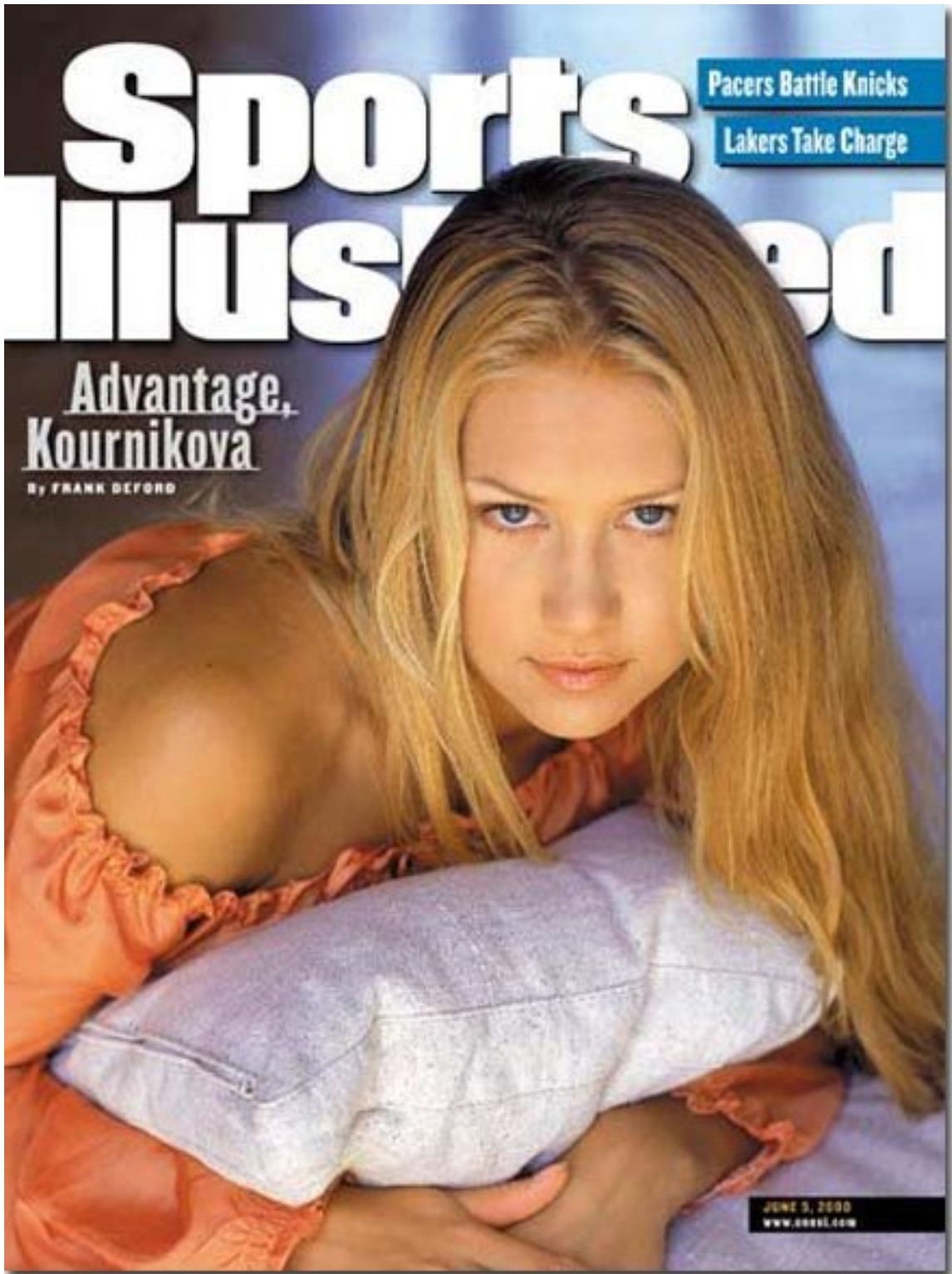


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APPENDICES

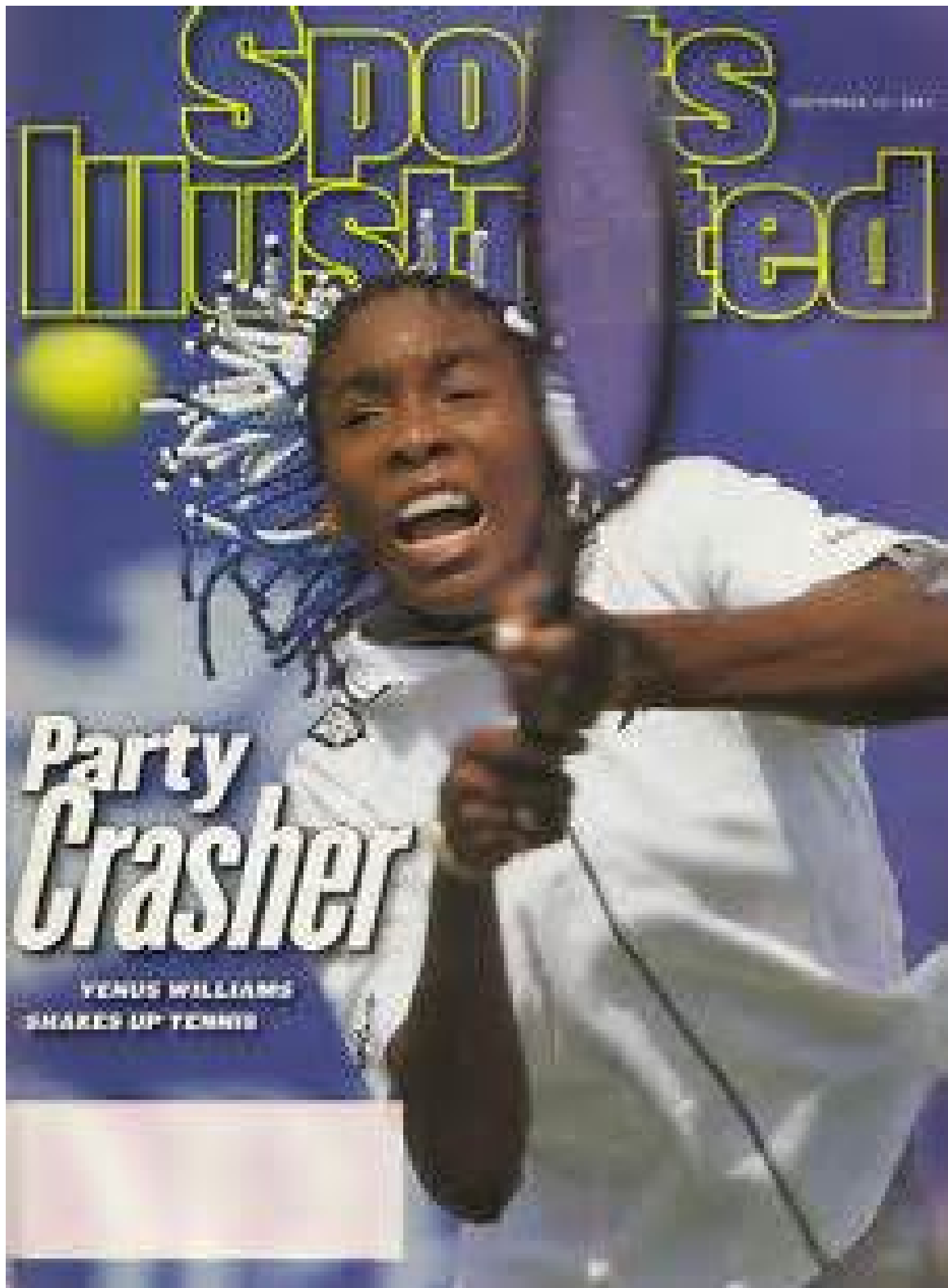
Appendix A

Anna Kournikova's June 2000 *Sports Illustrated* Magazine Cover (Bedford, 2000)



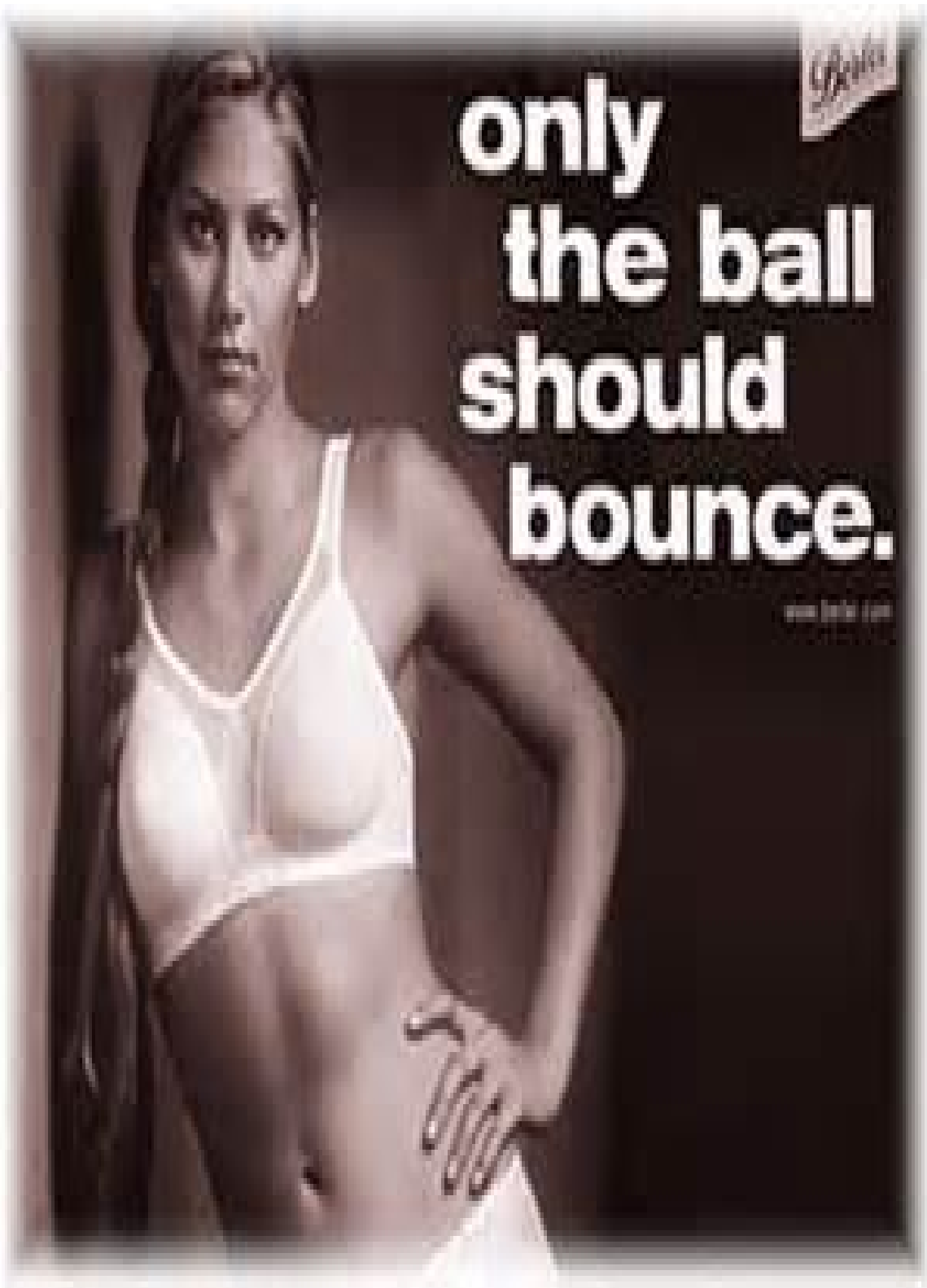
Appendix B

Venus Williams's September 1997 *Sports Illustrated* Magazine Cover (Manfra, 1997)



Appendix C

Anna Kournikova's Berlei Sports Bra Print Advertisement



Appendix D

Venus Williams's Tide Sport Laundry Detergent Print Advertisement



UNBEATABLE STYLE.  
CHAMPIONSHIP CLEAN.

It's not enough to just wash and dry. It's how you wash.  
Tide Sport is the only clean that is not.



Appendix E

Anna Kournikova's K-Swiss Tennis Shoes Print Advertisement



Appendix F

Venus Williams's EA Sports Active 2 Print Advertisement





Appendix G

Anna Kournikova's Omega Watches Print Advertisement



Appendix H

Venus Williams's Kia Motors Print Advertisement



