

2000

# Femininity, sexuality and sport: A case study of female inter-university varsity athletes.

Carolyn L. Dutot  
*University of Windsor*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd>

---

## Recommended Citation

Dutot, Carolyn L., "Femininity, sexuality and sport: A case study of female inter-university varsity athletes." (2000). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 2093.

This online database contains the full-text of PhD dissertations and Masters' theses of University of Windsor students from 1954 forward. These documents are made available for personal study and research purposes only, in accordance with the Canadian Copyright Act and the Creative Commons license—CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution, Non-Commercial, No Derivative Works). Under this license, works must always be attributed to the copyright holder (original author), cannot be used for any commercial purposes, and may not be altered. Any other use would require the permission of the copyright holder. Students may inquire about withdrawing their dissertation and/or thesis from this database. For additional inquiries, please contact the repository administrator via email ([scholarship@uwindsor.ca](mailto:scholarship@uwindsor.ca)) or by telephone at 519-253-3000ext. 3208.

## **INFORMATION TO USERS**

**This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.**

**The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.**

**In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.**

**Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.**

**Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.**

**Bell & Howell Information and Learning  
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA  
800-521-0600**

**UMI<sup>®</sup>**



**Femininity, Sexuality and Sport: A Case Study of  
Female Inter-University Varsity Athletes.**

**by**

**Carolyn L. Dutot**

**A Thesis  
Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and Research  
Through the Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts  
at the University of Windsor**

**Windsor, Ontario, Canada  
2000**

**© 2000 Carolyn Dutot**



**National Library  
of Canada**

**Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services**

**395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada**

**Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada**

**Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques**

**395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada**

*Your file Votre référence*

*Our file Notre référence*

**The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.**

**The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.**

**L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.**

**L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.**

**0-612-52541-4**

**Canada**

## **ABSTRACT**

**This study examines the marginalization of women's sport, and the social control experienced by elite female athletes. The research provides a critical assessment of the contemporary literature on women in sport, observation of female athletes in the media, perceptions based on my own experience as a varsity athlete, and an analysis of in-depth interviews with other female inter-university varsity athletes. Together the findings of this study indicate that an emphasis on traditional expectations of femininity and an association between lesbian images and female athletes are found within women's sport, particularly for those women participating in traditionally masculine sports. It is then argued that as more emphasis is placed on their appearance and sexuality than their performance, the accomplishments of female athletes are discredited, and their experience in sport diminished.**

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

There are many people who deserve credit for the completion of this thesis. First and foremost I need to thank my committee—Drs. Suzan Ilcan, Jacqueline Lewis and Margery Holman. I also want to thank Victoria Paraschak for her support in the early stages of this thesis and for referring me to Margery while she was on sabbatical during the latter stages of this project.

Jackie, you know there are no words to express my gratitude for the help and guidance you have offered me. Thank you for all the time and effort that you put into my work, and for always being available when I needed your help. You have always gone above and beyond the expectations of a professor, and a committee member, and I will always be indebted. I also owe you for the e-mails which convinced me to come back from Australia to finish.

Suzan, thank you as well for everything you have done for me throughout the completion of this thesis. I appreciate that you were always very positive and supportive of my work, and especially for sticking by me, and continuing to work with me after my hiatus from the program.

I would like to thank all the women who volunteered and offered their time and insight for my study. To all my friends and family that have had to hear about this thesis for such an extended amount of time. Each and every one of you have contributed in some way throughout the completion of this thesis, and I

**thank you. I especially want to thank everyone who showed a genuine interest in my work, and encouraged me to finish so that they could read it!**



**Femininity, Sexuality and Sport: A Case Study of  
Female Inter-University Varsity Athletes**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	iii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b> .....	iv
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
Femininity, Sexuality and the Female Athlete	
<b>CHAPTER TWO: FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY</b> .....	12
Conceptual Framework	
Qualitative Methods of Research	
<b>CHAPTER THREE: TRADITIONAL EXPECTATIONS OF     FEMININITY</b> .....	32
Reserving Sport for Men	
Female Athletes in the Media	
Expectations of Femininity and Athletes Responses	
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: LESBIAN IMAGES IN SPORT</b> .....	52
Silence of Lesbianism in Sport	
Male Dominated Sport and Lesbian Images	
Lesbian Images and Labels Directed at Female Athletes	
Breaking Down Barriers Between Female Athletes	
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION</b> .....	71
Conclusions	
Recommendations for New Research	
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	79
<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	85
<b>VITA AUCTORIS</b> .....	97

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **FEMININITY, SEXUALITY AND THE FEMALE ATHLETE: AN INTRODUCTION**

The state of sport, particularly women's sport, appears to have changed dramatically in the past 100 years. In North America, there has been a dramatic rise in participation rates in female sport (Acosta and Carpenter, 1994). There have also been more female athletes in the media spotlight, and a growth in the popularity of female sporting events. However, in the quest for equality, female athletes have encountered a turbulent track. Despite advances they have made, women in sport continue to face many hurdles.

Within women's competitive sport, there have been several historical events for female athletes.<sup>1</sup> The Olympic Games have proven to be an important stepping ground for the growth and recognition of female athletes. Despite opposition by some members of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Olympic Games of 1900 included women's golf and tennis. In 1908, archery and figure skating were added events. In 1928, women's track and field<sup>2</sup> was

---

<sup>1</sup> A film has been produced by HBO Sports, *Dare to Compete: The Struggle of Women in Sports*, documenting female athletes through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Greenburg, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> The Amsterdam Olympics of 1928 included only five track and field events, including: 100m, 800m, 4x100 relay, high jump and discus. The press attention, however, "was of a disparaging nature. So much was written about the collapse of several competitors at the end of the 800m final that the event was deleted from the Olympic programme until 1960" (Watman, 1996:39).

introduced. However, as more traditionally masculine sports were added to the Olympic roster, an increasing emphasis was placed on the feminine appearance of the female athletes (Guttmann, 1991). "There was a decided tendency to publish pictures of women Olympians posed like beauty queens" (Blue, 1988:27). Even athletes themselves made statements emphasizing the importance of femininity. For example, swimmer Eleanor Holm, winner of the 100-meter backstroke and often referred to as the "most beautiful girl athlete," told the press:

It's great fun to swim and a great thrill to compete in the Olympics, but the moment I find my swimming is making me athletic looking, giving me big, bulky muscles, making me look like an Amazon, rather than a woman, I'll toss it to one side (Posnack as cited in Guttmann, 1991:324).

An emphasis on the feminine appearance of female athletes continued into the 1940's and 1950's. As men were fighting in World War II, women were recruited into the labour force to cover the labour shortages in industry. It was during this time of women's increasing involvement in male-dominated activities that female softball players from across the United States and Canada were recruited to form the All American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) (Weiller & Higgs, 1994). Although "Rosie the Riveter," wearing the traditionally masculine labourer attire of pants or overalls, became a national symbol (Browne, 1993), the women of the AAGPBL were required to uphold a feminine image.

**Wrigley<sup>3</sup> believed image was a vital selling factor for the new league and judged the women who tried out as much for their beauty as for their baseball ability...athletes were taught how to put on make-up, enunciate correctly, and maintain correct posture (Fidler as cited in Weiller and Higgs, 1994:291).**

**The AAGPBL operated from 1943 to 1954, continuing after World War II.**

**However,**

**following the War the national psyche demanded a different kind of woman than had begun to emerge in the years between the Wars. The housewife and mother role prescribed for women...was...a natural reaction for a society that wished to integrate a large number of men back into its work force (McDonald, 1995:12).**

**This attitude carried over to create a decreased acceptability of women's participation in a traditionally male sport, such as baseball (Chafe as cited in Weiller and Higgs, 1994).**

**Many researchers have referred to the period after World War II, as the Dark Age in women's sport. It was not until the 1970's and 1980's that women's sport began to once again make advances. During this time a new wave of feminism was occurring. The battle for equality on all levels of society translated into increased opportunities, including in sports, for more women, (McDonald,**

---

**<sup>3</sup> Chicago Cubs owner Phillip K. Wrigley established the AAGPBL in 1943 (Guttmann, 1991).**

1995; Guttman, 1991).

As we head into the next millennium, it appears that women's sport is growing in popularity, making some advances towards equality and being recognized as competitive sport. We can now pick up a paper and read about the local female boxing champion. We can turn on the television and watch a professional women's basketball game. We can watch the gold medal game in the Olympics for women's ice-hockey or soccer. There is no question that women have made gains in the sporting arena, which has brought about new optimism for young girls across the nation. Despite this positive outlook, behind the glossy photos of professional athletes to the locker rooms on university campuses, women's sport continues to be controlled by patriarchal ideals. Female athletes are often viewed in ways that portray them both as sex objects and/or as sexual deviants.

Although the enactment of new laws<sup>4</sup> has allowed women opportunities towards equal access and participation in sport, female athletes are still regarded by a large portion of the general population as trespassing on male property. In

---

<sup>4</sup> In Canada, the enactment of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the Constitution Act of 1982 brought about equal rights and freedoms to males and females. In 1986 Sport Canada established a formal policy on Women in Sport with the goal of equal opportunity for women at all levels of sport (Robertson, 1995). In the United States, 1972, Congress passed Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments Act, which requires federally funded high schools and colleges to provide males and females with the same benefits of athletic participation (Women's Sports Foundation, 1998).

order for these women to be held in high regard there is pressure on the athletes to maintain traditional characteristics and expectations of female behaviour, in spite of their athletic status. These constraints are necessary in order to reserve sport as a male activity and maintain the importance of sport as an institution of masculine definition (Lenskyj, 1986; Messner, 1988; McDermott, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994).

As noted by McDermott (1996), sport-feminist analyses suggest that male attempts to control women's participation in sport is connected to the linking of physical activity and sexuality. Female athletes who participate in more traditional feminine sports and present images of "femininity" are treated as sporting sex symbols. In contrast, female athletes participating in traditionally masculine sports face being labelled unfeminine or encounter accusations of being lesbian. Griffin (1992) suggests that the presentation of a feminine image has become necessary to reassure the public, and possibly the athletes themselves, that they are still women despite their athletic interests.

For female athletes, their role as an athlete must be secondary to their traditional role as a woman. As a result, the status of woman, wife, mother and caregiver must be demonstrated. As Bowman and Daniels (1995:85) suggest, "the socialization of women into selective roles legitimates the ideology of patriarchy and reinforces the power to control what is considered 'appropriate' for females by males." The mass media, including magazines, newspapers and television commentary, play a vital role in "reproducing dominant interpretations

of femininity' (McDermott, 1996:15). In contrast with male athletes, profiles of female athletes often include stories of husbands and children in order to project a heterosexual image and show their athletic role is secondary (Griffin, 1992). Female athletes are also sexually objectified through condescending descriptions and glamorous and gratuitous photography (McDermott, 1996; Bowman and Daniels, 1995).

The sexualization of female athletes can be clearly demonstrated through recent developments in the sport of tennis. Tennis has traditionally been viewed as an acceptable feminine activity, as past competitors relied more on finesse and accuracy and less on strength and power. Recently, however, there has been an increase in stronger female tennis players. Strength training combined with the availability of new equipment (e.g., racquets engineered for power) has led women to develop a power game similar to the men's game.

Along with these advances has come the stigmatization of "masculine, muscular athletes," and the sexual objectification of more "feminine" athletes. For example, at the 1999 Australian Open a new 19 year old French player (Mauresmo) upset the number one player in the world (Davenport). Immediately following the match, newspapers were filled with articles about Mauresmo's lesbian relationship, including pictures of Mauresmo with her girlfriend (Yallop, 1999:5). Athletes on the tennis tour were quoted in the press with comments such as: "I thought I was playing a guy" (Davenport); and "She's here with her girlfriend, she's half a man" (Hingis) (Hogan, 1999:20). This type of coverage

illustrates the ability of the mass media to highlight negative comments made by the athletes themselves to undermine women's athletic accomplishments, and to control and marginalize women's sport through sexualizing the athlete and using the lesbian stigma. According to University of Toronto professor Margaret MacNeil, the publicity surrounding Mauresmo illustrates that homophobia continues to be a problem in women's sport (Gatehouse, 2000:A3).

While some female athletes are being stigmatized as deviant, other more feminine athletes are being exploited as they are normalized through praise and promotion as sex symbols. During the 1999 Wimbledon tennis tournament, a "fairly reputable newspaper actually ran a two-page, full colour 'Derriere Quiz', which featured rear-end undies shots of no fewer than 11 female players, along with hints to match the tush with the tennis" (Albom, 1999:20). The sexual innuendo running through the coverage of women's sport is apparent in several other articles featuring tennis player Anna Kournikova. One article starts, "she has a golden long mane of plaited hair, a tanned and trim body barely covered by her mini-dress and a sparkling array of white teeth, which could light up a room" (Albom, 1999:20). Another reads "her practice togs consist of nothing more than an Adidas bathing suit-black stretch halter top and wee black shorts, which appear to have been painted on her bronzed, lean body" (Coleman, 1998:98). There is, however, a debate surrounding Kournikova, in that some critics would argue that "people focus on her hair and her attitude...[but] overlook...that she's one hell of a tennis player." Others feel that although "she's not that good...there



are glaring weaknesses in her game...the tennis world has what it wants-a pretty, heterosexual girl" (Coleman, 1998:98). Either way, the focus on Kournikova's sexuality, as opposed to her athletic ability, exemplifies the transformation of a female athlete into a sexual object. Sexual objectification trivializes athletic ability and further controls the achievements of women in sport.

Sexism in sport can be understood as both male privilege and female subordination. Heterosexism assumes heterosexuality as the dominant form of sexual acceptance, and stigmatizes homosexual and bi-sexual identities (Griffin, 1998). The effects of these dominant systems seems to have been impeded by the general assumption that a change towards equality has been occurring in all aspects of sport. This change may be due partially to the fact that liberal feminists have focused on equality and equal access within existing structures in their efforts for change (Jefferson Lenskyj, 1994,1995). Although the efforts of liberal feminists are highly accredited (Jefferson Lenskyj, 1995), the publicity of current women's sports and the attention on the increased participation of female athletes fail to recognize the continuing stigmatization that some athletes experience.

Radical feminists (Jefferson Lenskyj, 1994; Cahn, 1993; Griffin, 1992) challenge researchers to address the role of sexuality in new sport-related literature. Helen Jefferson Lenskyj, a feminist and sport sociologist, has written numerous essays on women and sport since her first book, *Out of Bounds: Women, Sport and Sexuality*, was published in 1986. Her research has

stimulated much thought on sport as a feminist issue. In particular, Lenskyj looks at the institution of "compulsory heterosexuality," originally identified by Adrienne Rich (1980). Lenskyj outlines how compulsory heterosexuality has shaped the female sport experience, "specifically by classifying physical activities as 'feminine,' and therefore appropriate for females, only when they [are]... seen to enhance heterosexual attractiveness" (Lenskyj, 1990:236). Lenskyj's research adds a substantial contribution to the amount of Canadian literature on women, sexuality and sport.

Pat Griffin, an American researcher, also plays an important role in the foundation of women and sport research. Her research addresses issues of sexism, heterosexism and homophobia in sport, and the effects of these on all women in sport. Griffin's (1998) latest book, *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport*, explores these issues, providing candid experiences from lesbians in sport. The work of both Lenskyj and Griffin opens the doors for many new researchers to delve further into this area and provides a great deal of the background for this study.

The purpose of this study is to explore the marginalization of women's sport as experienced and understood by elite female athletes. Specifically, this study examines traditional gender role expectations within sport, and the subsequent portrayal of female athletes as both sexual objects and/or sexual deviants. Using a feminist framework, this study investigates the social control, within North American society, of women's sexuality and its impact on women in

**sport.**

**Personal interviews with female inter-university varsity athletes were conducted to focus on this specific objective of interest, outlined above. The participants in this study considered sport to be an integral part of their lives and spoke about personal experiences in sport while growing up and participating in varsity level sport. Their involvement in sport at an elite level also gave privilege to their views and perceptions of the portrayal of elite and professional female athletes in society. In their interviews athletes discussed how sports are dominated by men and male standards. Females participating in sport are judged by these standards, in addition to standards of femininity and sexuality. The presence of lesbian images attached to women's sport and the management of these images by the athletes and their teammates are also discussed.**

**Chapter two of this thesis is divided into two sections. The first section of chapter two of this thesis provides a critical review of the literature concerned with relevant issues related to gender and sexuality within sport, particularly women's sport and an outline of my conceptual framework. This section focuses on the enforcement of traditional gender roles in sport and the sexualization of the female athlete. In addition, women's entry into the male sporting domain and the subsequent violation of gender role expectations within patriarchal heterosexist Western society, are outlined. The second section of Chapter 2 outlines my personal interest and motivation for undertaking this research and presents the methodological approach used in this research project.**

The findings of this study are presented in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. Chapter 3 explores how sport is viewed as a male activity and the secondary status afforded female athletes. The emphasis on femininity and the treatment of female athletes as sexual objects is presented. Further, an examination of the expectation for female athletes to uphold a feminine image and the athletes' responses to this expectation are identified.

Chapter 4 describes the strength of the lesbian image in sport to control female athletes. This chapter identifies the association of lesbianism with traditionally masculine sports. In addition, the techniques female athletes use to disassociate from this image are discussed. The potential of the lesbian image to segregate and divide female athletes and control the participation of women in sport is also explored.

The final chapter of this thesis, Chapter 5, draws conclusions from the findings of this study and describes the direction of women's sport participation. The subordination of female athletes and the need for change is emphasized. In addition, recommendations for future research are also provided.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **FEMALE ATHLETES CROSSING THE PATRIARCHAL BOUNDARY: TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY OF SPORT SOCIOLOGY**

#### **Conceptual Framework**

The sociology of sport has expanded rapidly in recent years, and is now a respected field of research. Much of the early research produced by men focused on sport, class and race. More recently this research was expanded to include the construction of masculinity. George Sage, Jay Coakley, John Hargreaves, Bruce Kidd, Michael Messner, and Donald Sabo are among the scholars who study these issues (Burstyn, 1999). Unfortunately, many of the male approaches to sport have focused on "male" sports, using the "add-women and stir" approach to generalize their findings to the experiences of females in sport. Some scholars (e.g. Jay Coakley, John Hargreaves) have devoted separate space to female sports and gender issues in sport, although, usually still within a male orientation and only in a small section or short chapter (Hargreaves, 1994).

An increasing amount of literature has been developed in recent years specifically addressing women's sports. In the feminist context, most sport-related research tends to reflect a liberal perspective, with questions of equal access being the central feature (Lenskyj, 1990; Hargreaves, 1994). Researchers such as Boutilier and SanGiovanni (1994) and Acosta and Carpenter (1994) have focused on improvement in the sporting opportunities and

resources available to girls and women. Liberal feminists find women's oppression to be grounded in the lack of equal civil rights for women. They believe that through reform of political, legal and educational opportunities, all women can have equal access and be rewarded equally for their talents (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1994).

Although it is important to note the work done by liberal feminists and the advances that they have made, it is also important to acknowledge those areas that liberal feminists have neglected. For example, although female athletes have made great strides towards equality in sports participation, there remains a danger in equating these successes as general equality within sport. Such false assumptions allow us to believe that a real change has occurred for the majority of women entering and participating in sport. Since the main goal for liberal feminists within sport is to assure equal opportunity for female athletes, they tend to neglect the important role of sexuality in sport and the impact of compulsory heterosexuality on athletes. It is therefore necessary to draw from other feminist frameworks, including both radical and socialist feminism, to address the issue of sexuality.

Socialist feminists examine patriarchal forms of cultural and social life and acknowledge both sexism and heterosexism as forces which maintain male privilege. They recognize the need to abolish these forces in order to overcome the oppression of all women (Boutilier and SanGiovanni, 1994). For radical feminists, the primary focus of concern is the control of women's sexuality and

the female body. Taking this position, radical feminists find it important to identify sport not only in connection with power and male superiority, but also with sexuality. For radical feminists the link between sexuality and physicality is identified by male attempts to control or prevent women's participation in sport (McDermott, 1996), particularly sports that have traditionally been considered male domain.

Historically, control over female physicality has been enforced in a variety of ways. In early 20th century North America, the medical establishment warned women about the debilitating physiological effects of participating in sport (Griffin, 1992; Cahn, 1994), particularly the dangers of sport for female reproduction (Lenskyj, 1990). Women were also cautioned about the masculinizing effects of vigorous athleticism (Griffin, 1992). Later, in both Canada and the United States, court rulings against female participation in traditionally male team sports demonstrated control of physicality through state regulation. "Sports designated as contact sports were permitted male-only teams...[and] subsequent attempts were made by opponents of integration to have most team sports designated contact sports" (Lenskyj, 1986:111). Another attempt to restrict female participation in athletics has been the use of continuous innuendoes concerning the sexuality of female athletes, particularly those women involved in so called "masculine" sports. Female athletes were referred to as butch, or mannish and further, "female athletic mannishness began to connote failed heterosexuality (Cahn,1994:165).

According to McDermott(1996:15) control of female physicality “is not likely due to some well-thought-out plan to oppress women, but is rather a mechanism of self-protection founded upon male fears of declining power.” The maintenance of male power and privilege depends partially on carefully constructed and institutionalized beliefs about gender differences. “Sport, by prevailing definitions concerned with physical ability and body comportment provides an appropriate site for instruction in masculinity and femininity” (Lenskyj, 1990:240). Accepting that modern sport was developed primarily for men as an area of male dominance, sport was, and is, regarded and carried out as a domain of masculine orientation, values and norms (Palzkill, 1990). Sport serves an important function as a training ground for traditional male gender roles. Women in sport, especially serious competitors, weaken the special role of sport in the development of masculinity, and the resulting privileges for...heterosexual men (Griffin, 1998; Fenton, 1995).

Female athletes are seen to pose a threat to heterosexual men and the dominant culture because their participation in sport represents women’s resistance to their subordinate status (Schur, 1984). “In a sexist and heterosexist society women who defy the accepted feminine role or reject a heterosexual identity threaten to upset the imbalance of power enjoyed by...heterosexual men in a patriarchal society” (Bryson, 1987:352). Women’s resistance to the traditional female role initiates mechanisms deemed necessary to ensue compliance with the normative gender order. In particular, mechanisms such as



the stigmatization and devaluation of those individuals whose behaviour deviates from the norm are used (Schur, 1984).

It has been argued that we become our gender within a heterosexual paradigm which institutionalizes certain images of femininity and masculinity (Kolnes, 1995). Radical feminists argue that compulsory heterosexuality has been accomplished through the classification of certain physical activities as feminine. These activities are then viewed as appropriate for females because they are perceived to enhance a woman's heterosexual attractiveness (Lenskyj, 1995).

Since traditional feminine characteristics do not include qualities such as physical strength, aggressiveness, independence, tough-mindedness, and muscularity (Cohen, 1993), some female athletes are perceived as crossing or extending the boundaries of socially constructed definitions of femininity (Theberge, 1985). As Theberge (1985) notes, sport requires aggressiveness, strength, competitiveness and independence which is in sharp contrast to the stereotypical ideal that women should be submissive, sensitive, weak and dependent.

In general, all women competing in sport are at some risk of being stigmatized because of their athletic status. Pederson and Kono (1990), however, found that there are some sports that are perceived to be less masculine. Sports that require the use of less heavy objects, those which need accuracy rather than strength, and those that have little or no body contact, seem

to be more acceptable and less threatening. Athletes participating in these sports are therefore at less risk of being labelled unfeminine or lesbian. As one athlete commented:

Gymnastics is not labelled since gymnastics is a girly thing. The leotards they are in...look at female basketball players and they wear their shorts to their knees, huge and baggy. [They] wear shirts untucked. And the gymnasts have their hair fixed perfect and their make-up on, and it's not at all physical (Blinde and Taub, 1992:161).

Such statements illustrate the masculine and feminine images associated with different sports. According to McDermott (1996), females who engage in traditional "masculine" sports often have their sexuality called into question and may be labelled as "unfeminine," butch or lesbian. Women who engage in "traditional" female sports, in contrast, are held up as the appropriate female sporting models. Female athletes who participate, however, in masculine sport are at risk of a masculine image. They must choose to accept this image or make attempts to counteract the image. Female athletes who choose to present a feminine image are praised for their physical beauty, but their sporting accomplishments are secondary.

Sport, particularly elite sport (professional, amateur, inter-university/inter-collegiate) which is the most visible and official form of sport, has become an institution that legitimizes the sexualization of women. The body is at the center of all sport. For female athletes, the focus on the body goes beyond athletic

**proWess to physical beauty. The focus on beauty is evidenced in media reports. For example, when discussing the increasing competition and raw power in women's tennis, Lindsay (1997:58) adds "beauty will still have its place of course, as it should." Most often through the media and advertisements we see images of female athletes that focus on their femininity, family and other factors unrelated to the sporting accomplishments of the athlete (Bowman and Daniels, 1995). The sexualization of female athletes downplays their performance skills and transforms the athletes into sexual objects (Kolnes, 1995). As noted by Hargreaves(1990:24):**

**Athletic skills are ignored and sexuality highlighted. Such glamour images can transform an athlete into an object of desire and envy. Both are ways of eroticizing the female body and presenting it as an acceptable sexual object, and both trivialize female sport.**

**Female athletes recognize that to be tolerated in a traditionally masculine domain, they are required to emphasize their femininity. According to some athletes, as an apology, feminine images are perpetuated through the use of make-up, having long hair, and by dressing in feminine ways outside the sporting arena (Kolnes, 1995; Klasovec, 1995; Lenskyj, 1987). As one athlete noted:**

**I have always been very preoccupied with being feminine. It might be the fact that I've never had short hair is an attempt to compensate for playing in shorts, gear, and socks. You're not necessarily masculine because of that, but it is neither directly feminine....I know for sure that one of**

**the reasons that I haven't had short hair, is that I am a soccer player. I do not want short hair because it looks sort of boyish. To have long hair has been exactly what I've needed (Kolnes, 1995:66).**

**This quote demonstrates that presentations of heterosexual attractiveness are used in an attempt to avoid being labelled.**

**Within the context of sport, femininity serves as a code word for heterosexuality (Kolnes, 1995). The belief that sport is a masculine activity creates the image of women who participate in sport as being masculine, unladylike or manly. Cahn (1993:343) argues that "the figure of the mannish lesbian athlete has acted as a powerful but unarticulated 'bogey woman' of sport." In her book, Cahn (1993) explores the historical relationship between lesbianism and sport. According to Cahn, the homophobia of the post-war era is responsible for the long-standing link between homosexuality and female athletes.**

**Today, the enforcement of traditional gender roles and fears about homosexuality still have the power to intimidate and discourage women from participating in sports. Those women who do choose to participate are merely perceived by many as second-rate imitations of the real thing, male athletes. According to Cohen (1993) this perception reinforces the notion that successful women athletes are masculine. Blinde and Taub (1992, 1992b) agree with Cohen. They note that attaching the label of lesbian to women who engage in sport diminishes the sporting accomplishments of female athletes.**

**A woman who is active in the male domain of sport pays a very special price. Her behaviour and whole person are described as masculine and her sexuality as woman is denied (Palzkill, 1990). Accusing women athletes of being masculine has been one way to control women in sport. Labelling them lesbians has been an even more effective means of control given the homophobia that exists within North American society (Blinde and Taub, 1992; Fusco, 1995). The lesbian image carries an extreme negative social stigma, which most women wish to avoid (Griffin, 1992). As long as lesbian images can be used to intimidate female athletes, women's sport can be trivialized and controlled (Cohen, 1993). The lesbian images surrounding sport can intimidate girls and women from both participating in sport and challenging sexist notions regarding female athletes. According to Griffin (1992) the lesbian label is a political weapon that can be used against any woman who steps out of line, or otherwise defies traditional gender roles. As long as women are afraid of being called lesbians, this label will continue to serve as an effective tool to control all women and limit their willingness and ability to challenge the sexism inherent in society.**

**In explaining the use of the lesbian label as a weapon, Lenskyj (1991) argues that the fact that lesbians are sexually, socially and economically independent poses a particularly significant threat to male domination. Stigmatization of lesbians ensures that they are viewed as norm violators and deviants which helps maintain male power and privilege. When applied to athletes this stigmatization works to discourage women from entering sports or**

**pursuing it to the full development of their potential. In a homophobic society where there is intense prejudice against lesbians, using the lesbian label to discredit women helps limit the number of women in sport.**

**The lesbian label is manifested in direct and indirect verbal abuse towards those who challenge the patriarchal system. The verbal slander directed at female athletes is a well worn and effective means of social control. According to Bennett, Whitaker, Smith and Sablove (1987:373):**

**The female in sport is described as mannish, muscle bound, unpretty, unhappy, having hormone problems, having menstrual problems, hating men, loving women. She's called a jockette, a butch, a dyke, a lezzie.**

**The association of lesbians with women in sport has served as a strong control mechanism to discourage female participation in "male only" activities (Bennett et al., 1987). "The underlying fear is not that a female athlete... will appear too plain or out of style, the real fear is that she will look like a dyke or, even worse, is one (Griffin, 1992:254). Such homophobic and sexist standards of femininity and attractiveness remind women in sport that, to be acceptable, they must monitor their behaviour and appearance at all times.**

**In addition to monitoring their appearance and projecting a feminine image, some athletes will advertise their heterosexual relationships to avoid being labelled. Often athletes will be photographed with men and always mention a boyfriend or husband. According to Lenskyj (1996:336), "in sport, the femininity**

**of women who play traditionally male sports is suspect unless they make deliberate efforts to meet male defined standards of attractiveness and to assert their heterosexual orientation."**

**In addition to altering their own image, some athletes avoid being associated with female athletes who are subject to stigmatization because they are, or have been, labelled lesbian. They fear being labelled from merely associating with lesbian athletes. Fear of the lesbian label among female athletes perpetuates animosity among the women, segregating the heterosexuals and the lesbians, and also dividing those lesbians who are open, and those who choose not to disclose their lesbian identity. Heterosexual athletes blame the lesbian athletes for the stigma that female athletes, in general, face. As one athlete admitted, "The negative image of women in intercollegiate sport scares me. I've met too many lesbians in my college career. I don't want to have that image" (Griffin, 1992:257).**

**The social control encompassing women in sport takes many forms and is often enforced through the use of subtle techniques. These techniques place emphasis on sexuality and femininity to diminish the accomplishments of competitive female athletes. Some athletes are not affected, some choose to ignore the threats, while others use strategies to manage the stigma (Blinde and Taub, 1992; Kolnes, 1995). These reactions by the athletes indicate that more changes are needed within women's sport to make it an acceptable female activity. A feminist analysis of these issues is necessary to help increase**

understanding, and provide direction for potential solutions to overcome the marginalization of women in sport.

Compulsory heterosexuality in sport is exemplified through the labelling and stigmatizing of female athletes involved in non-traditional female sport. The reinforcement of this practice can be used to control the number of women participating in sport, and also devalues the accomplishments of those who choose to compete. The increase in the number of girls and women entering sport hides the fact that there are many who are still afraid to enter sports. It also denies recognition to those who must alter their image or behaviour, or selection of activity, in order to compete. As we head into the next century, we must work to change the institution of sport to include women with complete equality and respect. Girls and women should have every opportunity to become involved in sports. They should also be proud every time they enter the gym or step onto the rink, court or playing field.

The literature outlined in this chapter is used as a framework for the analysis and interpretation of the findings in this thesis. Knowledge and understanding of previous research has provided me with the background to develop an appropriate methodology. In addition, my own personal experience as an athlete has helped develop my understanding of the issues raised in this thesis. In the next section of this chapter I outline my motivation for this research and the methodology and strategies used to elaborate on issues presented in previous literature.



## **Qualitative Methods to Research Issues of Women in Sport**

In this study, semi-structured, in-depth personal interviews were conducted to further examine issues of femininity and sexuality presented in the literature. My own experience as an athlete, and my involvement in sport provided the background to establish rapport with the participants, and also to draw out rich data from the interviews. In addition,

particularly in qualitative research, the role of the researcher as the primary data collection instrument necessitates the identification of personal values, assumptions, and biases at the outset of the study (Creswell, 1994:163).

My interest in this area of research grew out of my own personal experience as an athlete. My experience began 20 years ago when I started playing ice-hockey, a sport long dominated by men and a "flag carrier of masculinity" (Bryson, 1990:180). I started out as the only girl playing in a boy's house league in a small rural town, and eventually moved my way up to playing for an inter-university varsity team. I was a member of the varsity team for 4 years, three years as a player and one year as a trainer. I continue to play hockey at a competitive level in Ontario and Michigan where I belong to the largest women's hockey league in the United States, the Metro Skaters Hockey League.

During my involvement in sport I have encountered barriers to participation. For example, I have had my accomplishments trivialized and have faced stigmatization due to my involvement in a "man's sport." Despite these

**hurdles, my overall experience as an athlete has been positive. I feel however, that certain issues need to be addressed regarding the experience of female athletes. I am interested in creating more awareness of the continued marginalization of women's sport, with the goal of establishing a more positive experience for future female athletes.**

**This study is based on data from two sources: (1) the literature in the field of feminist sociology and sport sociology; and (2) data from interviews with 13 inter-university athletes. The main objective of this study is to explore, and give voice to the experiences of the 13 female varsity athletes, within a theoretical framework. To achieve these objectives, in-depth interviews were used as the primary method for data collection. The overall interview process proceeded through several stages: choice of interview format; construction of the interview guide; sample selection; interviewing; transcription and thematic coding of interviews; and, data analysis.**

**In depth, semi-structured personal interviews were chosen as the interview format. This design allows the researcher to take advantage of the benefits of both structured and unstructured interview designs. An interview guide comprised of pre-determined questions was designed to allow for a degree of consistency across the interviews [see Appendix B]. In addition to the pre-determined questions and topics included in the interview guide, unscheduled probes were used in order to delve into the meaning of responses and to focus on emerging themes and unanticipated areas of inquiry (Berg, 1995; Glaser and**

**Strauss, 1967). The interviews were conducted in an informal manner to allow the participants to freely express themselves.**

**Since the emphasis of this study is on femininity and sexuality in women's sport, the interview schedule was designed to measure the experiences of inter-university athletes and their perceptions of the emphasis of femininity and the lesbian images on women in sport. The interview guide contained a series of questions to develop rapport and to gain trust from the respondents [see Interview Guide, Appendix B, Questions 1 to 10], before moving on to more specific research questions. The interview schedule focused on several aspects of the inter-university sport experience, including: societal perceptions of women's sport and female athletes [Questions 11 to 16]; masculine identity in sport [Questions 17 and 18]; emphasis on femininity and sex appeal in the media [Questions 19 and 20]; stigma and trivialization of athletes [Questions 23 to 26]; strategies to compensate for being an athlete [Questions 21, 22 and 27 to 34]; lesbian images and the management of these images [Questions 35 to 39]; and, overall experience of and feedback on the interview [Questions 40 to 42]. A range of socio-demographic questions, including sexual orientation, were posed at the end of the interview [Question 43]. A copy of the interview guide is included as Appendix B.**

**The next step in the data collection process was to determine the participants to be interviewed. Purposive and sampling was used. This technique is appropriate "when a researcher wants to identify particular types of cases for**

in-depth investigation...[and when] the purpose is less to generalize to a larger population than it is to gain a deeper understanding of types" (Neuman, 1994:198). The intent of this research project is not to construct a single profile, but to acknowledge that athletes' experiences are different and that all responses are unique. The criteria used for the sample selection included being female, being a member of a university varsity team, availability and geographic proximity.

Female varsity athletes were chosen as the population for this study for several reasons. First, female athletes have been recognized as a stigmatized group because of their participation in a traditionally male domain. Second, inter-university athletics is a visible and official form of sport within our society. Individuals competing at this level are regarded as elite athletes. They are also the most accessible group of elite female athletes.

In order to recruit participants for the study, I designed an information sheet outlining the purpose and details of the research project, providing an opportunity for athletes to indicate if they would be willing to participate in the study [see Appendix A]. In an attempt to allow all female varsity athletes an opportunity to indicate an interest in participating in this study, information packages were distributed to coaches for six women's varsity teams at a university in Southwestern Ontario. The six sports included volleyball, basketball, hockey, soccer, track and field, and cross-country. Coaches were asked to distribute the information package to their athletes. In addition, coaches

were asked to collect any responses indicating a willingness to participate, and return them to me. My telephone number was included on the information sheet. Athletes were encouraged to call me if they had any questions or if they wanted to volunteer at a later time.

Since only two respondents, "Alex" and "Diane" were recruited through the distribution of information packages by coaches, it was necessary to devise a second means by which to gather participants for my study. The e-mail addresses for all of the athletes at this same university were obtained. Using these, the athletes were sent the same information sheet through e-mail, inviting them to participate in the study. Response from this method was more successful. Eight additional athletes, "Cindy," "Gina," "Paula," "Tammy," "Theresa," "Sarah," "Nancy," and "Michele" responded, expressing an interest in participating in the study. In order to increase my sample further, a third technique was used, snowball sampling. Three women, "Laura" and "Rachel," teammates from the original university sample, and "Pam," from another Southwestern Ontario university, volunteered to participate in the study. All participation was completely voluntary.

In total, thirteen female athletes from two universities in Southwestern Ontario were interviewed for this study. The study population consisted of women who played soccer, basketball, hockey, track and field, cross-country, wrestling and rugby. Six of the athletes participated in more than one varsity sport.

Interviews were conducted at the respondents' convenience. They were conducted in private in one of three locations: the respondents' homes, my home, and a private university office. Before the interviews started, participants were asked to read and sign a written consent form [see Appendix A]. With the participants' knowledge and consent, each interview was audio-taped. Interviews ranged in duration from 40 minutes to 90 minutes, with an average length of 65 minutes.

The final step of the data collection process was the transcription and coding of the interviews. I transcribed the audio-taped interviews on my personal computer. The transcripts were then stored on the computer's hard drive with a back-up stored on floppy disk. During the transcription process participants were only identified by their respective pseudonyms in order to protect confidentiality. Once individual transcripts were completed, hard copies were printed.

Employing the principles of grounded theory, data analysis proceeded as an on-going process, conducted simultaneously with data collection (Creswell, 1994; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In line with these principles, during the data collection process I looked for emerging themes and began constructing theoretical propositions to make sense of the data. The transcripts were read in their entirety. As I read the material I kept a record of emerging links to the research problem. The process involved clustering similar topics and forming category labels for these related topics as part of the coding.

Initially I developed several broad coding categories to organize the data.

**These categories were: the silence and trivialization of women's sport; the issue of compulsory heterosexuality and masculinization of sport; patronizing humour and slander directed at female athletes; apologetic behaviour demonstrated by the athletes; issues of lesbianism; and, ideas for change. After coding all of the transcriptions, I read through these categories several times and narrowed the focus of the data to illustrate more effectively the research problem. Data elicited from the interviews outlined several aspects of the athletes' experiences in sport, including topics such as male standards of performance. Although important, data related to the controls of women's sexuality were examined more closely. Familiarity with the literature and theoretical frameworks relevant to this research project helped to interpret the data (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998; Kirby and McKenna, 1989). Quotes were then selected from the transcripts to further support my analysis.**

**During the data collection phase of the project, careful attention was paid to respecting the rights, needs, values and desires of the participants (Creswell, 1994:165). Several techniques, outlined below, were implemented in this study to protect the participants' rights and to insure all gave full voluntary, informed consent to participate. For example, each potential participant was provided with a description of the research project in written form [see appendix A]. This description included the researcher's name and affiliations, essential procedures and purposes of the study, any benefits and or risks involved, and the rights of the subject (e.g., to withdraw without penalty, assurances of confidentiality). In**

**addition, each participant was asked to sign a consent form [see appendix A]. No deception of any kind was used to conduct this research.**

**The privacy and confidentiality of the respondents were assured in several ways: through conducting interviews in private at the location chosen by the respondent; through the use of pseudonyms and changing any specific reference to names and places mentioned during interviews; and, through securing the data. Files of the interview transcripts were locked in my computer to which only I have access. Printed material was kept under lock and key in my filing cabinet. In addition, I plan to destroy all identifying information, within two months after completion of this research project.**

**Participants were informed that they would not be offered any type of financial remuneration for their participation in the research project [see appendix A]. However, all participants were offered a copy of a report of the research findings upon completion of the project.**

**The framework and methodology presented in this chapter have laid the foundation for the analyses of the data in the next two chapters. Chapter three explores the traditional expectations of femininity and the management of these expectations by female athletes. Chapter four looks more closely at the lesbian images surrounding women's sport and the reaction and methods to deal with these images as experienced by the women in this study.**



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **TRADITIONAL EXPECTATIONS OF FEMININITY AS EXPERIENCED BY FEMALE INTER-UNIVERSITY VARSITY ATHLETES**

This chapter examines the underlying traditional gender roles found in sport and the effect of traditional expectations of masculinity and femininity on female athletes. An analysis of data reveals the perceptions of women's sport and female athletes in society. The significance and explanation of the reservation of sport as appropriate only for males is outlined. In addition, an examination of gender role expectations is explored through: the portrayal of female athletes in the media; female athletes and their motivation for participation in sport; the role of sportswear to sexualize female athletes; and, the management of societal expectations of femininity by the athletes themselves.

#### **Reserving Sport for Men**

Throughout North American history, sport has been dominated by men and viewed as a male activity. Women who defy this tradition in sport encounter barriers to both participation and acceptance. The barriers that female athletes face are similar to other segments of patriarchal societies (e.g., obstacles women face in the workplace including the double day of work and glass ceilings). Several of the women in this study recognized the barriers in sport to be representative of challenges to access and acceptance in the workplace. One athlete from this study, Pam, found the experience of women in sport to be

reflective of other male-dominated territory. She related a story of the double stigmatization she faced, inside and outside of sport.

Michael [my boyfriend] was on a plane coming back from Costa Rica, and he sat next to this man that was an engineer, and Michael said, "Oh my girlfriend just graduated from engineering," and he just looked at him and said, "Oh, that must have been recently, because back when I was in school there were NO women." So had he said that she wrestles too...[laughs], I am sure the man would really have had something to say.

Pam felt that the older generation in particular, who maintain traditional patriarchal values, were more likely to resist women's advances in areas that have traditionally been associated with men. Schur (1984) points out that women whose behaviour challenges traditional gender norms will face stigmatization, especially those entering traditionally male dominated fields (e.g. sports, law enforcement, engineering).

A major barrier restricting women's advancement in sport is the representation of sport as a male activity. This view of sport is at least partially responsible for the sexism inherent in sport, which continues to sexualize female athletes while trivializing their accomplishments. The women interviewed for this study talked about male privilege in sport. Some reported feeling that people in our society view sport in general as being reserved for men. As Diane noted, "I do think the overall domain of sport is seen as belonging to men." More specifically, the women were likely to associate male privilege with elite athletes.

**“As for the elite level it is very much male, and they get the most attention and the most money and everything” [Gina]. Such perceptions were most likely grounded in the prominent position afforded to men's sports in the media, male athletic budgets and the stardom of professional male athletes. In addition, professional male athletes, especially in the United States, receive extremely high salaries and winnings.<sup>5</sup>**

**Not only did the women express the sentiment that men in upper level sports achieve recognition that far surpasses their female counterparts, they also talked about how some sports, regardless of level, were deemed male only sports. Football is one such sport. All of the athletes in this study suggested that North American football would be classified as a male activity. As the following quotes illustrate, some of the women also felt that other traditionally masculine sports, such as hockey, rugby and wrestling were considered male activities. “Football and rugby are definitely viewed as men's sports, and wrestling for that matter too” [Diane]. “Look at football, it is definitely a man's sport, and I think they are still trying to hold onto hockey” [Alex]. Interestingly, one of the female athletes interviewed for this study admitted feeling that some sports should be reserved for men: “Some sports are designed for guys. I don't want to watch**

---

**<sup>5</sup> In a list of the 40 highest paid athletes published by *Forbes* magazine in 1997, the highest paid athlete was Michael Jordan, professional basketball player, who earned a total of \$78.3 million from both salary and endorsements for that year. The lowest paid athlete on the list earned \$9.2 million. There were no women that made the list (Associated Press, 1997).**

girls play rugby at all" [Laura]. This last statement significantly illustrates that although women participate in sport, some may continue to accept that they are encroaching on male terrain.

The classification of sports as masculine is enforced by a long history of predominately male participation (Lenskyj, 1986). These sports are socially constructed as masculine because of the aggression and body contact involved, and the emphasis on physical strength. Historically, body contact has been a criteria used for legislation in both Canada and the United States to designate sports as male-only. Respondents in this study referred to body contact and aggression as traits which characterize traditionally masculine sports:

Very high contact sports are still going to be men's sports and I think they always will be...it is just because of the contact, the contact level in the sport, volleyball you don't have it, track you don't, but obviously basketball and hockey you do [Paula].

The contact sports like hockey and basketball are masculine, volleyball is always classified as a more feminine type of sport, there is not too much contact [Rachel].

It was common for the women in their interviews to classify volleyball as a non-masculine sport due to the minimal body contact and aggression involved. During their interviews, the women were encouraged to identify sports that they felt would be classified as feminine. Most of the women, however, had difficulty associating feminine characteristics with sport. Statements were made such as,

**"I don't think that there are very many feminine sports at all, maybe ballet and dancing, which aren't really sports" [Laura], and "I don't even know what they would consider women's sports, probably like figure skating and gymnastics and stuff, maybe dance" [Pam]. In explaining their choices the women talked about how they viewed these particular sports as feminine because of their emphasis on grace, flexibility, and co-ordination. According to Hargreaves (1994), these sports "affirm a popular image of femininity and demonstrate their essential difference from popular images of sporting masculinity" (159).**

**Competition is another standard revealed in this study that differentiates sports as either masculine or feminine. Competitiveness in sport is recognized as a male characteristic. Consequently, female athletes are not taken seriously as competitors and are not expected to achieve success through sport. As Paula noted:**

**Most people don't understand that women feel the same way about sports that men do...they look at men's sports and think that the guys are doing it because they could have a career at it and...we are doing it because it is fun.**

**This type of misunderstanding is reflected in much of the literature that examines motivation and competition in sport. A common theme in the literature is presented by Mathes and Battista (1985). They argue that women "are more concerned with interpersonal relationships than with the achievement of goals in a competitive setting" (724). Based on the findings from this study, I, however,**

would argue that this type of view is a reflection of traditional female gender norms that require women to be less assertive than males and more concerned with interpersonal relationships rather than an indication of a lack of competitiveness (Bell, 1986).

Earlier research has outlined that males generally express a greater competitive motivation for sport (Sage, 1980) and females are more likely to express a social motivation for sport (Curry and Weiss, 1989). A few of the athletes in this study mentioned the social aspect of sport to be highly rewarding. Tammy found “the whole being part of a team aspect” to be the biggest reward for her participation in varsity sport. The majority of the women, however, revealed that the competition at the inter-university level was the most rewarding aspect of their involvement in their sport. Responses such as, “getting to play at a really high caliber” [Gina], “I love the competition at the university level” [Paula] and, “you get to compete at a higher level” [Laura] demonstrated the importance of competition for these athletes.

The competition and rewards of sport participation drive women to pursue their sporting goals. Despite the oppressive nature of defining and classifying sports as either masculine or feminine, female athletes continue to push through male-dominated territory, including team sports. In recent years, several events have given rise to women’s team sports. The Olympic Games have had a tremendous impact on women’s team sports in North America, most notably the success of women’s soccer in the United States and women’s ice hockey in both

the Canada and the United States. For example, The U.S. Women's Soccer Gold Medal Championship at the 1996 Atlanta Summer Games led to the Women's World Cup Soccer Championship in July, 1999, and discussion of a professional women's soccer league (Canoe, 1999b). The addition of Women's Ice Hockey as a medal sport in the 1998 Nagano Olympic Winter Games was credited for renewing attention in women's hockey. In September, 1999, the National Women's Hockey League (NWHL) debuted with nine teams from Quebec and Ontario. This was the start of a 5 year plan to eventually establish a professional league spanning Canada and the United States (Canoe, 1999).

These developments for women's team sports are regarded as particularly significant because they have traditionally been classified as male sports.

Although there have been attempts in the past to establish women's professional leagues in the United States, only the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) has survived. Most recently, the demise of the American Basketball League (ABL)<sup>6</sup> demonstrates the difficulty involved in sustaining women's

---

<sup>6</sup> On December 22, 1998 the ABL announced that it was suspending operations and filing for bankruptcy. The ABL was launched in 1996 as a women's professional basketball league in the United States. The following summer the WNBA was formed: "Backed by the multi-million dollar marketing and publicity might of the NBA [National Basketball Association]." The WNBA formed teams in cities with NBA franchises. In contrast with the ABL's fall/winter playing season the WNBA played from June to August during the NBA off-season. Originally, the ABL was signing most of the nation's top players. Observers ranked the quality of play as better than that of the WNBA. In addition to offering higher salaries than the WNBA, the ABL offered its players stock options, a retirement plan, year-round health benefits, and a seat on the

professional leagues, especially for traditionally male team sports.

At the time of this study, most of the women felt positively about the recent advances in women's sport, especially in terms of the Olympics: "with the Olympics coming, and hockey being a medal sport, everyone is very excited" [Nancy]; "the Olympics is great for all lower profile sports, and for women's sports especially...women's hockey is coming up fast, and now with the Olympic coverage it will only grow more" [Diane]. It seems, however, that overwhelming public attention and excitement sparked by Olympic glory has not been long-lasting. As a recent article in *The Hamilton Spectator* on the World Cup soccer illustrates, these events are recognized only as "moments":

That's it. A blip on the screen, like others before it....The bounty of attention and excitement that was an outgrowth of the U.S. women's 'World' Cup soccer title has, for all intents and purposes spoiled...as Americans turned their attention back to McGwire and Sosa<sup>7</sup>, or readied themselves for the NFL [National Football League] (Pennett, 1999:CO1).

Although women may prove that they are skilled and talented athletes, sport is still judged by male standards. Male superiority is recognized as excellence in

---

Board of Directors. In the end, the ABL was unable to obtain the television exposure and sponsorship support needed to sustain the league (WTNA-TV News, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Mark McGwire of the St. Louis Cardinals and Sammy Sosa from the Chicago Cubs, both members of Major League Baseball, have been in the media spotlight for their head-to-head battle to break the all-time record for most home runs in a season .



masculine traits of speed, strength and aggressiveness. As noted by Bennett, Whitaker, Woolley Smith & Sablove (1987), presumed male superiority is another mechanism of control which maintains women's accomplishments in sport as secondary.

### **Presentations of Female Athletes in the Media**

Male superiority in sport is most clearly promoted by the extensive media coverage of male sporting activities. The relationship of the media with corporate sponsors is tied to an old boy's network which has not yet recognized the achievements and potential of women's sport. The television exposure of women's professional basketball was an event to which many of the women in this study made reference during discussions of female athletes in the media. At the time of the interviews for this study, the WNBA was at a high point in terms of the attention and recognition the league was receiving from the public and the media. The respondents felt that the WNBA received a favourable amount of recognition in their debut season, and often made comparison to the coverage given to the ABL. One woman commented on the media coverage of both leagues, but emphasized the lack of coverage of the ABL:

**It has been good this year with the WNBA...of course there has been a lot of media coverage with it being the first year...but I mean the ABL was in last year and there wasn't anything [Paula].**

**The amount of media coverage dedicated towards the WNBA has been attributed to its association with its male counterpart, the NBA. Unlike most women's**

sports, the NBA made a commitment to the development of the WNBA, and this association will inevitably be responsible for the success of the league.

Although quantitative representation of women's sport within the media is important, the women in this study were more concerned with the qualitative coverage of individual athletes. Rachel expressed her frustration with the tendency of media reports to emphasize attributes of the athletes unrelated to their sporting accomplishments:

I thought it was great the summer that the WNBA had so much coverage, but the stories they did, it was incredible...she is a basketball player and a singer at the same time...or she is great and she volunteers at the local health centre....It is always the personal side and the professional side, there is always an interaction between the two, whereas with males it is the professional side and that is it.

In another example of qualitative coverage, Rachel talked about the media depictions of Catriona Le May Doan, gold medal winner for the Canadian speed-skating team at the 1998 Winter Olympic Games in Nagano, Japan, to demonstrate the emphasis on female roles:

I think the thing that stands out from the Olympics is Catriona Le May Doan. When she won the gold, they had her husband [at the interview]....I was so upset I couldn't believe that, and then they asked her about how it felt when she won, and then they asked the husband..., "So how did you meet?", like that is a significant thing.

**As Rachel's accounts illustrate, although female athletes are "noteworthy for their athletic efforts...sport still poses a threat to popular ideas about femininity; [therefore] readers are assured in various ways that they remain 'real' women" (Hargreaves, 1994:164).**

**Media accounts that focus on female athletes' pursuits of traditional female roles, such as wife, mother and caretaker, and downplay the role of sport in their lives, serve to reassure the public that female athletes, and women's sport in general, are not threats to men or patriarchal society. They also reinforce the idea that female athletes are still women despite violating traditional female gender roles. Hargreaves (1994) explains that within the media, the accomplishments of male athletes are highlighted, and they are revered for exhibiting traditionally masculine characteristics in their sport, such as competitiveness and aggressiveness. For female athletes, in contrast, emphasis is placed on their femininity as demonstrated by the use of glamorous and sexual images and by references to their female roles outside of sport.**

**The images found in media coverage of professional athletes were discussed with the women during their interviews. The women often compared illustrations, advertisements and commentary of male and female athletes and expressed the belief that there are major differences in both the vocabulary and content used to describe athletes. For example, Tammy, a cross country runner, commented on a recent magazine article that she had read:**

**I just read about people saying, "Here comes the**

lovely Suzie Hamilton...down the track"; you wouldn't say that for a guy, the lovely, beautiful. She got all upset obviously. It was in a magazine that I read; she is a professional runner.

Rachel, a basketball player, talked about the television commentary during a recent WNBA game:

and the commentators, it is incredible, "she eats rice, and they braid each other's hair"...it was terrible....It minimizes and reduces their talent level because you see them not as an athlete but as something else, and you are supposed to see them as an athlete....Michael Jordan doesn't...[hear that] Scottie Pippen combs his hair before the game.

In both print media and television, several accounts of sexist language were mentioned by the women in this study. The examples the women provided suggested that female athletes are constantly reduced to something less than an athlete because they are women. As Duncan, Messner, Williams and Jensen (1994) discovered, in their study concerned that compared male and female athletes in the media, there are several differences in the language used to describe athletes. Specifically, they found that "the sports media reflect the social conventions of gender-biased language" (267).

Advertisements also reflect the social conventions that maintain sports as being either masculine or feminine through trivializing women's sports. Female athletes are often used "simply as channels for the commodification of the female body" (Hargreaves, 1994:167). As one woman suggested:

**The media doesn't really use women's sport for commercials; they use their bodies and their hair. Men's sport, they focus on shoes and they are running and exercising, whereas women are washing their hair, and putting on make-up [Theresa].**

**This example of media attention illustrates the difference between male and female images in sport and also reinforces the importance for female athletes to remain feminine while being competitive.**

### **Expectations of Femininity and Female Athletes Responses**

**One important factor within sport which has and continues to differentiate the image of athletes is athletic gear, uniforms or sportswear. At the university level, some sports have uni-sex uniforms, while other sports continue to differentiate between male and female athletes. Findings from this study suggest that the uniform worn by the athletes has been attributed to the image of the sport, and to individual athletes themselves.**

**At the inter-university level, some sports have been identified as having a more feminine image because of the athletic clothing worn by the athletes. Several of the women in their interviews suggested that athletes competing in sports with more sexually appealing uniforms are considered to be more feminine and appealing to the male and female audience:**

**When I compare volleyball [to basketball] it stands out in my mind because....I think it comes down to what they wear. I mean we [basketball players] wear shorts and a tank top, and they [volleyball players] wear those tight spandex....When it comes down to**

**it, if you are in the stands [and]...there is person there with baggy shorts and there is a person there with spandex who would you perceive as more feminine? [Rachel]**

**I know that the basketball players wear the baggy shorts, and the volleyball players the spandex, and I have heard some guys comment, "Oh, I am going to watch the game [volleyball] to see the girls in the blah, blah, blah...", and even at the track meets, we wear the bum-huggers and I have heard guys say, "Oh check her out in the bum-huggers, blah, blah, blah" [Tammy].**

**As Tammy's comment illustrates, the emphasis on uniforms within women's sport puts female athletes at risk of being treated as sexual objects. "There seems to be an increasing tendency for sportswear to sexualize, erotisize and objectify the female body, and is particularly obvious in some track and field events" (Kolnes, 1995:67).**

**Sexualizing the female athlete has historically been used as a method to control the image of women participating in sport. The role of sportswear has served as a standard for control of female athletes, as exemplified in the AAGPBL, when,**

**uniforms, which were short skirted, were specifically designed to convey a feminine image.... Players were always required to appear in feminine attire. No apparel that was thought to be masculine in nature was allowed (Fidler as cited in Weiller and Higgs:291).**

**This type of control continues today and was mentioned by one athlete from this**

study, who recognized the discrepancy between the requirement for her school uniform and the uniform worn while participating in sports.

**[In] high school...the guys [male athletes] wore shorts down to [their knees]...and they made us [female athletes] wear these little uniforms that were so short....We couldn't wear our kilts above our knee, but they sent us [female athletes] out there to represent our school [during sports] in something that was way under our butt.**

The requirement and expectation for female athletes to wear feminine attire works to classify specific sports and individual athletes into masculine or feminine categories. The control of women's sport through this classification of sports reminds female athletes of the necessity to uphold a feminine heterosexual image. Athletes are pressured to express their femininity in an attempt to reassure both the public, and possibly themselves, that their female role has not been jeopardized by their participation in sport.

During their interviews athletes were asked if they ever experienced pressure to look feminine. There was a range of responses from the women. Diane reported feeling that female athletes have become more comfortable with a natural look and are less concerned with their appearance than most people.

**Female athletes more than anyone need to be comfortable with their own natural look, because you don't see too many female athletes going to the beauty parlour before a game.**

Rachel, however, held the opposite view. During her interview she recounted an

**incident which suggested that female athletes from an opposing team monitored their appearance before the start of a game:**

**The image that comes to me is Victoria. We played them on Wednesday and they came out of the change room...and they [had] their hair done and their make-up done and I don't think that anyone on our team does that...and I haven't seen anybody else on any other team.**

**Similarly, Nancy recalled a previous competitor who used make-up as a means to accentuate her femininity:**

**There was this one girl, and it actually made me laugh because I would skate past her on the ice and all that I could see was her make-up and she wore this bright pink lipstick. It seemed so ridiculous to me considering that we wear a full mask and no-one can see your face anyway.**

**Olympic hockey gold medalist Cammie Granato explains the importance of make-up for female athletes: "Make-up sends the message that hockey players can be feminine and still play a game aggressively" (Bartolomeo, 1999:48). Her belief reinforces the idea that female athletes are expected to be competitive, yet feminine, and that there is some benefit derived from doing so.**

**In addition to altering images through the use of make-up, having long hair was found to be very significant in the presentation of a feminine appearance.**

**Blinde and Taub (1992) also found that athletes sometimes consciously**



accentuated their femininity by wearing dresses, skirts, and make-up or by letting their hair grow. Some of the athletes in this study openly admitted to feeling pressured to reject the stereotypical image of being a female “butch” athlete. The most common approach they used to reject this image was by keeping their hair long. As Michele stated, “I don’t want to look butchy so I prefer to have long hair.” Other women from the study also spoke about their preference to have long hair:

Because of those well-known stereotypes that exist when you are a hockey player....I think you are somewhat self-conscious about looking feminine...at the very least you don't want to look masculine... long hair tends to be something...long hair definitely [Cindy].

I may accentuate my feminine side sometimes, and maybe even emphasize my heterosexuality to avoid being labelled...and definitely long hair. I have always had long hair, but I know people have said to me, “Just keep your hair long and you won’t have to worry about those hockey stereotypes” [Diane].

More than appearing feminine, Griffin (1998:73) found that “young white athletes in particular place a lot of importance on hair length as a statement about sexual identity (straight women have long hair and, lesbians have short hair).”

Despite accounts from several of the athletes about the lengths they will go to maintain a feminine image, some of the athletes were reluctant to describe their experiences as involving pressure from either coaches or teammates. They admitted that societal expectations of femininity still exist, but referred to it as

**harmless fun and not pressure:**

**There are always kinda jabs and stuff at the girls that it is not their style to wear a dress, so we kid around that we are going to make them wear a prom dress, but it is all in fun; there is no pressure [Gina].**

**There was one [girl that the team influenced], but it was only because she was always wearing pants and a ponytail and hats...because she was uncomfortable in skirts....There was one day we made her put on a skirt. Whenever she did wear a skirt we were always so shocked because she was always wearing pants...but it was not like we pressured her [Sarah].**

**According to these women's accounts, they were not pressuring their teammates to maintain more feminine images. The athletes who were on the receiving end of the jokes and requests to wear dresses, however, may have interpreted the situation differently. Although the women may not recognize the situation as overt pressure, what is clear from the interviews is that conventional femininity continues to incorporate images of women in feminine attire. "There is a great deal of pressure on female sports figures to conform to traditional notions of dress, appearance and conduct" (Gatehouse, 2000:A3). This situation persists despite efforts by athletes who choose to present themselves in more comfortable and less restrictive clothing thereby challenging gender based expectations regarding dress.**

**In discussing social pressure to appear feminine, one significant theme that emerged in the interviews was pressure from athletes' mothers to present a**

traditional feminine appearance. A number of the women admitted that they sometimes changed their appearance in an effort to satisfy their mothers. Gina reported, "My mom is always on me about wearing make-up...[and] my grandmother is the same way." Rachel talked about her mom criticising how she looks: "Why can't you do your hair like this and why do you have to wear it in a ponytail after the game?" [Rachel]. Two other athletes also discussed the control their mothers have over their self-presentation:

My mom also wants me to wear more feminine things, and is always at me about wearing a hat, a ball cap I mean, and...sometimes I think about it, and might not wear my hat or my ripped jeans because of things she says [Diane].

I mean even from my mom when we go shopping if she likes it and she thinks it makes me look more feminine then she'll pay for it, but if it's a pair of jeans or a T-shirt, like my hockey shirts and stuff, I have to buy that myself [Cindy].

These examples illustrate the role that mothers play in the socialization of their daughters, and the perpetuation of traditional feminine ideals. Typically, in patriarchal families, mothers are "assigned a key instrumental role that involves them more in the day-to-day control of their children, especially their daughters" (Hagan, Gillis and Simpson, 1987:792).

Traditional ideals of femininity continue to impact on female athletes and their participation in sport. The classification of activities as either masculine or feminine has the ability to keep some women out of traditionally masculine sports,

as these sports are not seen to enhance feminine characteristics. The women who continue to enter these typically masculine realms of sport are continually reminded that they are expected to adhere to feminine gender norms. The pressure for compulsory heterosexuality impacts on female athletes' choice of clothing, hairstyles, and the use of make-up, as these things are perceived as making important statements about sexual identity and gender (Griffin, 1998). However, according to Messner (1988), accepting both behavioural and physical restrictions in an attempt to be viewed as feminine will make it difficult for athletes to view themselves, or to be viewed by others, as being equal to men.

It is essential to look at inequity within sport beyond participation levels and access to funding. It is necessary to look further into the quality of the experience of female participation in sport. This chapter began with an examination of the patriarchal division of sport into masculine and feminine. I argue that the tradition of sport as a male activity results in female athletes encountering the barriers of sexism and compulsory heterosexuality as a compromise for their participation in sport. The accomplishments of female athletes are often reduced to their ability to be sexually appealing. Although the image of a beautiful woman has expanded to include women with more muscular bodies, female athletes participating in sports which are aggressive and physical continue to be regarded as unfeminine. These athletes are, in turn, expected to maintain traditional feminine qualities outside of sport to compensate for their participation in these sports. Those who fail to do so may experience

**discrimination based on perceived sexual orientation.**

**The discrimination which female athletes face is rooted in the institution of compulsory heterosexuality. This ideology is maintained in part through the media and public perceptions of women's sport and female athletes. Under-representation and trivialization of the accomplishments of female athletes occurs in part because of the sexualization of the female athlete. The next chapter examines the use of lesbian images and labels as significant tools in the control of female athletes. Using the personal experiences of the women in this study, I discuss and analyze the potential of these images to divide female athletes.**

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **LESBIAN IMAGES IN SPORT**

The previous chapter outlined examples of traditional gender role expectations within sport, as reflected in the media and experienced by the varsity athletes in this study. The reservation of sport as a male activity and the resulting pressure for female athletes competing in sport to emphasize their femininity was explored. In addition to female athletes being treated as sexual objects, female athletes who resist sexual objectification are assumed to be sexual deviants. These women not only faced pressure to emphasize their femininity, but also their heterosexuality.

This chapter examines the presence of lesbian images associated with women's sport and the effect of these images on female athletes as experienced by the inter-university athletes in this study. The potential for lesbian images to divide female athletes, control their participation in sport, and reinforce patriarchal dominance is explored. The findings from the interviews are used to examine the: silence surrounding lesbianism in sport; stigma in a male-dominated sport; athletes targeted with the lesbian label; the monitoring techniques and behaviours used by athletes to counteract the images and labels; and the segregation of teammates.

#### **Silence Surrounding Discussion of Lesbianism**

There continues to be evidence across women's sport of the perception of

**a connection between athleticism and lesbianism. Issues of lesbianism and homophobia in sport are, however, rarely overtly addressed. This lack of attention reinforces the lesbian taboo and further perpetuates control over the behaviour of female athletes. "The fear of lesbianism operates...as it has for decades to police women's behaviour within the world of sport" (Cahn, 1994:268).**

**Athletes at all levels of sport experience another version of the tension between femininity and athleticism - the suspicion that athletic ability and interest signals lesbianism (Cahn, 1994:265).**

**Lesbian images, in combination with homophobic attitudes, serve to intimidate both homosexual and heterosexual athletes, and in turn divide the two. Griffin (1992,1998) suggests the pervasive nature of prejudice against lesbians in sport gives power to the lesbian images to control and marginalize women's sport and female athletes.**

**The taboo nature of the lesbian topic, particularly within sport, was illustrated during the interviews for this project. During their interviews, the athletes were provided with several opportunities to discuss stereotypes and lesbianism in sport (see Appendix B, Questions 18,21,22,25,31,34). They were also directly asked about their perceptions and experiences of lesbianism in sport. When the women were asked directly, all but two of the respondents indicated that they believed there are lesbian images attached to women's sport. Many, however, were reluctant earlier in the interview to initiate a discussion of lesbianism.**

The reluctance of female athletes to discuss lesbian issues has been identified by researchers as a silence across women's sport. Griffin (1992) and Lenskyj (1987) outline the power of homophobic views in society to silence women in sport. Reluctance to discuss lesbianism represents the effect of the negative social stigma that is attached to homosexuality (Blinde and Taub, 1992; Lenskyj, 1991; Griffin, 1992,1998). Although two of the athletes acknowledged being lesbian in the demographics at the end of the study, neither mentioned or spoke of their sexual orientation during the discussion of lesbianism. This supports the literature that suggests female athletes are afraid to openly discuss this issue.

Many of the women interviewed for this study initially seemed uncomfortable and hesitant to discuss the lesbian images in sport. Instead, athletes used comments that implied they were referring to lesbians. Athletes often made an effort to discuss the issue without mentioning the word lesbian. The most common term used in place of lesbian was "stereotype," while others simply said "blah, blah, blah," or "you know." "They might say 'she's a you know', 'you know' throw out a stereotype about sexuality" [Paula]. During her interview Paula made several references to the group of lesbian athletes on her team. She also talked about how male varsity athletes make derogatory comments and perpetuate rumours about the sexuality of her and her teammates. She, however, was always evasive in her explanation of the sexual orientation of her teammates, and rarely, if ever, used the term lesbian.



Another athlete was asked about verbal harassment that female athletes may face. Nancy mentioned that she had heard derogatory statements directed at female athletes. After several probing questions and much hesitation, she finally said that the verbal harassment she has experienced suggests that "female athletes are all gay." The general reluctance among female athletes to mention lesbianism reinforces the findings of Blinde and Taub (1992). The participants in their study also demonstrated some uneasiness when discussing lesbianism choosing instead to make indirect references to the topic.

### **Lesbian Images and Male-Dominated Sport**

Although the majority of athletes in this study were reluctant to discuss lesbianism, there was an exception. One group of athletes did initiate the lesbian topic early in the interview. All of these athletes were hockey players, one of the most traditionally masculine sports included in this study. Although women have been participating in the sport of ice-hockey since the late 1800's, they have only started to receive recognition for their abilities and skills in the past ten years (Avery and Stevens, 1997). There continues to be great resistance to acknowledging the accomplishments of female hockey players.

The lack of acknowledgement to female hockey players has been compounded by the negative attention and focus on lesbianism in women's hockey. The recent success of Canada's Women's Hockey team at the 1998 Olympics in Nagano was overshadowed by a scandal that erupted weeks before the competition. This scandal involved an allegation that the coach, Shannon

**Miller, was having an affair with one of her players. An investigation was initiated by the Canadian Federation of Athletes, and, although no evidence was found to support the charges, the allegations were enough to discredit the coach and the players (Strachan, 1998). This type of exposure can have devastating effects on the development of women's hockey, and sport in general:**

**A number of national team players recall that in their teens they stayed away from hockey, despite their interest in the game because of rumours that many of the players were gay, and their fear of being seen that way by their peers (Etue and Williams, 1996:219).**

**The fear of being labelled lesbian has become an effective tool to control the number of women participating in hockey and other male dominated sports.**

**Lesbian images control the social acceptance for female participation in these sports. Women may choose not to participate in these sports to avoid being labelled a lesbian.**

**Radical feminists argue the terms feminine and heterosexual are often used interchangeably as are the terms masculine and lesbian for women (Lenskyj, 1986). As Pam pointed out,**

**People think to be able to compete in the tougher sports you have to be masculine and for some reason they [people] think if you are masculine you are homosexual and that you are not a woman anymore.**

**As the following quotes illustrate, the hockey players in this study expressed the**

**belief that the general public perceives women hockey players to be masculine and possibly lesbians:**

**I think guys will think of lesbians and will think hockey....You still get comments about hockey and being a female player, about being lesbian and things like that [Cindy].**

**One time I met this guy I knew in a bar and he found out that I played on the hockey team and his first question was, "How many lesbians are on your team ...[and] are you one now too?" [Diane]**

**The latter of these comments suggests that participation in sport has a masculinizing effect and will further lead to involvement in deviant sexual behaviour.**

**Homophobic attitudes and the perception of female athletes as masculine work together to maintain sports, such as ice-hockey, as male territory.**

**Significant contributors to the maintenance of this perception are societal values, the education system, and parental influence. Parents are especially influential in the type of sports in which they direct their children to participate: "With young kids this could make or break the sport. I know mother's who wouldn't let daughters play with lesbians...[even though] they know their daughter loves the game" (Etue and Williams, 1996:219). The influence parents have over which sports their daughters play can control the participation of females in sport and further maintain the perception of certain sports as masculine.**

**During their interviews, several athletes spoke about the role parents play**

in determining which sports their daughters play. Pam indicated that she feels that parents definitely are responsible for encouraging their children to participate in sport, and for influencing the direction of their sporting career. Pam related a story about her roommate's disappointment while watching the women's hockey during the Olympics. Her roommate felt she could have had the potential to play hockey at this level had she been allowed:

**My roommate has three sisters, so there were four tall really strong athletic girls and they play rugby now and they could have been very excellent hockey players and she loves hockey. Now she plays in intra-murals, but she says they bugged and bugged their Dad when they were growing up and he said no because it was a boy's sport....And she grew up on a farm throwing bails of hay [Pam].**

This story provides a nice illustration of the belief that it is acceptable for young girls and women to perform hard labour jobs in the maintenance of the family, but not leisure activities and sport that require physical strength and competitiveness. Girls who pursue these activities are then classified as masculine. This mentality dates back to the early 1900's when heavy work was considered safe for women, yet heavy play was dangerous (Lenskyj, 1986).

Although there has been some lenience allowing young girls to enjoy leisure activities, including traditional masculine activities, when a girl reaches puberty "the social pressure put upon a woman to take her predestined place at the side of a man increases sharply" (Palzkill, 1990:223). According to Lenskyj (1987), many parents will discourage girls from participation in sport if their

interest continues into adolescence. At this time parents expect daughters to “abandon homosocial sporting activities for non-sport activities of a more heterosexual nature” (382). For example, Michele remembered her parents enrolling her in many sports when she was young, including baseball, gymnastics, soccer, speed skating and ringette, but as she got older she recalled being expected to give up playing sports:

When I got into high school they [my parents] didn't seem to really be thrilled that I was still wanting to play sports. When I was in grade 12 I had to sneak around to play hockey. I would hear comments like “when are you going to stop playing that...aren't you too old now to play.”

Michele felt that her parents failed to view sport as a vehicle to education or a career for women. She believed that they tried to influence her away from participating in sports, particularly the masculine sport of ice-hockey.

Parental control over their daughters participation in sport can also be influenced by the homophobia inherent in society. An incident experienced by one of the athletes demonstrates the power of homophobic attitudes that continue to be prevalent today:

I was talking to this friend from work about my hockey game on the weekend, and a co-worker came in and made some comment about all the lesbians that play hockey and then said he would never let his daughter play hockey because of that [Diane].

This incident illustrates the belief that associating with lesbians will lead

heterosexual women to convert to lesbianism. Further, there are stereotypes that lesbians are sexual predators. "According to this stereotype, lesbians coerce innocent, young, weak, and unwilling heterosexual women into unnatural sexual liaisons" (Griffin, 1998:58). The emphasis on sexual orientation and the myths surrounding lesbians in sport are related to the masculinity associated with sport.

Those sports most often regarded as masculine are team sports, such as ice-hockey. In this study, the only participant who saw no relationship between lesbianism and women's sport was a cross country runner. Long distance running is an individual sport that is not necessarily seen as involving masculine characteristics typical of team sports, such as aggression and body contact. In addition, individual sports have been found to be less threatening than team sports. As noted by Lenskyj (1986), participation in team sports poses a threat to male control as women practice co-operation and solidarity. The fear of lesbian stereotypes and lesbian images associated with specific types of athletes are used to impact on cooperation of teammates and diffuse the level of women's solidarity that can be achieved through team sport participation.

### **Application of Lesbian Images and Labels**

Although there are lesbian images attached to female athletes in general participating in masculine sports, certain athletes possess qualities that lead them to be more vulnerable to the lesbian label. "Stereotypes of lesbians are related to gender role expectations...lesbians are expected to look and act in ways we associate with men" (Griffin, 1993:200).

Participants in this study were asked if they felt any athletes in particular might be more susceptible to a lesbian image. The answers provided by the respondents suggest that the athletes themselves internalize societal stereotypes regarding lesbians and label women with certain physical traits as lesbians. The most common physical traits the women associated with lesbianism were: “appearance and how they interact” [Theresa]; “the way they dress” [Michele]; and “the way they look, their appearance, short hair, maybe the way they walk” [Pam].

Appearance and short hair are traits that lead certain people to be suspected of being lesbian. Female athletes portraying these characteristics in combination with participation in a masculine sport face the highest risk of being labelled. Rachel provided a compelling illustration of the speculation that can ensue from these stereotypes.

I have a friend that plays [hockey] in Toronto, and she is married and has two kids, but everyone confuses her as being gay because she has short hair. For sure because I think she is in an arena where stereotypes can be created. If she walked in and she had short hair, I don't think that people would say “oh my god she is gay,” into a bank...but if she walked out of a hockey arena and she has short hair and she is carrying her hockey bag, then people might perceive her as that.

Comments, such as those of Rachel and other women in the study clearly indicate that even those heterosexual women who conform to traditional gender expectations, such as marriage and motherhood, are still at risk of being labelled

**lesbians.**

**Although some athletes may be subjected to more scrutiny because of their outward physical appearance or behaviour, it is still a common practice for many athletes to engage in efforts to not fit the lesbian image and avoid the lesbian label from being applied to themselves. Several techniques were employed by the athletes in this study to deflect accusations. First, respondents from this study made subtle references to indicate that the label did not fit them. Terminology such as “them,” “that way,” “like that,” and “we” were used to indicate that these athletes were part of the non-lesbian group of women in sport. Blinde and Taub (1992b) explain that within the female athletic population, athletes will use “out-group” and “in group” terminology, such as “we” and “them,” to distinguish between the non-lesbian and lesbian athlete.**

**A second method that was commonly used by some athletes was to attack lesbians through the use of homophobic and derogatory statements. Such statements, directed at teammates and coaches, were expressed by the respondents in this study. It can be argued that women themselves help to perpetuate the stereotypes and reinforce lesbian images. The women in this study felt that female athletes contribute to the homophobia in women’s sport. One athlete cited examples of her teammates’ outward objections to lesbians, while another recalled a story of her teammate’s use of the lesbian label to attack their coach after being disciplined by her:**



**There is one girl that is very vocal about not agreeing with homosexuality to the point of being rude about it....She knows there are girls on the team [that are gay], but she is always making fun of them [lesbians] [Pam].**

**In this one instance someone hit someone on the ice and it was pretty dirty and then she got a penalty and she came to the bench and I think she was benched for the rest of the game and she said to the coach, "Oh why...was it your girlfriend?" [Cindy]**

**One technique to deflect suspicions of being a lesbian is through the use of homophobic statements and jokes towards lesbians. Gina found that some athletes used jokes against lesbians to deflect the lesbian image from themselves. "I know people that...actually join in on other people's jabs just to prove their own sexuality." This tendency was also found by Fusco (1995). In her study she found that "incidences of verbal bashing, whisper campaigns, homophobic jokes, slurs and derogatory comments...and scapegoating" (68) to deflect suspicions regarding their own sexual orientation were commonly used by female athletes.**

**A third technique used by athletes to disassociate themselves from the lesbian images applied to women in sport is emphasizing heterosexuality, by broadcasting their heterosexual relationships. Lenskyj (1987) believes that the homophobia inherent in women's sport puts pressure on athletes to send the message that the lesbian images do not apply to them. Some athletes will make it a point to mention a boyfriend, or that they have been dating men, to avoid any**

question that they are lesbian. The athletes in this study suggested that some of their teammates mentioned in front of the team that they were interested in or dating men specifically to deflect any accusations. According to Rachel,

there are some athletes that think it [the lesbian image] is terrible and try to get away from it, and that is when they announce that they went out with this guy so that everyone can hear.

Athletes in this study indicated that more than a verbal indication, being seen with men or having a boyfriend, is a common technique to re-affirm their heterosexuality. A few of the women from this study admitted to the use of this technique:

I was thinking actually of the [athletic] banquet and people going with a date or without a date and what would be said about you if you showed up with the women's hockey team without someone there with you....I think when you are playing in a sport where it is stereotypically male, if you don't want to be viewed as lesbian, then it's more important to try and show your feminine side or whatever [Cindy].

I remember one time that people were talking about me because I have some gay friends, and therefore it was guilty by association and I asked my boyfriend at the time to come out to the bar where the team was going to be, just to stop all the whispering behind my back [Diane].

The latter of these quotes not only illustrates the power of the lesbian images to make players monitor their behaviour, it also shows that female athletes are afraid to confront the suspicions and accusations of their teammates. Instead,

**athletes will use indirect methods to deflect any suspicions regarding their sexual orientation.**

### **Breaking Down Barriers Between Female Athletes**

**Despite the fact that some of the women in this study suggested that they were not intimidated by lesbian images, these same athletes were able to provide examples of the intimidation felt by their teammates and other female athletes. In addition, some of the athletes from this study openly admitted to using tactics to avoid being labelled as lesbian. The silence of lesbianism in sport has kept most of the athletes from understanding that the lesbian label is used as a method of control and would exist with or without lesbians participating in sport.**

**One athlete from this study, Gina, spoke about the need to open up the conversation of lesbianism within women's sport. Gina felt it was important to keep issues open because, "when things are swept under the table that is when rumours and stereotypes develop." Whether or not these issues are openly discussed, they continue to exist, and continue to threaten and divide the athletes. In some of the other interviews, the discussion was directed towards how the athletes felt about being more open with these issues. Specifically, I asked how the athletes felt about players being open about their sexual orientation to their teammates and coaches. Responses revealed that the women felt that when athletes are open about their lesbianism, it draws lines between heterosexual and lesbian players. Several of the athletes in this study offered examples to illustrate this tendency:**

**I think it would segregate and I know it has a couple people in the past teams that have wanted to cut themselves off, and want to socially not be around it as much, and not be around the team [Gina].**

**Yes, I have seen girls decide to leave a team because there were a majority of gay people on the team, and they are afraid of the label [Michele].**

**I played in a hockey league when I was younger, and I know that there were teams that were predominately lesbian, versus teams like mine that were heterosexual, and I know at one time there were players on my team that wouldn't allow any known lesbians to play, and one year we had a couple girls quit because of these two openly lesbian players trying out [Diane].**

**These three examples show the level of homophobia present in women's sport and the control it has over female athletes. Women may choose not to participate in sport, or on particular teams to avoid a negative label or because they believe the stereotypes about female athletes. Griffin (1998) has identified several beliefs about lesbians that are used to justify the fears of parents, athletes and coaches. Some of these beliefs include: participation in athletics promotes lesbianism; lesbians are sexual predators; lesbians are immoral and therefore poor role models; and, lesbian cliques dominate sports and discriminate against heterosexuals.**

**These beliefs have led female athletes to discriminate against suspected lesbians as well as lesbians who choose to be open about their sexual orientation to their teammates. In her interviews Fusco (1995) found that "suspected**

lesbians were ostracized, their social lives rarely validated, and treated differently from heterosexuals" (68). When lesbian athletes came out to their teammates, they "were often physically avoided when in close quarters, hotels or locker rooms with other team members" (68). Theberge (1995), however, in her study of an elite level women's hockey team, where all the lesbians on the team were "out" to their teammates, found that it was common for players to make reference to their lesbian partners. She found the friendships on the team to cross boundaries of sexual orientation and noted that "sexuality seems to be irrelevant to the dynamics of team relations" (398).

Participants in this study were asked how they felt most female athletes would react to an open acceptance regarding the sexual orientation of team players. Although some of the athletes in this study felt that some athletes might be accepting to an open policy regarding sexual orientation, they also felt that the overall response of most female athletes would be consistent with the homophobic attitudes that continue to exist in society. In other words, there will always be some people who would not accept it:

I think everybody would generally accept it, but I don't think it would be something that wouldn't be talked about, because there are probably other girls that would not accept it at all. I think maybe they wouldn't say anything to her, but when she wasn't around it would be the topic [Pam].

We have never had anyone that was openly gay, but I am sure they would be very divided. I think that there would be people who at the surface that would say "this is great," but I think they would be very

uncomfortable. There would be others that would be very supportive. I think it comes down to how confident you are with yourself, and I think that there are a lot of people that are very hesitant to say something because 1) do they get ostracized by the whole team, or are they going to be accepting and 2) am I going to get ostracized by the whole [athletic] department [Rachel].

Acceptance from teammates is an important issue to consider in the decision for players to come out openly as lesbians to their teammates and coaches. A more important consideration, which Rachel pointed out above, would be the reaction of the university and the athletic department. *In Strong Women, Deep Closets*, Griffin (1998) devotes a chapter to the candid accounts of lesbian players and coaches in terms of their experiences of coming out as lesbian. It is evident in these accounts that coaches face more risk in that they have to contend with players, parents and their own job security. Players themselves risk not being recruited and losing scholarships upon coming out. Players recommended coming out at schools with a more liberal campus, where lesbian, gay and bi-sexual support groups exist.

Even where support systems may exist for female athletes, the negative social stigma attached to lesbianism continues to evoke fear. This fear derives mainly from gender-based social controls and homophobia. The use of lesbian images in sport works to divide teams and segregate players. Female athletes use several techniques to avoid being labelled lesbian, some of which involve verbal attacks on teammates, competitors and coaches. Throughout this chapter,

I presented personal accounts from inter-varsity athletes, two of whom were lesbian. Respondents accounts demonstrated the strong influence of lesbian images in women's sport. Although not all the women were threatened by the image, it is apparent that many women participating in sport feel pressured to promote a heterosexual image, which raises concerns for the advancement of women's sport.

It is important to recognize that most female athletes seem to lack insight into the labelling of female athletes as lesbians. The fact that many female athletes accept and reinforce negative stereotypes reinforces the strength of the lesbian label to marginalize and control women's sport. This method of control is considered in the next chapter as strategies to create a more acceptable environment for women in sport are discussed.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **WOMEN'S SPORT HEADING INTO 2000 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Conclusions**

Female athletes' abilities and accomplishments have surpassed expectations. Although more girls and women are participating in a wide variety of sports, they continue to face barriers of patriarchal control. The control female athletes encounter continues to ensure that their achievements and the attention paid to female sport are secondary in relation to those of male athletes. Women who participate in sport are expected to give priority to traditional female gender roles. Female athletes, especially those in predominately masculine sports, are also threatened with a masculine or lesbian image for violating gender role expectations. Such threats pressure female athletes to emphasize a feminine image to counteract their participation in sport.

In an attempt to gain access to sponsorship and funding, and increase interest in women's sport, female athletes are increasingly conforming to expectations that they be sexually appealing. These athletes are exploiting their own sexuality to gain these benefits. A very interesting example of this tendency is the recent publication of a 2000 calendar of the Australian Women's Olympic Soccer team. Several members of the squad posed nude for the calendar in an effort to gain attention for the 2000 Olympics in Sydney. The following statement by one of the players illustrates the motivation for the calendar:



**[I] did the shoot to prove to people that female soccer players are not all "butch" masculine people ....I did it to promote soccer and the women's side of things...the attention is going to be great so at least people will know who we are now and they'll see that we can be feminine and look attractive as well (Canoe, 1999).**

**Another recent example of female athletes conforming to traditional expectations of femininity involves Canadian Olympic Champion, biathlete Myriam Bedard. On January 15, 2000, she launched a \$725,000 lawsuit against Wrigley Canada Inc., for the unauthorized use of a computer altered photo. The photo was altered to make her look more masculine. Bedard felt the photo stripped her of her femininity and made her look like a man. As she told the press, "I have always made a point of remaining feminine in a sport that is very demanding, and especially very masculine" (Gatehouse, 2000:A1). As long as elite female athletes, especially professional and Olympic athletes, continue to foster the stereotypes surrounding female athletes in sport, it will prove difficult to conquer the sexist barriers inherent in sport.**

**For this thesis, a case study of elite female athletes was conducted in order to examine the marginalization of female athletes participating in the male domain of sport. Female athletes are sexualized and are expected to emphasize their traditional feminine gender role while their accomplishments in sport are trivialized. The background research for this study included an extensive review of the literature in addition to articles and videos in the popular press. This**

research provided an understanding of women's historical movement through sport, and the inherent discrimination and stigmatization encountered by female athletes. Combined with my own experience as an athlete, in-depth interviews with a total of thirteen inter-university varsity athletes, some of whom had achieved national and international recognition, added to this research. Interviews with the women from this study established a life history of their involvement in sport, and resulted in a deep insight into experiences of their sport participation.

The majority of the women interviewed were participating in traditionally male-dominated team sports, including hockey, basketball and soccer. According to the athletes, an emphasis on the masculine values associated with these sports continues to exist. The women in this study reported feeling that societal expectations neither emphasize competitiveness nor athletic careers for females. In addition, female athletes are expected to adhere to gender-based norms and accentuate their femininity. As a result, they may monitor their appearance and behaviour in an attempt to conform. Such behaviour, however, downplays the accomplishments of female athletes and keep women's sport in a subordinate position vis à vis men's sport.

Female subordination, or male privilege, is identified through the ritualizing of activities as either masculine or feminine. Activities come to be classified through the enforcement of traditional patriarchal elements of femininity. In sport, physicality and aggression have been and continue to be, qualities reserved for

men. Women participating in traditional male sports are therefore stigmatized for their participation. As illustrated in this study, female athletes are expected to advertise traditional feminine expectations to compensate for their athletic status. Female subordination is also reflected through the objectification of female athletes as sexual objects. The athletes in this study expressed their frustration regarding the secondary status of women's sport, both in the media and their own experience as varsity athletes. The women were able to give examples from their own experiences in sport, of instances where feminine images seemed to be more important than athletic ability. Some athletes, particularly the hockey players, felt the need to avoid the masculine and lesbian images associated with female athletes.

In Western society, heterosexuality is recognized as appropriate sexual orientation. In this study some of the women were clearly intimidated by the lesbian images associated with sport. Intimidation was initially demonstrated by the apprehension of the women to discuss lesbian issues in sport and by the failure of some athletes to acknowledge they were lesbian. Within sport, heterosexual privilege is not only dominant, it is also recognized as an intolerance to lesbians, otherwise known as homophobia. In this study, it was discovered that homophobia is expressed as verbal harassment directed at fellow teammates, opponents and coaches. It is also evident in segregation of lesbians and non-lesbians in women's sport. The experiences of the women in this study demonstrate the power of the lesbian images in sport and the associated

**stigmatization of female athletes. This stigma has the power to divide women in sport, as the athletes themselves label their own teammates and challenge team dynamics through a division based on sexual orientation.**

**The findings of this study suggest that homophobia helps maintain male power and privilege. The interesting thing is that homophobia does not just come from outside of sport, it is also prevalent among the female athletes themselves. These athletes' failure to recognize the underlying implications of their use of the lesbian label, contributes to the negative stereotypes surrounding women's sport. The result is the continued control of female athletes.**

### **Recommendations and Future Direction for Research**

**The priority given to traditional female roles and the expectation that female athletes display a sexually appealing appearance reinforces the secondary status accorded female athletes and their accomplishments. The emphasis placed on their roles outside of sport sends a message to young athletes that participation in sport is acceptable as a pastime, but should not be taken seriously. This perception has managed to control women's participation and limit their opportunities in sport. In an attempt to further develop women's sport and provide opportunities for more girls and women, public education and the media should be utilized to strengthen the argument that females are able to achieve excellence in sport. In addition, attention needs to be focused on promoting the idea that it is acceptable for girls and women to be physically aggressive and participate in all sports, including those with body contact.**

**As a first step towards achieving these goals, universities could use their resources to help develop a positive and accepting environment for women in sport. One program that should be mentioned is the Athlete Mentoring Program, which exists at several Canadian Universities. This program involves varsity athletes entering into public school in their area to share with students their experiences in athletics (Sports Info, 1997). This type of program could be an excellent means by which to teach young individuals, both girls and boys, that females have the right and the ability to excel in sport.**

**In addition to promoting women's ability in sport, the inherent homophobia widespread in women's sport needs to be addressed. Applying the lesbian images to all women in sport has been, and continues to be, a weapon to control both women's participation and unity in sport. There is reason to believe that the stigma accompanying these images will always be felt by female athletes, because of the threat they pose to patriarchal values. If we are to enrich female athletes' experiences and minimize the stigma surrounding women's sport, then we need to fight against homophobia in sport and in society more generally.**

**Education is one way to minimize the threat of lesbianism in sport, and homophobia more generally. All athletes, and specifically female athletes, need to be aware of the implications of the sexualization of athletes and the application of the lesbian labels. As discussed in Chapter 4, female athletes themselves are partly responsible for the perpetuation of stereotypes and myths that marginalize women's sport. Policies need to be developed within the athletic department of**

universities to confront behaviours that contribute to a negative lesbian image in women's sport. The effect of using lesbian images against athletes and the impact of homophobic behaviour should be explained to both male and female athletes. In addition, anti-discriminatory policies of universities need to be reinforced and explained to all varsity athletes.

This research is exploratory in nature and its findings are therefore not generalizable to the larger population, however, it does raise issues that require further examination. This study is unique in that it represents one of a limited number of studies that examines elite female athletes' experiences in sport and their perception of women's athletics in general. In addition, much of the research confronting issues of femininity, sexuality and female athletes has not only been limited, but stagnant in the past several years. This research contributes to earlier findings and suggestions presented in the literature, and also suggests that similar problems are still quite prevalent throughout women's sport and continue to be overlooked. There is an obvious failure to confront these issues.

One prominent issue that emerged in this study that requires more in-depth examination is that of eating disorders and female athletes. For example, during the interviews conducted for this study, discussion of athletes as sexual objects also initiated conversation concerning body image and the resulting crisis with eating disorders that confront many female athletes of all ages. Similar to lesbianism, there is much silence over the issue of eating disorders among

**female athletes. What makes this issue particularly important is that these athletes' lives are at risk. The potential link between eating disorders, body image, and the sexualization of female athletes discussed earlier cannot be overlooked and needs to be examined. Such research could provide information to increase awareness of this problem, and educate coaches, parents and athletes on how to deal with it.**

**The fundamental factor related to the emphasis of femininity and sexuality, placed on female athletes, is the maintenance of traditional gender role values and expectations. The emphasis of the traditional female role in our society is in contrast to participation in sport. Sexualizing the female athlete has become a means of control to minimize women's achievements in sport, in an effort to reduce challenges to the patriarchal system. Only with awareness, unity and perseverance will women come to conquer their subordination both in sport and society more generally.**

## REFERENCES

Acosta, V. R., & Carpenter, L. J. (1994). The status of women in intercollegiate athletics. In S. Birrell & C. L. Cole (Eds.), *Women, sport and culture* (111-118). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Albom, M. (1999, July 2). Game, set and knickers. *The Press*, 20.

Associated Press. (1997, December 1). Forbes highest paid athletes list. *Washington Post*  
<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/sports/spobiz/daily/dec/01/forblist1.htm>> (Accessed 16December1999).

Associated Press. (1999, November 26). Australian soccer women bare all. In *SLAM Sports*. Canadian Online Explorer  
<[www.canoe.ca/soccer/nov26\\_au.html](http://www.canoe.ca/soccer/nov26_au.html)> (Accessed 18December1999).

Avery, J., & Stevens, J. (1997). *Too many men on the ice: Women's hockey in North America*. Victoria: Polestar Book Publishers.

Bartolomeo, J. (1999). Belle of the ball: Many women play sports with grace, agility..and a hint of mascara. *Women's Sports Fitness*, pp 48-49.

Bell, M. M. (1986). Role conflict of women as athletes in the United States. In R. E. Lapchick (Ed.), *Fractured focus: Sport as a reflection of society* (139-150). Toronto: Lexington Books.

Bennett, R. K., Whitaker, G., Woolley Smith, N. J., & Sablove, A. (1987). Changing the rules of the game: Reflections towards a feminist analysis of sport. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 10 (4), 369-379.

Berg, B. L. (1995). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences (2nd ed.)*. Needham Heights: Allyn and Bacon.

Blinde, E. M., & Taub, D. E. (1992). Homophobia and women's sport: The disempowerment of athletes. *Sociological Focus*, 25 (2), 151-166.

Blinde, E. M., & Taub, D. E. (1992b). Women athletes as falsely accused deviants: Managing the lesbian stigma. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 33 (4), 521-533.



- Blue, A. (1988). *Faster, Higher, Further*. London: Virago Press.
- Boutilier, M. A., & SanGiovanni, L. F. (1994). Politics, public policy, and title ix: Some limitations of liberal feminism. In S. Birrell & C. L. Cole (Eds.), *Women, Sport and Culture* (97-109). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Bowman, A., & Daniels, D. (1995). A shifting gaze? The changing photographic representation of women athletes. In M. Lynn & S. Wilkinson (Eds.), *Women and girls in sport and physical activity* (84-88). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Inc.
- Browne, L. (1993). *Girls of Summer*. Toronto: Harper Collins.
- Bryson, L. (1990). Challenges to male hegemony in sport. In M. A. Messner & D. Sabo (Eds.), *Sport, men, and the gender order: Critical feminist perspectives* (173-184). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Bryson, L. (1987). Sport and maintenance of male hegemony. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 10 (4), 349-360.
- Burstyn, V. (1999). *The rites of men: Manhood, politics and the culture of sport*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Inc.
- Cahn, S. K. (1993). From the 'muscle moll' to the 'butch' ballplayer: Mannishness, lesbianism and homophobia in U.S. women's sport. *Feminist Studies*, 19 (2), 343-367.
- Cahn, S. K. (1994). *Coming on strong: Gender and sexuality in twentieth century women's sport*. New York: The Free Press.
- Canoe. (1999, August 19). Women's hockey gets league of its own. In *SLAM Sports*. Canadian Online Explorer <[www.canoe.ca/HockeyWomen/aug19\\_wom.html](http://www.canoe.ca/HockeyWomen/aug19_wom.html)> (Accessed 18December1999).
- Canoe. (1999b, July 10). World cup soccer. In *SLAM Sports*. Canadian Online Explorer <[www.canoe.ca/soccerwomensWC/jul10\\_wha.html](http://www.canoe.ca/soccerwomensWC/jul10_wha.html)> (Accessed 18December1999).
- Cohen, G. L. (1993). *Women in sport: Issues and controversies*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Coleman, C. (1998, June). AnnaMania. *Women's Sports and Fitness*, pp 98-101.

Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research Design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. California: Sage Publications.

Curry, T. J., & Weiss, O. (1989). Sport identity and motivation for sport participation: A comparison between American college athletes and Austrian student sport club members. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 6, 257-268.

Duncan, M. C., Messner, M. A., Williams, L., & Jensen, K. (1994). Gender stereotyping in televised sports. In S. Birrell & C. L. Cole (Eds.), *Women, sport, and culture* (249-272). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Etue, E., & Williams, M. K. (1996). *Women making hockey history*. Toronto: Second Story Press.

Fenton, J. (1995). Reflecting on a life through sport. In M. Lynn & S. Wilkinson (Eds.), *Women and girls in sport and physical activity* (96-100). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Inc.

Fusco, C. (1995). Lesbians and locker rooms: Challenging lesbophobia. In M. Lynn & S. Wilkinson (Eds.), *University Press Inc.* (67-70). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Inc.

Gatehouse, J. (2000, January 15). Doctored photograph in gum ad makes me look like a man: Bédard. *National Post*, A1,A3.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

Greenburg, R. (Executive Producer). (1999, January). *Dare to compete: The struggle of women in sports*. HBO Studio Productions.

Griffin, P. (1992). Changing the game: Homophobia, sexism and lesbians in sport. *Quest*, 44, 251-265.

Griffin, P. (1993). Homophobia in women's sports: The fear that divides us. In G. L. Cohen (Ed.), *Women in sport: Issues and controversies* (193-202). Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Griffin, P. (1998). *Strong women, deep closets: Lesbians and homophobia in sport*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

**Guttman, A. (1991). *Women's sports: A history*. New York: Columbia University Press.**

**Hagan, J., Simpson, J., & Gillis, A. R. (1987). Class in the household: A power-control theory of gender and delinquency. *American Journal of Sociology*, 92 (4), 788-816.**

**Hargreaves, J. (1994). *Sporting females: Critical issues in the history and sociology of women's sports*. New York: Routledge.**

**Hogan, J. (1999, January 30-31). Man taunts fire up Mauresmo. *The Weekend Australian*, 63.**

**Jefferson Lenskyj, H. (1994). *Women, sport and physical activity: Selected research themes*. Ontario: Sport Information Resource Centre for Sport Canada.**

**Jefferson Lenskyj, H. (1995). What's sport got to do with it? In M. Lynn & S. Wilkinson (Eds.), *Women and girls in sport and physical activity* (6-10). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Inc.**

**Kirby, S., & McKenna, K. (1989). *Experience research social change: Methods from the margins*. Toronto: Garamond Press.**

**Klasovec, S. (1995). The sexual politics of women in sport: A survey of lesbophobia. In M. Lynn & S. Wilkinson (Eds.), *University Press Inc.* (63-66). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Inc.**

**Kolnes, L. (1995). Heterosexuality as an organizing principle in women's sport. *International Review for Sociology of Sport*, 30 (1), 61-75.**

**Lenskyj, H. (1986). *Out of bounds: Women, sport and sexuality*. Toronto: Women's Press.**

**Lenskyj, H. (1987). Female sexuality and women's sport. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 10 (1), 381-386.**

**Lenskyj, H. (1990). Power and play: Gender and sexuality issues in sport and physical activity. *International Review for Sociology of Sport*, 25 (3), 235-243.**

Lenskyj, H. (1991). Combating homophobia and sport in physical education. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 8, 61-69.

Lindsay, D. (1997). Courting women. *Racquet*, pp 55-60.

Mathes, S. A., & Battista, R. (1985). College men's and women's motives for participation in physical education. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 61, 719-726.

McDermott, L. (1996). Toward a feminist understanding of physicality within the context of women's physically active and sporting lives. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 13, 12-30.

McDonald, D. (1995). The golden age of women and sport in Canada. In M. Lynn & S. Wilkinson (Eds.), *Women and girls in sport and physical activity* (12-15). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Inc.

Messner, M. A. (1988). Sport and male domination: The female athletes as contested ideological terrain. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 5, 197-211.

Neuman, W. L. (1994). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches (2nd ed.)*. Toronto: Allyn and Bacon.

Palzkill, B. (1990). Between gymshoes and high-heels: The development of a lesbian identity and existence in top class sport. *International Review for Sociology of Sport*, 25 (3), 221-231.

Pederson, D. M., & Kono, D. M. (1990). Perceived effects on femininity of the participation of women in sport. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 71, 783-792.

Pennett, D. (1999, November 24). Women's sports still have a long way to go. *The Hamilton Spectator*, CO1.

Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Signs*, 5, 631-660.

Robertson, S. (1995). The life and times of CAAWS. In M. Lynn & S. Wilkinson (Eds.), *Women and girls in sport and physical activity* (16-21). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Inc.

Sage, G. H. (1980). Orientations toward sport of male and female intercollegiate athletes. *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 2, 355-362.

Schur, E. (1984). *Labeling women deviant: Gender stigma and social control*. New York: Random House.

Sports Info. (1997). *Lancer Athlete Mentoring Program*. University of Windsor: The Department of Athletics and Recreational Services.

Strachan, A. (1998, February 9). Canadian women's hockey rumors won't die. In *SLAM Sports*. Canadian Online Explorer  
<[http://www.canoe.ca/SlamNaganoHockeyWomenArchive/feb9\\_hwom.html](http://www.canoe.ca/SlamNaganoHockeyWomenArchive/feb9_hwom.html)>  
(Accessed 12December1999).

Taylor, S., & Bogdan, R. (1998). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A guidebook and resource (3rd ed.)*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Theberge, N. (1985). Toward a feminist alternative to sport as a male preserve. *Quest*, 37, 193-202.

Theberge, N. (1987). Sport and women's empowerment. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 10 (4), 387-393.

Theberge, N. (1995). Gender, sport, and the construction of community: A case study from women's ice hockey. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 12, 389-402.

Watson, M. (1996). *Olympic track and field athletics guide*. Athletic International: England.

Weiller, K. H., & Higgs, C. T. (1994). The all American girls professional baseball league, 1943-1954: Gender conflict in sport? *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 11, 289-297.

Women's Sport Foundation. (1998). Mythbusting: what every female athlete should know  
<<http://www.lifetimetv.com/WoSport/stage/RESLIB/html/mythbusting.html>>  
(Accessed December, 1999).

WTNH-TV News. (1998). News8 Channel Sports  
<<http://wtnh.com/sports/basketball/abl98-99html>> (Accessed 28October1999).

Yallop, R. (1999, January 30-31). Mauresmo out in the open. *The Weekend Australian*, 5.

## **APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX A**

- 1. EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH PROJECT**
- 2. WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE FORM**
- 3. CONSENT FORM**

## **Windsor Lancer Female Varsity Study**

**My name is Carolyn Dutot. I am a M.A. student in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Windsor. Currently, I am seeking volunteers to participate in a study concerned with the experience of female varsity athletes. I wish to interview female athletes about the nature of women's sport in the 1990's, in particular, the significance of femininity and sexuality to female athletes. It is my intention that this research investigation will compliment the existing research and inform others of the issues surrounding women's sport.**

### **Research Process:**

**I will personally interview all volunteer participants. Interviews will be conducted in an informal fashion to allow each participant an opportunity to freely express herself. Interviews will be 1 to 1 1/2 hours in length and will be conducted in private at each participant's convenience and choice of location. All participants are free to terminate the interview and/or withdraw from the study at any point in time. Interviews will be audio-taped. Taping allows the interviewer to concentrate on the interview and ensures that responses are recorded accurately. All participants are ensured confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and by changing any specific reference to names or places which occur during the interview.**

**No remuneration is offered as part of this research project. However, in appreciation for their participation, all participants will receive a research report at the end of the investigation which outlines the findings of the study if they so desire.**

**Although it is essential to obtain some personal information on each respondent, so that research reports can be delivered (i.e., full name, address and phone number), this information will be kept under lock and key and destroyed after the delivery of the final report, thereby ensuring that confidentiality is maintained.**

**This research project is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Suzan Ilcan of the Sociology and Anthropology Department of the University of Windsor. If you have any questions about this investigation, you can contact Dr. Ilcan at the university by calling (519) 253-4232 ext. 2208.**



**This research investigation has been cleared by the Ethics Committee of the Sociology Department, University of Windsor. Any questions or concerns regarding the procedures or ethics of this investigation may be directed to:**

**Dr. A. Hall, Chair  
Sociology Dept. Ethics Committee  
University of Windsor  
(519) 253-4232 ext. 2202**

**If you are interested in being a participant in this research investigation or if you have any questions please contact me:**

**Carolyn Dutot at (519) 974-1862 (Please leave a message on my machine if there is no answer).**

**You can also indicate your willingness to participate by writing your name and a contact number on the attached form. I look forward to your possible participation in this study.**

## **WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE FORM**

I \_\_\_\_\_ am interested in participating in the interview study that Carolyn Dutot is conducting on the experiences of female varsity athletes.

I understand that anything I say to Carolyn, in the context of the interview, will be kept confidential, that I will not be remunerated for my participation, and that I am free to change my mind at any point and decide not to participate in this research project.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

## **WRITTEN CONSENT FORM**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, give my consent to be interviewed by Carolyn Dutot, a M.A. student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Windsor.

I understand that this project is about the experience of female athletes in the 1990's, looking specifically at issues of femininity, sexuality, and trivialization within women's sport. I understand that the interview will be audio-taped and that my identity will remain confidential in any papers which are produced by this research. I understand that it is necessary for a record to be kept of my name, address and phone number in order that I may be contacted to receive a research report, once the research project is completed. Personal information, along with the transcribed tapes, will be kept under lock and key to ensure confidentiality. All identifying information will be destroyed upon completion of the research project. I understand that I can decline to answer any question(s) during the interview and that I am free to withdraw my consent and terminate the interview at any time. I understand that no remuneration is offered for my participation in this research investigation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **APPENDIX B**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

## **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

- (1) Which varsity sport are you presently competing in?**
- (2) How long have you been playing for this team?**
- (3) Have you played on any other varsity teams?**
  - which**
  - where**
- (4) What year of eligibility are you in?**
- (5) Have you received any awards/recognition in your sport?**
- (6) At what age did you become involved in organized sport?**
  - which sports**
  - which organizations(high school, city/town leagues)**
- (7) Was anyone influential in your decision to become involved in sports?**
  - also to continue in sports**
  - do they continue to support you today**
- (8) Who in your life is most supportive of your athletic career?**
  - what have they done to make you feel this way?**
- (9) Who do you find to be the least supportive of your participation in varsity sport?**
  - why do you think that?**
  - does anyone react negatively to your involvement**
- (10) What is the most rewarding thing about competing at the university level?**
- (11) How do you think people in general view women's sports?**
  - have you seen a change since you started in sports**
- (12) Do you think sports are generally still viewed as male territory?**
  - are certain sports still considered 'mens' sports?**
  - is your sport viewed as a 'mens' sport?**

- (13) In your opinion, how are the women's varsity sports viewed as opposed to the men's Lancer teams?  
-are they treated second-rate? how?(ask for examples)  
-by whom?
- (14) Do you feel that you experience the same amount of recognition as an 'athlete' as male varsity athletes do?  
-explain
- (15) How would you describe the fan support for your sport?  
-do you feel this is representative of other universities  
-how important do you think a winning record is for fans
- (16) How much camaraderie is there between the male and female athletes of your sport?  
-what influences this  
-how supportive are you of each other
- (17) In your opinion are sports categorized?  
-how?  
-'masculine' vs. 'feminine' sports?  
-examples  
-why do you think this is?
- (18) Do you think female athletes are still considered unladylike or masculine?  
-certain ones  
-if yes, why?  
-if no, what has changed?
- (19) Do you think the same qualities are emphasized in both male and female sports?  
-is there an emphasis on looks (beauty) as well as athletic ability within women's sport?  
-by who?
- (20) In your opinion, how does the media portray female athletes and female athletics?  
-do you think the media highlights sexuality(feminine attractiveness) over skills?  
-in what capacity?  
-examples?

- (21) Do you think looking feminine is important for a female athlete?  
-when? In what circumstances?  
-how come?
- (22) Have you ever felt pressure to look feminine?  
-because you are an athlete  
-in what circumstances  
-have you ever noticed teammates being concerned or pressuring others  
-does this change inside and outside of sport
- (23) How do people respond when they discover you are a varsity athlete?  
-positive/negative reactions  
-how do they make you feel?
- (24) Have you ever experienced anyone diminishing the accomplishments of female athletes/ or women's sports?  
-how do you react?
- (25) Have you ever heard any type of slander, name calling, or patronizing humour directed at female athletes?  
-elaborate on these situations
- (26) Are certain sports/athletes more at risk for being made fun of or taken less seriously?  
-explain why you feel this way
- (27) Have you ever had any situations where you preferred that others did not know about your athletic status?  
-how come?
- (28) Do you ever feel that you have to prove yourself as an athlete?  
-explain  
-do woman have more to prove  
-to whom
- (29) How do you think being a woman effects your athletic ability?  
-explain

- (30) Do you ever monitor your appearance or your behaviour because you are an athlete?  
-how?  
-when?  
-how come?
- (31) Do you feel you need to have long hair, wear-make-up or dress feminine?  
-how come (because you are an athlete)?  
-when?  
-in what circumstances (within/outside of sport)?
- (32) Do you feel more comfortable associating with other athletes than non-athletes?  
-why/why not?
- (33) How much interaction do you have with your teammates outside of your sport?  
-do you think this is typical
- (34) Do you ever make it a point to mention having a boyfriend/ or be seen with men?  
-when?  
-what situation?  
-to avoid a negative image?
- (35) In your opinion, is there are lesbian images still attached to women's sport?  
-certain sports/which?  
-explain?  
-why do you think these images exist?
- (36) Do you find that certain individuals get blamed for these images?  
-are some athletes labelled more than others?
- (37) How do you think the image is handled by athletes?  
-is it discussed  
-how do you confront the issue



- (38) Do you think fear of lesbians influences the decision of girls/women to participate in sports?  
-how come?  
-does it affect parental decisions
- (39) Have you ever been afraid that someone would call you a lesbian because you are an athlete?  
-what have you done to alleviate these fears  
-do you discuss these concerns with teammates, friends  
-do teammates openly discuss sexual orientation  
-how is it or how would it be accepted
- (40) How do you think a positive athletic image can be developed for female athletes?
- (41) How would you describe your overall experience as a varsity athlete?
- (42) Is there anything else that you would like to add  
-About this research project, comments, feelings, etc.  
-Things you thought I might ask, or think I should ask

Now I would like to ask you some quick questions of a more personal nature. Remember that your answers to these questions are optional.

- (43) Background information:  
-age  
-race/ethnicity  
-year of study  
-faculty  
-sexual orientation  
-parent's profession(s)  
-where are you from (permanent residence)

## **VITA AUCTORIS**

**NAME:** Carolyn L. Dutot

**PLACE OF BIRTH:** Kingsville, Ontario

**YEAR OF BIRTH:** 1972

**EDUCATION:** Kingsville District High School  
Kingsville, Ontario  
1987-1991

University of Windsor  
Windsor, Ontario  
1991-1995 B.A.

University of Windsor  
Windsor, Ontario  
1995-2000 M.A.