THROUGH HER EYES: EXPLORING THE HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE ATHLETES

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to ascertain the high school sports experiences of female athletes. In an attempt to obtain a better understanding of these experiences, focus group and individual interview sessions were conducted with twelve intercollegiate athletes who were members of Division I soccer and volleyball teams at a mid-sized Midwestern University in the United States. This study examined the role that socializing agents such as parents, coaches, teammates/peers, and the media play in both positively and negatively influencing the sports experiences of these female athletes. Results revealed overwhelming support for the value that agents play in introducing athletes to sports and providing continued support throughout their sports careers. Results also showed that negative interaction with certain socializing agents sometimes led athletes to sacrifice other aspects of their social lives and at times led them to consider quitting sports. In some instances, athletes did quit their sports teams due to negative interactions. Additionally, sports participation allowed athletes to formulate their identities around sports. Based on the results of this study, I suggest that more educational opportunities need to be provided for various socializing influences such as parents, coaches, teammates/peers, and the media, all of whom impact the participation experiences of girls and women in sport.
I dedicate this research to the many women and men who have fought and continue to fight to increase opportunities for girls and women in sports.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Twenty miles and two exits away lies a potential glimpse of my future. When I see a green road sign with the Medaille College logo along the thruway it only heightens my anxiety. My father’s red Honda glides smoothly along the road at a steady sixty-five miles per hour while I sit in the backseat with Jill, my high school teammate and friend, who has come along for support. I feel a mixture of uncertainty, excitement, and pressure sifting through my brain and emptying into my gut. My emotions tumble and thrash around in my stomach like heavy, wet socks in a dryer. This is only my second college athletic recruiting trip, and I am still unsure about my possibilities. I know that I need to make a decision within the next month. I am making this trip to see Medaille’s conference tournament game as a result of an invitation from Peter Jerebko, Medaille College’s athletic director and women’s head basketball coach.

I stare out the window nearest me, avoiding eye contact with everyone else in the car so that they cannot read the emotions on my face. The light dusting of snow that covers the barren ground reminds me that basketball season is winding down. The few glimpses of the grass that I can see suggest that it has been matted down by the overbearing weight of the snow this year. Only a few blades seem to have survived their wintry assault. In New York in early March, snow has yet to retire for the season, but luckily the accumulated snowfall has not been too destructive. The closer we get to the game site, the more I wonder about playing basketball in college.

Just thirty minutes after passing the college’s sign on the thruway, we finally reach the Hilbert College campus where the Upstate Athletic Alliance women’s
basketball conference tournament is being played. As we pull into the parking lot, I remove my oversized headphones, turn off my CD player, and step out of the car.

“Be confident,” I remind myself as I walk across the recently shoveled lot and into the athletic facility.

As we enter the gymnasium, we encounter two girls who are seated behind a game admissions table. The charge for admission is $3.00 per person. My dad reaches into the back pocket of his beige Dockers, pulls a crisp ten dollar bill from his wallet, and hands it to one of the two girls. I assume that the girls are Hilbert students because they are both wearing royal blue hooded sweatshirts bearing the Hawks logo. They appear to be about twenty years old. The girl responsible for collecting money glances upwards momentarily, hands my father a dollar, and quickly returns to conversation with her friend seated to her right. Upon receiving change, my father carefully places the money in his wallet.

We enter the gymnasium.

The game has just begun. Hilbert’s gym is rather large and with fewer than forty total spectators it looks even bigger. A few college banners and an American flag are mounted on the opposite wall facing the bleachers. One of the banners lists the schools that are members of the Upstate Athletic Alliance and reveals just how small the conference really is. Only four colleges belong to the UAA: Cazenovia, D’Youville, Hilbert, and Medaille.

I scan the bleachers to my left to try to find the perfect spot. One or two rows up will allow us to see the game, but will also allow me to observe the women that could possibly be my future teammates. Committing to seats in the second row, I walk over and
sit down. My father and Jill follow. I sit anxiously with them in the gymnasium and absorb the ambiance of Division Three women’s basketball.

Directly behind the three of us is a group of ten students making noise and being as obnoxious as possible. Since they are sitting in the stands near Medaille’s team bench and wearing scarlet and navy t-shirts, I assume that this rambunctious group is among the Mavericks’ faithful. Four of the guys in the group happen to have drums and maracas with them and seem to be responsible for most of the racket emanating from the bleachers. The shouts and instruments of this “Fantastic Four” drown out the other six voices of their cluster. Students seem to comprise over half of the fans in attendance and based on their excitement and noise, I guess that this is a heated rivalry. My attention returns to the action on the court.

Only three minutes have elapsed thus far in the game and already Medaille has committed a foul. The ref blows his whistle.

“Foul on blue, #5. Two shots.”

“That looked like a clean block to me,” I say to my father, defending the Medaille forward.

“Naw, she definitely hit the girl with her body,” he replies supporting the ref’s call.

“No freakin’ way ref,” the guys in the stands chime in incredulously. Apparently, they agree with me.

“That was the worst call I’ve ever seen.” The drums beat loudly confirming their disapproval.
In case the refs did not hear him the first time, one of the guys tosses in an extra insult, “Take your jersey back to Footlocker, you zebra!”

The three referees on the court may not have heard these remarks, but more likely they are choosing to ignore them. Either way, the guys behind me remain irritated.

“It isn’t going to be easy to win this game when we’re getting home-jobbed,” one of the drummers retorts.

His fellow drumming partner agrees, “No kidding, man!”

After two Hawk charity stripe conversions, Medaille’s center, #50, grabs the ball and inbounds to her point guard. The point guard fires a pass to her two-guard, #32, slashing to the bucket at the other end of the court. A soft finger roll licks the net as it falls through.

*All-out hustle! I love it!* Medaille returns to their defensive half of the court.

“Ahhh!” screams one of Medaille’s starting forwards.

She blocks a shot and sends the ball viciously out of bounds. The ball slaps the end wall with a similar ferocity. A menacing glare, one that conveys arrogance, accompanies #23’s defensive stop. The crowd and the drums are uncontrollable.

“Yeah, AC!!”

“Not on your block Slater! You show her what’s up!”

Once again, I begin to ponder my college athletic options.

I wonder what it would be like to guard these players in practice.

*Would I fit into this basketball system?*

*Where would I fit?*

*Is it possible that I might play basketball in college and eliminate any doubts?*
My apprehensive musings are interrupted by what is going on down on the court. The excitement reminds me why I am not ready to give up competitive sports. This may be a small-time, Division Three women’s basketball tournament, but the boisterous clamor indicates otherwise. To these fans, it might as well be “March Madness” or the Super Bowl. Perhaps they think that making so much noise will rattle the game officials and ultimately allow the fans to contribute to the game’s outcome. A win would belong to them as much as it would to their women’s basketball team. To them, like me, this sport seems to consume them. It gives them a purpose.

I have not yet decided where I am going to attend college, yet I remain set on the possibility of playing three sports, especially basketball. Most of all, I just want to prove my detractors wrong.

My high school basketball coaches rarely encouraged anyone on my team to think about playing in college. Naturally, they offered little help with the recruiting process. *Why couldn’t they at least call college coaches or even offer suggestions of athletic programs or colleges to attend?* I often wondered. I guess it wasn’t in their job descriptions.

One particular incident remains fixed in my mind.

It was the beginning of basketball practice my sophomore year in high school and my team was sitting in our school gym ready for practice to begin. We felt giddy after the previous night’s victory as we prepared to start the day’s drills. Still undefeated at 14-0, we felt invincible.

I am one of the leaders and a captain on the team. Nothing gives me more pride.

My coach casually saunters into the gym. A white lollipop stick hangs loosely
from the corner of her mouth. As she approaches, she begins her usual pre-practice discussion.

“We have had an incredible season thus far and last night’s game just added to the excitement. We need to continue working just as hard for our next game. Our season is beginning to wrap up but most importantly, if you take anything away from this season, I want you to remember one thing. Enjoy this while you can. Most of you, with an exception of one or two of you, will never play basketball in college.”

My heart is crushed by my coach’s words. I am uncertain whether I fit into this select exception, but I doubt myself.

*How could she say a thing like that?*

*Isn’t it her job to motivate us and to help us reach the next level?*

*Why is this next level out of reach for us?*

Plenty of coaches failed to help me with the college recruiting process. But I accepted their lack of guidance as a challenge. Instead, I initiated a few recruiting opportunities by contacting coaches and athletic departments myself. The lack of direction constantly led me to question my abilities, but at least I felt a sense of comfort knowing that my own efforts had not failed. I was determined to control my future, and I knew that my persistence earned me the opportunity to see if Medaille was where I wanted to continue my collegiate athletic career.

During the basketball game, I have been pondering so much that I almost don’t realize how quickly it finishes.

“Woooooo!” the spirited yells bring me back to the Medaille basketball game.

“Yeah! Mavericks are number one!” The crowd cheers behind me.
The Medaille Maverick fanatics are ebullient over their consolation tournament game victory and applaud the team as the Mavericks exit the gym and enter their locker room.

The Medaille coach strides over to me. I immediately notice a resemblance to Conan O’Brien; his hair is a shade lighter but is swept to one side as O’Brien’s and the shape of their faces is similar. He stands confidently at six feet, five inches tall and has broad shoulders, no doubt an attribute that helped him during his own college career. In his senior season, close to fifteen years ago, he was his conference’s “Player of the Year,” quite an accomplishment for Division Two perennial powerhouse Lemoyne.

“Hey, you must be Megan,” he presumes.

“Yes, it’s a pleasure to meet you,” I reply. “Solid game out there. This is my father and my high school teammate, Jill.”

“Nice effort from your girls, Coach,” my father says as he extends his hand to the coach and they politely greet each other with a hand shake.

“Call me Coach P. Yeah, the game got a bit too close at times, but we’ll gladly take the W. My girls should only be another fifteen to twenty minutes in the locker room. Then we can head back to Medaille’s campus, discuss your options at the college, and I can try to answer any questions that you might have. Our van is parked out front and you can follow us back to Medaille if that works for you.”

“Yeah, sounds great, Coach. Thanks,” I respond.

Fifteen minutes pass and we exit the gym and head toward the front parking lot where the Medaille van and my dad’s car are. My father and Coach P exchange driving directions to the campus just in case we lose sight of the van. I cannot possibly envision
that happening. The van looks like an oversized white Chevy cargo van and has Medaille painted in bold blue letters on both sides. There is no way we could ever miss this van.

For an early-March weekend it feels warm. At forty-five degrees I remove my thick, winter jacket as I get back into my dad’s car. I am interested in Jill’s reaction to the game and whether she feels Medaille’s basketball team would be an ideal fit for me.

“What do you think of Medaille’s offense?” I ask. “What about their defense?”

Jill offers her insights, “The program could use some help with their outside shooting, and their transition defense was a bit weak at times. There were times when they should have looked for the fast break, but didn’t necessarily have that option because their guards didn’t push as hard as they needed to.”

I agree, “Yeah, I think I might be able to help out with this program.”

The trip to Medaille from Hilbert takes twenty-five minutes. After arriving at Medaille’s campus, my dad parks his car while Coach P parks the college’s van. My dad, Jill, and I follow Coach P across the student quad, enter the college’s main entrance, and continue upstairs to his office. He offers me a seat. His office is much smaller than I expected, especially since he is also the college’s athletic director. I immediately notice the blue Medaille basketball jersey and memorabilia adorning his walls. The jersey is emblazoned with the college’s name in white block letters and remains secure and perfectly aligned on the wall. I want to wear that jersey.

On another side of Coach P’s office there are pictures and newspaper clippings of him coaching men’s teams at other colleges. One article features him entering the assistant coaching ranks at his alma mater while another one focuses on assistance he provided to the Gannon University men’s Division Two basketball program in
Pennsylvania. The third story introduces him as the new head coach at Pitt-Titusville Junior College. He appears to have quite a bit of coaching experience.

Two photographs are tacked below the paper features. One is a team picture from the 1999-2000 Maverick women’s hoops squad and another is from his senior season at Lemoyne. Comparing this senior season snapshot to how he looks now indicates little change. His hair, a reddish-brown shade, reveals no sign of aging and he appears to have kept in shape since his college days.

Coach P interrupts my thoughts with a brief summary of his history at Medaille.

“I’ve been the athletic director here just over a year now and this is my first season as the head women’s basketball coach. Our previous athletic director, who is also the men’s basketball coach now, stepped down from the position because it was too difficult to handle both. There really isn’t enough time to coach a men’s team and direct an entire athletic program. Shortly after applying and interviewing for the athletic directorship here, I was offered the job along with coaching the women’s basketball team. I gladly accepted both opportunities.”

I listen as he shifts gears to focus on my academic interests at the college, “What are you interested in studying here?”

I hesitate a few seconds before responding, “Well, I am not entirely sure, but I would like to work in a sports environment or with athletes. I feel that the sport management, psychology, or communications programs would best fit my interests. Overall, I am interested in the opportunity to participate in college athletics.”

Coach P reinforces my desire, “In terms of your athletic career here, our college and athletic program will give you the opportunity to play right away. At other colleges,
many athletes have to wait until their junior and senior years before they are able to play considerable minutes. That is not the case here.”

I find the chance to play from day one incredibly appealing.

“Our athletes are also able to play more than one sport if they so choose. I understand that you played three sports in high school?” Coach asks me.

“Yes, soccer, both outdoor and indoor, basketball, and softball,” I answer.

“Have you been in touch with our other coaches?” he follows.

“Yeah, through letters in the mail and e-mail,” I respond.

“They are not currently on campus but if you can make another visit out here, perhaps to spend some time with our teams, I’ll make sure that they are around for you. Are you being recruited by any other athletic programs right now?”

“Umm, some, yes,” I reply.

“How many?” he inquires.

I answer, “Well, with letters and phone calls, maybe ten to fifteen.”

“You realize that if you were a boy, you’d have one hundred to one hundred fifty schools recruiting you?”

I nodded my head in agreement. At the time, I didn’t give it much further thought. I also didn’t think about an athletic director not having enough time to coach a men’s sport. Later, I contemplated. Why was there time to direct an entire program and coach a women’s team?

I guess that was “just the way it was.”

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1 I would later discover that this is what the notion of hegemony is all about. According to Williams (1985), hegemony was not commonly used prior to the nineteenth century to describe “political predominance.” In the twentieth century, however, the understanding of hegemony was extended beyond its notion of political predominance to describe predominance in a more general sense. Hegemony is “seen to depend for its hold
Years later, I remember that conversation during my recruiting trip to Medaille and the words reverberate as they replay in my mind:

...I could have had more options!

...More colleges!

...More athletic programs if I had been a male athlete!

...Being a male athlete meant I could have had more opportunities!

. . . . . . .

Sports have been part of my life for as long as I can remember. I learned about sports mainly through my parents. My father coached high school soccer, basketball, cross-country, and track and field teams. When I was in the second and third grades he coached the junior varsity high school girls’ soccer team in my school district. Occasionally, my brother and I joined their practices and ran sprints with them. I admired the girls and couldn’t wait to play sports in high school. While my father’s involvement in sports was always obvious, I rarely heard stories of where sport fit into my mother’s life. I had already been participating in competitive sports leagues for five years before I learned of her involvement in volleyball and softball. But like many of my other experiences in sports, I never questioned why I didn’t hear more about her athletic involvement.

I started competing athletically when I was seven. My parents were supportive and willingly signed me up. I joined recreational softball and soccer leagues, went to

not only on its expression of the interests of a ruling class but also on its acceptance as ‘normal reality’ or ‘commonsense’ by those in practice subordinated to it” (p. 145).
summer basketball camps, and continued playing competitive softball, basketball, and soccer until the end of my collegiate career.

As I reflect on my athletic experiences while growing up, I realize that I am like most other female athletes who rarely question why some of the opportunities that we received were so different from male athletes our age. We may have realized that differences existed but assumed that change was unlikely to occur anytime soon.

Now that I think about it, I recognize that there were a lot of differences between the opportunities that were afforded to male and female athletes. I notice that when I first began playing softball in summer recreation leagues that the boys’ baseball teams played on nicer fields and even had a concession stand at their ballpark. It was not until four summers ago that the village league finally built a batting cage at one of the town fields where the youth girls’ softball teams typically play.

I remember in high school that one of my biggest frustrations was the lack of fan support for girls’ sports. I especially noticed this during my high school junior varsity and varsity basketball seasons. Year after year, the high school girls’ teams on which I played were better than the boys’ teams. We won more frequently and advanced further in postseason play. Despite our comparative success, fans still failed to attend our games to the same extent that they did for the boys’ teams. We were lucky if our team had fifty fans at a game, including the junior varsity and varsity players. And yet, it seemed like the boys’ teams always averaged at least one hundred fans for every game, even if it was predicted to be a blowout by the opposing team.

That was “just the way it was” and my teammates and I just accepted things as they were. Our expectations for change were limited. We thought maybe if we were
better or more skilled we would draw more fans. Competing in itself meant something to us individually and as a team. This is what we came to rely upon. Secretly, we hoped it would mean something more to outsiders, to the spectators, but what could we do about it if it did not?

Upon further personal reflection on my athletic memories, I realize that parents, friends, and coaches also played a significant role in shaping the overall sports experiences for me and other female athletes. My personal experiences lead me to wonder about the experiences of other high school female athletes and have sparked a curiosity to discover potential constraints and opportunities that these athletes may encounter in their athletic endeavors today. As a result, the purpose of my research is to study various social factors that influence and shape female athletes’ experiences in sports while growing up, while participating in sports in high school, and how these social factors influence collegiate sports involvement.

To examine how this account of my personal experiences relates to the experiences of high school female athletes of today, I draw upon the sociological imagination. By utilizing this theory, I will attempt to show where my personal experiences intersect with society’s historical conditions as well as the collective experiences of other high school female athletes. Ultimately, I hope to examine the intersection between biography and history.

In this thesis, I ask: How do female athletes experience high school sports? More specifically, based on previous research, I am interested in exploring a variety of factors that influence how youth and adolescents experience sports. Some of these factors include parents, peers, coaches, and the media. I wish to examine how these factors
influence the participation of high school female athletes in sport. In addition, because the media influence is so pervasive in our society, I intend to analyze how the media portrays female athletes’ experiences and how female athletes react to and come to understand these portrayals as influences in their lives.

In order to better comprehend these social influences and their implications on high school female athlete experiences, I will use the sociological imagination (Mills, 1959) coupled with social learning theory to explore how parents, coaches, and peers influence the construction of one’s social identity. Finally, I will attempt to discover how high school female athletes personally understand and discuss their athletic involvement.

As I discovered when reflecting on my own athletic involvement, it is often difficult to evaluate or critique sporting experiences while an athlete is immersed within a sporting culture. Thus, I will focus my research efforts on college-aged females who previously participated in high school sports. My research aims to provide these athletes with an opportunity to understand how the sociological imagination enables them to grasp the connection between historical conditions and their own biographies.
CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

In this section, I examine literature that explores the experiences of girls and women in sport primarily in the United States and particularly since the passage of Title IX. The legislation known as Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act was passed in 1972 and has dramatically impacted the experiences and opportunities for girls and women in sport in the U.S. (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004; Carpenter & Acosta, 2005). Thus it is imperative to include a discussion of how Title IX fits into the historical context of girls’ and women’s experiences in U.S. sport.

In this research project, I draw upon the notion of the sociological imagination, as forwarded by C. Wright Mills (1959). Mills’ theory allows for an individual to understand the relationship between one’s personal biography and the historical context in which one lives. Therefore, by studying the historical conditions surrounding the passage of Title IX in 1972, we are better able to understand the experiences of contemporary female athletes. As a result of Title IX, dramatic changes in philosophy, and in organizational and leadership perspectives occurred in both women’s and men’s sports. While this pivotal legislation was created and enacted prior to the athletic involvement of today’s female athletes, they are inevitably influenced by it.

Subjectivity must also be a part of the focus of any research that utilizes the sociological imagination. I am personally invested in this research project since the idea to explore the sports experiences of female athletes largely developed as a result of my own involvement in sports while growing up, when I participated in sports in high school, and also in college. Overall, I cannot separate myself from this research; I am a part of it.
Capturing an objective reality is not a goal of my research, and eliminating subjectivity is not possible. The subjective realities of my research participants and the subjective reality of me as the primary investigator shaped my research. Research that relies upon utilizing objectivity promotes a separation between the researcher and the researched and further establishes and perpetuates a power differential, an “otherness” in the research process (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld, 1983). Subjectivity allowed for and acknowledged that through the research process my participants and I were presented with the opportunity to learn from each other’s experiences (Flick, 2006). As participants shared their experiences, opportunities existed for me to learn more about myself. Simultaneously, while I conducted focus group and individual interview sessions, my research participants were granted opportunities to learn more about themselves. Thus awareness was raised on a variety of levels. Not only did my participants and I have the chance to learn about each other and about ourselves, but we were all afforded opportunities to learn how our experiences fit within historical and social contexts.

In writing about contemporary female athletes’ experiences, I also utilized a feminist perspective that allows women to share their experiences in their own words. Instead of being written about, as women and their experiences have traditionally been written, these women will be allowed to explain their own ideas and opinions. The women in this study will be encouraged to offer their own perspectives on factors that influenced their experiences in high school athletics. In particular, I seek to discover how female athletes understand their athletic experiences in relationship to their parents, coaches, peers, and the media. All groups are influential components of social learning theory (Greendorfer, 1993; Higginson, 1985; Langlois & Downs, 1980; McPherson,
1981; Shakib & Dunbar, 2004). Social learning theory explains how these constituents play a key role in the development of children and adolescents (Lewko & Greendorfer, 1988). Socializing agents, along with changing historical, economic, political, and social conditions can lead to athletes to experience sports differently.

**The Sociological Imagination**

The sociological imagination proposes that, “Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both” (Mills, 1959, p. 3). Understanding individual experience sheds light on what it is like to live within society’s historical moment as understanding history provides more in-depth insight into personal triumphs and struggles. Greater understanding accrues when history and biography are understood to be connected. Individuals are products of their environments but also have the ability to impact their own and society’s history. Mills (1959) notes that even the most insignificant action or detail contributes to the shaping of society and history. Furthermore, Mills (1959) asserts that, “The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals” (p. 5). The sociological imagination can be applied to my research in that it will allow me to develop a better understanding of myself and the female athletes in my study. That is, their individual experiences in sport cannot be understood apart from the historical conditions that resulted from the passage of Title IX.

Sport provides a valuable vehicle through which to better understand how the sociological imagination operates. Tomlinson (1984) believes that, “sport has the capacity to […] offer […] unforgettably intense and meaningful moments, and is all the
more effective because it could be you or me out there performing” (p. 29). Through sport, the individual is allowed to place himself or herself within society and within history. Thus history is shaped by the individual and the individual is shaped by social and historical influences. This is referred to as a dialectical relationship. Georg Hegel contributed to a better understanding of this relationship by proposing that an individual cannot solely be understood by being separated from his or her social contexts (Beamish, 1984). For example, an athlete cannot be understood completely without considering his or her relationship with other teammates, family members, coaches, and other individuals in society. An athlete also cannot be completely understood without considering socio-economic status, class, and other conditions surrounding his or her athletic participation and the athletic participation of others (Beamish, 1984). Hegel claimed that in order to really understand an individual, “he or she must be progressively located within the ambit of ever more complex relations” (Beamish, 1984, p. 68). Hegel also argued that “the movement away from immediate, analytic differentiation meant the drawing together of logically contradictory pieces of information: [an athlete] is both an individual and a team member (the one and the many)” (Beamish, 1984, p. 68; Mechikoff & Estes, 2002).

Tomlinson (1984) also provides insight on the dialectical relationship by stating that “sports may be repositories of inner meanings, but they do not exist in autonomy. They represent the value systems of the time and in so doing can embody the tensions, contradictions and antagonisms of the age” (p. 35). This statement exemplifies the sociological imagination, revealing the existence, the relationship, and the reliance between individual milieux [sic] and “public issues of social structure” (Tomlinson, 1984, p. 21; Guttmann, 1984; Hollands, 1984; Mills, 1959).
In utilizing the sociological imagination, Mills also suggests that we can distinguish between troubles and issues. Troubles reside within an individual whereas issues “have to do with the organization of many such milieux [sic] into the institutions of an historical society as a whole, with the ways in which various milieux [sic] overlap and interpenetrate to form the larger structure of social and historical life” (Mills, 1959, p. 8). If *enough* [italics added] people within a society are experiencing the same trouble, then an issue is likely present. Mills (1959) illustrates the concept of *enough* [italics added] via unemployment:

> When, in a city of 100,000, only one man [sic] is unemployed, that is his [or her] personal trouble, and for its relief we properly look to the character of the man [sic], his [sic] skills, and his [sic] immediate opportunities. But when in a nation of 50 million employees, 15 million men [sic] are unemployed, that is an issue, and we may not hope to find its solution within the range of opportunities open to any one individual. The very structure of opportunities has collapsed. Both the correct statement of the problem and the range of possible solutions require us to consider the economic and political institutions of the society, and not merely the personal situation and character of a scatter of individuals (p. 9).

Understanding individual troubles makes it possible to determine whether larger societal issues exist. It allows members of society the opportunity to better understand their personal, individual lives and how they fit within “larger social realities” (Mills, 1959, p. 15). In this study, in order to clearly understand the construction and formulation of the
individual experience, it is important for me to delineate the philosophy underlying the historical involvement of girls and women in sports.

*Philosophical and Organizational Changes in Women’s Sport*

*Female athletes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries*

Participation in athletics in the U.S. for girls and women in the latter part of the nineteenth century and for a considerable portion of the twentieth century remained socially taboo in the eyes of many (Mechikoff & Estes, 2002; Rader, 1996, 2004). Mechikoff and Estes (2002) indicate that, “One of the arguments used by early sport advocates was that sport built manliness. Clearly, then, if one believed that sport built men, then one probably would believe that women should have nothing to do with it” (p. 260). During this same time frame, physicians warned against physical activity when they argued that “robust games would damage or inhibit the maturation of female reproductive organs. [Experts] therefore urged young women to shepherd their energies and, at most, engage in only mild, carefully regulated exercises” (Rader, 2004, p. 134). Health authorities also believed that “vigorous sport during menstruation could lead to a displaced uterus and a reduction in childbearing capacities” (Rader, 2004, p. 134).

Despite social discouragement and warnings from physicians, girls and women still participated in athletics. According to Rader (2004), expert advice warning against women’s athletic participation “failed to curb a general trend after 1890 toward a greater freedom of physical expression for women. Rural, working-class, recently arrived ethnic, and wealthy women had never been as circumscribed in their roles as middle-class, Victorian women” (Rader, 2004, p. 134). However, “by the late nineteenth century,
women in the middle-income ranks also began to break out of the confines of a rigidly defined special sphere” (Rader, 2004, p. 134).

In the early twentieth century, dance became popular in women’s physical education programs, particularly in collegiate programs (Mechikoff & Estes, 2002), and in the 1920s, a variety of women reached celebrity-status in the athletic realm. Three such women were Helen Wills, Sybil Bauer, and Gertrude Ederle (Cahn, 1994; Rader, 1996, 2004). Wills, a tennis sensation, won her first singles championship at Wimbledon in 1927 and won eight total championships in her career (Cahn, 1994). She also gained recognition, “as a ‘commoner’ who had broken into the snobbish upper-class world of championship tennis” (Cahn, 1994, p. 31). Wills’ accomplishments on the tennis court helped to aid the growth of sports for girls and women (Cahn, 1994). As Cahn (1994) explains:

Wills’s success and popularity in the late 1920s capped a decade of tremendous growth in women’s sports. While stars of tennis, golf, and swimming gained national celebrity status, in communities across the country ordinary female athletes took to the playing fields with less fanfare but an equal amount of enthusiasm (pp. 31-32).

Other female athletes helped to bring attention to women’s sports in the 1920s, as well. Sybil Bauer broke the world record in the backstroke in 1924, beating men’s records, and in 1926, Gertrude Ederle became the first woman and only the sixth person to swim the English Channel (Cahn, 1994; Women’s Sports Foundation, 2004). According to the Women’s Sports Foundation (2004):

The swim took 14 hours and 31 minutes, and was an estimated 35 miles long
due to rough seas forcing her to take an indirect route. Her time beat the records of the five men who had previously made the swim, the fastest of which was 16 hours and 33 minutes. Ederle [also] set 29 national and world records between 1921 and 1925 (p. 8).

While women excelled in athletics and athletic participation opportunities increased for girls and women in the beginning of the twentieth century, particularly in the 1920s, controversy sparked over the reputation that accompanied their sports involvement (Cahn, 1994). Cahn (1994) reveals that female athletes had earned “a reputation for physical excellence and sexual appeal—qualities that stirred not only excitement but fierce debate. Sport in the 1920s became an important site, symbolic as well as actual, for reflecting on and negotiating contemporary gender relations” (p. 33). During this time period, “the beauty culture continued to influence profoundly the behavior of American women” (Rader, 2004, p. 137). Rader (2004) indicates that, “Not only did [this preoccupation with appearance] circumscribe the potential of women as athletes, but those women who did venture onto the playing field found themselves publicly measured against the prevailing standards of feminine beauty and behavior” (p. 137).

Attention garnered by talented female athletes continued into the 1930s in large part due to the athletic prowess exhibited by Babe Didrikson (Cahn, 1994; Gorn & Goldstein, 1993; Mechikoff & Estes, 2002; Rader, 1996, 2004). Didrikson’s success defied society’s conception of traditional femininity (Rader, 1996, 2004). Rader (2004) reports that “Between 1930 and 1932 Didrikson broke American, Olympic, or world records in five separate track and field events [and] won 34 of the 88 [golf] tournaments she entered” (p. 225). In high school, Didrikson “participated in all sports available to
girls—volleyball, tennis, golf, basketball, and swimming” (Rader, 2004, p. 225). She led her Amateur Athletic Union basketball team to a national championship in 1931, and won six gold medals and broke four world records in the baseball throw, the javelin, the 80-meter hurdles, and the high jump at the women’s AAU track and field championships in 1932 (Rader, 1996, 2004). Didrikson’s accomplishments along with other female athletes in the 1920s and the 1930s contributed to the fears held by women physical educators that sport was becoming too competitive. These educators “saw the growth of highly competitive, male-dominated sports as an infringement on their professional turf” (Rader, 2004, p. 228).

To allay fears that sports were too competitive for girls and women and in hopes of curbing this competitive aspect of sports, women physical educators allied with the National Amateur Athletic Foundation to found a Women’s Division (Rader, 1996, 2004). Rader (2004) asserts that “the 1923 platform of the Women’s Division served as a guiding principle for women’s athletics until the late 1960s” (p. 228). Staying true to their philosophy of sports participation for all athletes, women physical educators “invented alternatives to interscholastic and intercollegiate athletics” (Rader, 2004, p. 229) in the form of play days and sports days. Play days attempted to reduce the competitive aspects of sports by creating mixed teams. Teams were comprised of girls from different schools as opposed to girls from only one school. Thus one school was not solely competing against another (Rader, 2004). However, the creation of sports days allowed schools to formulate teams and allowed these schools to compete against one another. Still fearing that competition would be a problem and that sports would no longer promote
competition for all, physical educators changed the rules of the games and “refused to announce winners” upon the competition’s conclusion (Rader, 2004, p. 229).

Other organizations and universities governing and sponsoring women’s athletics soon developed. In 1941, Ohio State University sponsored the first intercollegiate women’s golf championship (Cahn, 1994; Rader, 1996, 2004) and in 1958, the United States Olympic Committee “created a Women’s Advisory Board consisting of representatives from the AAU (Amateur Athletic Union), former women Olympic athletes, and sympathetic physical educators” (Rader, 2004, p. 333) in hopes of improving the performance of the American Olympic team’s female athletes (Rader, 1996; 2004). The Women’s Advisory Board and the Division of Girls’ and Women’s Sports (DGWS) were also responsible for organizing national institutes that were responsible for training female athletes (Rader, 2004).

A collection of organizations and committees within organizations (e.g., Amateur Athletic Union, American Alliance for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, National Association for the Physical Education of College Women, National Section for Girls’ and Women’s Sports, Women’s Athletic Association, Women’s Athletic Associations) held some degree of power over women’s athletics prior to the creation of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women’s (AIAW) in 1971 and until its demise in 1982 (Cahn, 1994; Carpenter & Acosta, 2005; Festle, 1996; Mechikoff & Estes, 2002; Rader, 1996, 2004; Suggs, 2005). Mechikoff and Estes (2002) help to explain the governance of women’s intercollegiate athletics when they state that:

In 1957 there was enough interest in women’s intercollegiate sports to
establish a committee to investigate the growing interest in athletic competition. The National Section on Girls’ and Women’s Sports (NSGWS) was formed under the auspices of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (AAHPER). This organization, after several name changes, evolved into the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) in 1971 (p. 264).

Increased interest, skill, and participation contributed to power shifts within women’s athletic governing bodies (Mechikoff & Estes, 2002; Morrison, 1993). As interest and skill continued to develop amongst girls and women in sport, they began to desire greater opportunities to compete (Morrison, 1993). Thus, the DGWS, which had governed women’s athletics in the 1950s and 1960s, “created the Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (CIAW) in 1966 to conduct national championships” (Morrison, 1993, p. 61). Eventually, it was discovered that not even the CIAW could handle all of the responsibilities and the continually increasing interest of women in sports. With only four commissioners, the CIAW was not able to meet the needs that were associated with governing and organizing women’s collegiate athletic championships (Morrison, 1993). Thus, in 1971, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women was created (Morrison, 1993).

Legislative and organizational changes in women’s sports

Nationally, the 1970s witnessed legislative and organizational changes that forever reshaped the American athletics’ domain with the creation of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) in 1971 and the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments in 1972. Title IX, the creation of the AIAW, and the NCAA’s
eventual takeover of the AIAW-sponsored women’s collegiate athletic championships in 1982 for Division I athletics, revolutionized the philosophical underpinnings and perceptions of women’s sport and female athletes in the U.S. (Acosta & Carpenter, 1994; Carpenter & Acosta, 2005; Festle, 1996; Mechikoff & Estes, 2002; Suggs, 2005; Wushanley, 2004).

A creation of the collaborative efforts of the DGWS, the National Association for the Physical Education of College Women (NAPECW), the CIAW, and other physical-education associations, the AIAW was partially created in order to, “give female athletes expert coaching and better competition on varsity-style teams” (Suggs, 2005, p. 47). This organization was “accepted widely and quickly [and included] a total of 275 colleges and universities [who] signed on as charter members [and also included] junior colleges, women’s colleges, liberal-arts colleges, regional universities, and state flagship institutions” (Suggs, 2005, p. 52). The AIAW was created on the basis of a few indispensable platforms. As Festle (1996) explains, the AIAW:

would help schools extend their sports programs for women, hoping to encourage excellence in women athletes. At the same time, these programs would be consistent with their member schools’ educational aims. So that sports would be part and parcel of education (not contrary to it), athletes would be treated like other students. Finally, they wanted to stimulate leadership among those (mostly women) who were responsible for women’s programs. …The most basic function would be conducting national athletic championships for women (pp. 110-111).
Obtaining a solid, well-rounded education was of primary importance to founders of the AIAW. Athletic opportunities were intended to enhance the overall educational atmosphere for women but would not take precedence over education provided in the classroom (AIAW, 1979-1980; Carpenter & Acosta, 2005; Suggs, 2005; Wushanley, 2004). The AIAW also stressed that sport should be something provided for all females who wanted to partake in it (Morrison, 1993; Suggs, 2005; Wushanley, 2004). Unlike the NCAA, the main governing body for men’s sports, members of the AIAW wanted to avoid an athletic culture where sports were only for elite athletes. Instead, the AIAW membership wished to promote participation for everyone as opposed to competition for a limited number of athletes, hence the AIAW’s adages “sports for all” (Wushanley, 2004, p. 11), a “girl for every sport, and a sport for every girl” (Suggs, 2005, p. 50), and “a sport for every girl and every girl in a sport” (Morrison, 1993, p. 60).

Maintaining and creating positions of power for women in athletics was also of considerable importance to the women in the AIAW. Holding their own, separate national athletic championships for women’s sports would allow them to keep their power, would allow other girls and women an opportunity to view women in influential sport leadership roles, and would allow them to make decisions that they felt most directly fit the AIAW mission (AIAW, 1979-80; Festle, 1996; Morrison, 1993; Wushanley, 2004). A separate, non-NCAA affiliated organization for women’s sports was essential in the eyes of women’s sport administrators because these women were, “deeply suspicious of the regular scandals in men’s sports—stories of players being allowed to skate through classes, boosters handing out bribes to recruit talented players, and point-shaving to help gamblers” (Suggs, 2005, p. 49). Ties to controversial matters
such as these would directly oppose the mission of the AIAW and other women’s sports organizations. Rader (1996) sheds light on some of these controversial matters that were associated with the NCAA and subsequently how they were handled by the NCAA. He reveals that, “Prior to 1941 the colleges had limited the NCAA’s authority to the making of playing rules for various sports, the supervision of certain national tournaments, and the assertion of principles” (p. 281). The NCAA, in existence since 1910, condemned the recruiting and athlete payment practices that were taking place at some colleges, but they “could only resort to moral suasion to enforce its scruples” (Rader, 2004, p. 281).

Realizing that collegiate athletic departments were not policing their actions, the NCAA ratified “a new NCAA constitution in 1940 that provided for the expulsion by a two-thirds vote of member schools who failed to abide by association rules” (Rader, 2004, p. 260). A policy, known as the “sanity code”, was implemented in 1948 that provided student-athletes with grants and/or jobs. While these grants and jobs “had to be awarded solely on the basis of the athlete’s demonstrated financial need” (Rader, 2004, p. 281), they still represented a break from amateurism. Even with grants and jobs, college athletic programs and athletes still entangled themselves with “point-shaving”, other gambling, and cheating scandals (Rader, 2004, 1996). In hopes of remedying the unethical activities in collegiate athletics, the NCAA “decided to permit the awards of full scholarships based only on athletic ability [italics in original] (i.e., athletic scholarships)” (Rader, 2004, p. 282) beginning in 1952. The NCAA was also provided leverage in 1952 to “impose sanctions upon colleges that violated the associations’ legislation” (Rader, 2004, p. 282). As the NCAA grew older, it became more powerful and more interested in controlling women’s athletics.
The Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), the first established athletic organization that the NCAA battled against in the struggle to govern amateur athletics, was formed in 1888 as a result of differences in opinion regarding athletes’ eligibility and the enforcement of rules within the National Association of Amateur Athletes of America (NAAAA) (Wushanley, 2004). Membership of the AAU consisted of institutions that had withdrawn from the NAAAA (Wushanley, 2004). In order to control amateur athletics and revenue sources, the AAU banned athletes from participating in its sponsored competitions if the athletes participated in non-AAU-sponsored-competitions. This regulation was incredibly controversial with other amateur athletic organizations. In particular, the NCAA disagreed with this platform.

The policies and the beliefs of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), created in 1905 in hopes of limiting violence and unethical practices that had become commonplace in college football, and the policies and the beliefs of the AAU often opposed each other. As a result of their deviations in policy, a number of organizations were created and others were subsequently terminated (e.g. the American Olympic Committee (AOC), the American Olympic Association (AOA), and the National Amateur Athletic Federation (NAAF)).

Sports took on an elevated position of significance for the United States and the Soviet Union as tensions raged between the two nations during the Cold War (1945-1989). The Cold War played an important role in the governance of intercollegiate athletics that both the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and the NCAA fought viciously to secure. The war pitted the Communist Bloc, including the Soviet Union’s communist
government, against the Western powers, including the United States’ capitalist
democracy. Results of international sporting competitions were viewed as a reflection of
the status of the Cold War, thus Americans believed that it was important that they win at
the international level (Wushanley, 2004). Because female athletes from the United
States often did not perform as well (read: did not win as many Olympic medals as
female athletes from the Soviet Union, as evidenced in the 1956 and 1960 Olympic
Games) (Rader, 2004), it became more difficult for the United States to declare
supremacy on an athletic, a governmental, and a philosophical basis (Wushanley, 2004).
While the United States was focused on demonstrating athletic and governmental
dominance, the NCAA used the United States’ disappointment in athletic performances
and the Cold War turmoil to its advantage. The NCAA argued that the AAU’s leadership
over amateur sports and U.S. Olympic participation was in need of review and that
ultimately, U.S. Olympic and international competition results could be improved under
NCAA leadership (Wushanley, 2004). At the same time, the NCAA also felt that since
many Olympic Games medal winners were males attending NCAA institutions that they
should be granted control of amateur athletics (Wushanley, 2004). A case that developed
in 1923, known as the Charles W. Paddock case, intensified the rough climate between
the AAU and the NCAA. Paddock, a sprinter from the University of Southern California
ran at the International University Athletic Games in Paris that same year (Wushanley,
2004). Because the AAU was responsible for the governance of track and field in the
United States and because the Union disapproved of Paddock’s international competition,
they stripped him of his amateur status and declared him ineligible for the 1924 Olympic
Games’ United States team trials (Wushanley, 2004). The case helped to solidify the
NCAA’s belief that eligibility and international and national competition concerns of athletes most appropriately lay within their jurisdiction.

Conflict over amateur sports’ governance, however, did not just occur directly between the AAU and the NCAA. While the AAU played a centralized role in the disagreements, trouble also erupted between the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) and the NCAA in the 1960s and 1970s because the NCAA felt that the USOC was “dominated by the AAU and [was] unwilling to undertake meaningful changes” (Wushanley, 2004, p. 28). Issues between the AAU and the NCAA concerning amateur athletics’ governance were resolved in 1978 when the Amateur Sports Act was passed by Congress (Rader, 2004). This Act was significant in that power was transferred to the national bodies that were responsible for governing different Olympic sports and left the AAU with virtually no control over amateur sports. The NCAA understood that controlling women’s intercollegiate and interscholastic athletics was increasingly imperative upon the passage of the Amateur Sports Act.

NCAA interest in women’s intercollegiate and interscholastic sports, however, did not immediately follow the passage of the Amateur Sports Act in 1978 (Wushanley, 2004). It actually developed almost twenty years earlier when the organization broke from the AAU in 1960 and formulated separate sports federations that were responsible for the governance of men’s sports and women’s sports (Wushanley, 2004). In hopes of tipping the power scales in their favor in the early 1960s, the AAU and the NCAA made attempts to captivate the interests of women’s sports organizations (Wushanley, 2004). Each organization invited leaders of women’s sports to serve on various policy-making committees (Wushanley, 2004). Wushanley (2004) indicates that “the AAU in early 1962
invited the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation to appoint representatives to all AAU committees in which the AAHPER had an interest” (p. 29). The NCAA on the other hand, “by the fall of 1962, had successfully established its puppet federations in basketball, gymnastics, and track and field. It had also created a Women’s Basketball Association of America within the basketball federation” (Wushanley, 2004, p. 30). These federation establishments challenged the power of the AAU and women’s sports organizations.

In the following year, the NCAA joined the Institute for Women’s and Girl’s Sports sponsoring efforts that had been initiated by the Division for Girls and Women’s Sports (DGWS) and the Women’s Board of the United States Olympic Development Committee (Wushanley, 2004). Interest in women’s sports continued in 1964 at the NCAA’s annual convention when “a roundtable discussion on women’s sports” (Wushanley, 2004, p. 30) was held and “two prominent women college athletic leaders” (Wushanley, 2004, p. 30) were invited to share their perspectives with convention attendees. Women’s intercollegiate and interscholastic sports occupied a hotly contested terrain for the UAA and the NCAA. Wushanley (2004) acknowledges this by revealing, “It became clear by the early 1960s that whoever could control the fast-growing intercollegiate and interscholastic women’s athletics would eventually become the most dominant force in U.S. amateur sports” (p. 31). Domination and the desire to quell the efforts of its major opponent were appealing to both the UAA and the NCAA. At the same time, leaders of women’s sports were concerned over the NCAA’s interest in women’s intercollegiate athletics and consequently the Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (CIAW) was established in 1966 (Wushanley, 2004).
Unfortunately, even the formation of the CIAW and other organizations that would later govern women’s sports could not prevent the future union between the NCAA and women’s intercollegiate sports.

*The AIAW vs. the NCAA: A battle to control women’s intercollegiate athletics*

Female leaders of women’s sports organizations, in particular the AIAW, recognized the efforts that pioneers in women’s sports had made (Morrison, 1993). Prior to the official establishment of the AIAW and during its lifespan, many female administrators carried out association and committee duties in addition to their professional career roles as coaches and teachers (Morrison, 1993). Coaching and organizational positions were often taken on without compensation of any sort, be it monetary or verbal recognition (Morrison, 1993). Because women had worked so diligently, often volunteering several additional hours weekly to these women’s sports organizations, they understood the value in maintaining any amount of power that they held over sport (Morrison, 1993). Their time and effort only provided them with extra ammunition and incentive to seek to continue to control the destiny of women’s sport.

Offering athletic scholarships was a major topic of philosophical difference between the AIAW and the NCAA (Festle, 1996; Mechikoff & Estes, 2002; Morrison, 1993; Rader, 1996, 2004; Suggs, 2005; Wushanley, 2004). In order to abide by its educational mission, some members of the AIAW were vehemently against granting athletic scholarships to female athletes (Festle, 1996; Morrison, 1993; Suggs, 2005; Wushanley, 2004). The AIAW felt that awarding athletic scholarships created opportunities for female athletes to be abused and exploited by the educational institution and the athletic systems of which they might potentially become members (Carpenter &
Acosta, 2005; Festle, 1996; Suggs, 2005). This issue of abuse and exploitation of both male and female athletes receiving athletic scholarships is unfortunately still an argument that surfaces today. Suggs (2005) reveals the AIAW’s initial anti-scholarship sentiment that was shared by some AIAW administrators. Christine Grant, along with other AIAW leaders, argued that the schools should be recruited by the athletes and not the other way around. Focusing on recruiting emphasized competition over participation and also took coaches away from their coaching and teaching duties on campus. With the opportunity to receive a scholarship for athletics, the potential was created where a female athlete might select a school based on athletics instead of academic programs. The AIAW wanted athletes to keep educational curriculum at the forefront of their minds when selecting a college (Suggs, 2005).

Some members of the AIAW and other leaders in women’s sports (e.g., Marjorie Blaufarb, editor of the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation’s Update, the association’s newsletter, Linda Estes of New Mexico, and Mary Alyce Hill of San Diego State University), however, believed that female athletes should be allowed to receive scholarship money for their athletic participation just as male athletes had an opportunity to receive financial assistance while participating in NCAA-sponsored athletic programs (Festle, 1996; Suggs, 2005; Wushanley, 2004). In fact, some female athletes were aggravated by the AIAW’s no-scholarship policy, as well, and in 1973, “Fern Kellmeyer, director of physical education at Marymount College, female students who were recipients of athletic scholarships at Marymount College and Broward Community College, the women’s tennis coaches from both schools, and Marymount College”, sued the AIAW over its position on not granting scholarships (Wushanley,
2004, p. 63; Suggs, 2005). The plaintiffs filed a lawsuit, more commonly known as the *Kellmeyer* lawsuit (Wushanley, 2004). They “cited five federal statutes in support of their charge, including the Fourteenth Amendment and Title IX of the Education Amendments Act” (Wushanley, 2004, p. 63). Not only did the plaintiffs feel that the “AIAW’s scholarship rule denied them equal protection of the law” (Wushanley, 2004, p. 63), but they also felt that if male collegiate athletes were able to receive aid for their talents, then female collegiate athletes should, too (Suggs, 2005; Wushanley, 2004). Settling the suit, the AIAW reluctantly decided to allow scholarships to be used for the recruitment of female athletes.

Suggs (2005) discusses this new scholarship policy that was instituted by the AIAW:

Many female administrators viewed the awarding of scholarships as a critical change for women’s college sports. …Scholarships shifted the emphasis from women already enrolled to those who could be recruited. Armed with scholarships, coaches needed to go and find the best possible recipients. They had to choose athletes on the basis of athletic ability, not as a way of providing students with a healthy extracurricular activity (p. 61).

The opinions of many AIAW leaders (e.g., Christine Grant, Leotus Morrison, Carole Oglesby) had not changed even after the decision to allow scholarships was implemented. Leaders remained concerned that scholarships would impede the AIAW’s education-first philosophy and would continue to take coaches, who had to focus on recruiting future athletes, away from the college environment (Suggs, 2005, Wushanley, 2004).
In the attempt to partially alleviate the scholarship situation, the AIAW established restrictions on the number of scholarships that a school could distribute to its female athletes each year. Eight scholarships were allowed for basketball, field hockey, gymnastics, lacrosse, softball, swimming, track and field, and volleyball. Only four per year were allowed for archery, badminton, bowling, crew, golf, fencing, riflery, skiing, squash, and tennis (Festle, 1996; Suggs, 2005, Wushanley, 2004). Male athletes competing in NCAA-sponsored athletic programs had no limits on their scholarships, but the AIAW imposed limitations on female athletic scholarships. A female athlete awarded a scholarship was, “required…to pass minimum academic standards [for scholarship renewal, and these scholarships] were limited to tuition, room, board, and fees, [with the exclusion of] books” (Suggs, 2005, p. 62). Ultimately, however, the Kellmeyer lawsuit and the resulting philosophical changes attributed to awarding scholarships within the AIAW paved “the way for the NCAA’s entry into women’s college sports” (Wushanley, 2004, p. 70).

Due to the new scholarship policy and in order to retain power in women’s intercollegiate athletics, the AIAW was forced to switch to a policy of commercialism which was in direct opposition to their original educational model (Wushanley, 2004). Under a policy driven by commercialism, making profit is of primary importance. The previous educational policy promoted the concept that sports should be an educational opportunity, should complement a school’s educational mission, and that sport should be offered for everyone. This new philosophy of the AIAW allowed female athletes to compete professionally while they were still competing on the collegiate level. Ultimately, this sacrificed the athletes’ amateur status (Wushanley, 2004). However, any
money earned while competing professionally had to be donated to charity (Wushanley, 2004). This philosophical change directly contradicted the AIAW’s intentions and original educational model that stressed avoiding the exploitation of athletes (Wushanley, 2004). To retain control over women’s intercollegiate athletics, the educational model was sacrificed (Wushanley, 2004). Wushanley (2004) supports this by stating that “When the power and control of intercollegiate athletics for women were at stake, when the interests of those who controlled women’s sports were threatened [by the NCAA], the educational model was sacrificed for greater security” (p. 75). Thus the AIAW was placed in a “vulnerable position without the protection of a unique ideology” (Wushanley, 2004, p. 75) and was forced to accept a policy similar to that of the NCAA’s (Wushanley, 2004). Meanwhile, the NCAA continued to fight for exemption from Title IX legislation. However, “when the NCAA and its allies failed to have men’s interscholastic and intercollegiate athletics exempted from Title IX compliance, they again turned their attention to the control of women’s athletics” (Wushanley, 2004, p. 75). The NCAA was not ready to abate their attempts to govern women’s collegiate athletics, and the appeal to earn money from women’s intercollegiate athletics via television contracts was too tempting (Festle, 1996; Suggs, 2005; Wushanley, 2004).

While the NCAA, led by Walter Byers, continued to press the issue of usurping control of women’s intercollegiate sports (the NCAA’s interest was first noted publicly when it separated from the AAU in 1960), which included holding power over women’s sports championships, the NCAA was met with resistance from some leaders in women’s sports. In an October 1974 meeting between NCAA and AIAW representatives, the NCAA suggested that “the NCAA should absorb the AIAW” (Festle, 1996, p. 168). The
NCAA’s representative indicated that the NCAA had been in existence for a longer period of time and was essentially more powerful (Festle, 1996). Laurie Mabry, an AIAW representative, indicated that if a merger were to occur the “AIAW would want equal representation at all policy-making levels” (Festle, 1996, p. 168). David Swank, an NCAA representative revealed that women would be lucky if they received four seats of eighteen total seats on the NCAA Council (Festle, 1996). Unhappy with the AIAW’s refusal to merge, the NCAA researched the possibility of establishing its own women’s athletic championships (Festle, 1996). Several NCAA college representatives were surprised to discover that the NCAA was interested in hosting women’s championships (Festle, 1996). Many of them did not want to be fiscally responsible for women’s athletics (Festle, 1996). AIAW’s leadership and Title IX posed serious threats to the leadership of the NCAA (Festle, 1996). As Festle (1996) explains, “…the NCAA’s main reason for interest in women’s sports [was] the possibility that women’s sports leaders might hinder the NCAA’s control of men’s sports” (p. 170). Even though NCAA delegates did not want to support women’s athletics financially, when the possibilities emerged where women could replace them in NCAA leadership positions and where television revenues could be earned through women’s collegiate athletics, the NCAA could not ignore these lures (Festle, 1996).

There were leaders of the AIAW who feared that an NCAA-takeover would mute their voices and would take away leadership opportunities. However, there were other leaders in women’s sports who supported an affiliation with the NCAA (e.g. Marjorie Blaufarb, Linda Estes, Mary Alyce Hill). Suggs (2005) reveals that women in support of NCAA affiliation felt that female athletes deserved recognition for their participation in
athletics. While the most ideal situation included receiving this attention while remaining under the auspices of the AIAW, some of these pro-NCAA women concurrently understood society’s views on sports. Female athletes would be taken more seriously and considered to be closer to the *real* athlete (read: male) that the NCAA promoted if the NCAA took over women’s collegiate sports (Suggs, 2005). NCAA takeover would provide more exposure and more options for female athletes and their sports (Suggs, 2005).

Some women’s leaders not in favor of NCAA takeover believed that because the male-run organization could not stifle the decision and the eventual power of Title IX, the NCAA would act on its next available alternative. This other option included taking control of women’s athletics while also maintaining power over men’s. Suggs (2005) provides evidence for this claim, “The NCAA spent much of the 1970s trying to kill off Title IX in Congress and in the courts. …Once those efforts failed, the next best option was to acquire women’s sports” (p. 64). The NCAA was vociferous in its opposition to the AIAW’s policy of a “girl for every sport, and a sport for every girl” (Suggs, 2005, p. 50). NCAA leaders believed in a more competitive sporting environment and felt that its organization was better equipped to manage women’s collegiate sports (Festle, 1996; Suggs, 2005).

The AIAW and the NCAA continued to fight for power over women’s collegiate athletics (Festle, 1996; Suggs, 2005). Title IX, perhaps one of the most pivotal pieces of legislation for girls and women in sport and also the most revolutionary for all of sport in general in the United States, played an instrumental role with the NCAA’s attempts to govern women’s intercollegiate athletics (Suggs, 2005). Without the passage of Title IX,
the legislation would never have been able to support the *Kellmeyer* lawsuit decision that ultimately allowed for scholarships to be awarded to female athletes. Scholarships, as previously noted, were a significant topic of disagreement between the AIAW and the NCAA. A combination of Title IX legislation, the NCAA’s unrelenting pursuit to control women’s intercollegiate athletic programs, and support from some female sports’ administrators who believed female athletes should be able to receive scholarships led to the NCAA’s takeover of the AIAW in the early 1980s (Suggs, 2005).

AIAW’s control of Division II and III women’s athletic championships for basketball, field hockey, swimming, tennis, and volleyball was lost to the NCAA in the 1981-1982 academic year based on Divisional voting in 1980 (leaders in each respective NCAA Division voted to take over the championships for the aforementioned AIAW sports) (Festle, 1996; Suggs, 2005; Wushanley, 2004). At the annual NCAA convention in 1982, “the entire NCAA membership voted to expand its committees and allocate positions to women, and to create a three-year transition period to allow colleges to adapt from AIAW to NCAA rules” (Suggs, 2005, p. 64). During this convention, NCAA Division I members also, “voted to establish Division I championships in basketball, cross-country, field hockey, gymnastics, softball, swimming, tennis, and outdoor track and field. … [The] measure passed 128-127” (Suggs, 2005, p. 64). Hosting the Division I women’s collegiate championships would now be the NCAA’s responsibility as opposed to the AIAW’s responsibility. Championships would commence in the 1982-1983 academic year. Not willing to surrender without a fight, the AIAW sued the NCAA on the grounds that the NCAA was monopolizing the college sports market in 1981 (Festle, 1996; Suggs, 2005; Wushanley, 2004). The attempt was intended to prevent NCAA-
association with women’s intercollegiate sports championships, but it ultimately failed
(Festle, 1996; Morrison, 1993; Suggs, 2005; Wushanley, 2004). After a decade-long
battle, the NCAA finally had the power it desired.

The AIAW to NCAA shift in governance and philosophy eventually molded the
power dynamic that is currently visible in high school sports and in collegiate sports that
are governed by the NCAA. The downfall of the AIAW was a mixed result of financial
distress, disagreements between its organizational leaders, and pressures from outside
factions such as the NCAA. Financial difficulties were partially due to the AIAW’s break
from its previous “parent organization, the American Association for Health, Physical
Education, and Recreation/National Association for Girls and Women in Sport”
(Wushanley, 2004, p. 134). This separation granted the AIAW an “independent legal
entity” (Wushanley, 2004, p. 134) status, but it also created a situation where the AIAW
would no longer have an organization to “absorb” any financial difficulties (Wushanley,
2004). With the collapse of the AIAW, athletic departments centralized their
administrative authority (Acosta & Carpenter, 1994; Wushanley, 2004). Male figures
maintained the positions they held prior to female athletes joining the NCAA (Acosta &
Carpenter, 1994; Wushanley, 2004). Women administrators, who were initially new to
the NCAA system of governance but not necessarily new to sports leadership roles, took
on positions below those held by men (Acosta & Carpenter, 1994; Wushanley, 2004).
The organizational system where women occupy administrative and coaching positions
below men has been perpetuated since 1982 and is likely to continue if structural changes
are not implemented and if it is not critically analyzed (Acosta & Carpenter, 1994, 2004;
Carpenter & Acosta, 2005). Justifying these structural changes, however, may have been
partially created based on previously developed social notions that stressed a separation between women and sports. Women have continued to rebel against these socially constructed views.

*The Feminine Appropriate Versus Feminine Inappropriate Sports Debate*

The role of sport contributed significantly to the women’s movement in the 1970s (Gorn & Goldstein, 1993). According to Gorn and Goldstein (1993), “The women’s movement of the 1970s joined the struggle for girls’ and women’s rights on the playing fields of organized sports” (p. 207). Though there was still social resistance to women participating in sport, specifically professional sport, tennis offered opportunities for girls and women to be seen and to be heard. A large step in fighting for equitable conditions for girls and women in society and in sport was taken when Gladys Heldman, *World Tennis* magazine’s founder organized an all-woman’s professional tournament, the first of its kind (Shelton, 1993; Spencer, 2000). This tournament was an alternative option for female tennis players if they chose not to compete in the Pacific Southwest Championship (Shelton, 1993; Spencer, 2000). The 1970 Pacific Southwest Championship, promoted by Jack Kramer, displayed blatant sexism towards female tennis players when male competitors were offered prize money at an 11 to 1 ratio in comparison to the women in the tournament (Spencer, 2000). Women participating in Heldman’s tournament signed a one dollar professional contract. Sponsorship with Philip Morris, Inc. enabled the first all-women’s professional tennis tournament to materialize (Roberts, 2005; Shelton, 1993; Spencer, 2000). Eight female tennis players, Rosemary Casals, Judy Dalton, Peaches Bartkowicz, Valerie Ziegenfuss, Kerry Melville, Kristy Pigeon, Nancy Richey, and Billie Jean King, signed the one dollar contract and
participated in the Virginia Slims Tournament (Roberts, 2005; Shelton, 1993; Spencer, 2000). Because of their participation in the Virginia Slims Tournament, the Emancipated Eight of 1970 were suspended from the United States Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA); the USLTA, however, during that same year, took notice of the tennis player’s dissatisfaction over tournament prize offerings and offered twenty three new women’s tournaments (Shelton, 1993). 1973 was a dynamic year for women’s tennis for a variety of reasons. First:

in April of that year, the International Lawn Tennis Association (counterpart to the Men’s Association of Tennis Professionals) declared that women must either submit to the national association or be banned from the Grand Slam tournaments (Australian Open, French Open, U.S. Open, and Wimbledon) forever (Shelton, 1993, p. 280).

Realizing that women’s tennis would be stronger and would offer more participation opportunities if women under both the USLTA and the Virginia Slims Tour were a united force, the groups fused under the USLTA’s name and kept Philip Morris as their primary sponsor (Rader, 1996, 2004; Roberts, 2005; Shelton, 1993).

The year 1973 saw equal prize money awarded to male and female U.S. Open tournament participants and also unveiled the creation of the Women’s Tennis Association (Roberts, 2005; Shelton, 1993). 1973 hosted the famous “Battle of the Sexes” tennis match between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs, as well (Pipkin, 2005; Rader, 1996, 2004; Roberts, 2005; Shelton, 1993; Spencer, 2000). King’s sweeping victory over Riggs rejuvenated women’s attempts both in the workplace and the home and on the athletic courts and fields to gain economic parity with their male counterparts.
(Rader, 1996, 2004; Roberts, 2005; Shelton, 1993). Her efforts encouraged women to fight for and demand respect in all aspects of their lives. In order to more fully comprehend the social climate that existed in the 1970s, it is important to understand the characterizations and definitions that were assigned to men and women on the basis of gender (read: masculinities and femininities).

**Defining Masculinities and Femininities**

Masculinities and femininities are not automatic associations that can be applied to the biological construction of an individual (Choi, 2000; Connell, 2000; Hargreaves, 1994; Krane, et. al., 2004). Instead, they are continually shifting, economic, ideological, political, cultural, and social manifestations that “are quite easily interpreted as internalized sex roles, the products of social learning or ‘socialization’” (Connell, 2005b, p. 22; Connell, 2001; Hargreaves, 1994; Krane, et. al., 2004; Whitson, 1994).

Additionally, masculinities and femininities are dichotomously arranged under Western socialization practices (Connell, 2000). Femininities are subordinated at the expense of protecting masculinities and preserving the naturalness of patriarchy (Connell, 2000).

At times in the history of the United States, the social characterizations of masculinities and femininities have been used to sustain and simultaneously promote the righteousness of a male-dominated hierarchy. This was particularly common during periods of warfare. Kimmel (1991) acknowledges that war presented an option to serve as a remedy for the elimination of feminized men and feminine qualities in men. U.S. military expansion and warfare in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fit into the masculine equation of rugged individualism. As Kimmel (1991) indicates, “the building of empire through military domination was fueled by an emotional fervor to prove masculinity” (p. 314).
By maintaining and promoting hegemonic masculinity, femininities continue to be subordinated. Hegemonic masculinity has been defined as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 2005b, p. 77). Additionally, the male model of sport which promotes competition, winning, and production among other things, allows for hegemonic masculinities to be produced and reproduced. Thus, the AIAW was reluctant to fold due to pressures exerted by the NCAA not only because they did not want to lose control of girls’ and women’s sports, but they also did not want hegemonic masculinities to be promoted (N. Spencer, personal communication, June 22, 2006).

Socially, masculinity in the United States has traditionally been connected to the exhibition of physical and economic power and independence, an aggressive desire to express and satiate a “heterosexual appetite,” an absence of emotional expression, and a strong competitive drive (Kramer, 1991; Messner, 1990). Involvement in sports for boys and men has been considered to be important in reaching and proving a socially ascribed masculine identity. Participating in sports allows individuals to compete and to exhibit aggression and perhaps dominance over others. The sport environment serves as a proving ground for boys and men to establish and continually reaffirm their masculinity. In sport, “boys learn cultural values and behaviors, such as competition, toughness, and winning at all costs, which are culturally valued aspects of masculinity” (Messner, 1991, p. 62). This statement contributes to a better understanding of what is promoted by a male sport model.
There are various forms of masculinity that exist and these forms often, as Connell (2005a) suggests, “do not simply sit side by side. There are concrete relationships—hierarchy, exclusion, negotiation, and sometimes tolerance—between them” (p. 21). However, even though ideas of masculinity may conjure up different images and expectations and change through time based on “age, class, ethnic subgroup, […] physique, […] individual talents and capacities” (David & Brannon, 1976, p. 12), there are “a small number of basic themes which pervade and ultimately define the male sex role” (David & Brannon, 1976, p. 12). The overriding theme of masculinity is that practicing any form of masculinity endorses and “requires the subordination of women” (Connell, 2005a, p. 21). Thus, when describing femininity, by contrast, Whitson (1994) emphasizes that it is “a product of discourses, practices, and social relations that construct the situation of women in patriarchal societies in ways that typically dis-able women in relation to men” (p. 355).

Traditionally, femininity in the United States has been associated with vulnerability, sensitivity, passivity, dependence on men, satisfying men’s sexual cravings, and a preoccupation with beautifying physical appearance (Choi, 2000; Messner, 1988; Whitson, 1994). Sports participation has been considered to be a “masculinizing process” (Whitson, 1994) and historically, has not been associated with the traditional characterization of femininity (Daniels, Sincharoen, & Leaper, 2005). Female participants in the athletic realm have generally been regarded as intruders into an environment that is meant for males (Messner, 1991). Most contact sports, which tend to be regarded as feminine inappropriate, rely on force and domination (Whitson, 1994). These characteristics are in direct opposition to what traditional femininity represents.
Therefore, if girls and women are interested in preserving and portraying femininity, they will likely avoid contact or feminine inappropriate sports or will present themselves as feminine when they are separated from competition (Choi, 2000). Some girls remove themselves from sports participation once they reach adolescence due to conflicting messages that are sold to them (Choi, 2000; Hargreaves, 1994).

Whereas, strength, muscularity, skill, and physical prowess have typically been empowering for boys and men; boys are taught that to achieve these will allow them to become a man (Choi, 2000; Hargreaves, 1994). Similar associations for girls and women, however, are usually valued less and belittled (Choi, 2000; Hargreaves, 1994). Muscularity and strength in girls and women are used as weapons to attack their sexuality and are also used to sell their sexuality (Choi, 2000; Hargreaves, 1994). When hegemonic masculinity is supported, a woman’s sexuality becomes more important than her strength and her skills. By labeling certain sports as feminine appropriate, women can still participate in sports and gain the benefits of participation, but they can also assist with the maintenance and preservation of male-dominated social, political, economic, ideological, and historical practices and ideals.

What are considered to be feminine appropriate sports, however, like tennis, ice skating, gymnastics, and golf, while they endured less-than supportive sponsor and social climates at times, have arguably been accepted more readily than seemingly feminine inappropriate sports, especially by the media (AAFLA, 2005; Bernstein, 2002; Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983; Duncan & Messner, 1998; Tuggle & Owen, 1999). As Boutilier and SanGiovanni (1983) indicate:

Girls and women continue [albeit 23 years ago] to receive social
acceptance for individual sports more readily than for team contests.

Social approval for sports such as tennis, golf, and gymnastics is high. As noncontact individual sports, they offer the dual ‘benefits’ of continued segregation of the female athlete from teammates and the continued confirmation of the participant’s ‘femininity’ (p. 43).

Girls and women in non-traditional, feminine inappropriate sports like basketball, softball, soccer, and ice hockey among others (all of which employ force), are often treated differently socially and still have not secured the same type and amount of media coverage when compared to those who participate in feminine appropriate sports (AAFLA, 2005; Bernstein, 2002; Duncan & Messner, 1998; Tuggle & Owen, 1999).

Feminine appropriate and feminine inappropriate sports, terms that were created prior to the passage of Title IX in 1972, have been analyzed by a variety of researchers (Choi, 2000; Holland & Andre, 2004; Kane, 1988; Krane, et. al., 2004; Metheny, 1965). Sports once deemed appropriate for girls and women were connoted with the ideals of traditional femininity (Choi, 2000; Duncan & Hasbrook, 2002; Hall, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994). Therefore, sports that allowed for the possibility of bodily contact, sports that required females to use physical force to restrain or control a competitor, and sports that included heavy equipment that females would have to use to carry out an objective would likely not pass the traditional femininity test (Kane, 1988; Metheny, 1965; Whitson, 1994). Based on these criteria, many popular sports that girls and women actively participate in today like basketball, soccer, and softball would be considered unfeminine or sex-inappropriate (Choi, 2000; Hargreaves, 1994). Participation in sports like wrestling, hockey, boxing, and football would certainly be classified as sex-inappropriate
(Choi, 2000; Hargreaves, 1994). Feminine-appropriate sports would include those with spatial barriers that would prevent bodily contact between competitors, would include “aesthetically pleasing” body movements from the participants, and would include the usage of lightweight equipment to accomplish an objective (Kane, 1988; Metheny, 1965). While volleyball has been considered to be a sex-appropriate sport, it is also a team sport. With the exception of volleyball, sex-appropriate sports, i.e., tennis, golf, ice skating, and gymnastics, are individualized sports whereas the sports classified as sex-inappropriate, i.e., basketball, football, soccer, and softball tend to be more team-oriented. In order to better understand the social constructions of sport, it is important to analyze some theoretical approaches that surround it.

Critical theorists recognize that society is not static but is comprised of a multitude of different individuals with varying experiences (Coakley, 2001). Theories analyzed from a critical perspective shed light on the opportunity that sport has to instigate and develop social, political, and economic change (Coakley, 2001). These theories promote the idea that:

the relationship between sports and society is never set once and for all time: sports change as historical conditions and political and economic forces change. Sports change with new developments in government, education, the media, religion, and the family. Sports change with new ideas about masculinity and femininity, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and physical ability. And sports change with new narratives and discourses that offer visions of culture and social life, which people use to make sense of the world around them. … Critical theories call
attention to the possibility that sports can be sites for transforming social life (Coakley, 2001, pp. 42-43).

Unlike functionalist and conflict theorists, critical theorists do not try to make blanket descriptions or attach singular purposes to social interactions. Instead, they often recognize the diversity of society. Feminist theory, an example of critical theory, aims to identify and support this diversity, as well.

There are numerous perspectives of feminist theory. Some versions include conservative, cultural, ecofeminism, lesbian, liberal, postmodernist, post-structuralist, radical, and socialist (Humm, 1990; Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004). In general, feminist theorists study the oppression of women and the power dynamics of societies that have typically placed women and some men on a lower rung than those who inhabit positions of power (Coakley, 2001). Feminist theorists also attempt to recognize the opinions and values of women, elements that have historically been overshadowed by other researchers. Additionally, feminist theorists attempt to analyze the formation, transformation, reproduction, and resistance of gender ideology in sport and in other social settings (Coakley, 2001). Furthermore, “feminist scholars insist that relations of power are central to all aspects of cultural life and that any analysis ignoring these elements is intellectually suspect” (McDonald & Birrell, 1999). When feminist theory is applied to sport, feminist theorists propose that sport has traditionally been written from a mainstream (also read: male) perspective (Hall, 1996). According to Ann Hall (1996), feminist theorists attempt to help women “negotiate their contested place in the sports world” (p. 30). Perspective(s) that are seen through the lens of feminist theory “can help us understand how, under conditions of inequality, people come together, form collective
identities, and constitute themselves as collective social agents” (Hall, 1996, p. 30) and can also provide insight on “how the cultural hegemony of dominant groups in society is secured and contested” (Hall, 1996, p. 30). By applying a feminist perspective to sport, it can provide athletes with an opportunity to enact social and political change (Hall, 1996).

**Patriarchy and Hegemony**

Historically, the sporting environment has been considered to be a place where masculinities are established and proven, an environment primarily for males to inhabit and control. The female athlete, her body, and her entrance into the sport domain, however, represent a “contested ideological terrain” (Messner, 1988, p. 197). That is, the naturalized concept of femininity is one in which women are weak, fragile, and dependent on men. Women’s involvement in sport challenges these characteristics and allows women to establish a sense of strength, aggression, and competitiveness, qualities traditionally associated with men. Participation in sport for women therefore not only serves to upset the social practices of patriarchy and hegemony, but it also serves to disrupt the traditional notions of femininity and masculinity. Patriarchy, according to Eitzen and Sage (2003) is “a set of personal, social, and economic relations that enable men to have power over women and services they provide” (p. 308). Traditionally, because sport participation has been closely linked to masculinities, women and girls have been afforded fewer opportunities for athletic interaction.

In the development of modern sport in the U.S. in the late 1800s, girls and women continued to be subordinated and marginalized as they occupied roles of spectators. This reinforced the concept that sport was a domain strictly for men (Eitzen & Sage, 2003). While sport continues to be led and directed primarily by male figures (Sabock &
Sabock, 2005), women and girls have challenged this male dominance in sport, perhaps in large part as a result of the passage of Title IX. This challenge has assisted in creating greater opportunities for their own participation, as has been well documented (Acosta & Carpenter, 1994, 2004; Carpenter & Acosta, 2005).

Women in Collegiate Athletic Administration Leadership Positions

Beginning in 1977, Acosta and Carpenter began measuring the progress and the impact of Title IX on the participation of girls and women in sport on college campuses. Specifically, their investigations focused on the participation, coaching, and administrative opportunities that females were provided in the aftermath of Title IX. The year 1977 was appropriate to begin measuring the legislation’s progress given that the mandatory Title IX compliance deadline for college and high school athletic departments was July 21, 1978 (Women’s Sports Foundation, 2002). Research related to coaching opportunities in collegiate athletics was the focus of a study conducted by Acosta and Carpenter. As part of their study, Acosta and Carpenter (1994) solicited the perceptions of intercollegiate athletics administrators and coaches in an attempt to ascertain why there had been a decline in the number and percentage of women in coaching and administrative positions. Both male and female administrators and coaches responded with a survey response rate that registered over 60% (Acosta & Carpenter, 1994). Interestingly, the responses indicated a noticeable distinction between males and females. In responses from female administrators and female coaches, the top four reasons for a decline in female administrators and a decline in female coaches in collegiate athletics included:

1) the success of the ‘old-boys-club’ network;
2) the failure of the ‘old-girls-club’ network;

3) the lack of support systems for females;


In contrast, the top four reasons provided by male administrators and male coaches as to why there was a decline in female administrators and female coaches in collegiate athletics included:

1) the lack of qualified female coaches;

2) the failure of females to apply for job openings;

3) the lack of qualified female administrators;

4) time constraints placed on females due to family duties (Acosta & Carpenter, 1994, p. 117).

Based upon their findings, female respondents tended to perceive reasons for the decline of women in powerful positions in intercollegiate athletics to be related to social systems and practices that were in place. Their responses may indicate that women felt trapped and marginalized by social practices and ideologies that are engendered by the sporting environment. By contrast, the factors perceived by men tend to concentrate more on the individual rather than on social systems and practices (Knoppers, 1987). Their responses seem to indicate that there is a decline in female occupation of athletic administrative and coaching roles due to the incompetence of individual females. Blame resides within the individual as opposed to within societal structures. Responses provided by male administrators and coaches appear to imply that females are in need of repair (N. Spencer, personal communication, April 10, 2006).
Comparing the Individual and the Organizational Models of Employment

Previous research conducted on both sport and non-sport occupation-related differences between males and females has focused on the individual model which asserts that a working environment is most directly nurtured by the worker (Knoppers, 1987; Kanter, 1977). Knoppers (1987) believes that, “the assumption that the worker shapes the workplace suggests that the factors which lead to occupational differences and inequities are inherent, especially for minorities and women” (p. 11). This individual model follows a similar line of thought as the one provided by male coaches and administrators in Acosta and Carpenter’s study (1994). Social structures are not responsible for occupational make-up and dynamics according to those who adhere to the individual model; most men in Acosta and Carpenter’s (1994) study appeared to employ an individual model of employment. Like a majority of the male’s responses found in Acosta and Carpenter’s (1994) study, the individual model places blame on women for not occupying positions of power in the workplace.

As opposed to the individual model, “the organizational model assumes that the structure of the workplace shapes the behavior of the workers” (Knoppers, 1987, p. 12). Because varying models exist, experiences and perceptions amongst and between both male and female individual workers may differ (Acker, 1978; Cabral, Ferber, & Green, 1981; Knoppers, 1987). Opportunity, power, and proportion are elements of the organizational model that may be experienced differently by men and women in the workforce (Acker, 1978; Kanter, 1977; Knoppers, 1987). The varying experiences with these elements may lead to different perceptions and opportunities for men and women in a working environment (Kanter, 1977; Knoppers, 1987). These determinants can also be
used to analyze the decline and/or lack of women in coaching and administrative positions in sport.

Knoppers’ (1987) explanation of opportunity states that, “Opportunity is described by the shape of one’s career ladder, perceived obstacles and satisfaction, access to training, and availability and type of feedback. Opportunity in the coaching [and administrative] profession[s] is often gender-related” (p.13). With fewer opportunities for women in coaching and athletic administration, upward career mobility within athletics may be more difficult for women; and girls may be losing out on opportunities to view women in positions of power (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004). As evidenced in Acosta and Carpenter’s (2004) study, Women in Intercollegiate Sport: A Longitudinal, National Study Twenty Seven Year Update 1977-2004, statistics revealed that “Females [held] 41% of all administrative jobs but only 18.5% of head administrator (AD) jobs” in NCAA Divisions I, II, and III (p. 25). Prior to the passage of Title IX, women in administrative positions hovered around 90% (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005). This is explained more in depth in the Coaching section of this review of literature.

Knoppers (1987) also indicates that other perceived barriers to opportunity in the coaching profession for women include lack of an entry point into the field, either by advertent or inadvertent hiring discrimination, sexual harassment, familial responsibilities, an overall lack of time for all of coaching and general living responsibilities, both male and female athlete preference for a male coach, and lack of feedback from others in the work environment. This lack of an opportunity present in the coaching profession for female coaches affects behavior in the workplace and influences rates of departure and entrance into the field (Knoppers, 1987).
Power is the second structural determinant of the workplace and according to Knoppers (1987), “Persons with power have autonomy and freedom of action, having access to whatever is needed to reach their goals” (p. 16). Female coaches and administrators often do not experience this autonomy and freedom of action and thus hold limited power (Knoppers, 1987). Autonomy in the work environment is virtually non-existent when female employees’ decisions are second-guessed and require a superior’s approval, when their access to mentors and superiors is limited, and when their ability to influence decision making is limited (Knoppers, 1987). Lacking any organizational power and perceiving little or no opportunity for upward mobility on the coaching and administrative ladder is a reason that women leave these professions (Knoppers, 1987).

The third structural determinant of the workplace as designated by Kanter (1977) is proportion. Proportion comes into play in the athletic work environment because if there are fewer women on the athletics staff, then many people often mistake the women to be secretaries, the women on the athletics staff usually are overwhelmed with committee work due to the need to have female representation on every committee, and most people tend to assume that because women occupy fewer positions on the athletics staff, then they are not considered to be the norm; thus they are not sought after as frequently by subordinates (Knoppers, 1987).

Responsibility Conflicts Faced by Female Coaches

Male and female respondents in Acosta and Carpenter’s (1994) study agreed that, “females burn out and retire from coaching and administration earlier than males” (Acosta & Carpenter, 1994, p.117). This contributes to females occupying fewer head
coaching and athletic administrative positions in comparison to males. According to Sabock and Sabock (2005), “burnout is physical, emotional, and attitudinal exhaustion [and is] brought about by unrelieved work stress, is characterized by depleted energy reserves, lowered resistance to illness, increased dissatisfaction with the job, and decreased efficiency” (p. 288). In coaching specifically, “a great deal of stress arises from a lack of job satisfaction or from other factors surrounding the job: salary, promotions, relationships with fellow teachers and the principal [other coaches, administrators, and faculty within an intercollegiate athletic environment], negative feedback from parents and critics, attitude problems with athletes, winning, losing, and job insecurity” (Sabock & Sabock, 2005, p. 288).

Juggling coaching and family responsibilities may contribute significantly to stress and burn-out for coaches (Knoppers, 1987; Sabock & Sabock, 2005). The time required for both duties is an obstacle encountered by male and female coaches (Knoppers, 1987; Sabock & Sabock, 2005). However, time needed for coaching and family responsibilities may be more of an obstacle and a cause of stress and burn-out for female coaches when compared to male coaches (Knoppers, 1987; Sabock & Sabock, 2005). As Knoppers (1987) reveals, “Traditionally, coaching has been a two-person single career for men in which wives were primarily responsible for raising the children, entertaining recruits and coaches, doing the housekeeping, and attending the games and other athletic events” (p. 14). Coaching for females on the other hand has often been a “one-person dual career” (Knoppers, 1987, p. 14). An overload of responsibilities can quickly lead to burn-out, can lead to fewer women entering the coaching profession, and
can lead to fewer women remaining in the coaching profession (Knoppers, 1987; Sabock & Sabock, 2005).

Another factor that may contribute to fewer women entering and remaining in the coaching profession is the lack of opportunity to fill a leadership role (Knoppers, 1987). Women and girls are offered fewer opportunities to fulfill leadership roles in social institutions ranging from corporate to educational institutions. Eitzen and Sage (2003) argue that, “Male/female disparities in wealth, power, and prestige are ubiquitous social phenomena” (p. 307). In society, men tend to be privileged with respect to the jobs that they hold and the positions of power that they occupy in their jobs. They also tend to be more respected and experience higher levels of self esteem in comparison to women (Albelda & Tilly, 1997; Eitzen & Sage, 2003; Landrine & Klonoff, 1997; Nelson & Bridges, 1999). A similar pattern can be also be found in sporting institutions, and the continued justification and acceptance of wealth, power, and prestige disparities in sport and outside of sport is reflective of hegemony.

Hegemony in Sport

Scholar, Eric Anderson, refers to hegemony as a social operation. The term, coined by Antonio Gramsci in 1971, is a “particular form of dominance in which a ruling class legitimates its position and secures the acceptance—if not outright support—from those classes below them. …people must believe that their subordinated place is both right and natural [italics in original]” (Anderson, 2005, p. 21). Hegemony allows for the preservation and the continuity of male dominance in sport even when women and subordinated men are fully capable of performing similar administrative and coaching duties as well as and in some cases better than men in positions of power. These
capabilities, however, are not always recognized by the subordinated populations because again, they feel their positioning in society is right and natural [italics added]. The hegemonic nature of institutionalized sport, “subverts respect for women, who are not viewed as worthy participants in the sporting terrain. …their social location frequently posits them as bodies to be pursued and conquered by the rightful participants of the sporting terrain” (Anderson, 2005, p. 35). Thus, the notion of hegemony promotes the ideal that women are not to be competitors within the athletic realm. Instead, they are supposed to allow men in positions of power to continue their dominance within athletic environments; they are not supposed to invade this otherwise privileged territory. A failure to critically analyze the institution of sport enables the social phenomenon of hegemony to persist. Thus, marginalized groups, like women, continue to be marginalized and learn to believe in the naturalness of their position within society and sport.

An example of how hegemony is carried out via the media can be drawn from Louis Althusser’s theory of hegemony (Giulianotti, 2005). Althusser believed that social domination occurred through the functioning of both “repressive and ideological state apparatuses” (Giulianotti, 2005, p. 50). Two examples of ideological apparatuses include the education system and the mass media (Giulianotti, 2005). Althusser also argued that “particular identities” are created based on how society views and treats an individual, also referred to as ideological “interpellation” (Giulianotti, 2005). Giulianotti (2005) provides an example of interpellation by the media:

Televised sports are surrounded by advertising images that “hail” us as consumers, and to which we respond in self-recognition. Sports
commentaries interpellate divisive forms of identity, and thus “hail” us as men (not women), Americans (not Australians [or any other nationality]), or whites (not blacks). Through interpellation, our recognized identities sustain a social order rooted in social division, efficient production and consumption (p. 50).

Through the media, individuals learn to associate with an identity that is ascribed to them. The educational system, along with the media, is an institution that assists with teaching this identity association. Both the media and individuals within educational environments, i.e., administrators, teachers, personnel, provide opportunities to learn about a social system’s practices and theories. Through these particular mediums, individuals, specifically children, become socialized and/or accustomed to ways that social systems operate. Because socialization is an ongoing process, these mediums continue to impact individuals in society.

Social Learning Theory

Parents, coaches, and peers are three components or “socializing agents” that occupy an integral place in an individual’s social system (Shakib & Dunbar, 2004). While Shakib and Dunbar’s (2004) research did not specifically address televised media, their research did touch on the fact that participants’ fathers had more newspaper clippings in comparison to participants’ mothers. The newspaper articles reflected fathers’ athletic accomplishments and involvement while they also provided affirmation of the fathers’ athletic involvement (N. Spencer, personal communication, April 11, 2006).
Due to its pervasive influence, the media, regardless of what form it takes (e.g., television, newspaper, magazine, Internet, etc.), provides opportunities for individuals, especially children and adolescents to learn (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983; Chafetz, 1978). Along with teachers and role models, parents, coaches, and peers occupy a centralized role in social learning theory or in the sport socialization process of adolescent athletes (Greendorfer, 1993; Higginson, 1985; McPherson, 1981). Research indicates that, “fathers, mothers, and peers each make unique yet complementary contributions to social development” (Langlois & Downs, 1980, p. 1246). As Watson (1975) explains, social learning theory states that behaviors and attitudes can be shaped based on socializing agents within an environment. How these agents respond to others’ actions, behaviors, and attitudes can shape how others will act in the future. More specifically, an individual, in this case the female adolescent athlete, will learn how to react to certain behaviors and attitudes based on how her socializing agents respond to similar situations. Based on what she views and experiences from these agents, female athletes will usually emulate similar expressions and actions. Shakib and Dunbar (2004) suggest that within the sporting context, an individual’s behaviors and attitudes about sport and an individual’s willingness to participate are molded by the parental, coach, and peer socializing agents. More specifically, while these aforementioned agents play a role in shaping the sports experiences of athletes once the athletes have already begun their involvement, the athletes’ parents, more so than other agents, have the potential to play a critical role in introducing sports to them while they are young (Shakib & Dunbar, 2004). Thus, agents play different roles for athletes at different times in their sport socialization process, whether athletes are being socialized into or socialized within sports (Clark,
To clarify the role of parents, coaches, and peers as agents of social learning theory, Shakib and Dunbar (2004) explain:

Significant others are thought to communicate norms and values about behaviors through a variety of their own behavioral practices as well as by consciously and unconsciously distributing positive and negative sanctions (i.e., reward and punishment). In this way, significant others are thought to become role models influencing whether or not an individual will engage in or model particular behaviors and values (p. 276).

Therefore, young girls are more likely to continue participation and replicate similar attitudes and behaviors that are practiced by their parents, coaches, and peers if they receive positive feedback for their sport participation, are not punished for exhibiting aggressive traits (which historically have been classified as being unfeminine) while engaging in activities, and are not advised against participating in historically male-dominated and contact sports. If such agents dissuade a female from participating in contact sports and fail to provide desired or even necessary encouragement for girls, their participation is likely to end (Greendorfer, 1987; McPherson & Brown, 1988). Similar negative feelings about contact sports may be passed on to impressionable, young girls if they are surrounded by a negative environment created and perpetuated by valuable agents in their lives.

The connection between social learning theory and sport is articulated by Greendorfer (1993) who explains that social learning theory assumes that a child may
become interested and may even mimic similar sport-related actions by viewing his/her parents and family members participating in sports in any capacity, whether the child watches his/her parent(s)/family member(s) coaching, engages in conversation about sports with his/her parent(s)/family member(s), or views his/her parent(s)/family member(s) playing sports. In subsequent sections, the complementary yet differing roles that parents, coaches, peers, and the media play in shaping the experiences of athletes are explained in greater detail. The primary focus of the next section includes the roles that parents occupy in socializing their children into sports and subsequently socializing their children within sports.

**Parental Influence**

Previous research on parental influence in sport indicates that parents play a significant role in the sporting experience for their children and continue to play a valued role throughout an athlete’s lifecycle (Greendorfer, 1983, 1993; Lewko & Greendorfer, 1988; Shakib & Dunbar, 2004; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1976; Varpalotai, 1987). According to Varpalotai (1987), parents are the most important element of the sporting experience for athletes; in fact, girls, when compared to boys, are “more reliant upon the influence of family direction” (Watson, 1975, p. 11). It is important to note that while both Watson (1975) and Varpalotai (1987) conducted their research in other countries (Australia and Canada, respectively) where Title IX was not in effect (and thus sporting opportunities may have differed), it may still be useful to apply their findings to the sporting experiences of adolescent female athletes in the United States. Both researchers discuss the influence of valuable agents such as parents, in a female’s sports environment. Cultural differences may impact the role of these agents to an extent, but the value of
these agents still exists. Therefore, Watson’s and Varpalotai’s findings may likely be applicable when studying adolescent female athletes in the United States.

Varpalotai (1987) focused on a girls’ sport subculture and analyzed the role of social agents, i.e., parents, peers, coaches/teachers, the media. She addressed the role of parents in the athletic setting by mentioning that they are pivotal in female athletes’ experiences due to her observation that adolescent females tend not to get involved with sports if they do not participate during early childhood (Varpalotai, 1987). Female athletes are dependent upon their parents for their development and participation in sport initially. Parents are required to sign their daughters up and most often, pay for leagues and camps. If parents never enroll their daughters for these leagues and do not or cannot provide financial support, an interest likely fails to develop. Even if parents are able to pay for leagues and camps, without additional support during early childhood, females are apt to drop out of sport before they even reach adolescence (Varpalotai, 1987).

The value of parental support is summarized by Greendorfer (1983), as follows. A strong, supportive childhood environment and encouragement from parents to participate in sports are likely to contribute to girls continuing their athletic participation. Parental support can also allow girls to experience less role conflict and can contribute to an established commitment to their sport involvement. Greendorfer (1983) concludes that support can help to validate their sporting experiences and involvement.

Due to the worth that many adolescents place on their familial input and environment and due to the amount of time that is spent with family while growing up, adolescents frequently pick up cues from their parents. Namely, when referring to sport, adolescents fail to see participation interest exhibited by their mothers (Shakib & Dunbar,
2004). In Shakib and Dunbar’s research (2004), many mothers (unlike fathers) lacked visible evidence of participation in athletic activities. On the other hand, fathers of many participants had collections of trophies, newspaper clippings, scrapbooks, and other evidence indicating their individual sport involvement. Furthermore, male and female high school athletes in the Shakib and Dunbar (2004) study indicated that by viewing the trophies, newspaper clippings, and other awards that belonged to their fathers, they were motivated to become involved and to pursue involvement in sport, thus providing their fathers with overwhelming credit for their athletic participation as children and adolescents. Because mothers did not have tangible verification of prior success or participation in sport, high school athletes often assumed that their mothers were not interested in sports. Some of the athletes recognized that their mothers had fewer opportunities to participate in sport while growing up; however, they still failed to make a connection between their mothers’ lack of opportunity and the development of an interest in sports that may have enabled them to become more skilled in sports. Instead of understanding that an opportunity needed to be provided for an interest and skills to be cultivated, the athletes believed that their mothers did not care about participating in sports and were not skilled (Shakib & Dunbar, 2004).

The athletes in Shakib and Dunbar’s (2004) study also came to understand that the household and childcare responsibilities assumed by their mothers were desired replacements for sports participation. They believed that their mothers would rather labor over these extra tasks than develop or continue an interest in sports. This assumption was increasingly solidified because fathers continued their sport participation in adult leagues, therefore, affirming the concept that a man’s place is on the athletic field and a woman’s
place is in the house. Instead of switching off from year to year, allowing the mother to
participate in a league one year and the father the next, the father played year after year,
leaving the household and childcare responsibilities up to the mother. Thus, this seemed
to paint an image in the high school athletes’ minds: mothers are not skilled in sport and
they do not care about sport; if they were skilled or if they cared, they would participate
more, even if there were other responsibilities needing attention.

Shakib and Dunbar’s (2004) research also indicated that because there was a lack
of communication about mothers’ sport interests and prior participation, if the high
school athletes’ mothers had in fact once been involved in sport, the athletes failed to
acknowledge the existence of sport interest(s) on behalf of their mothers. In some cases,
when mothers’ sport participation was discussed within the family setting, the
conversation became humorous. Mothers’ sport participation was also considered to be
unreal because they participated in a feminized version of sport, which included rule
alterations that limited opportunity for maximum physical exertion. An example of this
limit was found in girls’ basketball (Fields, 2005). At one time, female participants were
confined to limited sections of the court that they were required to cover. Because women
were restricted from running the entire length of the court, unlike boys’ basketball where
all players could cover any part of the court, this female version of sport was considered
by some to be weaker. Girls’ basketball also required six players to be on the court at one
time as opposed to five players in boys’ basketball (Fields, 2005). Six-player basketball
had been the norm for girls since the girls’ version of the game had been adopted in 1892,
a year after Dr. James Naismith founded the game in Springfield, Massachusetts (Field,
2005). Girls’ basketball was created by Senda Berenson, the women’s athletic director at
Smith College (Fields, 2005). Her version attempted to avoid negative publicity and rough play that was associated with boys’ basketball (Fields, 2005). While many high schools had changed their rules to allow five-player basketball by the later 1970s, the very last six-player basketball game was played in Oklahoma in 1995 (Fields, 2005).

Colleen, a female participant in Shakib and Dunbar’s (2004) study, discusses this limitation in basketball that her mother experienced:

Yeah [my mother played basketball in high school], but she didn’t like it that much because of the way they played. Like the guards could only go to half court. And the forwards couldn’t go past [half court]. She really didn’t like it (p. 284).

This perception of a less legitimate sport may have helped to perpetuate the impression that female athletes were/are incompetent in comparison to male athletes and that the sports that girls and women participate in are played at a lower level than boys and men. When discussing these versions of mothers’ sport participation with family members, if these sport experiences were mentioned at all, the concepts of women’s lack of skill in sport and lack of interest in sport were perpetually conveyed to the adolescent athletes (Shakib & Dunbar, 2004).

Mothers’ involvement in sport (or lack thereof) may not deter girls from initially becoming involved with sports, but learning of their mothers’ involvement might be a vital element for their continuation in sport. Learning of and communicating about mothers’ participation may serve as an internal reinforcement and may attach value to their own participation. Because parents and older siblings tend to be role models for children/younger siblings, when adolescent females do learn of their mothers’ sport
experiences they may want to emulate them. Young girls and adolescent females may also take pride in knowing that women can excel in sport because their mothers have. Knowing about mothers’ sporting activities during childhood could also create a desire for girls to begin their sport participation. If children and adolescents discuss their mothers’ involvement with sports, they may come to believe that a woman’s role is not merely one filled with childcare and household responsibilities, but instead can also include responsibilities in a sporting environment.

_The role of parents once children have been introduced to sports_

Females who continue their sport participation into adolescence also require support if they are going to remain involved and enjoy it. Storm and Jenkins (2002) reiterate factors of parental support that create a better sports atmosphere for an adolescent female athlete, stating that “adolescent girls are more likely to play sports when their parents: support and encourage their efforts; don’t criticize their performance; and maintain realistic expectations of their performances” (p. 59). Hannah Storm, a former sports anchor and reporter who is currently a co-host on CBS’s _The Early Show_ was, “the first woman [in American television history] to serve as the solo anchor of a network's major sports package when she hosted NBC’s coverage of the NBA (1997-2002) and Major League Baseball, including three World Series (1995, 1997 and 1999)” (CBS News, 2006, p. 1). Her experiences in the sports world along with being a mother of three daughters offer her a unique insight and allow her to offer complementary perspectives and arguments on the benefits of sports participation for adolescent females. Participation in high school sports and athletic activity throughout a female athlete’s lifespan are more apt to occur if the athlete is rewarded for sports participation during her
childhood, if she views her parent(s) being active in sports, engages in physical activity with her parent(s), if encouragement is provided by her parent(s) to compete at the highest possible level, and if her athletic experiences appear to have positive outcomes, i.e., lack of disapproval or derision from family members, peers, and school systems (Storm & Jenkins, 2002).

Admittedly, a considerable portion of the previous arguments pertaining to girls being socialized into and within sports are drawn from the findings of one study (Shakib & Dunbar, 2004), which is largely because there is little research from a qualitative research perspective that has been conducted to explore the high school sports experiences of female athletes (Shakib & Dunbar, 2004). Insights introduced in Shakib and Dubar’s study (2004) pertaining to athlete relationships with other socializing agents such as coaches and peers help to provide additional clarification on the experiences of adolescent females in sport.

**Coaches’ Influence**

Along with parents, coaches help to shape the experiences of athletes in sports. The coach’s role is similar to the role that parents play in that both have the potential to provide guidance. Sabock and Sabock (2005) explain the important role that a coach plays, saying that “[Athletes] need someone to talk to, they often need someone other than a parent to listen to them, and they sometimes simply need adult advice from someone in addition to or other than a member of their family” (p. 118). For an athlete, the coach can fill this role well. The athlete’s sports experiences are largely dependent on the influence of coaches (Reynaud, 2005; Sabock & Sabock, 2005; Storm & Jenkins, 2002).
Athletes’ preference for a female or a male coach

One factor that plays a part in shaping experiences for athletes is the gender of the coach. Whether the coach is male or female can sometimes affect an athletes’ experiences. Specifically, if female and male athletes see few women in power positions such as head coaching or athletic directorship roles, their beliefs about women in sports, about women in administrative roles, and their overall experiences in sports will likely be influenced (Knoppers, 1987). Previous research has noted different athletes’ responses with regard to male or female coach preference (Frankl & Babbitt III, 1998; Medwechuk & Crossman, 1994; Parkhouse & Williams, 1986; Varpalotai, 1987; Weinberg, Reveles, & Jackson, 1984; Williams & Parkhouse, 1988; Women’s Sports Foundation, 2000).

High school track and field athletes in Frankl and Babbitt III’s (1998) research survey did not directly reveal a coach preference, but female athletes did display “more negative feelings toward female coaches than did male subjects with regard to whether they would be angry if yelled at by a hypothetical coach” (p. 6). Frankl and Babbitt III (1998) argue that this may suggest that female athletes may not be as willing to accept direction from a female authority figure. Survey results from Frankl and Babbitt III’s (1998) study show that “females were more accepting of a male coach who yelled at them which suggests that the female athletes were more comfortable with a male authority figure in that situation” (p.6).

Swimmers in Medwechuk and Crossman’s (1994) study clearly preferred a coach of the same sex; that is, male swimmers preferred a male coach and female swimmers preferred a female coach. Male and female basketball players in Parkhouse and Williams’ (1986) research revealed a negative bias towards female coaches, “with the male athlete
showing an even stronger bias” (p. 58), while only male athletes expressed a negative bias towards female coaches in Weinberg et. al’s (1984) study. Female basketball players in Williams and Parkhouse’s (1988) study indicated a preference for a male coach except when win/loss record was included in the mix. However, even when win/loss record was included, less successful male coaches were still preferred by 40% of the female basketball players when the alternative was having a female coach. Varpalotai’s (1987) research revealed that because female athletes had some less than ideal experiences with female coaches, they preferred male coaches. Information provided via the Women’s Sports Foundation (2000) shares some of the myths that surround the ability and performance of female coaches. A few of these myths include: female coaches do not win championships, female coaches are not as demanding as male coaches, female coaches are more difficult to take criticism from, female coaches are not skilled enough, and female coaches are lesbians and sexual predators (Women’s Sports Foundation, 2000). These stereotypes and/or perceptions may operate to shape athletes and their preference for a male or a female coach.

While an athlete’s coach preference may be rooted in social practices and mores (Knoppers, 1987), coaching influence, whether the coach is male or female, can be beneficial or detrimental to the overall sporting experience of an athlete and can even influence whether an athlete continues or discontinues participation (Sabock & Sabock, 2005). Athletes come to depend on their coaches for acceptance and approval because the coach can give them something that they want, whether it is guidance in sport or life, skill instruction, or playing time during competitions. Coaches play an integral role in athletes being able to reach their goals (Reynaud, 2005).
Some male and female athletes are overwhelmingly partial towards male coaches (Frankl & Babbitt III, 1998; Knoppers, 1987; Parkhouse & Williams, 1986; Women’s Sports Foundation, 2000). As Frankl and Babbitt III (1998) explain, “Gender bias toward female coaches may be derived from many different levels within the coaching environment, ranging from hiring practices of athletic directors to athletes’ perceptions” (p. 1). Female coaches have sometimes been criticized by individuals in society (including athletes, others coaches, athletics administrators, sports spectators, athletes’ parents, etc.) for being too emotional and at other times are judged negatively for not being vocal enough (Women’s Sports Foundation, 2000). Participants in Varpalotai’s 1987 research study indicated a preference for male coaches. One sixteen-year old female athlete in the study stressed:

I prefer male [coaches]—they seem more stricter [sic], if they’re not tough on you I don’t try… I think that all the male coaches I’ve had are the best coaches in the world. It seems the ones I’ve had are so smart compared to the lady coaches (p. 420).

Another sixteen-year old female athlete in Varpalotai’s (1987) study expressed similar sentiments:

I think I like male coaches better because they seem to be a lot more stronger [sic], not so wimpy, like last year my coach she wouldn’t speak up and say things… I’m not saying that all female coaches are like that, but… (p. 420).

This athlete’s failure to finish her concluding statement may suggest that she does not want to negatively categorize all female coaches but her experiences with female coaches
may lead her to believe that the ability of all female coaches is sub-par to the ability of a male coach.

The athletes in Varpalotai’s (1987) study held these beliefs about female coaches even after revealing that their exposure to women coaches was relatively limited. Because they had fewer experiences with female coaches and because they felt that their experiences with female coaches were less than ideal, it may have become easier to assume that men were more talented and more intelligent in the field of sports. This corresponds to findings in Knoppers’ research (1987) that allude to the notion that because there are more men in collegiate athletic administration positions as opposed to women, men must be more qualified. Perhaps it became easier for the female athletes in Varpalotai’s (1987) research to classify all women coaches as less intelligent, weak, soft, and/or more quiet based on a few poor coaching experiences involving females. These traits, according to the girls in the study, could automatically qualify the coach as someone unworthy of respect from her athletes. If the athletes in Varpalotai’s (1987) study are representative of many female athletes, adolescent female athletes may learn not to expect the same treatment and experiences from female coaches that they come to expect from male coaches. Female athletes’ specific experiences with and their expectations of male and female coaches in the United States is something that clearly needs further exploration.

In research conducted by Williams and Parkhouse (1988), female athletes who participated on a varsity high school basketball team revealed overwhelming preferences for a male coach. When players were asked to indicate their preference for a hypothetical male or female coach, categorized as successful or unsuccessful solely according to
his/her win/loss record, players in the study selected the male coach. The only divergence from this preference occurred when a player had a choice between an unsuccessful and a successful female coach. Based on this criterion, successful female coaches were preferred, but only by sixty percent of the athletes. The remaining forty percent still indicated that they would rather be coached by the unsuccessful male coach (Williams & Parkhouse, 1988).

A study carried out by Frankl and Babbitt III (1998) highlights another element regarding coaching preference. Their research, somewhat similar to that of Williams and Parkhouse’s (1988), analyzed high school athletes’ perceptions of hypothetical male and female coaches. However, while Williams and Parkhouse (1988) focused on basketball, a more team-oriented sport, Frankl and Babbitt III’s research (1998) focused on track and field, a more individualized sport. Questionnaires administered to the male and female track and field athletes asked them to indicate their preference for a male or female coach based on ten separate questions. Most of these questions, eight of which were taken from Weinberg et al.’s research (1984), centered on whether male and female athletes preferred a male or female coach’s critiques, whether a male or female coach would instill the male and female athletes with confidence to improve, whether the male or female head coach had potential to be a head coach in the future, and whether the male or female coach was an overall good coach (Frankl & Babbitt III, 1998). An important note to highlight from Frankl and Babbitt III’s (1998) study is that, “The fact that gender bias by male and female track and field athletes toward female track and field coaches was not demonstrated in this study, may also be explained by the nature of the sport under investigations” (p.5). Where previous studies conducted have focused on team-oriented
sports, Frankl and Babbitt III’s (1998) research focused on a sport with more individualized events. Therefore, male or female coaching preference may be somewhat reliant upon whether or not the sport is individual or team-based. This factor requires further consideration.

The visibility of female coaches in collegiate and high school athletics

Another aspect of coaching that needs to be discussed pertains to the visibility of female coaches in college and high school sports. Whereas the gender of coaches in NCAA institutions is well documented by the National Collegiate Athletic Association, there is no comparable consistent reporting requirement of coaches’ gender available via the National Federation of State High School Associations, the primary governing body of high school sports. However, the statistics provided for this research are comprised of the genders of high school sports coaches in a mid-sized, Midwestern county with a 2004 population estimate roughly above 123,000 people (U. S. Census, 2000). According to the 2004-2005 National Federation of State High School Association’s High School Athletics Participation Survey (2005b), the five most popular sports for high school girls are, accompanied by the following participation levels: basketball (456,543), outdoor track and field (428,198), volleyball (386,022), fast pitch softball (364,759), and soccer (316,104).

In Ohio, where the present study was conducted, an analysis of sports offered by the Ohio High School Athletic Association (2005) revealed that all ten of the high schools within the county under consideration in this study (name withheld to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of research participants) had a male head girls’ basketball coach. Five of the schools within this county had head male coaches for the girls’ outdoor
track and field program, two head coaches were female, and three of these programs did not reveal whether the head coach was male or female. This lack of information was due to the lack of a program at the school or an in-progress coaching change within the school’s athletic program. Female head coaches were represented better in high school girls’ volleyball, where seven of the head coaches were female and three were male. High school girls’ softball programs within this county found far better male head coaching representation than female head coach representation. Eight head coaches were male while only two were female. Soccer programs were led by seven male coaches, zero female coaches, and three schools either did not have teams or were in the process of finding a new head coach. Athletic directorships at all of these high schools were held by men (Ohio High School, 2005).

If high school female athletes look to the collegiate athletic scene, similar patterns are found. Based on Acosta and Carpenter’s (2004) study, women in Division I, II, and III athletics occupied 60.7% of coaching positions in basketball, 19.7% of coaching positions in track and field, 59.5% of coaching positions in volleyball, 64.8% of coaching positions in fast pitch softball, and 30.1% of coaching positions in soccer. Nationally, statistics from the 2003-2004 high school athletic season/academic year to the 2004-2005 athletic season/academic year reveal that high school girls’ soccer acquired 7,072 extra participants. This was second only to track and field which added 9,212 female athletes (NFSHSA, 2005a). Perhaps this increase in soccer participation is reflective of a women’s soccer movement that was instigated by the 1999 Women’s United States National Team World Cup overtime thriller versus China in Pasadena, California (Longman, 2001).
Regardless of what provided the impetus, more high school female athletes are competing in and following soccer. In fact, since 1977, the year that Acosta and Carpenter began their collegiate athletics longitudinal study, soccer has grown more than any other sport offered for women. As of 2004, it was “offered for women on 88.6% of [college] campuses while in 1977 it was only found on 2.8% of the campuses” (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004, p. 2). A low visibility and a lack of head female coaches in the collegiate soccer picture and also within my study’s selected Midwestern county high schools, create a situation where increased numbers of female adolescents miss the opportunity to see women in power positions. This could be doubly dangerous due to soccer’s recent increases in participation and popularity on college and high school fields.

After the successful staging of the 1999 Women’s World Cup, soccer came to symbolize a rite of passage for female athletes of all ages (Longman, 2001; Zimmerman & Reavill, 1998). However, there remains a limited number women holding influential positions in this sport. Limited visibility of females competing in soccer and a lack of women occupying head coaching roles may discourage girls from pursuing coaching and other leadership positions within soccer and other sports after their high school and collegiate playing careers have finished. Furthermore, since the folding of the Women’s United Soccer League (WUSA) in 2003, female soccer players competing on all levels (youth, high school, college, etc.) saw an opportunity to play professionally disappear (personal communication, A. Apostolopoulou, March 24, 2006). Thus, visibility to compete at the highest level in the United States diminished. As of mid-September 2003, women in the United States no longer have a professional league housed within the country to continue their soccer careers after college.
Acosta and Carpenter (2004) further support the lack of visibility and occupation of administrative roles by women in Division I, II, and III intercollegiate sports when they state that, “Females hold 41% of all administrative jobs but only 18.5% of head administrator (AD) jobs” (p. 25). They also point out that, “About 4 out of 5 women’s athletic programs are administered by a male [and while] female representation is growing in the under ranks of administration, [it is not growing] in the top jobs” (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004, p. 25). When compared to pre-Title IX statistics, it is evident that women are currently and have been represented in a minimized capacity. Carpenter and Acosta (2005) indicate that, “When Title IX was enacted in 1972, women filled more than 90 percent of the coaching positions in women’s intercollegiate programs” (p. 175). With regard to women in administrative positions, “Before the enactment of Title IX, women filled more than 90 percent of the head administrative positions in women’s intercollegiate programs” (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005, p. 175). Overall, for collegiate teams, 44.1% of the coaches for women’s teams are female, while only 2% of coaches for men’s teams are female. This 2% representation has not substantially increased since the passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments in 1972 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004; Carpenter & Acosta, 2005). Acosta and Carpenter’s 2004 study also revealed that, “2004’s 44.1% is close to the lowest representation of females as head coaches of women’s teams in history” (p. 2).

The aforementioned statistics (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004; Carpenter & Acosta, 2005) reveal that men are found in positions of power more often than women at the collegiate and high school levels. This indicates and reinforces the naturalness of men occupying positions of power. High school female athletes have fewer female examples
to emulate and from whom to learn (Sabock & Sabock, 2005). Because male head coaches dominate the sports that have the most high school female participants (i.e., basketball, outdoor track and field, volleyball, fast pitch softball, and soccer) more female athletes are being subjected to a reality that reinforces the naturalness of men occupying positions of power. Thus, hegemony is preserved. More high school female athletes are missing out on an opportunity to view women in authority positions. As suggested previously, female athletes may assume that women do not hold these positions due to incompetence or even worse, the athletes just accept this reality without critically examining it. Instead of associating the lack of women in power positions with a lack of opportunity, female athletes may instead assign this ineptitude to the character of female coaches and to females in general (Kanter, 1977; Knoppers 1987). This absence serves to devalue all of women’s and girls’ sports and the girls’ individual sport participation.

Potential explanations for the lack of female coaches and administrators

The lack of female head coaches in collegiate and high school sports may further be accepted due to a failure of head coaches and administrators, both male and female, to acknowledge that inequities exist for girls and women in sport. As McClung and Blinde (2002) discovered in a study they conducted with female intercollegiate athletes, issues of inequitable conditions found within the athletic context for female athletes are often not discussed by coaches and administrators because of the controversy that surrounds the issue. McClung and Blinde (2002) explain why the lack of women in positions of power within athletics may not be a priority to discuss:

Administrators and coaches may fear losing power, respect, and opportunities for upward mobility if controversial issues such as gender
equity, feminism, and gender issues are discussed. As a result, administrators and coaches may be socialized not to discuss issues that may challenge or question the male hegemonic belief system or patriarchal control (p. 131).

If coaches and administrators do not mention these issues and instead, cast a negative light on them, even if ignoring the topics is inadvertent, adolescent female athletes may come to understand that these controversies [italics added] are not worthy of recognition or in depth analysis. McClung and Blinde (2002) associate this with the mainstream model of sport, under which coaches and administrators tend to place an emphasis on results and ultimately on winning. Because this stress on winning is as pervasive as it is, coaches and administrators feel that there is “little time to emphasize personal development” (McClung & Blinde, 2002, p. 131). McClung and Blinde (2002) place gender equity, feminism, and other gender issues in this personal development category. The emphasis that is placed on winning creates a barrier for the athletes’ ability to delve into development issues. This strict emphasis on results also creates a situation where athletes “may not be able to experience real-life issues or activities outside of the sport realm” (McClung & Blinde, 2002, p. 131).

While coaches have the ability to shape the experiences of athletes and while the role of the coach is valuable, the coach is but one additional socializing agent. An athlete’s teammates and/or peers also contribute to the shaping of his/her experiences. The influence of teammates and/or peers will be analyzed more in depth in the following section.
Peer Influence

Peer influence contributes to an athlete’s personal development. Along with the invaluable structure and support provided by an athlete’s family, peers are “recognized as essential in the socialization process” (Lewko & Greendorfer, 1988, p. 288). While family remains valuable for the continued development of athletes, peers are but another agent in the socialization mix. Peers play a crucial role for athletes when adolescence is reached (Lewko & Greendorfer, 1988). Athletes come to recognize that they are searching for other aspects of their identity with which family members may not be able to provide them (Clark, 2004). Often, peer groups provide additional support and recognition to adolescents (Greendorfer, 1993; McPherson, 1981). While family support and approval remain important and likely never become obsolete, peers take on a heightened level of importance and may even at times influence a teen more than a family member during adolescence (Clark, 2004). Sabock and Sabock (2005) reveal that teenagers are influenced strongly by their peers. This heightened influence that peers occupy may be because peer relationships offer a refuge from the identity search while they simultaneously provide substance to an adolescent’s identity (Clark, 2004). Athletes, along with most other adolescents, rely heavily on an identity which is formulated by those with whom they spend most of their time. Peer relationships appear to be a saving grace for many who are searching for a safe haven from life’s pressures (Clark, 2004). Storm and Jenkins (2002) state that, “More so than boys, girls tend to play sports to be with their friends” (p. 60). This may signify that value is placed on peer relationships by female adolescent athletes. Because high school is a time when adolescents endure treacherous terrain, essentially, it is a time of finding oneself, peer relationships become
that much more important. Female adolescents want to be accepted and approved (Storm & Jenkins, 2002). Many find this acceptance and approval amongst teammates.

*Socialization within sport: The role of peers*

The peer group reinforces a family’s influence with regard to socialization and involvement in sport, according to Greendorfer (1983). Basically, the athletic team becomes another family for female athletes and can often determine, just like family members, whether or not female athletes continue their sport participation. Most of the girls within Varpalotai’s study (1987) began their involvement in sport through individualized activities. Friends were responsible for introducing team sports to most female athletes and also played a significant role in keeping teammates interested in sports. This was accomplished through the creation and sustenance of an appealing team atmosphere (Varpalotai, 1987). In team sports there was a unique “team camaraderie” that “reinforced enthusiasm and commitment” (Varpalotai, 1987, p. 419). Patrick, et al., (1999) suggest that because relationships in sports have “a special sense of intimacy and fellowship—a stronger bond than other friendships” (p. 751), female athletes may potentially be drawn to the sports environment.

Due to significant amounts of time spent in practices and games, most athletes spend their time with other athletes, specifically their teammates (Blinde, Taub, & Han, 1994). This may be even more common for college athletes, but it is also true for athletes competing at club levels while growing up and at high school levels. Because athletes endure a similar rigor, they depend on each other differently than they may depend on non-athletes, parents or other family members, teachers, and coaches (Blinde et al., 1994). Teammates become a constant, personal, humanistic refuge from the pressures and
the stress that accompany sports participation. Members of an athletic team often feel that the only other people who understand and experience similar situations are other athletes and their teammates. Athletic teams allow adolescent females the social opportunity to feel empowered and allow for the creation and development of common team and individual aspirations (Blinde, et al., 1994). These teams create an affiliation, a sense of belonging, and a sense of worth for female adolescent athletes. In some cases, teams appear to be comprised of peer clusters. Clark (2004) describes peer clusters as groups that offer adolescents a place to belong. As a member of a peer cluster, individuals are allowed to be open with each other and share their beliefs, their problems, their experiences, and goals for their future. Adolescents in a peer cluster can become a member of a group solely based on their shared commonalities; formal membership is not necessary for inclusion (Clark, 2004). Because team try-outs and cutting of athletes from high school squads would constitute a formal membership practice, athletic teams may not fit Clark’s exact peer cluster categorization. With the exclusion of the no-formal-membership qualification, however, sports squads still exemplify the peer cluster concept.

Peer Influence and Collective Identity

The peer influence found amongst female athletic teams also allows for the creation of a collective identity which has been used in some instances (Pelak, 2002), albeit research indicates rarely, to fight the inequities that exist for female athletes. One such example occurred with a female club hockey team at a large Midwestern university in the 1990s (Pelak, 2002). The team formed and used a common identity to fight negative social perceptions that were attached to females participating in a contact sport.
(Pelak, 2002). Pelak (2002) discusses the collective identity formulation in her study, “The opposition that the club experienced contributed to the formation of the club’s collective identity because such resistance raised awareness of structural inequality and framed interactions between the women’s club and other rink stakeholders” (p. 100). In the ice hockey club’s initial years, members were not granted access to use the rink’s locker rooms and resorted to dressing “in the rink lobby or small changing rooms next to the ice surface” (Pelak, 2002, p. 100). Locker rooms were reserved for the men’s varsity hockey team and the team’s opponents, however, the rooms were used by the men’s hockey club as well because some of these team members also worked at the rink (Pelak, 2002). Limiting access to changing facilities was one method used to establish a boundary between other rink patrons and the women’s ice hockey club team and was important in constructing the women’s club members as ‘outsiders’ (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983; Pelak, 2002).

Attempts to promote the team during the club’s first few years were also met with resistance (Pelak, 2002). Requests to post team information on bulletin boards were repeatedly denied as were requests to use the trophy case to display evidence of team success. Trophies were finally allowed in the case and photographs were exhibited, “only after the athletic department legitimized the club with financial support during their seventh season” (Pelak, 2002, p. 100). These visible differences between the men’s and women’s hockey organizations, lack of assistance or cooperation from administration and hockey rink authorities when practice and game schedules were created, and derogatory comments (the women’s team was nicknamed “The Mighty Dykes” by male workers and patrons of the ice) about women playing in a male-dominated sport, “contributed to the
formation of the club’s solidarity and growing consciousness of gender stratification at the rink” (Pelak, 2002, p. 101). Ultimately, because the team in Pelak’s study (2002) experienced so much opposition to their hockey participation, gender-consciousness was raised. Their experiences also explain why a component of the collective team identity focused on fighting gender inequities.

Even if they have a collective team identity, Blinde et al.’s (1994) research indicates that team members are not always willing to fight existing gender inequities. The collective identity of the college athletes in their research did not lead them to incorporate an activist approach in opposition to acknowledged gender inequities. Of the twenty-four female athletes in Blinde et al.’s (1994) study, five were basketball players, four were track and field athletes, three were volleyball players, three were swimmers, three were softball players, two were tennis players, two were divers, and two were gymnasts. The athletes in Blinde et al.’s (1994) study recognized that by participating in sports, they were challenging historical and societal perceptions of a female’s inability in sport and acknowledged that inequities still existed between women’s and men’s programs. However, when asked if they associated themselves with feminism or women’s issues activism, most athletes did not feel connected to these concepts. Aside from recognizing differences between men’s and women’s sports programs (e.g., women received less ideal practice slots, had less money in their team’s budget, were promoted less, and had poorer facilities among other things in comparison to the male teams), the female athletes interviewed had a “somewhat limited” awareness of women’s equity issues. Only a few athletes out of the total twenty-four were able to extend women’s issues beyond noting the differences between the men’s and women’s teams. One athlete
noticed how sport seemed to be part of a larger picture of the remainder of society. In society and in sport she acknowledged that it appeared that there were things that women do not typically receive as much of in comparison to men (e.g., respect). Overall, in the eyes of the athletes, these issues were viewed negatively. Perhaps, an association with feminism and/or activism would jeopardize the traditional sense of femininity for them or as research suggests, “Open identification with feminism or being an activist for women’s issues might intensify the already present lesbian labeling of women athletes” (Blinde et al., 1994, p. 57; Hall, 1984; Knoppers, 1987). Perhaps, because female athletes are already fighting these accusations and labels on the athletic front, they do not feel safe when associating themselves with a cause (e.g., feminism) that is also viewed negatively by some members in society. Not attaching themselves to feminist and women’s activist issues allows an opportunity, even if it is already partially sacrificed by their sport affiliation, for society to view them as feminine. This way, the scale can still tip in the athletes’ favor.

*Women’s Hockey Fights for a Promotion to Varsity Status: Cook v Colgate*

An example of a situation where a women’s ice hockey club team struggled to obtain varsity status and where raised consciousness resulted in action involved a team at Colgate University (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005). Women on the team wanted the club team to be promoted to varsity status. However, Colgate had a policy that stated that club teams could only request this promotion “once every two years” (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005, p. 134). Requests for a varsity team were made in 1979, 1983, 1986, and 1988. After another request failed in 1990, hockey club members filed a Title IX lawsuit that would force Colgate to form a women’s varsity team. Initially, the plaintiffs were
successful, but after the university appealed the decision, it was Colgate who was triumphant. Colgate claimed that “because all the plaintiffs would have graduated by the time the next hockey season began the district court’s order was no remedy for the plaintiffs” (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005, p. 134). The 1993 *Cook v Colgate* decision established a precedent. The university would have had to create a team had the plaintiffs sued as representatives of a class as opposed to individuals. However, because the plaintiffs sued as individuals, a women’s club team was not created as a direct result of the decision in the case. The court sided with the defendants in this particular case. After the *Cook v Colgate* case, “Most Title IX cases involving claims of participation violations have been filed as class actions to avoid being ruled moot when the named plaintiffs graduate” (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005, p. 134). Title IX lawsuits often require several years of deliberation before a conclusion is reached, often longer than the typical span of time that a student is in college. Thus, plaintiffs searching for a judgment in their favor will likely have better luck achieving this end if they file class-action cases (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005).

*Lack of Support for Girls’ and Women’s Sports*

The female hockey club team members in the *Cook v Colgate* case and the female hockey club members in Pelak’s (2002) research experienced a tremendous lack of support from administrators, fans, the media, and society in general. This lack of support provides an additional means where players can find a niche, a common ground with one another, aside from sharing common goals and spending considerable amounts of time with each other in practices, team functions, and games. Lack of support is not just an issue with women’s college hockey club teams. It is experienced at the high school level
as well. Zimmerman and Reavill (1998) reveal the dismay associated with the lack of fan support. One of the athletes chronicled in their research, Erica Lewis, a seventeen-year old senior female basketball, softball, and volleyball player at Walnut Hills High School in Cincinnati, Ohio shares her disappointment:

It kind of makes you feel down sometimes…. When you’re about to play a sport and the gym is empty or the field is empty. You don’t have anybody there watching you. Especially if you do something good. Guys, if they know the people are watching, they try to impress them, try harder. But for us, no one’s ever there (p. 123).

The disparity in fan support may contribute to the perception that women’s sports are not worth watching and may lend support to the idea that female athletes are on a second-tier, a notch below male athletes. Zimmerman and Reavill (1998) propose that during a male’s athletic lifespan, specifically from high school on, he will generally have better equipment, will have the opportunity to compete on better fields/courts, will have more opportunities to play professionally or semi-professionally, will typically have better trainers, doctors, and therapists for injuries, and will have “four times the college scholarship money [when compared to high school female athletes]” (p. 114).

*Women Athletes in the Mainstream Model of Sport*

Because sport in the United States follows the mainstream model of sport, one that emphasizes strength, power, and speed, “a majority of mature males have a decided advantage over a majority of mature females” (Rinehart, 2005, p. 236). The elements of this sport model may reiterate to female athletes that the disparity in strength, power, and speed legitimize their second-tier status and might, “[account] for the disparity in
opportunity” (Zimmerman & Reavill, 1998, p. 115). Society comes to rely on and anticipate these stressed components of sport and when women’s sports fail to meet their expectations, it may be assumed that women’s athletic capabilities are below the capabilities of men. Thus, women may not receive as much support for their athletic efforts.

**Media Influence**

The media also plays a significant role in the lives of individuals in the United States. Boutilier and SanGiovanni (1983) support this when they argue that:

> We receive our primary information about the world from the electronic and written media. They shape our values, attitudes, and knowledge of ourselves and of others. Virtually no institution, social process, group, or person is left unaffected by the images and words that emanate from these sources (p. 183).

A more contemporary analysis of the media’s influence states that, “much of what we know and understand about sport [and society] is shaped by the media” (Kinkema & Harris, 1998, p. 27). Both of these statements help to explain why the media portrayal of female athletes is so important. Even if participation opportunities are expanding for female athletes, “it is the media’s treatment and evaluation [italics in original] of that relationship that will shape its direction and content” (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983, p. 186). Children are especially susceptible to mediated images and content because they lack the ability to judge and/or critique the image and content validity (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983; Chafetz, 1978).
The Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles’ media studies

In 1990, scholars at the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles began a longitudinal study that explored both qualitative and quantitative aspects of men’s and women’s televised sports coverage (Duncan & Messner, 1998). Their report in 1990 featured analysis of coverage from the 1989 women’s NCAA “Final Four” basketball tournaments, the women’s and men’s singles, doubles, and mixed doubles matches of the 1989 US Open Tennis Tournament, and six weeks of sports coverage provided by KNBC, an NBC network affiliate in Los Angeles (Duncan & Messner, 1998).

Summarized results from the AAFLA’s 1990 report indicated that in the six week time frame of sports coverage provided by KNBC, ninety-two percent of air time was devoted to men’s sports, five percent of the air time was given to women’s sports, and the remaining three percent of the air time covered gender neutral topics. While women athletes received limited coverage, women in general received coverage. This coverage, however, often placed women at the center of jokes and sexualized commentary. Televised segments in the 1990 study that focused on the women’s 1989 NCAA “Final Four” basketball tournament were of a lower production quality, a lower camera angle quality, a lower editing quality, and a lower sound quality as well when compared to the men’s 1989 NCAA “Final Four” basketball tournament. During these same basketball tournaments, the men’s games tended to be dramatized more than the women’s games. Commentators during the NCAA “Final Four” referred to women by their first name thirty-one times while men were referred to by their first name only nineteen times (AAFLA, 1990). None of the male athletes who were referred to by their first name were white; each instance was used to refer to a man of color.
A similar pattern was discovered when analyzing the women’s and men’s singles, doubles, and mixed doubles matches of the 1989 US Open Tennis Tournament (AAFLA, 1990). Coverage revealed that 52.7% of the time women athletes were mentioned by their first name only and 7.8% of the time men were mentioned by their first name only (AAFLA, 1990). The 1990 AAFLA study reported that overall, when compared to prior sports coverage, commentators appeared to be making an improved effort to limit and/or eliminate sexist reporting of women athletes and women’s sports.

A second study was sponsored by the AAFLA in 1994 that again aimed to qualitatively and quantitatively measure the coverage that women athletes and women’s sports were receiving. The report in 1994 analyzed the same events that were analyzed in 1993’s study, however, instead of reviewing only one network affiliate in Los Angeles, the study expanded to cover three Los Angeles networks (Duncan & Messner, 1998). Televised sports news coverage of the network affiliate was measured for a total of six weeks (three two-week segments, March 15-28, 1993; July 12-25, 1993; November 8-20, 1993), and the affiliates included in the study were KNBC, KCBS, and KABC (Duncan & Messner, 1998).

Network affiliate sports news coverage of women’s athletics was similar to the 1990 study in that ninety-four percent of the air time was devoted to men’s sports, five percent of the air time was given to women’s sports, and one percent of the air time focused on gender neutral topics (AAFLA, 1994). During the six weeks of coverage a total of 126 newscasts were analyzed and within these newscasts, there were 137 interviews with men coaches or athletes and only four interviews with women coaches or athletes (AAFLA, 1994). When women athletes and women’s sports were provided
coverage within the news segments of the network affiliates, they were still marginalized and at the center of gag features. All women in general within these news segments were sexually objectified far less often than they were in the 1990 study (AAFLA, 1994).

While improvements in the quality of production, camera work, editing, and sound for women’s sports were noted in the 1994 study, coverage of men’s sports was still of a higher quality. Men’s sports were accompanied by higher quality and longer pre-game, halftime, and post-game shows in comparison to women’s sports and often, the shows for women’s sports were used to highlight and to build interest for men’s sports (AAFLA, 1994). In the coverage analysis of the women’s and men’s singles, doubles, and mixed doubles matches of the 1993 US Open Tennis Tournament, women athletes were referred to by their first name 31.5% of the time (AAFLA, 1994). This was a decrease from the percentage that was revealed in the 1989 US Open Tennis Tournament (52.7%) (AAFLA, 1994). Men on the other hand were mentioned by their first names only twelve percent of the time, an increase from 7.8% of the time that was unveiled in the 1990 AAFLA report (AAFLA, 1994).

Overall, while it appeared as if coverage of women athletes and women’s sports showed marked improvements, there were also areas of concern. For example, in the coverage of the 1993 “Final Four” basketball tournaments, gender was rarely if ever attached to descriptions of men’s basketball (AAFLA, 1994). In the women’s “Final Four” basketball tournament, however, gender was verbally, visually, and graphically labeled on an average of 110 occasions (AAFLA, 1994). This nearly doubled the measurements of specific gender labeling that was uncovered in the 1989 “Final Four” basketball tournament (AAFLA, 1994).
The study of coverage in 1999 analyzed the same sports reports that were used in the 1990 and the 1994 study (six weeks of sports coverage on KNBC, KCBS, and KABC; the men’s and women’s NCAA “Final Four” basketball tournaments; women’s and men’s singles, women’s and men’s doubles, and mixed doubles matches of the 1999 U.S. Open tennis tournament), however, the 1999 study added ESPN’s *SportsCenter* and coverage of the NBA and the WNBA Championships (three games from each league) (AAFLA, 2000). Time frames for the six weeks of sports coverage on the Los Angeles news affiliates utilized were the 6:00 p.m. and the 11:00 p.m. segments on March 15-28, July 12-25, and November 8-21 (AAFLA, 2000).

Statistics regarding the coverage of women’s sports on the Los Angeles news affiliates revealed little change from the AAFLA’s studies that were conducted in 1989 and 1993. In the 1999 study, men’s sports accounted for 88.2% of the airtime, women’s sports received 8.7% of the airtime, whereas gender neutral topics occupied 3.1% of the total airtime (AAFLA, 2000). On these news affiliates, men’s sports stories outnumbered women’s sports stories by a 6:1 ratio, however, this statistic is much lower than the ratio that was discovered after analyzing *SportsCenter*’s coverage (AAFLA, 2000). Men’s stories were covered at a 15:1 ratio in comparison to the coverage of women’s sports stories (AAFLA, 2000). Time devoted to women’s sports on *SportsCenter* occupied 2.2 percent of the entire time devoted to all sports stories (AAFLA, 2000). Men’s sports stories far outnumbered women’s sports stories at the local level as Los Angeles network affiliates included 918 men’s sports stories while they only covered 160 women’s sports stories (AAFLA, 2000).
When women’s and men’s sports stories were analyzed, however, it was discovered that twenty-one percent of women’s stories included an interview with a woman athlete or women coach while twenty-five percent of men’s stories included an interview with a male athlete or a male coach (AAFLA, 2000). In the 1994 study, women’s sports stories included an interview with a woman athlete or a woman coach only seven percent of the time (AAFLA, 2000). Women’s sports coverage in the 1999 study tended to mock women’s sports and women athletes (AAFLA, 2000). According to the AAFLA’s (2000) summarized findings, “Most of the few 1999 local news reports on serious women’s sports (like basketball, tennis, golf or soccer) were fairly brief” (p. 6). Stories that received more attention were “gag features (e.g., nude bungee jumping) or stories on marginal, but visually entertaining pseudosport (e.g., professional women’s wrestling)” (AAFLA, 2000, p. 7).

Technical production quality of the women’s NCAA “Final Four” basketball tournament games that were broadcast on ESPN were of a lower technical quality when compared to the men’s NCAA “Final Four” basketball tournament games that were broadcasted on CBS (AAFLA, 2000). Post-game analysis and shows for the men’s tournament games were also longer and included “dramatic recaps” while the post-game analysis for the women’s tournament games was hurried and much less dramatic (AAFLA, 2000). WNBA game and NBA game analysis revealed that their technical production quality was similar (AAFLA, 2000). Production quality of one WNBA game that was broadcast by Lifetime, however, was much lower in comparison to the production quality of the games that were broadcast by NBC (AAFLA, 2000).
The 1999 AAFLA study also revealed that “tennis commentators were three times as likely to refer to a woman athlete by her first name only, continuing a pattern found in earlier studies” (p.7). Commentators were more than twice as likely to refer to male tennis players by only their last name (AAFLA, 2000). A first-name and a last-name pattern was not found in the 1999 “Final Four” basketball tournaments nor was it discovered in the WNBA and the NBA Championship games (AAFLA, 2000). Differentiations indicating gender were still made by commentators in the women’s NCAA basketball games (AAFLA, 2000). On average, during the NCAA women’s “Final Four” tournament, commentators marked the games (e.g., ‘the women’s championship game’) by gender 52.7 times per game (AAFLA, 2000). Coverage of the NCAA men’s “Final Four” tournament “nearly always referred to the men’s contests in gender-neutral terms” (AAFLA, 2000, p. 7). Tennis commentary revealed “high rates of symmetrical gender marking” (AAFLA, 2000, p. 7), while levels of gender marking were low for WNBA and NBA commentating.

The AAFLA’s 1999 study also looked at the racial/ethnic and the gender composition of the commentators on sports news shows. Make-up of the commentators on the sports news shows and on SportsCenter revealed that 61% of the commentators were white and 39% were people of color (AAFLA, 2000). Of the anchorpeople on the sports news and highlights shows, 96.8% were male (AAFLA, 2000). Also revealed in the 1999 AAFLA study was the racial/ethnic and the gender composition of basketball and tennis commentators. Of these commentators, sixty-two percent were men and seventy-three percent were white (AAFLA, 2000). Upon further analysis of these basketball and tennis commentators, it was discovered that when the 1999 investigators
counted “only the play-by-play and ‘color’ commentators ‘in the booth,’” [they found] (especially in basketball) that white males are still the dominant ‘voices of authority,’ (AAFLA, 2000, p. 8). Women and people of color tended to be used more to share their expertise in pre-game, halftime, and post-game discussions and also for “peripheral on-court commentary” (AAFLA, 2000, p. 8).

Most recently, in July 2005, the AAFLA published a fourth report in this longitudinal study, Gender in televised sports: News and highlights shows, 1989-2004. Sports programs in the 2004 review included CBS, NBC, and ABC network affiliates in Los Angeles, ESPN’s SportsCenter, and making its debut was Fox’s Southern California Sports Report. In the 2004 study, coverage for network affiliates was measured for a total of six weeks while coverage for ESPN’s SportsCenter and for Fox’s Southern California Sports Report was measured for a total of three weeks each (AAFLA, 2005).

Co-investigators for this study, Duncan and Messner, discovered after reviewing six weeks of sports coverage on the network affiliates that:

The 2004 study indicated a decline in coverage of women’s sports, compared with the 1999 study, and a return to numbers that are closer to those of fifteen years ago. In all, these data indicate that the proportion of news time devoted to women’s sports has not changed since 1989 (AAFLA, 2005, p. 8).

Due to the attention women’s sports were receiving in the latter half of the 1990s this coverage report comes as a disappointment, but even more disconcerting was the sexualized portrayal of female athletes in the media. Surely there were successful women on the sports scene, so why were they not receiving coverage? And when they were
receiving coverage, why were women’s sports and female athletes being portrayed as sexual objects?

The research sponsored by the AAFLA (2005) indicated that men’s sports coverage on KNBC, KABC, and KCBS:

- received 91.4% of the airtime, women’s sports 6.3%, and
- gender neutral topics 2.4%. These numbers indicate a decline in the coverage of women’s sports since 1999, when 8.7% of the airtime was devoted to women’s sports. In 1989 and 1993, women’s sports received 5% and 5.1% of the coverage, respectively (p. 4).

The 2.4% difference in coverage for women’s sports from 1999 to 2004 indicates a significant decrease with no definitive indications as to why this drop occurred. This may be due to a diminished allure attached to women’s professional basketball and women’s professional soccer (the demise of the WUSA), however, only assumptions can be offered with regard to the decrease in coverage.

In comparison to the network affiliation coverage, ESPN’s *SportsCenter* and Fox’s *Southern California Sports Report* provided even less coverage for women’s sports “whereas on the Los Angeles news, men’s sports reports outnumbered women’s sports stories by a 9:1 ratio, Fox’s male-to-female ratio was 15:1, and *SportsCenter*’s ratio was a whopping 20:1” (AAFLA, 2005, p. 4). These data may be even more disappointing due to the fact that these shows reach a larger market. Essentially, more people miss out on the opportunity to view women in a sporting context, perhaps helping to preserve the notion that female participation in sport is not as natural as male participation in sport.
Data recorded during the 2004 AAFLA study (AAFLA, 2005) revealed that there were time frames where women’s sports received increased coverage. This coverage, however, was either provided during the Olympics or focused specifically on women’s tennis (AAFLA, 2005). In July 2004, 15.4% of KNBC’s coverage focused on women’s sports. This was a significant increase when compared to a total of 5.4% combined coverage for women’s sports in March and November (AAFLA, 2005). This increased coverage was attributed to the Olympic Games (AAFLA, 2005). Fox dedicated 6.8% of its coverage to women’s sports in November, an increase from 1.3% March and July combined coverage (AAFLA, 2005). Most of this increased coverage was given to women’s tennis and, “corresponded with a series of ads that Fox ran during the program, promoting a local WTA tennis tournament played at Los Angeles’ Staples Center” (AAFLA, 2005, p. 5). Though the AAFLA study suggests that this local tournament [italics added] was of little significance, it was in fact, the last tournament to close out the professional women’s season in 2004, where top finishers can win upward of one or two million dollars (N. Spencer, personal communication, March 16, 2006).

While an increase in coverage for women’s sports may portray the impression that improvements are being made and that women’s sports are being taken more seriously, women’s coverage lacked sports variety. The five sports shows that were reviewed illustrated that men’s sports varied with most stories focusing on collegiate and professional football and basketball and on professional baseball (AAFLA, 2005). Men’s ice hockey, boxing, tennis, golf, and auto racing also received considerable coverage, though not as much as basketball, football, and baseball (AAFLA, 2005). On the other hand, women’s tennis accounted for 42.4% of the coverage given to women’s sports,
supporting the finding that many women’s sports, especially team sports, are ignored (AAFLA, 2005). This statistic also supports the long-held assumption that coverage of certain women’s sports is appropriate if women wear skirts, wear skin-tight or revealing clothing, and/or have sex-appeal (AAFLA, 2005; personal communication, A. Apostolopoulos, N. Spencer, March 24, 2006).

The 2004 AAFLA study did report fewer instances of trivialization and sexualization of women’s sports (AAFLA, 2005). When women’s sports were covered, though rarely, they were often portrayed seriously (AAFLA, 2005). This was a welcomed change from previous instances of showing women’s sports clips as “non-serious gag features” (AAFLA, 2005, p. 5) and portraying women as sexualized objects. In the 1999 study, there were sexually suggestive jokes and comments when airing segments on Anna Kournikova, the Russian player whose tennis career was relatively brief, was plagued by injuries, and was unproductive overall. Although Kournikova held promise early in her career, she hit the peak of her tennis career in the latter 1990s and became more famously noted for her appearance as one of only two athletes named to People Magazine’s Fifty Most Beautiful People list in 1998 (Sony Ericsson, 2006).

Comments regarding a woman’s appearance were noted during this study (AAFLA, 2005) as well when close-up shots of female spectators in bathing suits were shown as reports of men’s baseball scores and highlights were given. Unfortunately, the sexualization of female athletes was not entirely eradicated in the 2004 study either. Based on recorded coverage, tennis’ Maria Sharapova was often the focus of sexualized humor and themes (AAFLA, 2005). One example was presented on KABC:

‘They slapped her on a billboard that read ‘the closer you get the hotter it
gets.’ Seventeen year old Maria Sharapova may have the same appeal as Anna Kournikova, but the young Russian can actually play tennis… Sharapova is a poster girl for the event’ (AAFLA, 2005, p. 15).

Other sports programs in the 2004 study (AAFLA, 2005) reported instances of commentators howling at segments that featured Sharapova. These comments and actions clearly place a focus on appearance rather than on athletic skill. Even if a player’s skill is recognized, it is likely that viewers will remember the sexualized comments as opposed to the athletic abilities of the female athlete and may come to place more value on appearance than skill. This emphasis on female athlete appearance, regardless of their age and/or skill, becomes the take-home message for viewers.

Other examples of sexualized themes were presented on other network affiliates as well. For example, KABC showed a segment on a women’s ‘football game’ where players would be competing wearing lingerie (AAFLA, 2005). A KNBC segment featured a trip to the White House made by the University of Southern California’s national champion women’s volleyball and football teams. Twenty-eight seconds of this segment focused on the football team while only six seconds was centered on the women’s volleyball team (AAFLA, 2005). Prior to this feature airing, the promotional teaser used to keep viewers watching was, ‘Coming up: President Bush scoring with the USC women’s championship volleyball team’ (AAFLA, 2005, p. 15). Both the ‘football game’ and the USC volleyball team segments contribute to the justification of trivializing women’s accomplishments, maintain and further reinforce the preservation of athletic turf as male terrain, and impress upon audiences that sexualization of women’s sports is acceptable.
Another portion of the AAFLA study (2005) analyzed coverage of lead stories. Out of the 228 sports segments included in the 2004 data, only eight of these included lead stories on women’s sports. This 3.5% coverage was not much better than the 2.9% coverage reported in 1999 (AAFLA, 2005). Often, lead stories set the tone for the remainder of the sports program and tend to be the longest segments of the program (AAFLA, 2005). They also “contain the highest production values (graphics, an interview, or sometimes even multiple interviews, game footage, musical montage, etc.)” (AAFLA, 2005, p. 12). If women’s sports were featured as a lead story, it was often women’s tennis or the Olympics that received this main focus (AAFLA, 2005).

When Margaret Carlisle Duncan and Michael Messner, researchers who conducted the 2004 Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles study, reviewed the proportion of male and female sports anchors and co-anchors in footage that was recorded for the AAFLA’s 2004 study, they found that out of a total of 394 anchors and co-anchors, 190 were white males, seventy-six were black males, forty were Latinos, sixty-six were Asian-Pacific males, twenty-two were white females, and there was no anchor representation among black females, Latinas, and Asian-Pacific females (AAFLA, 2005). Segments airing that required additional reporters found that women filled these roles nineteen out of a total of 202 times (AAFLA, 2005). Racial/ethnic minority women were absent from fulfilling these supplementary roles, as well (AAFLA, 2005). Women continue to hold fewer anchor roles in sports broadcasts in comparison to men, who according to Billie Jean King, “occupy 90 [percent] of the sports media” (Brennan, 2005, p. 12c; Roberts, 2005, p. 211). If women continue to hold such a low number of sports broadcast anchor roles and if women’s sports continue to be marginalized, women’s team
sports today will likely run into problems. More recently, as of September 2005, women’s professional soccer was struggling to formulate a new league, women’s softball had been eliminated as an Olympic sport, and the Women’s National Basketball Association was suffering from a lack of support (Brennan, 2005).

Messages conveyed through the AAFLA studies

Limited, sexualized, marginalized, and trivialized coverage of women’s sports, female athletes, and female commentators lends support to the idea that women’s sports are less serious and less important in comparison to men’s sports. This coverage may also lead adolescent females into believing that careers in the world of sports will make them unwanted and different and may very well be difficult to obtain, if not impossible. The lack of women in anchor and reporting roles lends further support to the notion that women are incompetent in the sporting realm. Are these the messages that are being conveyed to adolescent female athletes? Will female athletes value their participation less or even discontinue their participation in sport due in part to these messages that are conveyed via the media? Because adolescent female athletes view “women in lead commentating and even in ancillary roles less often than men” (AAFLA, 2005), will they feel as if their career options are limited? Do media outlets persuade female athletes into believing that their athletic involvement may force them to compromise traditional notions of femininity? Coverage as it currently exists and as it has existed for at least the past fifteen years, as reflected by the studies sponsored by the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles, may indeed influence adolescent female athletes’ participation in sport. Yet, as statistics reveal, the actual participation of girls in high
school sports during the time of these studies was much higher than the media’s dismal portrayal and limited coverage of female athletes seemed to reflect.

During the first year of the AAFLA media project, 1,858,659 girls played sports (academic year 1989-1990) (NFSHS, 2005b). The second media study was conducted in 1993 and during the 1993-1994 academic year, 2,130,315 girls were active in high school athletics (NFSHS, 2005b). Female high school sports participants rose to 2,675,874 in the 1999-2000 academic year (NFHS, 2005b). The third media study took place in 1999. These values clearly indicate increases, typically steady, in the sport participation of girls in high school. Overall, since the passage of Title IX in 1972, this steady participation increase has continued for girls in high school sports. In the 1971-1972 academic year, 294,015 girls played sports at the high school level (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005). After the passage of Title IX, however, high school sport participation for girls during the 1972-1973 academic year skyrocketed to 817,073 total athletes (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005). Furthermore, these statistics suggest that females are interested in sports [italics added]. This serves to provide potential evidence that these girls, females in general, and other viewers may want [italics added] to watch sports broadcasts and programs that are more in sync with their rising enrollments and interest in sports. Based on the sports coverage that was included in the four AAFLA studies, the increase in girls’ sports participation and their interest in sports is not reflected in sports broadcasts and programs. Statistics provided by the National Federation of State High School Associations (2005a), reveal that there were 2,908,390 girls who participated in high school athletics during the 2004-2005 academic year. If more girls are participating in sports and yet, sports news broadcasts continue to portray women’s sports as second best when compared to men’s
sports, continue to marginalize female athletes, and continue to sexualize the coverage of female athletes, more girls, and boys as well, are potentially missing out on the opportunities to view women’s sports and female athletes as natural [italics added]. Girls may discount their aspirations and place lower value on the option to continue their sport participation after high school and the option to pursue athletic-related vocations.

Because women’s sports are rarely covered in the sports segments and are given little consideration when they are shown, the sporting environment is portrayed as a world exclusively for men. Most of the sports commentators in the 2004 study were men and the assumption made by these commentators is that a significant chunk of their viewing audience is male, as well. To them, this may legitimize their lack of coverage of women’s sports and may legitimize the sexualization of women in their broadcasts. They believe that they are giving their fans what they want. When sports programs’ producers and anchors “perceive it to be in their interests, [they] give us not what they think we want, but what they want us to want [italics included]” (AAFLA, 2005, p. 23). The media serves as an outlet that can convey the naturalness [italics added] of men in sport and can remind women that they are invading territory that has not traditionally been associated with them. Duncan and Messner (AAFLA, 2005) consider this lack of coverage and trivialization when they note that, “we suspect that the lack of coverage of women’s sports, along with the sometimes insulting treatment of women might contribute to a dramatic narrowing [italics added] of what could be a more diverse audience for televised sports news shows” (p. 21). Thus, it is important to analyze potential ways that audience demand can be built for television programs.
Building audience demand for television programming

Televised sports programs utilize a variety of techniques in the attempt to build audience demand. On most occasions, however, sports programs attempt to build a specific type of audience (AAFLA, 2005). In most cases with ESPN sports programming, the audience that is being reached out to is one of a male heterosexual demographic (AAFLA, 2005). Because this is the lone demographic that ESPN and other sports programs/channels are attempting to reach out to, other demographics are often ignored. Frequently, female athletes and their sports tend to be disregarded except when the athletes or their sports are a topic of sexual humor, are considered non-serious, and/or allow for sexual voyeurism (AAFLA, 2005).

Three examples of women’s sports being ignored, marginalized, and/or placed at the center of sexual humor were presented by Messner, Duncan, and Cooky (2003). Further analysis of their AAFLA studies (these studies quantitatively and qualitatively broke down the coverage that female athletes and their sports received on network affiliates and ESPN) that were published in 1990, 1994, and 2000 revealed that in the March news segment coverage, even though women’s NCAA basketball was in season, “there was almost no coverage of this on the news and highlights shows” (Messner, et. al., 2003, p. 48). Another example of women’s sports being ignored occurred during the July news segments (Messner, et. al., 2003). Even though the WNBA was in season, it was rarely mentioned on the news and highlight segments (Messner, et. al., 2003). A final example occurred during the July segment, as well. Perhaps, one of the greatest moments for women’s sports at the turn of the century was the 1999 United States Women’s World Cup soccer victory. This momentous occasion provided an opportunity for women’s
sports to be brought to the forefront of news and sports segments. However, not only was this historic game shoved aside, but when it was discussed in news and sports segments, it was “humorously sexualized” in large part due to Brandi Chastain’s removal of her jersey after scoring the winning penalty kick in overtime versus Chinese goalkeeper Hong Gao (Messner, et. al., 2003).

Another method that is utilized to build audience demand is through the usage of “teasers” and lead stories. Lead stories are sports and news clips that are often conveyed as being of utmost importance. Messner, et. al. (2003) indicate that “teasers” are “previews [that] are intended to hold an audience through a commercial break, in anticipation of an exciting or important report” (p. 44). While a significant majority of these previews on network affiliates KNBC, KABC, KCBS, and ESPN focus on men, female athletes and their sports were not completely ignored. KNBC devoted 11.1% of its previews to women, KABC provided 14.8% of its previews for women, KCBS allotted 6.7% of its previews for women, and ESPN’s *SportsCenter* assigned 2% of its previews for women (Messner, et. al., 2003). While some of these percentages may appear to be appealing, in most cases, they should not be. When compared to the percentages that men’s sports received, women’s sports are portrayed as a mere “afterthought” or even worse, they are portrayed as if they never existed in the first place. Messner, et. al. (2003) also point out that, “a large proportion of these women’s sports previews appear to have been aimed at sexually and humorously titillating the viewer” (p. 45). A segment that featured professional wrestler, Sable, showed her posing in a bikini top and black hot pants and also referred to her posing in *Playboy* (Messner, et. al., 2003). Another segment highlighted women bungee jumping while nude, while another segment provided
coverage of Anna Kournikova (Messner, et al., 2003). This last segment, however, did not focus on Kournikova’s athleticism, but instead, focused on her sex appeal (Messner, et al., 2003).

In the 2004 AAFLA study, the attempt to build audience demand was focused merely on the goal to bring attention to outside promotions. When female sports and athletes were given coverage in the 2004 AAFLA study’s sports broadcasts, their coverage appeared to be tied to the promotion of outside influences as opposed to the sole promotion of female athletes and their sports. The AAFLA (2005) project reveals that:

Producers of sports news and highlights shows actively and consciously attempt to build audience demand for events in which they have a vested interest. … Audience-building appears to happen for women’s sports, though, only when the producers of a show see a direct link between their interests and the promotion of a particular women’s sporting event (p. 23).

This may illustrate that unless there is another reason for women’s sports to receive coverage, they most likely will not receive the coverage. It is evident that sports are dependent on sponsorships for funding. However, because sponsors tend to back sports organizations and athletes that receive a significant amount of coverage, many women’s sports and female athletes are not provided comparable funding and coverage in comparison to men (Bernstein, 2002). Arguments forwarded by the AAFLA (1990, 1994, 2000, 2005) and Bernstein (2002) likely support the notion that without sponsorships, coverage of women’s athletics becomes jeopardized. It is also possible that without coverage, women’s athletics may not be as able to secure sponsorships (A. Apostolopoulou, personal communication, March 24, 2006). Audiences may not desire
women’s sports because the producers and anchors do not want audiences to desire them. Continually setting women’s sports aside helps to ensure that this will happen. Overall, according to Bernstein (2002):

Since the media are seen as reflecting what is important and has prestige, especially in western society, this severe under-representation is seen as creating the impression that women athletes are non-existent in the sporting world or of little value when they do exist (p. 417).

As long as the media continues to be pervasive and valued as it currently is in society, female athletes, their athletic status, and their athletic accomplishments will continue to be trivialized and marginalized.

Visibility of Women’s Team Sports

While more media attention has been provided for female athletes and their sports, it is the type of coverage and also the sports that are covered that must be considered. Comparable to the revolutionary force behind Billie Jean King’s historic tennis defeat of Bobby Riggs in 1973 (30,492 fans were in attendance and an estimated ninety million people watched the match worldwide [Roberts, 2005]), the 1999 U.S. women’s national soccer team’s overtime thriller versus China helped to bring women’s team sports to media’s front pages and perhaps more importantly to the forefront of people’s minds (Roberts, 2005). As Spencer and McClung (2001) assert, “After the victory of the Women’s World Cup Soccer Team in 1999, soccer emerged from the 1990s as one of the most visible team sports for women in North America” (p. 329; Longman, 2001).
The mediated attention centered around the Women’s 1999 World Cup soccer match, which had a television rating of thirteen (this translates into reaching audiences in forty million households), sold over 650,000 total tickets, and seated 90,189 fans on-site, allowed adolescent female athletes and the remainder of society to view women competing in a team sport on a grand scale (Lehrer, 1999; Longman, 2001; Roberts, 2005). Women participating in a traditionally unfeminine sport, displaying strength and aggression, were under the watchful gaze of a nation and a media that historically had afforded them little coverage (Roberts, 2005).

Prior to the 1999 U.S. women’s national team World Cup win, other events in women’s team sports helped to build the stage for increased media coverage (Longman, 2001; Roberts, 2005). The 1990s marked an introduction to noticeable improvements in the amount of coverage that women’s team sports at the collegiate, Olympic, and professional levels received. As Flores (2000) reports:

Since ‘The Year of the Woman,’ as [1996] was widely known, there has been a boom in women's sports coverage, from the 1997 launch of the Women's National Basketball Association to the 1998 U.S. women's gold-medal hockey team to the 1999 Women's World Cup Champion U.S. team (p. 1).

Reflecting on improved coverage, Nelson (1999) asked a most appropriate question when she inquired:

What’s going on here? Over 90,000 people flocked to the final game of the Women’s World Cup. The Women’s National Basketball Association averaged almost 11,000 fans per game last year, and that’s up 12 percent this season. Even the Women’s Pro Softball League recently got better
TV ratings than a (men’s) Major League Soccer game shown during the same time slot (p. 55).

While attention provided to women’s sports and female athletes at the closing of the twentieth century and the opening of the twenty first century provided hope that trivialized and sexualized coverage would at least be partially eliminated, results from the 2000 and 2005 AAFLA studies revealed that change still needs to occur.

Returning to the spotlight on women’s sports in the 1990s, the nation took notice when the University of Connecticut women’s basketball team won the NCAA tournament championship and also finished their season undefeated at thirty-five wins and zero losses at the conclusion of the 1994-95 athletic season (NCAA, 2003). Connecticut became only the second team in the history of the NCAA’s hosting of the women’s college basketball tournament to win a national title and finish their season undefeated (NCAA, 2003). Texas’ women’s basketball team was the first team to accomplish the feat in the 1985-1986 athletic season when they won thirty-four games and lost zero (NCAA, 2003).

Throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, the University of Connecticut and the University of Tennessee women’s college basketball teams and their rivalry captured the interest of fans and media (English, 2002; Roberts, 2005; K. Smith, 2004; S. Smith, 1998; Strelitz, 2003). In fact, as Strelitz (2003) notes, “Since 1990, every game in the Tennessee-Connecticut rivalry has been nationally televised, elevating the sport of women’s basketball to new heights” (p. 1). Roberts (2005) adds that the rivalry “hoisted TV ratings while debunking the myth that the sport was a clumsy, second-rate alternative to the men’s game” (p. 215). Increased attention was also given to women’s
team sports at the 1996 Summer Olympics held in Atlanta, Georgia when the U.S women’s basketball, soccer, and softball teams won gold medals. While “more than 65,000 spectators crammed the stands to see the U.S. women claim a soccer gold medal, [the U.S. softball team] claimed the first gold medal ever awarded in softball” (Kemp & Shelton, 1996, p. 1). Overall, the “U.S. sent the largest contingent of female athletes—287— and the 3,779 women competitors (out of 10,440 total) represented a 26 percent increase from the previous summer games in Barcelona, Spain (Kemp & Shelton, 1996, p. 1).

The 1999 Women’s World Cup soccer victory for the U.S helped to establish the birth of the Women’s United Soccer Association in 2001 (Gardiner, 2003), while the same could be said for the 1996 U.S. Olympic women’s basketball team. Winning the gold medal that same year only provided further support for the continued development of women’s professional basketball in the United States (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003; PBS, 1997). Thus, in 1996, the American Basketball League (ABL) and the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) were created. While ABL teams started their games in October of 1996 and the first WNBA game was not played until June of 1997, the ABL eventually folded after competing for only two seasons (1996-1997, 1997-1998, and most teams played twelve games of the 1998-1999 season) (WNBA, 2006). The ABL folded in December of 1998. Even with the collapse of the American Basketball League (ABL), “women’s basketball in general [still] enjoyed a resurgence of visibility throughout the United States” (Spencer & McClung, 2001, p. 334) in the late 1990s and into the twenty-first century. Collegiate women’s basketball in the U.S. met an all-time high in the 1997-98 season as more than seven million fans attended their games
Women’s college basketball also scored the second-highest audience for a college basketball game shown on ESPN in 1999; 3.24 million households tuned in to the 1999 NCAA Women’s National Basketball Championship (Lopiano, 1999).

Softball in the 1990s also achieved a greater visibility as there was a thirty-seven percent increase in girls participating in high school softball throughout the entire decade (Lopiano, 1999). Professional women’s softball was able to use its 1996 Olympic success to its advantage when it secured a deal with ESPN2 to air Women’s Professional Softball League games for the 1997 season (Spencer & McClung, 2001). While women’s ice hockey leagues remained at an amateur status in the United States (Spencer & McClung, 2001), ice hockey also broke ground in non-traditional sports when the U.S. women’s ice hockey team captured gold at the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan (Avery & Stevens, 1997; Turco, 1999). In 1998, 23,380 females participated in ice hockey, an increase from 5,573 female participants of all ages in the 1990-91 season (Lopiano, 1999).

It might be assumed that because the U.S. women’s soccer, basketball, and softball teams experienced gold-medal successes at the 1996 Olympics that their teams would have received significant media coverage. However, Tuggle and Owen (1999) indicated in their 1996 Centennial Olympic Games research that coverage of women’s sports for these Olympics was typically provided for female athletes competing in “socially acceptable” individual sports, like gymnastics, diving, and swimming. In fact, the National Broadcasting Channel (NBC) failed to have even one reporter at the U.S. women’s softball championship game (Tuggle & Owen, 1999). Tuggle and Owen (1999) reported that out of a total of 181,386 total seconds of Olympic coverage that they
recorded, 85,926 seconds were devoted to female athletes and their sports. From this total of 85,926 seconds, women’s individual sports were provided with 54,778 seconds whereas women’s team sports were given 29,353 seconds (Tuggle & Owen, 1999). Women’s basketball was afforded 5,721 seconds, women’s soccer was given 1,773 seconds, and women’s softball was provided 2,118 seconds of total coverage (Tuggle & Owen, 1999). As Tuggle and Owen (1999) point out, NBC, a popular U.S. media outlet for coverage of the 1996 Olympic Games, failed to fully reflect the support and interest that were demonstrated by fans towards women’s team sports such as softball, soccer, and basketball for the 1996 Olympic Games.

Furthermore, and perhaps an even more disappointing revelation with regard to women’s sports coverage, was exposed in Bernstein’s (2002) research. Alex Gilady, Senior Vice-President of NBC Sports for global operations, stated in a November of 2000 interview that:

David Stern decided that he will make this business [the WNBA] grow. So he forced NBC because of the deal with the Men’s [Basketball]. So what?

If he stopped it today we would stop it immediately, immediately! It has no value, and no money (Bernstein, 2002, p. 419).

This bold statement seems to indicate that little value is attached to women’s athletics and that the WNBA would certainly perish without its affiliation with the men’s league, the NBA. More importantly this may indicate a lack of appreciation and funding provided to women’s basketball specifically and women’s sports generally. Gilady’s statement also supports the ideas that coverage is determined by a select group of media executives and that there is supreme value in having allies in powerful positions (personal
communication, N. Spencer, March 24, 2006). These executives decide what is important and what is not, what will be shown in the media and how it will be portrayed. Their actions serve to maintain and further reinforce the social practices of patriarchy and hegemony.

McDonald (2000) also discusses how hegemony is maintained via the marketing of the WNBA. McDonald’s analysis (2000) focused on the connection between postfeminism and the WNBA’s marketing. Postfeminism, as she explains, “does not refer to the absence of feminisms, but rather to the rising number of women (and men) who now take for granted the accomplishments and goals of second-wave feminism” (p. 36). Some of the accomplishments of second-wave feminism included: “increased gender equality in the workplace, access to reproductive health care and sexuality information, and civil-rights legislation that made discrimination on the basis of sex or race illegal” (Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004, p. 26). The marketing of the WNBA as a league promoting the opportunity for social change and as a league that encourages all women to discover their girl power “ignores deep-seated gender, race and class oppressions and repositions both the United States and American sport as meritocratic realms” (McDonald, 2000, p. 40). Furthermore, when WNBA products are purchased, consumers are not only buying something tangible, but they are also buying into the equitable-opportunity mindset that marketers are selling to them, even if this notion of equity ignores the reality of oppression (McDonald, 2000). As the WNBA is currently marketed and as it has been marketed since its inception in 1997, much of women’s sports history is disregarded (McDonald, 2000). A specific example of this was evident during the league’s first season in 1997, which also happened to be the twenty-fifth anniversary of Title IX.
Marketers promoted the league as a pro-Title IX venture but simultaneously forgot [italics added] to recognize the “repeated attempts by the then male-only National Collegiate Athletic Association to overturn [the legislation]” (McDonald, 2000, p. 41). Thus, marketers failed to share some of the more difficult struggles that female athletes and their sports have endured and instead, promoted the league, women’s sports, and athletic women as concepts that have always been accepted.

Sport marketers are particularly interested in women due to the fact that women represent a newer target market to which they can sell products (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2000). They also recognize that household purchasing power primarily resides with women. Women make “approximately 80 percent of a household’s purchasing decisions” (McDonald, 2000, p. 40). Spending on sports apparel hit the $33.6 billion mark in 1997 and out of this, women made close to 100 percent of the purchasing decisions for women’s and children’s sports apparel and close to fifty percent of the purchasing decisions for men’s sports apparel (Lopiano, 1999). While marketing and media personnel recognize a woman’s buying power and because their attempts to latch onto a new demographic may be shedding a new spotlight on women’s and girls’ sports, the role and aim of this attention must be understood. As McDonald (2000) elaborates:

This attention could be positive overall if it helps to promote women’s achievement, good health, and well-being. The attention could be negative, however, if it promotes products that exploit and undermine women or turns legitimate female role models—for example, premier athletes—into standard glamour girls who send the wrong message (p. xix).
An opportunity for additional income is appealing to marketers and corporate sponsors, as would be expected. However, selling and promoting female athletes as *glamour girls* may portray an undesirable image of the athletes.

The efforts of female athletes and women’s sports leagues, including the WNBA, continue to be marginalized when women’s leagues are marketed and promoted as an alternative to the selfishness and hip-hop aura of men’s professional sports leagues, especially the NBA (Cole, 2000; McDonald, 2000). This may also reflect racism. Promoters of the WNBA falsely sell the concept of equity and claim that it can be purchased. Thus, when consumers buy into the league, marketers can argue that equity has been reached (McDonald, 2000). While the marketing of the WNBA has surely introduced many men, women, girls, and boys to the world of professional women’s basketball, the league’s promotion has aided in the maintenance of hegemony. The media’s positioning of the WNBA and other women’s sports assist with the continuation of hegemony, as well. This maintenance is made possible through the placement of the WNBA as an alternative to men’s professional basketball.

Studying the institutionalization of the media in society is invaluable because of the way that the media often portrays society and individuals within this society; that is, we can see how these members come to formulate opinions about their society and ultimately, how they come to know and behave towards themselves and others (Bernstein, 2002; Dyer, 1993). Individuals come to learn their value and their place in a society partially based on how they are presented in the media. Bernstein (2002) explains that the media, “preserve, transmit and create important cultural information” (p. 416). Primary areas of focus when researching this coverage have centered on the amount of
coverage that female athletes and their sports receive and on how these athletes and their sports are portrayed (Bernstein, 2002; Duncan & Messner, 1998).

Additional Research Needed

Experiences of female athletes have changed throughout the years. This has been due to a mixture of changes regarding historical legislation that has been passed (Title IX), historical events that have occurred (1973 “Battle of the Sexes” and the 1999 U.S. Women’s national team World Cup victory), and philosophical shifts that have developed concerning girls’ and women’s athletics (NCAA’s takeover of the AIAW in the early 1980s). Each historical, philosophical, and social change provides new opportunities for additional research to be performed concerning girls and women in sports.

While a considerable amount of research has been conducted analyzing the role of socializing and historical influences for athletes (Acosta & Carpenter, 1994, 2004; Carpenter & Acosta, 2005; Greendorfer, 1983, 1987, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994; Higginson, 1985; Kane, 1988; Lewko & Greendorfer, 1988; Longman, 2001; Lopiano, 1999; Mechikoff & Estes, 2002; Morrison, 1993; Rader, 1996, 2004; Roberts, 2005; Shakib & Dunbar, 2004), gaps still exist. One of these gaps is in the documentation of girls’ high school sports experiences. Due to the lack of literature depicting and explaining the high school sports experiences of female athletes, however, this study will further address matters that relate specifically to the involvement of girls in high school sports. By utilizing qualitative methods to research the socializing agents and sports experiences of female athletes, I will attempt address gaps that previous research has failed to address. My research will focus on the high school sports experiences of female athletes. More specifically I ask: What role do socializing agents such as parents, coaches, peers, and the
media play in developing the experiences of female athletes? Noting that most athletes endure difficulties in their sports experiences, I am also interested in discovering what potential constraints are imposed on female athletes by their socializing agents and how the athletes cope with these potential constraints.
CHAPTER 3

Method

This study focuses on the high school sports experiences of female athletes currently competing on soccer and volleyball teams for a Division I Midwestern University. To obtain the experiences in their own words, I employed qualitative research techniques which allowed me to:

share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives. Researchers [who use] qualitative techniques examine how people learn about and make sense of themselves and others (Berg, 2004, p. 7).

In particular, I utilized focus groups and individual interviews to discover how former high school female athletes have been influenced by various socializing agents, such as parents, coaches, peers, and the media.

Participants

Twelve female collegiate athletes were selected to join this study and to discuss their experiences in sports by participating in one focus group and one individual interview. The five athletes who participated in the first group were members of an NCAA Division I, Midwestern university women’s soccer team while the other seven women were members of an NCAA Division I, Midwestern university volleyball team. The ages of participants in this study ranged from nineteen to twenty-two years old. The athletic eligibility of members of the soccer team included four freshmen and one senior participant. Of these five soccer participants, two were forwards, one was a defender, one was a midfielder, and one was a goalkeeper. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants
based on field positions that corresponded with the positions of women from the 1999 United States World Cup soccer team. Additional information regarding the participants’ introduction to sports and development through sports can be viewed in Table 1 in the Results section.

The other seven participants who were volleyball players consisted of three freshmen, three sophomores, and one junior with regard to their athletic eligibility. Three of these volleyball members were either left- or right-side hitters, one was a setter, one was a libero, and two members were middle hitters/blockers. Pseudonyms for this group were selected based on jersey numbers and positions that corresponded with members from the 2006 United States Women’s National Training Volleyball Team. Information regarding the sports introduction and development of these volleyball members can be found in Table 2 in the Results section.

In order to learn about the sports experiences of female high school athletes, I selected collegiate female student-athletes to participate in this study. My rationale for choosing this cohort was based on the assumption that it might be easier for them to reflect on high school sports after they had ceased participation as opposed to answering questions about their sports experiences while they were still participating in high school sports. Additionally, the rationale for selecting collegiate female athletes was based upon my personal experiences in high school and collegiate sports and my recognition that it was easier for me to reflect on and dissect my sports experiences after I was removed from them for several years (specifically, high school). It would have been difficult for me to fully assess my high school sports experiences while I was still immersed in that environment.
Collegiate female athletes were selected for this study due to convenience and accessibility, as well. Flick (2006) reveals that convenience refers to “a selection of cases [or participants] that are the easiest to access under given conditions” (p. 130). Specific conditions relevant to my data collection included time constraints and limited participant availability. Participants for this study were located via team homepages and rosters that were included on the University’s Athletics Department website.

**Instruments**

**Sports Participation Survey**

Prior to each focus group meeting, participants were given the Sports Participation Survey that was formulated specifically for this study. J. Schensul (1999) indicates that it is useful to collect demographic and numerical data “prior to the beginning of a group session” (p. 78). Surveys can be used to introduce a topic to research participants. In a sense, the survey is a tool that is used to frame the issue that is being explored (Madriz, 2003). A survey allows focus group and individual interview participants the opportunity to formulate their ideas and reflect on their experiences prior to being asked more specific, open-ended questions during the subsequent interview sessions. Incorporating a survey into the research setting also allows participants to warm up to their environment and may enable them to become more comfortable when they are asked to share their experiences (Flick, 2006).

Surveys can serve a variety of purposes in research studies. One purpose is that the survey enables the primary investigator to introduce broad “cultural domains” to participants (Schensul, J., 1999a). Cultural domains “are the major category of beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, perceptions, or policies that constitutes the focus of the study”
Additionally, combining surveys with interviews can allow a researcher to “obtain knowledge about the issue of the study” (Flick, 2006, p. 40) from a broader perspective (more than one approach is involved) and can allow a researcher to “mutually validate the findings of both approaches” (Flick, 2006, p. 40). By combining methods, a researcher can be provided with a fuller picture of the specific issue in question (Flick, 2006).

Questions included in the Sports Participation Survey (Appendix B) served as a preliminary tool to introduce participants to some of the subsequent questions that would be asked during their focus group session. Categories on the survey included participants’ youth sports background, high school sports background, and college sports background. Separating questions within these three categories allowed for information to be organized more easily.

*Focus groups*

The purpose behind using focus group interviews (Appendix C) for this research was twofold. Overall, this research attempted to discover more about the high school sports experiences of female athletes. At the same time, however, while females discussed their high school sports participation, it was important to create an environment where they felt comfortable enough to discuss their prior experiences and the role of influential factors that impacted their participation. By conducting these focus groups with other females of approximately the same age and with athletes from their own teams, the participants appeared to be more willing to openly discuss their experiences (Madriz, 2003). It appeared to me that the already-established-comfort-level allowed discussions to take on their own form and overall were more in depth (Madriz, 2003).
Focus group interviews provide a variety of benefits. One benefit includes the opportunity to “observe the most important sociological process—collective human interaction” (Madriz, 2003, p. 365). Madriz (2003) explains focus group interaction between participants and between participants and the investigator. Participant interface is also referred to as “horizontal interaction” (Madriz, 2003). As the primary researcher, focus groups allowed me to observe this interaction as well as “vertical interaction,” the interaction between the participants and the researcher (Madriz, 2003). Furthermore, using focus groups appeared to alleviate and remove restrictions that could have been imposed on participants via closed-ended questions and also presented the women, an often-marginalized, “other” population, a voice of their own (Wilkinson, 2004). Taking into consideration the opinions and sentiments of an often unheard group, such as females, allowed the participants to follow their own agenda as opposed to an outsider’s agenda (Madriz, 2003; Maynard & Purvis, 1994; Wilkinson, 2004). Additionally, the focus group setting provided the opportunity for an escape from the “artificiality” that other research methods and data collection entail and allowed me as the primary researcher to observe the normal, everyday experiences of people and social their behaviors (Wilkinson, 2004). Inherent in the utilization of focus groups is a system of “checks and balances” (Flick, 2006, p. 190). Focus groups allow common themes to emerge but also create opportunities for extreme views to be expressed. The more extreme views can serve as a check to the development of common themes and vice versa (Flick, 2006).

The focus group environment was conducive to self-expression and offered an opportunity for all members, not just a select few, to participate (Madriz, 2003). Madriz
(2003) describes further benefits that focus groups offer by indicating that “group interviews heighten the opportunities for participants to decide the direction and content of the discussion” (p. 371; Berg, 2004). This is relative to the power dynamic of a focus group, as Madriz (2003) explains:

Focus groups minimize the control the researcher has during the data gathering process by decreasing the power of the researcher over research participants. The collective nature of the group interview empowers the participants and validates their voices and experiences (p. 368).

Overall, the removal of a dominant presence eliminates an association with a hierarchy and visibly contributes to an establishment of a comfort level for participants (Wilkinson, 2004).

*Individual interviews*

Following the focus group meetings, I sought to conduct individual interviews with each participant in both focus groups (Appendix D). Individual interviews are “one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings… the most common form of interviewing involves individual, face-to-face verbal interchange” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 645). Furthermore, Fontana and Frey (2000) indicate that “interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but [are] active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results” (p. 646). During interview sessions, the primary investigator also contributes to the formulation and discovery of data. Peshkin (1982) asserts that the significance of information revealed during interviews along with the patterns that emerge are a result of both the subjects being interviewed and the primary investigator doing the interviewing.
Peshkin (1982) continues by suggesting that personal observations and what are made of them “result from the interaction of what is out there and what is in [the researcher]” (p. 63).

The individual interviews that were utilized in this research can be classified as both gendered and semi-structured interviews. The gendered interview recognizes that “the sex of the interviewer and that of the respondent do make a difference, as the interview takes place within the cultural boundaries of a paternalistic social system in which masculine identities are differentiated from feminine ones” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 658). Knowledge and ways of knowing are created based within the society that one inhabits and is amongst (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Gendered interviews take this into account (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Furthermore, group dynamics will be influenced in the individual interview in a relatively similar fashion as to how they were shaped in the focus group interview.

The interviews that were conducted were semi-structured, which as described by S. Schensul (1999):

Combine the flexibility of the unstructured, open-ended interview with the directionality and agenda of the survey instrument to produce focused, qualitative, textual data at the factor level. The questions on a semi-structured interview guide are pre-formulated, but the answers to those questions are open-ended, they can be fully expanded at the discretion of the interviewer and the interviewee, and can be enhanced by probes (p. 149).
Therefore, some direction is provided to participants; the primary investigator is responsible for maintaining some sense of structure (Schensul, S., 1999). However, participants are encouraged to share their experiences and are provided the freedom with which to do so (Schensul, S., 1999). During semi-structured interviews, the primary investigator is also allowed a sense of freedom to reword and reorder questions as seen fit (Berg, 2004).

Individual interview questions that were employed in this study centered on the role of parents, coaches, peers and teammates, as well as the media. Other questions focused on the level of support that athletes and their high school and college teams received from their communities, other students, and their high schools and universities. For the sake of clarification and/or elaboration, interview conversations also extracted material that was introduced during focus group sessions.

Procedure

**Obtaining approval and selecting participants**

Prior to any interaction with the individuals who were involved with my research, I obtained approval from the University’s Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). After officially receiving approval to begin collecting data for my research, I mailed an electronic request form to female athletes who were members of collegiate teams at the University during the 2005-2006 academic year/sports seasons (see Appendix E). Female athletes from the women’s basketball, cross country, gymnastics, soccer, swimming and diving teams, and volleyball teams were contacted electronically to ascertain if they would like to be a member of a focus group and participate in an individual interview session. After two members of the women’s soccer team responded
to the electronic mail request form indicating that they would be interested in joining the study, we established a particular date and time to meet for the first focus group. Because the ideal number for most focus groups ranges between five to seven participants (Berg, 2004; Flick, 2006; Krueger & Casey, 2000), I utilized snowballing techniques in order to obtain a sufficient number of participants. Through snowballing I was granted access to other individuals with whom I was not in regular contact. Snowball sampling is named as such “because the study group starts with a single individual and grows incrementally, as a snowball grows while rolling down a snow-covered hill” (Schensul, S., 1999, p. 269).

Similar procedures were carried out to find participants and times to meet for a second focus group. The second focus group consisted of seven members of the University’s women’s volleyball team (three freshmen, three sophomores, and one junior with regard to athletic eligibility). While participants’ academic and athletic eligibility statuses are included, specific eligibility statuses were not sought. I was primarily interested in having current and/or former high school athletes in my study. Snowball sampling was utilized to find participants for the second focus group, as well. After one volleyball member indicated that she was interested in joining the study, she provided me access to six of her teammates who were also interested in participating in the focus group and individual interview sessions.

Before proceeding with participant data collection in each focus group session, I sought to obtain informed consent from each participant (Appendix A). Upon arriving at the location where the focus groups were conducted and prior to the beginning of each focus group interview, I distributed informed consent forms to all participants. They were instructed to read them and ask questions if the consent form contained anything that they
did not understand. Consent forms (Appendix A) explained the purpose of my research and highlighted that as research participants, they could discontinue their involvement at any point without penalty. By signing their consent form, the focus group members agreed to participate in one focus group and one individual interview session (focus group sessions lasted approximately one and one half hours whereas individual interviews ranged from thirty to forty-five minutes). Participants were also presented with the option to be quoted and to be given a pseudonym or the option to not be quoted at all. All soccer and volleyball athletes indicated their willingness to be quoted if they were provided a pseudonym.

Prior to conducting the first focus group session I received input from my thesis advisor concerning the structure, order, and clarity of my questions. Her suggestions enabled me to condense my original focus group question guide and to eliminate several questions so that a total of only fifteen questions remained. Additionally, as a student in qualitative research methods courses, I was previously introduced to methods regarding the creation of interview guides and facilitation of interview sessions.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Both confidentiality and anonymity are important elements of research studies (Berg, 2004; Flick, 2006). Readers of reports that are confidential and anonymous should not be able to identify the participants of a particular study (Flick, 2006). Berg (2004) indicates that, “Ensuring confidentiality is critical if the researcher expects to get truthful and free-flowing discussions during the course of the focus group interview” (p. 140). While ensuring confidentiality and anonymity both attempt to satisfy the protection of participants engaged in a study, they are slightly different. Information that is kept
confidential will not be shared with outside parties not directly involved in the research process. On the other hand, information that is kept anonymous has no means of being able to be tied back to a particular person. Anonymity can be preserved via the usage of pseudonyms.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity for all components of my research (i.e., Sports Participation Survey, focus group transcripts, and individual interview transcripts) recorded notes and tapes were secured in a location known only to myself. Because focus group and individual interviews were tape recorded, tapes were kept in a secure place to protect the interests of the research participants. Protecting research participants’ interests was also the reasoning behind collecting each participant’s Sports Participation Survey after the focus group session was completed. Prior to beginning the focus group interview questions, participants were informed that focus group and individual interview tapes and transcripts would be destroyed upon the final submission of my thesis.

Data Analysis

Content analysis provided one of the ways used to analyze data obtained through various methods as outlined above. Berg (2004) describes data or content analysis as a “passport to listening to the words of the text and understanding better the perspective(s) of the producer of these words” (p. 269). Data or content analysis is an “objective coding scheme [that] must be applied to notes or data” (Berg, 2004, p. 265). Furthermore, data can not be properly analyzed and/or compared with other data or studies until information “has been condensed and made systematically comparable” (Berg, 2004, p. 265). Therefore, in the attempt to condense data, after recording focus
group and individual interviews, fourteen tapes were transcribed and transcriptions were analyzed line by line. After reading through transcripts several times, themes from the focus group and individual interview sessions began to emerge.

According to Berg (2004), “The analysis of qualitative data allows researchers to discuss in detail the various social contours and processes human beings use to create and maintain their social realities” (p. 7). In order to better understand the social realities of adolescent female athletes, multiple data sources were utilized. Multiple data sources, i.e., the Sports Participation Survey (Appendix B), focus groups (Focus Group Question Guide; Appendix C), and individual interviews (Individual Interview Question Guide; Appendix D), were not only used to gain perspective on the high school athletic experiences of female athletes but also allowed for the establishment of validity and reliability. Validity is a measure that is used to determine whether or not an outcome pertains or relates to the primary question that is being asked (Flick, 2006; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2005). Reliability is a measure that is used to determine how similar results are when a method is carried out through time (Flick, 2006; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2005). In the process of analyzing data, reliability can also be established when “the criteria of selection are sufficiently exhausted to account for each variation of message content and are rigidly and consistently applied so that other researchers or readers, looking at the same messages, would obtain the same or comparable results” (Berg, 2004, p. 268). A method of analysis can be deemed reliable if similar data framing categories are established by a variety of researchers through time.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) reveal that, “the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon
in question. Objective reality can never be captured. We can know a thing only through its representations” (p. 8). Because more than one data source can be used to represent [italics added] the experiences of female athletes and can also be used to understand and learn from their experiences, the Sports Participation Survey, focus groups, and individual interviews were employed in my research.

**Crystallization**

While triangulation is suggestive of a compelling strategy utilized to establish validity and reliability, as it has been discussed by researchers (Berg, 2004; Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2003; Schensul, 1999), the concept of crystallization is perhaps more suitable to this study. Crystallization is not dependent upon linearity or sequence and offers the opportunity to learn about experiences being researched from a three-dimensional perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). As opposed to a triangle, which can be unyielding and can leave perspectives trapped, a crystal reflects and refracts realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 2003). Different methods contributed to my understanding of the experiences of these female athletes. Each method and each individual explanation of experiences supported the proposal that, “there is no ‘correct’ way of telling [an] event. Each telling, like light hitting a crystal, reflects a different perspective” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 8) of the high school sporting experiences for female athletes in the early twenty-first century. Each athlete shared a different story because she experienced different relationships and opportunities with her parents, peers, coaches, and the media. However, while individual accounts differed, every story contributed to an understanding of the athletic experiences of adolescent female athletes. The individual accounts shed additional light on the socialization processes of female
athletes into sports and the socialization processes of female athletes within sports. These different stories that were collected through a multi-method approach assisted with the creation of new realities.

**Grounded Theory**

One theoretical framework that allowed me to analyze my findings in relation to the literature is known as grounded theory. According to Strauss (1987), grounded theory does not employ “a specific method or technique” (p. 5). Instead, a grounded theory approach is:

A style of doing qualitative analysis that includes a number of distinct features, such as theoretical sampling, and certain methodological guidelines, such as the making of constant comparisons and the use of a coding paradigm, to ensure conceptual development and density (Strauss, 1987, p. 5).

The grounded theory approach “gives priority to the data and the field under study over theoretical assumptions” (Flick, 2006, p. 98). Furthermore, when utilizing grounded theory, “theories should not be applied to the subject being studied but are ‘discovered’ and formulated in working with the field and the empirical data to be found in it” (Flick, 2006, p. 98).

Grounded theory begins with general concepts and develops into more centralized ideas (Charmaz, 2003; Strauss, 1987). It focuses around a particular topic of interest and “studied subjects are selected on their relevance to the research topic. They are not selected for constructing a (statistically) representative sample of a general population” (Flick, 2006, p. 98). Ideas and concepts emerge and are built from the ground
up (Flick, 2006). As such, the grounded theory in my research allowed me to theorize about the high school sports experiences of female athletes and the socialization processes of female athletes into and within sports.

Categories created during data analysis were based on information that was provided during focus group and individual interview discussion and centered on the main question being asked or the focal point of research. Preconceived categories are not utilized in the application of grounded theory. Using grounded theory allows for patterns to develop and become more visible to the researcher. As Charmaz (2003) suggests, “categories synthesize data and, moreover, interpret them and identify patterned relationships within them” (p. 82). Categories allow for data to be more easily understood by grouping data together. Essentially, through the usage of grounded theory, patterns took on a heightened relevance and meaning for me. However, this being said, it is important to note that “neither data nor meaningful interpretation of them simply await the researcher” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 91). When utilizing grounded theory in research, it must be made known that the researcher cannot separate him/herself from the actual processes of collecting and analyzing data. Charmaz (2003) supports this by saying that, “our understanding of respondents’ meanings emerges from a particular viewpoint and the vocabulary that we invoke to make sense of them” (p. 91). The researcher is as crucial to the research process and the results as the participants are.

Coding

Coding is a part of data analysis that allows a reader to better understand general themes or concepts that emerge from conducting a study (Berg, 2004).
As themes for each focus group and individual interview emerge, they can be compared with the emergent themes of other focus groups, interviews, and/or studies that have previously been conducted to identify “similar phrases, patterns, relationships, and commonalities or disparities” (Berg, 2004, p. 267). After similar or disparate patterns are determined, “sorted materials are examined to isolate meaningful patterns and processes, and identified patterns are considered in light of previous research and theories. [Thus], a small set of generalizations is established” (Berg, 2004, p. 267). Ultimately, dimensions or themes emerge from studies when researchers “immerse” themselves in documents and/or transcripts (Berg, 2004). As coding frames are created, it is important that “categories should have some direct relationship with the research question” (Berg, 2004, p. 285).

In the attempt to discover patterns in the information that was provided by female athletes while completing pre-focus group question guides and while describing their experiences during focus group and individual interview sessions, I read through and analyzed interview transcripts multiple times. As I analyzed the focus group and individual interview transcripts, themes and patterns began to emerge and thus the specific categories that can be viewed in Tables 1 and 2 were created. The categories that were created in these tables are centralized around athletes’ socialization into sport.
CHAPTER 4

Results

Most of the female athletes in this research study indicated that their high school sport experiences were largely shaped by their socializing agents and by their desire(s) to continue their athletic involvement in college. Because of these factors, I will discuss the relationship between high school and college sports and will discuss the role that parents, coaches, peers, and the media played in continually developing and creating new experiences for athletes while they were in college. While athletes acknowledged their intrinsic interest to compete and become involved with sports, it was evident that some form of external support during their sports journeys was necessary for them to continue playing and to become initially involved. As athletes relayed their experiences in sports during focus group and individual interview sessions, certain themes emerged. These themes can be found in Table 1.

Each individual focus group’s members were from the same team which seemed to create a greater comfort level for the participants directly involved in the research. As the primary investigator, it appeared as if individuals were at ease when discussing difficult experiences and often laughed with each other while sharing their experiences during focus group sessions. In one scenario, while Elizabeth struggled to share how the death of her grandfather impacted her level of involvement in sports, one of her teammates touched her shoulder. This cue, as well as the body language exhibited by participants with each other, conveyed the idea that all members were incredibly open with one another and were willing to share almost anything in the group setting. During individual interviews, I asked participants to elaborate on some of their responses
Table 1: Socializing Agents and Their Influence

**PARENTS**

- Support from both parents was important with athletes becoming and remaining involved in sports

**Mothers**
- Tended to provide emotional, relationship guidance to daughters
- Discussed emotional and relationship aspects of sports with daughters
- Tended to be more concerned with daughters’ happiness with sports

**Fathers**
- Discussed technical, skill, and game strategy aspects of sports with daughters
- Coached daughters’ teams more than mothers did
- One athlete mentioned how seeing her father’s sports pictures in his yearbook motivated her sports involvement/participation
- Tended to be more concerned with daughters’ success in sports; wanted daughters to be happy but success was important, as well

**COACHES**

- Pressure to specialize in a sport contributed to athletes dropping out of sports other than their primary/college sport
- More soccer players specialized and specialized earlier in their sports careers in comparison to volleyball players
- 9/12 athletes preferred having male coaches as opposed to female coaches
- 3 athletes did not have a preference (two of these athletes had little experience with female coaches)
- Coach preference was largely based on prior experiences with coaches
- Volleyball players had experienced more female coaches in their sports involvement, yet they still preferred male coaches

**Positive Experiences**
- Some recruiting experiences were “fun”; it was nice to know that coaches acknowledged talent and years of hard work in sports
- Coaches provided support during the recruiting phase of athletes’ career; willing to make phone calls, send statistics, send game tapes to college programs/coaches
- Coaches reminded athletes how much they loved sports when/if they suffered from burn-out; offered advice and support; served as mentors

**Negative Experiences**
- Most recruiting experiences were classified as stressful, fake, and/or deceitful
- Athletes had to rely on their gut when selecting a program to play sports for; select the school/coach that puts up the better front
- Coaches’ lack of knowledge contributed to athletes becoming frustrated and quitting some sports teams
Table 1: Socializing Agents and Their Influence (cont’d)

COACHES

Negative Experiences (cont’d)
- Disliked female coaches discussing “feelings” and “emotions” during sports participation/after games

TEAMMATES/PEERS

Positive Experiences
- Athletes relied heavily on sports and on their fellow teammates to establish their identities
- Sports at all levels provided athletes with automatic friends (especially in high school and college where establishing an identity and being recognized for something were most important for the athletes)
- Teammates motivated athletes to continue their involvement in sports in youth, high school, club, and college sports

Negative Experiences
- A few athletes revealed that politics made high school sports difficult; they felt that certain players received privileges solely based on their “family’s name”
- One athlete shared how she was hazed by older teammates
- Peers not involved with sports did not always seem to understand their athletic friend’s sports schedule; At times, athletes felt that they were sacrificing time that could have been spent with these other friends due their intense sports involvement

MEDIA

- 10/12 athletes watch ESPN’s SportsCenter
- Media was not mentioned as frequently as parents, coaches, and teammates/peers were in the sport socialization process

OTHER

- Time commitment of sports participation was the most disliked aspect of sports
- Time commitment of sports participation made some athletes feel as if they were sacrificing other aspects of their social life (e.g., parties, proms, spending time with friends not involved in sports)
- Most athletes became involved and remained involved in sports due to an inherent competitive drive; drawn to sports because they were competitive
- Athletes were motivated to play sports and continue playing sports because they wanted attention and recognition from parents, family, peers, teachers, etc.
- Playing sports gave athletes “status” and allowed them to receive “automatic respect” from some students
provided during their focus group session. Specifically, most members discussed in depth the role that their families had in introducing them to sport and the support that their families provided along the way.

*Socialization into and within sport: Early sport involvement*

All members of the soccer team (Mia, Brandi, Sarah, Tracy, and Tisha) appeared to have an intense sports background. This was also visible with the athletes on the volleyball team: Nicole, Elizabeth, Dominique, Ashley, Marcie, Amy, and Sophia. By the age of nine, all members of the soccer and volleyball teams were involved on at least one sports team (see Tables 2 and 3). Dominique, a member of the volleyball team, was the last member to join an organized sports team at the age of nine. Prior to joining official teams, female athletes were active in sports in their physical education classes, during school recess periods, and in their spare time, often in their backyards. Club-level sports participation also began at early ages for most research participants. Prior to entering junior high school, each member of the soccer team had already begun her involvement with club soccer. Around the ages of eleven or twelve, most of the female athletes had begun playing on club-level teams. However, Tracy was involved on a club soccer team at the age of six. A majority of the members of the volleyball team started to participate on club volleyball teams as junior high and high school students, which was later than most soccer team members. Marcie and Sophia were the first members of the volleyball team to begin club volleyball at the age of twelve. Other group members began at the ages of thirteen (Nicole, Elizabeth), fifteen (Dominique), and sixteen (Amy).

Club-level sports, also referred to as travel teams, Olympic Development Program (ODP) teams, and Junior Olympic (JO) teams, typically include higher caliber
### Table 2: Early Sport Experiences for Team 1

**KEY** (For Tables 1 and 2)

- **MS**: Middle School
- **R**: Recreation
- **A**: Area
- **X-Country**: Cross Country
- **HS**: High School
- **C**: Club
- **B-ball**: Basketball
- **S-ball**: Softball
- **V-ball**: Volleyball

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>SPORTS PLAYED</th>
<th>SIBLINGS IN SPORTS</th>
<th>PARENTS SPORTS WHILE GROWING UP</th>
<th>PARENTS IN CHILD’S SPORTS</th>
<th>RELIANCE ON PARENTS CHANGED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MIA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Soccer (C)</td>
<td>Older sister in soccer</td>
<td>Dad: Playground Basketball</td>
<td>Watched dad umpire baseball games and play b-ball and s-ball growing up</td>
<td>Club, HS (still talks with dad)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Soccer (MS)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mom (R) Softball</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B-ball</td>
<td></td>
<td>*Neither played on school teams</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S-ball</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRANDI</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Soccer (C)</td>
<td>No siblings</td>
<td>Dad</td>
<td>Dad was her b-ball coach for a few years for her junior league team</td>
<td>College (still relies on dad)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Soccer (A)</td>
<td></td>
<td>HS Baseball</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>X-Country</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Track</td>
<td></td>
<td>HS Cheerleading, Dance College Cheerleading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>B-ball</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARAH</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Soccer (C)</td>
<td>Older brother in football and baseball</td>
<td>Dad</td>
<td>Mom went into labor at a track meet; every Friday went to dad’s football games; every Sat. went to track meets; went to bro’s football and baseball games</td>
<td>Club (still relies on parents for mental aspects, not so much for skills)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Soccer (R)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRACY</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Soccer (C)</td>
<td>Two older sisters in soccer</td>
<td>Dad</td>
<td>Watched TV sports with parents, mostly dad; mom and dad coached (R) league soccer teams</td>
<td>Club HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Soccer (R)</td>
<td></td>
<td>College Baseball</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>S-ball (R)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S-ball (MS)</td>
<td></td>
<td>HS Tennis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TISHA</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Soccer (C)</td>
<td>Four sisters in soccer,</td>
<td>Dad</td>
<td>Parents coached teams up until MS; Dad ➔ Soccer; post-game lectures</td>
<td>HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Soccer (HS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>B-ball (MS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S-ball</td>
<td>B-ball, and S-ball</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Track</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>V-ball</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Early Sport Experiences for Team 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PSEUDONYM</th>
<th>AGE BEGIN. ORG'N'ZD SPORTS</th>
<th>SPORTS PLAYED</th>
<th>SIBLINGS IN SPORTS</th>
<th>PARENTS SPORTS WHILE GROWING UP</th>
<th>PARENTS IN CHILD'S SPORTS</th>
<th>RELIANCE ON PARENTS CHANGED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NICOLE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Soccer (C)</td>
<td>Sister (+2y)</td>
<td><strong>Dad</strong> HS Baseball, B-ball</td>
<td></td>
<td>14 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>S-ball (C)</td>
<td>in B-ball, Soccer</td>
<td><strong>Mom</strong> HS cheerleader</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>V-ball (C)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELIZABETH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tee-ball</td>
<td>No siblings</td>
<td><strong>Dad</strong> HS, College baseball,</td>
<td></td>
<td>Parents input still matters, esp. mattered when being recruited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adult men’s softball league</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>B-ball</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Mom</strong> No chances to play</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Track</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>V-ball (C)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOMINIQUE</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9, 12</td>
<td>S-ball (R, C)</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td><strong>Dad</strong> HS B-ball, baseball,</td>
<td></td>
<td>Depended on sport; V-ball never really followed dad’s input but followed his input for B-ball and softball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>B-ball</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Com. College B-ball, baseball Adult leagues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12, 15</td>
<td>V-ball (S, C)</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Mom</strong> HS B-ball (1yr)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASHLEY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td><strong>Dad</strong> HS football, track, B-ball</td>
<td></td>
<td>Coaches have always been more influential with skill aspects, but still discusses sport with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>S-ball</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Mom</strong> No org. sports but liked B-ball, softball</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>V-ball</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>B-ball</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Track</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARCIE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tee-ball</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td><strong>Dad</strong> HS baseball, golf</td>
<td></td>
<td>For primary sport, never really relied on parents for technical direction; relied on coaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>S-ball (C)</td>
<td>Baseball</td>
<td><strong>Mom</strong> No sports</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>V-ball (C)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSEUDONYM</td>
<td>AGE BEGIN. ORGAN’ZD SPORTS</td>
<td>SPORTS PLAYED</td>
<td>SIBLINGS IN SPORTS</td>
<td>PARENTS SPORTS WHILE GROWING UP</td>
<td>PARENTS IN CHILD’S SPORTS</td>
<td>RELIANCE ON PARENTS CHANGED</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMY</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>S-ball</td>
<td>No siblings mentioned</td>
<td>Dad HS track, X-Country Mom HS B-ball, V-ball</td>
<td>Dad was soccer coach when she was eight; Discuss sports on T.V.</td>
<td>Parents never really coached from sidelines; relied more on coaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>V-ball (C)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOPHIA</td>
<td>7, 12</td>
<td>S-ball (R, C)</td>
<td>Older Brother</td>
<td>Dad Rec. Baseball Mom HS Pom Squad capt.</td>
<td>Discusses sports with both parents regularly; spectators at games; goes to dad for emotional support; dad sponsored youth softball teams</td>
<td>17 yrs old Club and HS V-ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10, 12</td>
<td>B-Ball (S, C)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10, 12</td>
<td>V-ball (S, C)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
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</table>
competition and often require more practice time of participants when compared to most recreation leagues. This is often necessary or is at least relayed to athletes by their coaches in order for them to develop and “perfect” their skills. This being said, it must be noted that there are different levels of competition within these clubs. Not all clubs cultivate the same level of competition. Nicole touches on the levels associated with Junior Olympic volleyball by saying, “Junior Olympics is a huge thing. There are different levels, national, regional, and state” (personal communication, April 28, 2006). She participated in Junior Olympic volleyball at the national level for five years. For the sake of clarification and description, the term “club” will be substituted in these results for all advanced, elite playing levels including travel teams, ODP teams, JO teams, and actual club teams themselves.

In the attempt to better explain the categories used in the tables, I have included the athletes’ pseudonym, the age that the athlete began her participation in sports, all of the sports in which the athlete participated, whether or not the athlete had a sibling(s) participating in sports, whether or not the athletes’ parents played sports while they were growing up, the extent to which the athletes’ parents were involved with the child’s sports involvement (i.e., coaching, supporting in a fan capacity, managing, keeping score, etc), and the point in the athlete’s sports development when she stopped relying on her parents as much for sport-specific instruction/guidance. While the categories branched off into different themes, they still focused on the high school sports experiences of female athletes and thus, helped to provide detailed explanations that I sought to discover.
Some of the themes specific to my research that emerged included: difficulties with college recruiting trips, pressure from socializing agents to specialize in a particular sport, and communication differences between mothers and fathers with their children when sports were a topic of conversation (i.e., fathers tended to discuss technical and skill aspects of sports with their daughters while most mothers tended to discuss emotions and relationship aspects of sports with their daughters).

While soccer and volleyball team members became involved with advanced-level teams at relatively early ages, several of them were members of recreation teams, as well. Of the fourteen participants, nine of them mentioned or alluded to their involvement in recreational sports. One of the soccer group members, Tracy, revealed that her involvement in recreational soccer around the age of six met a temporary obstacle:

I wanted to choose soccer. There actually weren’t enough girls to have a girls’ team, so I had to play on the boys’ team. My parents didn’t want me to have to do that so they switched me over to play softball, but I never really liked it that much. Then I got a coach I hated, so they switched me back to soccer, which I liked better anyway. It took a while to get a league going for girls (personal communication, April 21, 2006).

At six years of age, Tracy returned to playing soccer at the recreational level and continued her club-level participation throughout her recreational participation hiatus. While in middle school, she also played softball for one year but due to conflicting practice schedules, Tracy was unable to go to both practices. Her softball and soccer coaches were unhappy with her attendance and ultimately made her choose one sport over another. She chose soccer.
At times, involvement in a particular youth sport was the result of a lack of opportunity to participate in other sports, as was the case with Tracy and Sarah. Sarah participated in soccer at a young age and indicated that she chose soccer partially because with all of the other sports “you had to be older for them. You had to be older to play softball and volleyball. When I already had soccer in my life it had become a habit, and I didn’t want to break it” (personal communication, April 21, 2006). Dominique, a member of the volleyball team, met a temporary obstacle when a girls’ basketball league was not available for her. Instead, she participated in a boys’ basketball league when she was ten and eleven years old.

Brandi, an only-child and a member of the soccer team, began her sports involvement at a young age just as her teammate Tracy had. She started playing basketball in elementary school at the age of seven and also played soccer at the recreational and club-levels during elementary and middle school. When she was twelve, her father helped her to get into an area soccer try-out. Brandi said:

If it wasn’t for him pushing me to do that, I probably would have stayed with the city team that I had been playing on. I don’t know how much better I would have gotten had I stayed playing on that team. In seventh grade with this new team, I started playing on a higher level, and from there it just went up (personal communication, April 21, 2006).

Like Tracy, Brandi was also active in other sports but involvement in these other sports lasted only for a short period of time. Brandi continued:

I did cross country in eighth grade and track in seventh grade. I wanted to do track in high school, but the track coach wouldn’t let me do both
soccer and track. So, I had to choose one. Since I had invested more time into soccer and because I liked soccer, I stuck with soccer (personal communication, April 21, 2006).

These statements reveal that pressure from coaches may begin at an early age for many athletes. The stories also indirectly refer to the presence of pressure to compete on elite teams at an early age if athletes have any desire to “improve” their skills and compete on a Division I collegiate level. Often, in order to enhance their skills, several hours of practice and training are required weekly. The athletes acknowledged that they sacrificed a great deal for their sport. Obviously, there is something that has kept them from discontinuing their participation.

Sarah, a soccer defender, devoted a significant portion of her time developing her soccer skills when she was young. She started playing recreational soccer at the age of four and moved to club-level soccer when she was eleven. Her parents encouraged her participation in soccer because “with gymnastics and other activities [she] was done after a day. [Her parents] encouraged her to stay with [soccer] and were influential in her continuing her sports participation” (personal communication, April 21, 2006). Soccer was a sport that she enjoyed.

Tisha, a star midfielder on her soccer team, began her involvement in school-sponsored and club-level soccer at the age of ten. As a nine and ten-year old she also participated on a school-sponsored basketball team and ran track and played volleyball for one season each on school-sponsored teams when she was twelve. She played softball for two years in high school but quit after her sophomore season saying that:

[She] had to make a decision [between] either soccer or softball, and of
course, [she] loved [soccer], so [she] dedicated [her] spring season to
getting better in soccer for college. It pretty much came down to so many
conflicts. It came down to just choosing, because [she] couldn’t do it. It
came down to school, practice softball until five, soccer until eight, and
then [she] had to come home with homework. It just was too much
(personal communication, April 21, 2006).

Part of what helped Tisha to make her choice was the skill that she possessed in soccer.
Her elevated skills contributed to her attachment to the sport. When she finally had to
make a decision based on time conflicts, Tisha selected soccer; the sport she envisioned
playing in college.

Growing up with sports was a part of Mia’s life, as well. She was involved with
softball, basketball, and soccer as a child, but ended her participation in softball during
elementary school. When she was twelve, she played Amateur Athletic Union (AAU)
basketball (an elite-level, traveling team) and played on a club soccer team. Mia played
soccer and basketball for school teams as well but decided to terminate her basketball
career before her junior year in high school. She recalled quitting basketball in high
school, “I always wanted to quit basketball, but my parents wanted me to do it. I stopped
playing eventually because my parents forced me to do it. When I quit, my parents
threatened to take away my car” (personal communication, April 21, 2006).

While Mia’s experiences with quitting basketball were not characteristic of the
experiences relayed by other members on the soccer or volleyball group, they still convey
the incredible amounts of pressure and the difficult decisions that high school athletes
have to make regarding their future sports participation. All of the athletes in this
research had to end their involvement in at least one sport at one point in their athletic career. More times than not, this decision was assisted by parents, coaches, and/or peers/teammates.

Members of the volleyball team shared similar stories regarding their early entrance into sports and the teams with which they were involved. Marcie’s first sports experience came at age five when her father signed her up for a tee-ball team. Her father also enrolled her in sports camps as a youngster. When she was twelve, she joined her first club softball and volleyball teams. Nicole’s parents were responsible for signing her up for sports leagues as well. She began playing on a club soccer team at the age of four. Her love for sports was developed because her “mom and dad played outside with [her] all the time, whether it was soccer or tee-ball” (personal communication, April 27, 2006). As a twelve year old, Nicole played on her first club softball team and joined her first club volleyball team a year later. Ashley’s initial sports interaction began when she was five in soccer and softball leagues. At the age of twelve she was actively engaged with volleyball, basketball, and track squads.

In addition to the important role that parents played in introducing participants to sports and assisting with their continued development in sports, siblings took on a valued role. Dominique illustrated this by saying, “I started playing at nine years old because my brother was in sports and I was jealous that he got all the attention, so I decided to start playing” (personal communication, April 27, 2006). Once she was involved with sports, Dominique continued her participation. She was involved with basketball at the age of ten, joined a club softball team and played volleyball at the age of twelve, and
participated on her first club volleyball team when she was fifteen. Ashley also explained how both her parents and her older sister encouraged her sports participation:

I started playing soccer when I was five and then went to softball right after that. I had an older sister so I was really competitive with her, and that encouraged me. My parents were influential in keeping me interested, as well (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

It was evident that siblings contributed to the participation of members of the soccer focus group, too, and in certain cases, siblings’ involvement in sports led women on both the soccer and volleyball teams to begin playing sports. Four out of five soccer team members had siblings who were involved with athletic activities and of these four, Mia, Tracy, and Tisha had sisters who played soccer. It comes as no surprise that they all also decided to follow in the soccer path that had already been established by their siblings. Mia admits that having an older sister who played soccer influenced her decision to engage in the same sport. She “wanted to follow her [older sister] around and do the same types of things that she was doing” (personal communication, April 21, 2006).

Playing soccer was certainly no exception to this rule. Sarah had an older brother who played baseball and football so getting involved with sports seemed like an easy decision. According to Sarah, “I saw him play sports and wanted to do what he was doing” (personal communication, April 21, 2006). Of the seven volleyball focus group members, five of them had siblings, and four of them recalled growing up watching their older brothers and sisters play sports.

Additionally, because older siblings were receiving attention for their involvement in sports, focus group members wanted to get involved in and remain
involved in sports. Earning recognition from their parents was important. Like most young children, Brandi, Tisha, Sarah, Mia, and Tracy wanted to be recognized for doing something well. Mia indicated that she had two older half-siblings, and as the youngest child she “liked the attention that [she] got from [soccer]” (personal communication, April 21, 2006). Tracy also provided evidence to support how receiving attention was important to her involvement in sports:

I loved the attention that I got from my parents. On game days when you win, that’s why I loved it so much. I was the youngest of three, so I was always fighting for attention. Because I got so much attention for it, I stuck it out. Out of [my three sisters] I was the only one who really did (personal communication, April 21, 2006).

This also sheds a bit of light on the idea that receiving attention for sports participation is motivation even when difficulties arise during involvement. Case in point, when Tracy suffered from burn-out during her junior year in high school, it was support from her high school coach along with the attention that accompanied her participation that kept her playing the game that she loved.

When she was younger, Sophia was always playing sports with her older brother and other boys in the neighborhood. As soon as she was old enough to play in a recreational soccer league (around five years of age), her parents signed her up. As a seven year old, Sophia played softball recreationally and became involved with club softball when she was twelve. She also played club basketball and volleyball when she was twelve and played both of these sports at the age of eleven. While Elizabeth and Amy were growing up, as the only children in their household, they did not benefit from
siblings who encouraged their involvement in sports. Because of this, they seemed to have an even stronger attachment to their parents.

Elizabeth, a middle hitter on her volleyball team, started playing tee-ball at the age of five and moved on to soccer and basketball when she was six years old. In junior high, she joined the track team and began her involvement with club volleyball when she was thirteen. Amy’s parents were responsible for signing her up for her first softball and soccer teams when she was six years old. She continued participating in sports for her schools and played with her first club volleyball team as a sixteen-year old.

All five soccer women had parents who were active in their sports involvement and the sports involvement of their siblings if participants had them. The same thing can be said about the parental involvement in the lives of the seven volleyball players and their siblings if participants had them. Marcie shares how her father aided her development in volleyball:

I got started out with local club teams and worked my way up to playing on more competitive teams. My dad was really involved with this because if he found out about different try-outs he would tell me about them and encourage me to go to them. He was willing to take me to all of them.

(personal communication, April 27, 2006).

So even though Marcie had already been introduced to softball (her father was her softball coach while she grew up) and had been playing for close to seven years before she started club volleyball, her father was still instrumental in her being socialized into an additional sport. Sophia, along with several other volleyball teammates and soccer focus
group members, acknowledged how important her parents were in getting her to and from
games when she was younger and while she was growing up with club sports:

My junior and senior year when I played club volleyball, we traveled a lot.

I think we traveled out of state maybe ten times in like seven months.

They took me to every single tournament. They just made time for me

(personal communication, April 27, 2006).

One soccer player revealed, however, that her parents did not provide an overwhelming
amount of support for her oldest sister. Tracy indicated that her oldest sister “had a lot of
issues because there were three daughters and only two parents. A lot of her [sister’s]
games were the ones that got missed. She got kind of resentful and quit” (personal
communication, April 21, 2006). This helps to show that parental support prior to and
during participation in sports is important for children as they mature in sports and likely
plays a role in the child’s decision to continue playing sports.

Parents’ Prior Involvement in Sports

The five soccer players and the seven volleyball team members’ parents were
involved with sports while they were younger. Soccer team members Brandi, Sarah,
Tracy, and Tisha had parents who participated in high school sports, and the fathers of
Sarah and Tracy were involved with collegiate sports teams. Sarah’s father played
Division I college football before a knee injury terminated his career, and Tracy’s father
played Division I college baseball and was even in the Major League Baseball draft,
although he was never picked up by a Major League team. Reflecting on her father’s high
school involvement in baseball Brandi stated that:

My dad was actually really good at baseball and then tore some ligaments
in his knee and had to get surgery. That pretty much ruined his career. He probably could have played in college which is sometimes in the back of my mind of why he wanted me to [play sports in college] (personal communication, April 21, 2006).

While he never outright vocalized his desires for Brandi to play collegiate sports because he was unable to, Brandi still felt pressured to play “at the next level” (personal communication, April 21, 2006) because she wanted to make her parents proud and because they had financially supported her development through soccer. Brandi also brings attention to the idea that her father is no longer participating in sports due to an injury and not because of a lack of opportunity to play, whereas most participants’ mothers are/were not active in sports due to limited opportunities (other than cheerleading or dance) to participate when they were younger (Sarah and Elizabeth mention this about their mothers) or due to familial obligations (Tisha provides an example of this with her mother).

The mothers of Sarah, Brandi, Tracy, and Tisha were active to some degree while they were in high school. Sarah’s and Brandi’s mothers were cheerleaders, and Brandi’s mother was also involved with dance. Brandi’s mother went on to be a cheerleader in college. Sarah’s mother participated in summer recreational softball leagues but never had the opportunity to join a high school team because her school did not offer teams on which girls could play. Sarah conveyed her mother’s dismay with the lack of opportunities to participate in sports:

My mom, unfortunately for her, grew up pre-Title IX, so all she could do was be a cheerleader. She didn’t really have the opportunities that I had,
and she always tells me that. She always says, ‘I wish I had what you have because you have opportunities to do so much with sports that I never had.’ She played softball in the summer for recreation teams, but she wasn’t able to play for a school team. She’s coaching high school track and cross country now [at the same school where she was a student and is currently a counselor]. I think she’s making up for not being able to play when she was younger (personal communication, April 24, 2006).

Tracy’s mother played tennis in high school and quit when her doubles partner left (perhaps, due to graduation). Her mother claimed that she was never really that good at tennis. Tisha’s mother participated in high school volleyball and track but did not continue her participation past high school due to familial obligations.

Volleyball focus group members’ parents were also involved with sports while they were growing up. Ashley indicated that her dad participated on his high school track and field team while her mom “liked to play basketball and softball but sports weren’t as organized for girls when she was in school as they are now” (personal communication, April 27, 2006). According to Dominique, sports were a part of her father’s life ever since he was young. He “even played basketball and baseball at a community college. [Her father] has always been involved and used to play in adult leagues, too. [Her] mom did basketball for a year, but stopped when she realized she wasn’t athletic” (personal communication, April 27, 2006). When asked if her parents currently participate in sports leagues, Dominique relayed that her father “doesn’t play anymore due to a bad hip” (personal communication, April 27, 2006), but that her mother “plays slow pitch softball” (personal communication, April 27, 2006).
This particular communication raises an interesting idea that could be worthy of future analysis. Dominique mentioned that her mother stopped playing basketball in high school after only a year because she recognized that she was not skilled enough to continue playing and that she did not like running. However, her mother is still involved with an adult softball league. There is an obvious interest in participating in sports and/or socializing with other people. Perhaps Dominique’s mother discontinued her participation, not due to a lack of her own athleticism, but due to the lack of opportunity or encouragement to improve her skills. Even though Dominique believed that her mother “was in high school around 1976” (personal communication, April 27, 2006) and Title IX legislation was passed in June 1972, it is still quite possible that her mother had few opportunities to enhance her abilities in the sport. It is also possible that Dominique’s mother is involved with sports for social interaction. Both of these possibilities should be kept in mind.

Nicole and Marcie discussed the opportunities that were available for their mothers, as well. Nicole shared that while her “dad played high school baseball and basketball and played college baseball, [her] mom didn’t really have any sports to play when she went to high school other than cheerleading” (personal communication, April 28, 2006). She remained active, however, by “skiing and riding horses” (personal communication, April 28, 2006). Marcie’s father was an avid baseball player, but her mother was not involved in sports. Perhaps, Elizabeth best summarized the participation opportunities for most focus group members’ mothers:

When my mom was in high school, there were no opportunities for women.

My mom has told me stories that the only thing that resembled athletics as
they are now was playing in gym class. Girls could be cheerleaders, too,
but that wasn’t anything super athletic (personal communication, April
28, 2006).

Elizabeth’s father, however, was “super involved in organized sports when he was
younger” (personal communication, April 28, 2006). Additionally, Sophia’s mother was
the captain of her Pom [sic] squad in high school but didn’t do anything “seriously sports
related.” Her father played on a recreation baseball team while he matured. Amy’s
mother and father were both involved in high school athletics. Her father ran track and
cross country and her mother played basketball and volleyball. While her mother’s
restrictions to participating in high school sports were not specifically discussed, it was
noted that her parents were both involved in sports in Canada where Title IX legislation
was not applicable.

It appears as if parents’ encouragement of their children to become involved and
remain involved in their children’s sports activities as well as their prior involvement in
high school, recreational, and college sports played a significant role in children
becoming active in sports. Tracy supported this claim, “My parents were really athletic,
so they wanted to pass that on to me, I guess” (personal communication, April 21, 2006).
Soccer and volleyball members frequently mentioned how they wanted to make their
parents proud and liked the recognition that they received from their athletic
involvement. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that they continued their participation in
sports.
Members of the soccer and volleyball teams frequently communicated with their parents regarding sports. Communication ranged from parents’ previous and current involvement, children’s involvement, and/or watching sports on television. Most soccer and volleyball members indicated that after their club, high school, and college games, their parents, often their fathers, regularly offered post-game analysis and suggestions. These “helpful” hints were not always welcomed but were offered nonetheless.

Dominique shared how she valued her father’s input pertaining to her sports development while she was growing up but that it wasn’t always easy to deal with, “I played for my dad all through basketball when I was younger. It was hard because I would see him at home and he would correct me all the time” (personal communication, April 27, 2006). This statement is reflective of the lack of a separation between interaction in a sports environment and interaction in a household environment. Often, when the two collide, it can become difficult for children because they are attempting to develop other aspects of their social lives.

Generally, when participants discussed sports with their parents, fathers tended to discuss skill and technical aspects with their daughters and mothers were more frequently involved in conversations pertaining to emotional and relationship aspects of sports teams. However, several participants provided examples where this pattern was reversed. During her involvement in sports while growing up, Sophia’s father provided a considerable amount of emotional support for her:

My dad has been there every step of the way for me emotionally. I call him after games, and if I’m having a problem, even now. He’s just there to
listen, even though he wasn’t a big-time athlete. He gives me that outsider perspective that I really need to stay focused (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

While Tracy tended to watch sports on television and communicate about them more with her father than her mother, her mother was “probably more involved in her own sports participation and communicated more with her about it than her dad. She went to like every single one of [her] tournaments and every one of [her] games while [she] grew up in sports” (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

A few participants felt that their fathers were more interested in their daughter’s success in sports and that their mothers were more concerned with their overall happiness in sports. Ashley’s comments were representative of others’ comments that were shared during focus group and individual interview sessions. She reported that she got the impression that her “mother just wanted [her] to do what made [her] happy and has always been supportive” (personal communication, April 27, 2006). Happiness was important for her father as well, but she felt that for her father “it was more important for him to see [her] succeed than to just have fun” (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

Nicole shed light on how communicating about her father’s previous athletic successes drove her to want to become involved with sports and intensified her urge to continue her sports participation:

I would always see my dad’s yearbooks, and I’d see his sports pictures in them. He’d always tell me stories about playing sports and I just really wanted to have that, too. I think that it’s great getting attention doing well in sports, but I also like the community support that surrounds most sports.
I like being involved (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

Visible relics of her father’s prior athletic glories helped to initiate sports conversations between Nicole and her father. They also served as constant reminders of something that her father considered to be important. Nicole wanted to be known for athletic success like her father and wanted to surround herself with something that her father valued.

*Formative Years: Viewing Sports*

As they grew older, research participants also saw at least one of her parents actively engaged in either a coaching or a playing role. Soccer players Brandi, Tracy, and Tisha were coached by their fathers in youth sports and Tracy and Tisha were also coached by both their fathers and their mothers. When Sarah was not playing soccer as a youngster, she was around other sports. During high school football season, she went to games coached by her father, and every Saturday she went to high school track and field meets that both her father and mother coached. Her mother and father are still track and field coaches today, albeit at different schools. Sarah also went to her brother’s football and baseball games weekly during their respective seasons. When asked about her early involvement in sports, Sarah stated, “I think my mom even went into labor with me at a track meet. So, from getting out of the womb, I guess I was put right into sports” (personal communication, April 24, 2006).

While neither of Mia’s or Sarah’s parents coached one of their respective daughter’s youth teams, sports were still a topic of conversation and their parents’ involvement in sports was visible. As she matured, Mia watched her father umpire baseball games and watched her father play basketball and softball. Her father “was always really into sports. Even when [she] was younger, he was out playing basketball on
the playgrounds and always used to go watch him” (personal communication, April 25, 2006). When asked about her mother’s participation, Mia said, “I think she used to do softball sometimes, but she’s not really athletic” (personal communication, April 25, 2006). Mia’s mother, however, may have had limited opportunities to obtain skills in order to develop athletically.

Volleyball focus group participants were also shaped by viewing their parents take an active role in their sports development. In contrast to the soccer focus group members, however, none of the volleyball athletes mentioned having her mother as a coach of one of her athletics teams while growing up. Four of these women did indicate that they had their father as a coach. Fathers of Nicole, Marcie, Dominique, and Elizabeth coached their youth or club softball teams while Amy’s father coached her soccer team when she was eight years old. Elizabeth explained how she used to watch her father play in a men’s softball league while she grew up, “My family and our family friends used to go to games on Thursday nights when I was little. I have a lot of memories of going and watching him and his team play” (personal communication, April 28, 2006). Being immersed within a sports environment became a part of Elizabeth’s lifestyle. She felt that it was only natural to become physically involved with sports after growing up with them.

When discussing the role that their mothers had in their sports development and progression, most volleyball members said that their mothers attended their games and played more of a supportive role as opposed to a direct leadership or coaching role that their fathers filled. Sophia revealed that both of her parents were supportive when it came to attending her games but that that was the extent of viewing their participation in
athletic activities. Unlike the majority of her teammates, Ashley’s mother played a more active and visible role with her teams while she was growing up than her father did. She elaborated:

   My parents didn’t coach me, but my mom would always help out. She was like a manager. She helped organize where people were staying at hotels and got driving directions taken care of for people. My dad was more of a sideline dad and wasn’t as active as my mom (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

While this example suggests that a mother played a more active role (which she did in comparison to other athletes’ mothers), it still must be considered that her role appeared to be secretarial in nature. Most of the other athletes shared that their mothers were relatively quiet with regard to discussing game strategies and techniques and tended to be the “sideline” parent. Athletes’ fathers communicated with their daughters more regularly about sports skills than their mothers did and tended to fill more dominant roles (e.g. coaching).

Satisfying an Internal Competitive Drive

   It became evident, as some participants discussed, that while family influence was pivotal in their decision to become and remain involved with sports, sports also allowed most members to satisfy a competitive drive. Tracy and Mia shared how they liked the competitive aspects of sports when they were younger. Tracy explained, “When I first started I was very competitive. I mean, I’m still competitive, but I was ridiculously competitive” (personal communication, April 21, 2006). Mia added that she was also “really competitive and liked to play any game, any sport” (personal communication,
April 21, 2006). Attempting to satiate a competitive hunger presented itself to Ashley while she was a high school athlete, “Basically, I just hated losing. When I went to school the day after my team had lost a game, I’d be really upset. Teachers had to tell me to let it go, but I liked playing so much. Losing made it hard” (personal communication, April 27, 2006). Competitive drive was an issue for Dominique, as well. She felt that her drive was often unmatched by her high school teammates:

> It was hard for me to play in high school because only a few people wanted to continue playing past high school. A lot of them weren’t as competitive as I would have liked. It was hard when our team lost because it felt like other people didn’t care. That was really hard for me to deal with. I was like, ‘come on, it’s a big deal to lose or it’s a big deal to win.’ It was frustrating with some people (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

These members shared how an internal competitive desire led them to initially become involved with sports and also how this drive presented temporary constraints during their high school sports involvement. Constraints existed when other high school teammates did not share a similar drive as focus group members did. While these temporary obstacles were inconvenient and difficult for participants to deal with, the athletes continued playing nevertheless partially due to the support that other socializing agents in their lives provided for them.

The collection of examples that were provided by soccer and volleyball team members revealed that family members, specifically parents, played an integral role in them becoming involved and remaining involved with sports. When children view their parents participating in some athletic capacity and notice that their siblings are receiving
attention for their sports involvement, they participate in sports anticipating that their involvement will earn them recognition, as well. Communicating about parents’ previous involvement in athletics can help to create an environment conducive to children doing the same thing. In most scenarios, as revealed in both focus group meetings, because parents were previously involved with athletics or still involved in athletics while participants were growing up, parents appeared to want to pass this athletic desire to their children. Initially, parents do play a primary role in socializing their children into sports. Partially this may be due to children needing their parents to pay for league fees, club teams, and other sports camps. However, for athletes who continue their involvement in sports throughout their childhoods, throughout high school, and eventually throughout college, there are other socializing agents who impact the development and the desire of athletes within sports. Some of these additional agents include coaches, peers, and the media. In the next section, I will discuss how these other agents positively impact and/or temporarily constrain the development of female athletes in sports and the female athlete’s socialization within sport.

Socialization within Sport

Mia, Brandi, Sarah, Tracy, and Tisha all indicated that even in college soccer, their parents’ input regarding their sports participation remains important. However, with regard to technical and skill aspects, they tend to rely on other socializing agents such as coaches and teammates for guidance. These tendencies surfaced for Mia, Sarah, and Tracy once they became involved with club-level teams. According to Sarah:

Once I hit the more competitive aspects of soccer and once I went to the select (club) teams (beginning in sixth grade), my parents weren’t really
able to give me the input that I needed to improve my game. I had to look to outside sources like my coaches and my teammates for advice. [With regard to the mentality aspects of sports, my parents] have always helped me with that. I am mentally strong because of them, but the actual skills aspects, I think that came from outside sources (personal communication, April 21, 2006).

Similarly, Mia and Tracy began to rely on other sources for skill development and expertise at the club and high school levels. When Mia joined a club soccer team and an AAU basketball team in seventh grade, she began listening to her coach more. In club, high school, and college sports Mia explained, “When it comes down to actually playing the game, I take my coach’s side a little bit more because I have to play for him, but I still listen to what my dad has to say; he’s really honest” (personal communication, April 25, 2006).

Tisha indicated that her parents’ advice has always been important to her involvement in sports but in high school “it kind of got to the point where my parents would help coach and they would say things, but they didn’t say as much [as they used to]. I relied more on my high school coaches” (personal communication, April 24, 2006). Unlike her other teammates in the focus group session, Brandi shared that her reliance on her father’s input did not decrease until she began playing college soccer:

I rely on my coach more now in college because he has lots of experience, and my dad has never played soccer. I still take my dad’s words into consideration, but I take my coach’s advice into consideration a little bit more. He’s the one giving me playing time and stuff like that. Maybe now
and throughout the remainder of my college career I will probably take my
coach into consideration more than my parents, but I still rely on my dad
for support and advice (personal communication, April 24, 2006).

Clearly, the athletes rely on some form of support from their parents even when they
participate on elite teams and/or college teams. However, it appears that most of the
athletes in this particular study began to take the advice of other adult figures in their
lives once they started playing on high school teams. Other participants relied less on
their parents when they joined elite club teams. Athletes acknowledged that coaches had
more experience in their particular college and primary high school sport when compared
to their parents and recognized that their coaches were responsible for giving them
something that they wanted, playing time. Along with parents, coaches played an
influential role in shaping the athletic experiences of the female athletes in this study.

Socialization within Sport: The Role of Coaches

Coaches at all levels (recreational, club, middle school, high school, or college)
impact the athletes that they are coaching. Topics discussed during focus group and
individual interview sessions included the visibility of and preference for male and
female coaches and the overall sports environment that coaches help to shape for athletes.
As revealed during the focus group and individual interview sessions, soccer players
were exposed to more male coaches and volleyball players were exposed to more female
coaches. Every athlete, with the exception of one, had experienced both male and female
coaches. The one soccer player had never had a female coach. Exposure to more male
coaches contributed to athletes indicating that if they preferred being coached by men.
Athletes’ exposure to male and female coaches and their coaching preference is discussed more in depth and compared to previously conducted research.

Preference for a male or a female coach

It was not surprising to me to see the relationship of the statistics in this study between those of Acosta and Carpenter’s (2004) and the OHSAA’s (2005) studies. However, I was shocked to learn how the athletes in this study responded when they were asked if they preferred a male or a female coach. Of the twelve soccer and volleyball athletes in this study, nine of them indicated that they would rather have a male coach instead of a female coach. This preference was largely based on the athletes’ previous experiences with male and female coaches. The remaining three athletes revealed that they did not have a preference for a male or a female coach. They wanted a coach based strictly on their ability to apply strategies to games and their ability to relate to players.

Most athletes in this study shared that they preferred male coaches over female coaches because the female coaches that they had previously had tended to be more emotional. The male coaches that they had previously had were characterized as being more straightforward and to-the-point with their post-game analysis and overall skill instruction. Generally, the athletes wanted to keep emotions and “drama” separated from their sports experiences. Dominique explained why she prefers male coaches over female coaches:

I feel like female coaches kind of talk to you like a girl. They involve emotions and feelings. A guy is straightforward and to-the-point. I’d rather play for a guy who is short, sweet, and to-the-point, rather than a female coach who involves emotions (personal communication, April 27, 2006).
Other athletes expressed how they felt that male coaches were more intimidating and were easier to respect than female coaches. The soccer and volleyball players in this study shared the consensus that they felt male coaches made them work harder, were stricter with them, and did not allow them to make excuses for poor play. Tracy reflected on the issue of making excuses when she was asked about her preference for a male or a female coach. She argued that:

> Well, guy coaches, if they can learn how to deal with girls, I think they deal better with girls than a woman [coach] can. I don’t know. It’s just the experiences that I have had with them. Male coaches are very good about just being down to business, this is what you need to do. I mean it’s kind of annoying that they don’t understand everything that you go through, but it’s almost kind of good too because they don’t let you make excuses (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

Again, Tracy brings attention to the idea that her opinions on male and female coaches are based on her experiences with both of them. That being said, while most of the athletes in this study based their preferences on prior experiences with coaches, the athletes also tended to use their prior experiences to make sweeping generalizations about male and female coaches. Previous research indicates that athletes in other studies have responded similarly (Varpalotai, 1987; Zimmerman & Reavill, 1998).

One of the more surprising responses regarding male or female coach preference was provided by Elizabeth. Even though she has only had three male coaches in her sports experiences, she revealed that:

> I personally like to play for men, actually. I don’t know why. I just think
that the three male coaches that I’ve had have been very good and have been very to the point. They aren’t so much about drama and (trails off)… I don’t know. I just feel like female coaches sometimes take things too far, a little over the top. It’s too emotional with them. With males, it is much more to the point. They’ll tell you what to do and you go back out on the court and you finish the game. At least this is reflective of the experiences that I have had (personal communication, April 28, 2006).

Along with her teammates and the soccer players in this study, Elizabeth’s example fits well into the examples that were provided by athletes interviewed by Zimmerman and Reavill (1998) and Varpalotai (1987). Female athletes in their research indicated that even while they may have had fewer examples of having a female coach, when they did have a negative experience with a female coach, most of the time this led them to discount all female coaches. While a variety of socializing factors can shape athletes’ sports environments, there are times when more weight and responsibility are placed on coaches to develop a positive sports experience for athletes.

Considering that some of the soccer and volleyball players in this study have a desire to coach or are currently coaching teams of their respective sport, they recognize the irony in their preference for a male coach. Sarah discussed this paradox:

Hands-down, I’d choose a guy coach because even though I kind of want to be a coach when I’m older, I think a guy coach is more stern but also gives a little because he doesn’t really understand girls or women that much. Female coaches tend to sugar-coat things and men don’t. I appreciate honesty over someone telling me what I want to hear (personal
Athletes tended to recognize the difficulties associated with wanting to coach and the sometimes low visibility of female coaches. Even though Sarah acknowledged her preference for a male coach, she still shared that she was enticed to the coaching and sports environment because there are not always a lot of women visible in positions of power. She considered the environment to be a challenge but willingly accepted the opportunity to “knock down doors.” Additionally, while volleyball player, Nicole, currently coaches a club volleyball team, she realized that there are other difficulties associated with coaching. She shared how she sees how difficult coaching and familial responsibilities are for her college volleyball coaches. Because her assistant coach spends so much time at volleyball games and practices, he is not often able to spend as much time with his family. She also noted that she did not think her head coach was married or had any children at home. Most athletes in this study recognized the dual responsibilities associated with coaching a team and having a family. The responsibilities attached to coaching and having a family have the potential to impact both male and female coaches. However, these duties may affect female coaches and/or single coaches more than they affect male and/or married coaches (Knoppers, 1987; Sabock & Sabock, 2005). Additional duties that coaches face may also contribute to the environment that they create for their athletes during games and practices.

Athletes in this study relayed information on how their coaches shaped their sports environment and interacted with members of the team. In some cases, the interaction almost led athletes to quit participating in a particular sport altogether. In other cases, coaches played a positive role in the lives of athletes, and the relationship
between coach and player resulted in the player feeling more confident in her abilities
and left her wanting to pursue playing collegiate soccer or volleyball. Tracy, a soccer
goalkeeper, recalled difficulties with one of her club soccer coaches, “As a freshman in
high school, I played on a select team where I had a coach who was absolutely horrible. I
hated him so much, and I got really close to quitting because I couldn’t handle him”
(personal communication, April 21, 2006). She continued playing nonetheless and
explained her decision to remain involved:

[You get to a point where] you just make a decision to stay with it. [Even
though I had some bad coaches] I also had a high school coach who was
amazing. He was seriously like a second dad to me. Whenever I felt like I
was getting burnt out or I wasn’t having fun anymore, we’d sit down and
talk. He made me realize how much I really did love soccer (personal
communication, April 21, 2006).

Tracy’s comments revealed how valuable a role a coach can play. Athletes, specifically
those who build their futures and their lives around sports, can become dependent on
their coaches and the environment that is partially created by their coaches. Negative
experiences led female athletes to question their involvement and their future in sports
while positive experiences helped to establish and reestablish firm foundations for their
continued involvement in sports and helped to renew their confidence in sports.

Athletes also recounted positive experiences that they previously had with high
school and club coaches. During her high school soccer career, Sarah shares that her club
coaches and her high school coach would have done “anything for [her]” so that she
could play collegiate soccer. They would “call college coaches up just to put in a good
word for [her], or they would give the coach a game tape. They were willing to go that extra mile for [her] and encouraged [her] to continue playing” (personal communication, April 21, 2006). Tracy received similar assistance from her club and high school coaches when it came to deciding if and where she was going to continue playing soccer in college. Her club coaches “weren’t that old so they knew how the [recruiting] process worked more recently. [Her] club coach and the coach’s husband played in college so they’d always help” (personal communication, April 21, 2006).

As soccer and volleyball members reflected on their intense involvement in sports while growing up, specifically at more elite, club levels, they did reveal how coaches made their experiences difficult at times due to the time commitment that was demanded of them. Often, as previously shared, athletes were put under pressure from coaches to focus all of their energies on one sport.

*Time Commitment Required of Athletes*

In both focus groups, athletes most frequently mentioned the difficulties that were associated with time commitment in their sport(s) at club, high school, and collegiate levels. While listening to focus group and individual interview discussions, it became clear that athletes often experienced insurmountable pressure to specialize in one specific sport. When athletes were asked about this specialization, however, they failed to acknowledge that that was what occurred while they were growing up in sports. Perhaps this is due to the negative connotations that are linked to specialization. That is, socializing agents are sometimes viewed negatively because it appears as if they are placing too much pressure on athletes. Athletes sometimes may want to protect coaches and other agents that may be responsible for placing this pressure on them. Additionally,
athletes have a desire to portray the idea that they are in charge of their own decisions and can handle the pressure and stress that often accompanies an athletic lifestyle. These suggestions are merely speculation and were not examined in depth.

Elizabeth shared how pressure to specialize from the varsity basketball coach at her high school during her freshman year led her to drop the sport altogether:

She [the coach] felt that basketball was the only sport there was and told athletes that that was what they needed to focus on. As a freshman I was still trying to figure out which sports I was really good at and had the potential to do well in, so I really resented her approach. I quit playing basketball after my freshman year because of that. She also made fun of students who were involved with the music program and I was in that program, too, so I didn’t like that (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

Often, participating on club teams requires a considerable time commitment. When Sophia decided to play for an elite club team and after coaches from the team convinced her to join the team, she admitted that she “pretty much handed [her] life over to them and committed to practicing every moment of the day so that [she] could play in college” (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

Many elite team coaches promise that they can help athletes get scholarships to continue their careers in college. The opportunity to participate in college athletics and earn a scholarship to continue playing was a primary incentive for a majority of the athletes in both focus groups. Earning scholarships to continue their participation in their respective sports was important as noted specifically by Tisha and Dominique. Tisha
explained that the idea of getting paid to do something that she loved was attractive and was beneficial because “coming from a family of five girls, she knew that her dad was going to struggle putting all of them through school” (personal communication, April 21, 2006). Dominique shared how earning a scholarship to continue her career in college was important because without it she “wouldn’t be able to afford going out of state for college” (personal communication, April 27, 2006). As Elizabeth indicated, “Club training is essential for us to get recruited. You have to do it basically if you’re a girl. It seems as if boys can get recruited more easily just by playing for their high school teams” (personal communication, April 27, 2006). Often, it is club teams that take up considerable amounts of time for athletes, and because female athletes feel that club team involvement is necessary to receive an athletic scholarship, they are willing to specialize in one particular sport and dedicate their time to that sport.

Tracy revealed her mixed emotions when it came to the time commitment required of playing soccer in high school and in college:

I’m not going to go play in the World Cup, and I’m not going to go to the Olympics. I want to have memories to look back on besides waking up at 6am like I had to in high school to go play a team and get killed because they’re nationally ranked. I play though because that is the only way that I will be able to get seen by a good coach and get a college scholarship offer. It’s hard, but I still love putting the jersey on for game days. I love going out there and playing well, but it’s a really big time commitment (personal communication, April 21, 2006).
Due to tournament commitments, Tracy, along with her teammate Sarah, revealed that they were unable to go to their junior and senior proms in high school and felt like they missed out on other social activities.

Sarah, who began playing on a club soccer team at an early age, experienced difficult coaches from the very beginning of her participation. Her coach for her club team when she was in middle school was intense. Sarah and her teammates “basically had to go to every practice and every game or they would lose their starting position” (personal communication, April 21, 2006). She explained why soccer consumed a considerable amount of her life:

The thing with soccer is that if you want to be good at it and if you want to play in college, you have to dedicate your whole life to it. There’s really no time for anything else because you have your fall season, then during winter you’re training for your club season which is in the spring and carries over into the summer. During the summer, you’re preparing for your high school team. It’s a circle, and if you don’t dedicate all of your time into it, then you’re not going to be the best. You can play other sports, but you’d be spreading yourself too thin. The time commitment for soccer was tough. I didn’t go to parties because I had tournaments the following morning. I was tempted to quit so many times. I felt like I was sacrificing so much, too much, for a game (personal communication, April 21, 2006).

Sarah kept playing soccer because it had become a way of life for her. She not only received pressure from coaches to continue playing, but she pressured herself. It was this pressure that caused her to keep making “sacrifices” in her life.
Excessive pressures from social agents caused athletes to dedicate several hours daily to improving their skills in the sport(s) with which they were involved. Almost all of the athletes revealed that this time commitment was what they liked least about playing sports in high school. Dominique stated that “it was hard not having enough time to do the extra things, like going to the movies with friends, and other things like that” (personal communication, April 27, 2006). What has made her participation in college sports difficult, as was revealed by a number of other athletes, is that playing “seems to be more of a job. I hate knowing that ninety percent of the time, the scholarship is the main reason why I’m playing. I hate that it’s not for fun anymore. It’s for the money and to be with my teammates” (personal communication, April 27, 2006). College sports involvement has been difficult at times for Sophia, as well:

Since I’ve been in college, the game has become more mental; it’s more of a mental struggle instead of going out having fun and just playing. I decided to play in college to make friends, to be competitive, to have fun. This sport is always something that I’ve loved, but for the first time, it’s been questioned more (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

Athletes indicated on several occasions how competing in a sport that they grew up loving had become challenging once they joined college teams. Others shared how they met challenges on their club and high school teams, as well. Each challenge that was addressed seemed to have one theme in common: the sport was no longer fun.

Despite difficulties, the women in this study continued playing sports and were not deterred by the time commitments and other sacrifices that they were making and are still making. Along with pressures to specialize in a particular sport, athletes shared other
pressures that they experienced in club and high school sports and also explained how
they coped with their sports-driven lifestyle. One of these additional pressures, the
college recruiting process, was difficult for most focus group participants. However, most
of them also felt that quitting their sport and not playing in college was not an option.
Others indicated that not playing in college would make them feel guilty because their
parents had already sacrificed so much of their own time and money to support their club
team involvement. Athletes revealed the twisted experiences that they endured while
being recruited by college athletic programs as high school students.

*Surviving the Recruiting Maze*

College recruiting experiences for most focus group athletes were generally
characterized as difficult and at times, they were even cut-throat. What made recruiting
experiences even more challenging for athletes was that they had to make a decision that
would affect their lives for the next four to five years. This pressure was difficult for
them as seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds. When participants were asked to reflect on
their recruiting experiences, there was a general consensus that the process was fake and
deceitful. As Sarah explained, “The thing with recruiting is that it is all about who can put
up a better front. You basically have to make a decision based on your gut instinct and
your intuition” (personal communication, April 21, 2006). Ashley provided support on
how making this decision can be so difficult:

It’s hard to figure out what’s real and what’s fake because it is a business,
you know. The coaches are supposed to tell you the positive things about
their school and their program, but in high school, we don’t know exactly
what to look for. The whole process is extremely stressful, especially being seventeen or eighteen years old. You don’t know what to do with the rest of your life. That’s a big deal. You’re making a decision in one night about the next four years of your life. It was very hard (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

Elizabeth was one participant who was asked to make a recruiting decision over the phone. She shared details of the phone conversation:

Basically, I got an ultimatum on the phone. Coach would not offer me a scholarship until she was one-hundred percent sure that I would come here. That was hard for me because I still had other recruiting trips scheduled that I hadn’t gone on yet. I didn’t know what they were going to offer. Coach told me that if I hung up the phone, the scholarship would go away. I bawled on the phone with them for two hours and managed to talk a week out of them to decide. During that week I had to cancel all of my other recruiting visits and make the decision that I was going to come to this University. Sometimes now, I still wonder if I made the right decision when I decided to play sports in college (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

Other volleyball focus group members shared how colleges had initially offered them scholarships and then days before their official recruiting visit, coaches retracted their offers. In some cases, athletes were informed that they could be a walk-on for their first season and then afterwards would be compensated via an athletic scholarship for the remainder of their career. In another instance, Sophia shared that she was offered a
scholarship by one school and called the school the next day to inform the coach that she was interested in accepting the offer. However, the coach, within the previous day’s time, had already offered the scholarship to his second-choice recruit. After finding out about this Sophia was angry and frustrated. She discussed her emotions:

You really dedicate yourself to being the best you can be, and you feel like you deserve the recognition. I worked so hard and to be treated like that, to be lied to, and to be asked to step down was awful. It was a self-esteem kicker (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

As difficult as recruiting experiences were for athletes, most of them agreed that they were lucky and happy with the athletic programs they had selected. One reason disclosed for this satisfaction included having the opportunity to study within their academic program of choice. Ashley knew that she did not want to pick a college based solely on the reputation of its athletic program, “I wasn’t really going just for volleyball. I wanted to get a good education first” (personal communication, April 27, 2006). Sophia’s college selection was also reliant upon a school that had the academic major that she wanted to pursue. Other key ingredients to selecting an ideal college that were disclosed by athletes included the team dynamics (whether the team members welcomed them), the coaches’ personality (whether or not the coach seemed personable), the environment of the college campus, and the location of the college (distance from the athlete’s hometown).

The primary reason that athletes felt was the cause of their satisfaction with their college and team selection, however, was simply the people that they had surrounded themselves with, their teammates. After each athlete disclosed details of how difficult their recruiting experiences were and how they felt that they have sacrificed a lot to
continue playing the sport that they do, they indicated that it was all worth it because of their teammates and because of how sports are part of their identity. The role that teammates play in an athlete’s sports participation from youth sports to college sports seems to be of infinite value. As athletes shared, it is teammates who can make or break a team. Teammates are responsible for the creation and sustenance of team chemistry.

Additionally, because these athletes have participated in sports since youth, sports have consumed their lives, thus providing them with identity. The people whom they interact with in their sports participation, their teammates, are a part of the creation of a group and an individual identity.

*The Role of Peers and Teammates*

Focus group members revealed the value of interacting with other children and other athletes when they first began and continued playing sports. Sarah confessed:

> I think what I liked most about soccer was more the social aspect. I could care less about the game. When I started off, my best friend to this day, I met playing soccer when I was four. The friends that I’ve met along the way have made my soccer experiences important and fun for me. The game is a bonus to the friends I’ve made and to the people I’ve met. In college, most of my friends are soccer players, too (personal communication, April 21, 2006).

Brandi partially agreed with Sarah’s admission but returned to how her father influenced her early experiences in sports, “I really liked the social aspect. Most of my friends now and then have been involved with sports. There is a common interest, but I also liked
playing when I was younger because my dad gave me attention” (personal communication, April 21, 2006).

Individuals in the soccer and volleyball focus groups also shared that teammates and friends played a key role in their decision to continue their involvement in sports. From recreational and club teams at early ages to their participation on high school and college teams, research participants frequently reiterated the importance of their fellow athletes and peers. Tracy states that the role of her teammates in her sports involvement has been “huge.” Her “best friends have always been from her soccer teams because they are who she has been around all of the time” (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

Sarah supports Tracy’s statement:

We know what each other is going through; we’re all going through the same exact thing. We can tell our parents what we’re experiencing, but they don’t understand as well as our teammates do. My teammates and I have helped each other get through the rough times and we have celebrated together when we have done something well (personal communication, April 24, 2006).

Teammates spend considerable amounts of time together, whether they are practicing, competing in games, and/or traveling to and from games. They revealed that they experienced having to make similar sacrifices in order to play on their club teams, their high school teams, and on their college teams. Experiencing similar challenges as well as similar highlights of their sports careers (e.g., receiving a Division I college scholarship, being recognized as an athlete, winning team and individual championships and awards)
helped to bring them closer. Brandi provided further evidence to echo Sarah and Tracy’s claims that indicated how valuable her teammates are/have been:

My teammates have always been a big part of my life because a lot of my friends have been my teammates, as well. If I ever thought about quitting a team, which I don’t think I ever really have, but if I did consider it, they would be the reason why I wouldn’t. They’re your friends, so you’re with them all of the time regardless of whether or not you’re enjoying the sport (personal communication, April 24, 2006).

Soccer and volleyball focus group participants shared a variety of examples of when they were not particularly enjoying their sports participation. However, they continued to reveal how their teammates helped to make their sports experiences more enjoyable. Reasons for not enjoying their sports participation ranged from not getting desired playing time during games to feeling significant amounts of pressure to perform well on the field/court, and even to not having enough time to be “regular students.” Brandi explained how she is sometimes turned off by her team’s lifting program (strength and conditioning program) but shared how her teammates helped her through this difficulty:

Like right now in college, our lifting program stinks, but my teammates help to get me through it on the days that I don’t want to do it because they’re with me doing it, too. We all share that; we share the struggle (personal communication, April 24, 2006).

Common experiences and enduring similar rigors appeared to provide glue to the teams’ structures. Their experiences subsequently aided in the sustenance of their team’s camaraderie and the continued development of their group’s cohesion.
Not only have teammates assisted each other with physical stressors encountered in high school and college sports participation, but they have also supported each other through emotionally-trying times. As discussed by a few participants, participating in sports and being around teammates have allowed them to cope with a tragic loss.

Volleyball member, Nicole, talked about how sports were important for her grieving process after she found out that one of her older cousins had passed away in a car accident on the first day of try-outs for her high school volleyball team as a freshman:

> On the day of try-outs my team had to run like a mile. I have never run faster in my life. My cousin and I were close. We grew up together. It all was really tough, but volleyball helped me to let go of my problems (personal communication, April 28, 2006).

Elizabeth shared how the death of grandfather contributed to her continuing her athletic involvement:

> His death really influenced me because he was a huge role model for me. He was at every one of my games, everything. I was in eighth grade when he passed away and from that point on, I always wondered because he always made such a big deal about what a good athlete I was and how much I could do (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

While Nicole and Elizabeth’s stories showed how high school sports allowed them to focus their energies on something other than tragedy in their lives, they also shared how being around teammates, people they cared about and people who cared about them, helped them through their difficulties. Tisha elaborated on the value and comfort that
team members on one of her college teams provided for each other when a teammate suddenly passed away at the beginning of their season:

We (all of the girls on the team) were only friends for about four months, but it is amazing how close you get to people in only four months when you see them for like six hours a day and train with them. When Abby passed away and we all witnessed it happen on the field, it was really hard for us to deal with. The game ended up being rescheduled for the next day and we ended up winning after the game came down to penalty kicks. Even though it was only a day after, it still was like the greatest feeling in the world thinking that we had won the game for her. Our senior captain at the time was amazing and helped us all pull through that situation on and off of the field. I can’t even tell you how well she handled that situation and kept us together (personal communication, April 24, 2006).

Sports participation for these participants specifically, offered them an opportunity to escape from difficult situations in their lives during both high school and college sports involvement. Athletic activity served as a coping mechanism for them. Additionally, by surrounding themselves with teammates, people who often had their best interests in mind, participants were better able to handle their losses.

*The Value of an Athletic Identity*

Fellow team members also play a pivotal role in the creation of a collective team as well as individual personal identities. Members of the volleyball team expressed how they valued the role that sports played in creating a significant part of their identity. Ashley explained how sports shaped her:
I feel like playing sports gave me a sense of identity. You're around those friends (other athletes) all the time and you're involved in relationships with them and whatnot. I feel like if I wasn’t labeled as an athlete or a jock and didn’t have that circle of friends, I don’t know who else I would hang out with. Playing sports is something that I have come to look for in my friends, because they can relate. When I have kids, if they don’t play sports, I don’t know what I’m going to do (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

Elizabeth shared how her desire to be associated and identified as an athlete was partially formulated while she was a child:

I remember when I was a little girl and I would go to the varsity volleyball and basketball games. I would look at the girls and the way that they played. They were such a big deal. All the little kids, all the parents, everyone knew who they were. I wanted to be that. I wanted to be a stand-out (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

Elizabeth’s experiences with sports as a youngster brought attention to the concept that an athletic-related identity can begin early in life. Mia reveals that the creation of her athletic-related identity started at a young age:

I think when you start playing when you’re younger, [sports] become a part of your lifestyle. I come from a smaller town, and we didn’t have many good athletes come out of my school. I liked the recognition and being known as a top athlete. Once I got to high school it was almost like I was expected to play soccer because that’s what I was already known for.
As a freshman in high school, I played varsity soccer so that automatically gave me status. It was the same thing playing in college (personal communication, April 21, 2006).

Other soccer members shared how being able to associate themselves with sports in high school and having “status” allowed people in the community and other students at school to be able to recognize them. The desire to have an athletic-identity, as focus group members suggested can continue well into high school and college sports participation. For research participants, this sports-association also assisted with their transition from high school to college teams. Tracy shared, “Coming into college I didn’t know anybody. I knew my teammates two weeks prior to school starting, so I already had friends. I gravitated towards them because it was comfortable” (personal communication, April 21, 2006). Tracy continued by saying that, “Playing a college sport does give you status in your classes. When people find out that you’re on the soccer team, they actually think that’s really cool. You’re basically the coolest person ever” (personal communication, April 21, 2006). She also indicated that she liked being associated with and liked playing with other star players on her club teams when she was fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen. Some of those players were “amazing. They went to some really big colleges, so it was kind of cool to be able to say that I got to play with so-and-so” (personal communication, April 21, 2006). Tisha acknowledged how soccer impacted her identity, “It’s really nice with people knowing that you play because you work so damn hard at it. It’s nice to get credit for doing what you live for, for what makes you” (personal communication, April 21, 2006).
Interestingly enough, while soccer focus group members alluded to the formation and sustenance of team and individual identities through sports, none of these athletes actually used the “identity” qualifier. Soccer focus group members tended to refer to the creation of an identity by using the words recognition and attention. Volleyball focus group members, however, specifically utilized this specific “identity” terminology. This presents an interesting opportunity to reflect on the dynamics of group interaction. As occurred on a number of occasions, when one athlete mentioned something, a number of other athletes in the same focus group discussion agreed with the initial assessment suggested by another teammate. While this can often lead to concern over the potential existence of “groupthink” (Fontana & Frey, 2000), overall, there were instances where individuals in focus group sessions disagreed with their teammates during conversation. One particular instance that illustrated this notion occurred during the soccer focus group interview. When asked about certain likes and dislikes associated with their participation in athletics, Tisha offered that “the only reason you keep playing, even if you do burn out, is because you love the game. You’re not going to be there every day if you don’t want to be” (personal communication, April 21, 2006). While a majority of her teammates agreed with this sentiment, Sarah provided a different perspective:

I don’t agree that you have to love it to play it. I hate soccer a lot of the time. I really do. As bad as it sounds, if I didn’t play anymore, I’d be sad, but it’d be like hey life. I’d love to be a regular student, but I don’t think that I could just quit because I’d feel guilty about all of the support that my parents have provided for me along the way (personal communication, April 21, 2006).
Tracy added to Sarah’s perceptions, “I love sports a lot of the time, but I hate it a lot of the time, too. It’s frustrating at times with playing time and the time commitment. It’s like a love-hate relationship” (personal communication, April 21, 2006).

Together, soccer teammates disclosed in the first focus group interview, that while they do feel that they have “status” and are given respect from some students because they are college athletes and were stars in high school, there are times when they are frustrated with a lack of support. Because of this deficiency, they admitted that they often rely on each other for support. Brandi explained that sometimes the lack of University acknowledgement and recognition from some students serves to reinforce their competitive drives:

We’d like more people to come to our games and more people to give us respect, but sometimes it makes us work harder. Shoot, if we win another conference championship, maybe they’ll start recognizing us a little bit more. Whenever there are large-scale presentations on campus or people give speeches, they never fail to give a shout-out to the football team and the basketball teams. They don’t ever really mention us and we won back-to-back conference championships. But what are we going to do about it? If anything, we use it to bring our team together and use it as motivation to work even harder (personal communication, April 21, 2006).

I found this response to be somewhat encouraging because it provided evidence that the members of the group, as well as other athletes who were not in the group who likely receive little attention for their athletic success, worked through adversity to enhance
team camaraderie. However, it was also discouraging to me because it appeared as if members of a women’s team, at least to some degree, blamed themselves for not receiving support. They placed responsibility and additional pressure on their own shoulders in the attempt to draw more support and respect when it was quite possible that it was the University and other students who needed to change their perceptions of women’s sports.

Sarah touches on the associated difficulties with not always having as much support from her University and from fellow students as she and teammates would like:

Before our season began, we had to distribute schedule cards and hang up posters to promote our team. We don’t get as much press as the football, the baseball, or the basketball teams do, so we have to create our own ways to make money and to get people to come to our games (personal communication, April 21, 2006).

Volleyball focus group participant Nicole shares sentiment with how her team is sometimes frustrated at the lack of University and student support for their matches and suggests how more support might be gained:

Right now, we don’t have that much support. I feel like the University could give us a little more advertisement. You always know when there’s a home basketball game. There are always signs and posters up for that, and there’s really not that much advertisement for volleyball. I feel like more would help us get more fans (personal communication, April 28, 2006).
Elizabeth feels that one of the primary reasons why her sport does not receive as much support as other sports at the University and at the high school level is due to overall social awareness of volleyball and awareness of its rules. She provides an example:

Sports like tennis, volleyball, or soccer where there are rules that people aren’t exposed to every single day are different from sports like football and basketball. With those sports, people know how those games work; people understand the rules to those sports. For those sports, you don’t have to have an extensive knowledge of the games to watch and understand them (personal communication, April 28, 2006).

While it could easily be argued that extensive knowledge is required to understand sports like football and basketball, Elizabeth brought to light the value of exposure. I believe that exposure is the key concept. American football and basketball receive considerable amounts of coverage in the United States in comparison to sports like volleyball and/or soccer. Most of this coverage is provided through easily accessible media forms such as television, newspapers, radio, and the Internet. Therefore, because sports like volleyball and/or soccer are not glamorized by the American media, it is not as easy to learn about or to become attracted to these “other” sports.

The aforementioned examples painted a vivid picture of how teams were occasionally discouraged with the lack of support that they received at their competitive events. However, they also showed how teammates positively affected each other and how teammates helped each other to overcome difficulties and limited acknowledgement for their athleticism. As volleyball team members elaborated on the positive experiences they shared with their teammates, Elizabeth shared an example where her high school
volleyball teammates were viciously cruel. She reflects on how hazing impacted her high school volleyball involvement:

As a freshman in high school I was moved up to the varsity team and I was the only underclassman on the team. All the other players were juniors and seniors. There were five seniors on that team, and they hazed me really badly on and off of the court. Our locker room was pretty nice, but they made me keep all of my things in a grocery cart. I had to clean up after them in the locker room. They toilet-papered my house a few times and wrote profanities on my driveway with chalk. I took care of it before my parents saw it. The girls also had team-wide get-togethers and would never invite me. One of the girls on the team lived behind me and she would always throw garbage in my yard. On the court, I was set only two times the entire season and I was even the starting middle. It was just a really, really bad situation all the way around. I thought about quitting several times (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

The examples provided by Elizabeth reveal a darker side of high school athletics. Mia, a starter on her high school varsity basketball team as a freshman and sophomore, experienced difficulties with jealous, older teammates in her sophomore year:

I did pretty well my freshman year and by my sophomore year I started to get a lot more recognition. The seniors on the team got jealous and made it difficult for me in practice. They’d gossip about me and not pass me the ball, stuff like that. I remember one of the practices when my coach realized what was going on and he stopped practice to yell at everybody.
The next game I didn’t start because my coach wanted to show them what it was like when I wasn’t playing. They seemed to get the point and it never really happened again after that (personal communication, April 25, 2006).

Friends of athletes who were not involved in athletics were not always supportive of the time demands that were placed on the women in both focus groups either. While Tracy didn’t feel as if some of her friends who were not involved with soccer discouraged her involvement in youth and high school soccer, she did feel as if she was shoved aside at times. She elaborated:

Sometimes my friends would make little snide comments about me never being around, or they’d be like, ‘oh, do you want to come with us? Oh, no, you probably have to go to soccer, don’t you?’ They would throw little comments like that around which always made me feel left out, but they never ever made me choose. They knew how much I loved soccer, but you could tell that sometimes they got annoyed with how often I wasn’t around (personal communication, April 21, 2006).

Amy also shared how some of her friends not involved with athletics made her participation difficult at times while she was in high school, “The only people who discouraged me in sports, especially when I was swimming in high school, were the occasional friends who weren’t really into sports. They would get upset because swimming took up all of my time” (personal communication, April 27, 2006). Once again, however, sports had been a part of Amy’s life since she was young. This was the case for all of the individuals in this research. They had been involved with sports from
young ages. Sports had come to give them significant meaning in their lives, had helped
to shape how they spent their time and who they spent their time with, and allowed them
to identify with being an athlete.

The Role of the Media

Recognizing the important role that the media plays in both the shaping of
perceptions of female athletes and girls’ and women’s sports and in reflecting the
experiences of girls and women in sports, I asked participants which media forms, if any,
y they tended to use to update themselves with sports information. A handful of them
indicated that they use the Internet, often to check up on collegiate and professional
sports scores, while a few others collected sports information via newspapers. A
significant proportion of the participants (10 out of a possible 12), however, revealed that
they were more likely to watch television to educate themselves about sports issues and
to catch scores of recent games. The most popular television channel utilized to gather
this information was ESPN. This presents an interesting opportunity for analysis due to
the fact that ESPN has been critiqued by scholars (AAFLA, 1990, 1994, 2000, 2005;
Messner, et. al., 2003) for the lack of equitable coverage it provides for women athletes
and their sports and the channel’s often distasteful, sexualized portrayal of female
athletes. It is important to share that athletes watch ESPN and ESPN’s SportsCenter
because if they are watching the channel’s programming, then it is possible that they are
being influenced by the channel’s lack of equitable coverage.

When reflecting on sports leagues that she follows, Dominique shared that she
“loves watching college basketball, especially the men’s NCAA tournament” (personal
communication, April 27, 2006). In the attempt to uncover why she liked men’s college
basketball more than women’s college basketball, Dominique elaborated on her previous statement:

   Well, the girls are great to watch, but the guys are more exciting. I don’t know if it’s the showboating, but they dunk. That’s more fun. Plus, the guys are always on ESPN, they’re televised more. It’s easier to watch a men’s game than a women’s game” (personal communication, April 27, 2006).

Elizabeth shared similar viewing tastes and added:

   It’s not a big deal now for the guys at our University to be on ESPN. It’s just a normal thing now. If that were to happen to us, at the female level, oh my gosh, I don’t even think we’d know what to do with ourselves. If we knew that three of our matches were going to be on ESPN, primetime, it’d still be ‘oh, my gosh.’ It’s still a huge deal if a women’s game were to be on ESPN, whereas, when a men’s team is on, it’s not even a big deal anymore (personal communication, April 28, 2006).

Dominique and Elizabeth’s statements reveal that female athletes, at least to a small degree, are cognizant of disparities with regard to television coverage and opportunities to receive recognition for their athletic involvement. Unfortunately, on a general level, even with the awareness of women’s subordinated positioning in ESPN’s sports coverage, women are still watching and are still being subjected to trivialized coverage of female athletes and their sports.
Summary of Results

The soccer and volleyball members in my study provided a significant amount of support concerning research that had previously been conducted on socialization into and within sports. A primary reason why they have continued their involvement with sports is due to the positive relationship that they have built with sports. Generally, the relationship that they have formed with most of their socializing agents is positive, as well. While participants experienced difficulties in club and high school sports and still endure troubling situations on their college teams, it appeared as if the positive experiences trumped the less-than-ideal ones for the women in my research. Parents, siblings, other family members, coaches, peers, and an intrinsic desire to compete jointly contributed to the shaping of sports experiences for the athletes.
CHAPTER 5
Discussion

This section returns to the initial question that is the focus of this research: What are the high school sports experiences of female athletes? In this section I also address how athletes reflected on this primary research question, how athletes reflected on the role that their socializing agents played in shaping their experiences, and how athletes’ responses compared to previously conducted research and my personal sports experiences. Female athletes in this study frequently mentioned the role that their parents filled. Therefore, the role their parents played in socializing them into sports and within sports will be discussed. Additionally, the athletes in this study mentioned their experiences related to recruiting while they were in high school; because my collegiate athletic recruiting experiences partially led me to become interested in studying the sports experiences of high school female athletes, I will address the role that recruitment played in the athletes’ high school sports experiences. The role of parents along with other socializing agents such as coaches, peers, and the media and recruiting experiences for the athletes in this study will be compared and contrasted to previous research that has been conducted on these relationships and will be compared to my personal sports experiences.

*Parents and Family Members: Socializing Children into Sports*

Prior research regarding the capacity that parents fill in socializing children into and within sports served as a significant portion of the foundation for this research (Greendorfer, 1983, 1987, 1993; Lewko & Greendorfer, 1988; McPherson, 1981; Shakib & Dunbar, 2004; Varpalotai, 1987). With regard to socializing children into sports,
parents appeared to occupy a primary role for research participants (Greendorfer, 1983, 1987, 1993; Lewko & Greendorfer, 1988; McPherson, 1981; Shakib & Dunbar, 2004; Storm & Jenkins, 2002; Varpalotai, 1987). Frequent communication about sports with parents and a high degree of parents’ visibility in a sports setting contributed to participants wanting to become involved in sports. Often, watching and/or playing sports with older siblings created a desire for participants to join sports teams, as well.

Communication and visibility have been listed as important determinants in children becoming initially interested in sports (Shakib & Dunbar, 2004; Storm & Jenkins, 2002) and are associated with social learning theory. Social learning theory suggests children are more or less socialized into sports participation. If children view their parents and/or family members engaging in sports in some capacity (playing, coaching, discussing, watching, etc.), then they are more likely to become involved with sports (Greendorfer, 1983). As Shakib and Dunbar (2004) revealed in their study with male and female high school students, “the strongest prompt to children learning about parental sports involvement was parents’ athletic visibility, especially seeing parents play sports” (p. 283). This was a common theme for soccer and volleyball participants in this study.

Some specific examples provided during focus group and individual interview sessions that reflected the importance of communication and visibility in developing an initial sports interest were provided by several of the soccer and volleyball members. In particular, Tracy, Mia, Tisha, Sarah, Nicole, Ashley, Dominique, and Sophia had older siblings participating in sports, and Dominique had an older female cousin playing Division I volleyball when each of them decided that getting involved in sports might be something that they would enjoy. Having the opportunity to view her father’s yearbooks
was important in motivating Nicole to initially become involved with sports. The yearbooks served as a “communication starter” for Nicole to learn more about her father’s previous involvement in sports. Visible “sports paraphernalia” were discussed in Shakib and Dunbar’s (2004) research. Within their research, high school athletes indicated that trophies, newspaper clippings, and scrapbooks served as “prompts to the communicative process” when learning of their fathers’ past sports interactions (p. 283). Similarly, Nicole shared that seeing her father’s sports pictures in his yearbook initiated conversation about his prior athletic glories and led her to want to achieve the same things. These “prompts” were not available for mothers’ sports involvement in Shakib and Dunbar’s (2004) research nor were they available for participants’ mothers in this research. This was largely due the fact that mothers had few opportunities to engage in athletic endeavors while they were growing up.

Nicole was the only athlete on either team to indicate that sports relics were visible in her household, but her revelation allows for the opportunity to draw comparisons to Shakib and Dunbar’s research (2004). High school athletes in Shakib and Dunbar’s (2004) study shared that being able to view trophies, newspaper clippings, and other materials created opportunities for conversations regarding their fathers’ prior sports participation to develop. Additionally, because mothers had limited opportunities to play sports (outside of cheerleading and Pom-Pom squads), they did not have visible, tangible evidence of their involvement and/or athleticism.

Athletes in Shakib and Dunbar’s (2004) study also tended to laugh about their mothers’ involvement in sports (or lack thereof) when it became a topic of conversation with family members. When soccer and volleyball members were asked about their
mothers’ involvement in sports, several members indicated that their mothers were either cheerleaders, on dance teams, and/or on Pom-Pom squads. As members relayed this information, many of them smiled or snickered. While this may seem offensive, I surmise that the laughter over their mothers’ previous athletic involvement may not have been aimed towards their mothers but was instead, a reflection of their gratitude in being able to participate in more competitive athletic endeavors. I believe that participants’ laughter resulted more from participants trying to imagine having so few opportunities in sports. Having opportunities to participate on sports teams has been a part of their socialization process. After they have been immersed within a competitive sports culture for so long, picturing themselves in a role that most of them consider to be more of a spectator role as opposed to a competitive/action role (i.e., cheerleading and Pom-Pom squads) is not palatable. Laughter is merely a result of understanding that they have had far more opportunities to compete when compared to their mothers. A variety of focus group members (soccer member Sarah and volleyball members Elizabeth and Ashley) did acknowledge that their mothers had fewer competitive sport opportunities, regardless of when their mothers attended high school.

Most participants’ mothers attended high school in the years surrounding the passage of Title IX in 1972. The fact that mothers were in high school even after the passage of Title IX, however, did not guarantee access for them to be active members in sports because college and high school athletic departments were not required to be in compliance with Title IX until July 21, 1978 (Women’s Sports Foundation, 2002). To date, no high school or collegiate athletic departments have been punished for their failure to comply with Title IX (even though not all departments have been in
compliance) (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005). Therefore, most participants’ mothers still were not afforded opportunities to compete on athletic teams.

Another salient point that was introduced in Shakib and Dunbar’s (2004) research revolved around fathers’ participation in sports. If fathers were no longer participating in sports, the high school students shared that their fathers’ inactivity was due to a sports injury. Without the injury, the students’ fathers would likely still be participating in sports. Mothers, on the other hand, did not participate in sports because students believed that they were not athletic, were not interested in sports, and/or would rather look after child and household responsibilities (Shakib & Dunbar, 2004). A few participants in my study shared how their fathers were no longer involved in sports or had to terminate their sports involvement earlier than desired due to injuries that they had sustained (fathers of Sarah, Brandi, and Dominique). Had their fathers never become seriously injured, they would easily have been able to continue their involvement in high school and college sports. I find it particularly interesting that in certain cases it was a father’s injury that prevented him from continuing his athletic involvement whereas participants’ mothers were not even provided equitable opportunities to participate in sports. It appeared as if particular members in this study were more empathetic towards their fathers no longer being able to participate in sports due to injuries sustained than they were towards their mothers not participating due to the lack of opportunities they were provided to develop and enhance skills in sports. In a couple instances, athletes shared that their mothers were not involved in sports because they were not athletic and did not appear to take their mother’s lack of opportunity into account.
When athletes in this study shared how and what they communicated about sports with their parents, I found it interesting that they related that fathers tended to discuss technical and skill aspects and mothers tended to communicate about emotional and relationship aspects with their daughters. I believe that this is a reflection of how males and females are socialized. While females are generally encouraged to be the nurturer in the family setting, males tend to be pushed to fill a dominant role that advocates a competitive, strict, and business-like demeanor (Chafetz, 1978; Connell, 2000, 2005b; David & Brannon, 1976). Emotional support tends to be provided by females and developing a tough, competitive drive tends to be instilled by males (Connell, 2000, 2005b; David & Brannon, 1976). However, there were a few examples provided in this study’s focus group members where roles were reversed (i.e. mothers filled more active, visible roles [Ashley] and fathers were the source of providing emotional support [Sophia]). For most athletes, mothers also appeared to be more satisfied with their daughter’s happiness while participating in sports while fathers appeared to be more satisfied when their daughters excelled in sports.

Receiving emotional support from a female figure, however, became a contradiction with regard to female coaches. Many athletes in this study shared that what they disliked most about female coaches was that most of them were too emotional. Athletes did not appear to want to mix much emotion with their sports involvement. Specifically, during team meetings after games or practices, participants felt that most of their female coaches were too concerned with emotional aspects of their sport participation whereas male coaches, for the most part, strictly focused on strategies and technical aspects of the game. Female athletes in this study appeared to want their sports
participation to be more competitive and business-oriented in nature. This preference for a competition-based sports experience mirrors the idea that these female athletes have been socialized into a male-sport model. The athletes have come to expect and have played within a system that advocates competition, results, and winning. Therefore, anything that does not focus on winning represents a distraction to accomplishing the ultimate goal: winning. Coaches (in this research often female) who attempt to tie emotions into the objectives within a male-sport model will likely be disregarded no matter what their intentions are. Athletes have already been socialized into the concept that aggression, competitiveness, and winning do not mix with emotions (otherwise considered to be associated with traditional femininity) (Chafetz, 1978). The athletes have been socialized into a system where mostly mothers provide emotional stability; this emotional support, however, is not supposed to *invade* [italics added] the athletic environment.

*Parents: Socializing Children within Sports*

Not only are mothers and fathers of athletes important agents in socializing their children into sports, but they are also valuable in socializing their children within sports (Storm & Jenkins, 2002). Perhaps, support, encouragement, and maintaining realistic expectations are the most important things that parents can provide to their children’s sports involvement (Clark, 2005; Storm & Jenkins, 2002). This became evident during this study’s focus group and individual interviews. In one particular case, Tracy even revealed that because her parents were not able to support her older sister at her soccer games, her older sister eventually quit. Tracy’s older sister was annoyed that her parents were not able to go to her games. Most focus group participants revealed that they were
greatly motivated to participate and continue in sports due to the attention and recognition that they received from other people in their lives, especially their parents. While Shakib and Dunbar (2004) relayed the importance of parents communicating about sports so that their children become interested in sports, Storm and Jenkins (2002) indicated that communicating about sports and viewing parents engaged in sports continues to be important once children are already involved with sports.

Participants in this study shared that communication about sports occurred daily, often in the form of post-game discussions. Several participants also stated that as they grew up with sports, they continued to see their parents active in sports whether their parent(s) were coaching, playing in adult leagues, or playing on their own time. Though most of the athletes in this study explained that their parents’ input regarding their sports involvement changed once they became involved with high school sports and club sports (for most participants, this club involvement started while they were in high school), they relayed that it was still important to them that their parents supported their athletic efforts. In most cases, when athletes relied less on their parents and family and depended on other sources for direction regarding their particular sports participation, most athletes depended on the insight of their coaches.

*The Role of Coaches within Athletes’ Sport Socialization*

The experiences that athletes have in a sports environment depend significantly on the role that their coaches fill (Reynaud, 2005; Sabock & Sabock, 2005; Storm & Jenkins, 2002). Soccer and volleyball players shared in their interviews that this coach reliance is partially due to the fact that coaches determine their playing time. It is also due to the fact that their coaches view them in their sports setting more than their parents do.
Ashley supported this when she revealed that parents do not have the full picture of her as an athlete, whereas, coaches are in the environment all of the time, in practices and games, so they know more about team dynamics. Furthermore, athletes argued that in most cases, coaches had more knowledge of the sport that was being played.

Some of the athletes’ coaches also served as mentors to them. This mentoring role was particularly important for participants while they were being recruited by coaches and teams to play collegiate soccer/volleyball. Because some of the participants’ (Tracy) coaches had experienced recruiting on a personal level, they were able to provide more in depth guidance as to how the process worked. Other coaches “went the extra mile” (Tracy, personal communication, April 21, 2006) for their players who were being recruited by calling college coaches, sending videotaped games to coaches, and by compiling stats and mailing them to head soccer/volleyball coaches.

Most of the accounts that were shared reflecting the mentoring relationship between athletes and coaches during the collegiate recruiting phase of their athletic careers in this study ran counter to my personal experiences. I had some recruiting support from my high school coaches, but in most cases, I had already initiated contact with collegiate coaches and athletic departments before my high school coaches became interested. I remember only one of my coaches (my high school varsity soccer coach) who provided me with information about college soccer programs. When he gave me that information, I viewed it as a reaffirmation that I possessed talent and that dedicating my life to sports was paying off. More than that, however, was the idea that someone believed in me and felt that I could make a difference for a collegiate athletic program. Not having support from my other coaches felt like a betrayal and served as a source of
motivation to prove how wrong they were to doubt my abilities. As athletes in this study indicated during their recruiting trips, when coaches did not accept them on to their teams as scholarship athletes, they felt that that was a self-esteem kicker. I experienced the same thing when my high school coaches failed to support my collegiate recruiting efforts.

Athletes in this study felt that their coaches were important because they served as mentors for them during their sports participation and provided guidance during their collegiate athletic recruiting process. However, another perspective of the role of coaches became apparent when athletes revealed that when they had to decide which sport they were going to play (read: specialize), it was largely due to the amount of pressure that coaches had placed on them. Athletes from both the soccer and volleyball teams indicated that there were times during their high school sports participation when they stopped playing a sport due to the negative influence of coaches. Volleyball members Elizabeth and Sophia quit playing basketball in high school after difficulties with coaches. They shared that their coaches lacked knowledge of the sport and were even verbally abusive to players on their teams. Elizabeth provided an example of this abuse when she described how her basketball coach ridiculed her in front of teammates because she was also involved with the music program. Elizabeth’s basketball coach did not like to “share” athletes with the music program and wanted her players to focus solely on basketball. Her basketball coach asked her to discontinue her involvement with the music program at her high school, yet, that was not a choice that Elizabeth was willing to make. She quit the basketball team after her freshman season. The primary difficulty that athletes had with their coaches, aside from coaches who lacked knowledge about the
sport they were in charge of, was the amount of time coaches required of them. This often led to athletes specializing in one particular sport.

Specialization

An emphasis on specialization, along with competition, domination, aggression, business-orientation, achievement-orientation, product-orientation, and seriousness, have all been categorized as values that are associated with the male sport/product-oriented model (Blinde, 1989a). Values tied to alternative sport models include cooperation, sensitivity, exuding emotion, being expressive, being social, having a sense of affiliation, and being student-oriented (Blinde, 1989a). The values associated with alternative sport models were tied closely with the mission of the AIAW prior to its demise in the early 1980s (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005; Festle, 1996; Suggs, 2005; Wushanley, 2004) and as leaders of the AIAW feared, were compromised when the NCAA took over the AIAW. Based on testimony from the female athletes in this research study, the athletes did fall victim to negative recruiting practices, they still suffer from coaches and athletic programs that promote win-at-all-cost objectives, and they “sacrifice” opportunities in their lives to specialize in one sport.

Research conducted by Blinde and Greendorfer (1992) indicates that under a male/product-oriented sport model, female athletes have often experienced some form of conflict. Four forms of this conflict include value alienation, role strain, role conflict, and exploitation (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1992). According to Blinde and Greendorfer (1992), “Theoretically, conflict represents a complex and dynamic social process that articulates the contradictions between the dominant ideology of society or social structures (e.g., intercollegiate sport) and groups or individuals within these societies or structures (e.g.,
athletes)” (pp.99-100). While it appeared that several of the athletes in this study experienced at least one, if not more than one, of the four forms of conflict, it is necessary to explain these types of conflict in more detail. Value alienation in sport can occur when athletes experience:

1) discomfort with the value system of college sport,
2) [are] asked to do things that conflict with their personal value system,
3) feel alienated from their sport experience, and/or
4) perceive conflict between their personal value system and the value system of intercollegiate sport (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1992, pp. 100-101).

Furthermore, value alienation can occur when “an activity once rewarding becomes less rewarding as extrinsically motivating factors enter the picture” (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1992, p. 102). One extrinsically motivating factor is a collegiate athletic scholarship (Blinde, 1989a; Blinde & Greendorfer, 1992). Athletes from the soccer and volleyball teams indicated that earning a scholarship motivated them to continue playing sports in high school. Keeping their scholarship once they were already on a collegiate team, even though their collegiate sport was described as being job-like, was often their primary motivation to go to practices and games and ultimately, to continue playing.

Several athletes in this study also indicated that high school sport was a “lot more fun” when compared to collegiate sport. This lack of fun can contribute to an athlete feeling alienated. Because collegiate sport includes more pressures (i.e., scholarship, revenue production, allowing coaches to keep their jobs, an increased focus on
positioning and strategy as opposed to strictly “just playing,” etc.), the involvement in collegiate sport is not as fun as it was in high school for the female athletes in this study.

Role strain is experienced by athletes when they encounter “difficulties in meeting expectations of single or multiple role set members (e.g., coaches, athletic trainers, interpersonal friendships vs. competition for important resources)” (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1992, pp. 104-105). While athletes shared that most of their club and high school coaches stressed the value of earning a solid education, it was also revealed by some members that club coaches did not always emphasize the athlete’s academic role. A few soccer members explained that earning passing grades was important for high school coaches but it did not matter what types of grades they earned to be able to play on club teams. However, most athletes had other socializing influences in their lives (e.g., parents, family members, teachers, etc.) that reinforced the value of earning an education. Most athletes seemed interested in doing well academically even if they encountered club coaches who did not always reinforce the value of academics. Tisha, Ashley, and Sophia claimed that picking a college with a reputable academic program was more important to them than picking a college with a stellar athletic program. Brandi also shared that her grandmother emphasized that she had to complete her homework and academic projects before she could focus on soccer. As long as she finished her homework and did well academically, her grandmother was satisfied. In order to be able to meet the demands of her club team practice and game schedule and her academic duties, Brandi often completed her homework on her commute to soccer practices and games.

Role conflict differs from role strain because when an athlete experiences role conflict, he/she feels pressure to fill more than one role at the same time (Blinde &
Greendorfer, 1992). As Blinde and Greendorfer (1992) indicate, “the role set of athletes typically encompass[es] an athletic role, an academic role, and a social role” (p. 106). Female athletes in Blinde and Greendorfer’s (1992) study revealed that “relative to other domains of their lives, [participating in sports] forced them to sacrifice fun, friendships, and social [activities]” (p. 107). Soccer and volleyball players in this study similarly felt that they had to make sacrifices in their lives while they were participating in high school and college sports. Athletes explained that in order to play at top levels such as elite club teams and Division I collegiate athletic teams, they often had to sacrifice their social lives. Soccer players Tracy and Sarah missed their high school proms so that they could travel to club soccer games. They shared that playing club soccer was one of the only ways for them to be scouted by collegiate soccer coaches. Playing at the collegiate level was one of their goals and they, in turn, sacrificed other aspects of their lives.

The athletes in this study also discussed how their friends would complain about the athletes’ rigorous sports schedules and made comments to the athletes about them. This provides another example of how social lives are made difficult and sacrificed at the expense of specializing in sports. Most athletes recognized what was being jeopardized through their intense sports involvement and while some felt that negative consequences resulted, others felt that the sacrifices were worth it and did not force them to abandon their social lives. Instead, the athletes created their social lives within their athletic environments. When this occurs, it can be argued that the sports role has become a primary role for the athlete. This may further be asserted due to the value that athletes in this study attached to sport in shaping their individual identities. Blinde and Greendorfer (1992) suggest that because “sport is such a powerful role set, … athletes’ identities are
so shaped by the sport context [and] all other roles become secondary” (p. 107).

Additionally:

With respect to evaluation, the athletic role is the one that is most heavily reinforced, rewarded, monitored, and regulated. Even athletic scholarships, which in principle are for the purpose of supporting academic aspirations, actually reward athletic skill and obligate athletes more to athletic ‘labor’ than to academic ‘labor’ (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1992, pp. 107-108).

Because the athletic role appears to be reinforced prior to the enforcement of any other role that an athlete fills, athletes attempt to fill their athletic role and responsibilities first. In the examples provided by the athletes in this study, their athletic role was served before their social role was satisfied.

The fourth type of role conflict that is discussed by Blinde and Greendorfer (1992) is exploitation. Exploitation, though sometimes difficult to separate from role conflict, occurs “when a role in a role set dominates, forcing an individual to reduce involvement in other roles to the point that these other roles cannot be adequately filled or must simply be excluded” (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1992, p. 108). Some forms of exploitation that are experienced by athletes include sacrificing academics for the sake of sports participation (e.g., switching majors so that they are able to satisfy athletic schedule demands, not performing as well in courses due to not having enough time to study because of sports, etc.) and athletic programs earning revenues based on athletes’ talents and successes (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1992). Volleyball player, Dominique, shared that fulfilling academic responsibilities was important to her coach because the volleyball team had a tradition of doing well academically. It was important to her coach
that this tradition be upheld, but it was also important that members on the team do well academically for the sake of earning a solid education.

Another aspect of exploitation can include athletes feeling as if their coaches are using athletes as a means to “advance their own coaching careers” (Blinde & Greendorfer, 1992, p. 109). While this specifically did not appear in any of the accounts shared by the athletes in this study, volleyball players did indicate that they felt pressured at times to perform well athletically because they did not want to be the reason for their coach losing her job. Given this example, it appears that the athletes are not being exploited by their coaches per se, but they may possibly be exploited by the male sport/product-oriented model under which they play. The athletes may be forced to consider outside agendas as opposed to focusing on their own sports involvement.

While Blinde and Greendorfer’s (1992) study focused on collegiate level athletes, several of their arguments are relevant to the experiences of the female athletes in this study at the collegiate, high school, and club levels of competition. I believe that the stressors that are tied to the male sport/product-oriented model are invading sports at the high school level (if they have not already done so) just as they invaded women’s collegiate sports after the NCAA’s takeover of the AIAW in the early 1980s. The desire to compete at elite levels within the male sport/product-oriented model of sport appears to impact female athletes to the point where they are willing to specialize in one particular sport.

*Personal encounters with sport specialization*

While I was growing up in sports, specialization was not as much of an issue as it appears to be currently. It started to become more of an issue in my school district during
my junior and senior years, when, for the most part, it had negative connotations. Beginning in seventh grade and continuing through our senior year, a considerable number of the girls with whom I had grown up playing sports played three sports for our school teams. Having to pick one sport over another was not something that most coaches mandated or even suggested often. However, specialization became somewhat controversial during my junior and senior years when the new varsity girls’ soccer coach at the high school vocalized his desires for girls to play soccer year-round. Other coaches at my high school felt threatened by this and felt that the pressure to specialize would cause girls to drop their other sports. Thus, basketball, softball, track and field, cross country, lacrosse, and volleyball coaches worried that girls would no longer play on their teams due to the time commitment required to become an elite soccer player. At times, these other coaches even suggested to their athletes during practices that they not specialize. While there were not many, if any, girls in my high school during my junior and senior years in high school that specialized in just one sport, there were girls who were in elementary and middle school who had been convinced to specialize. Therefore, when I was in high school I became aware of it. I was lucky enough to be able to avoid most pressures associated with it. As a side note, I must acknowledge that while my personal experiences with sport specialization were not necessarily ideal, many athletes have few, if any, problems specializing in a particular sport. Therefore, it must be recognized that a considerable portion of my analysis on sport specialization is subjective.

Additionally, while the coaches in my high school who promoted specialization tended to be male, the gender of the coaches who promoted specialization for the athletes
in this study was mixed. Both male and female coaches suggested that his/her athletes focus on one sport. However, in this study most soccer players were exposed to more male coaches than female coaches and most volleyball players were exposed to more female coaches than male coaches in recreational, club, high school, and college sports.

Visibility of female and male coaches

In 2004, 59.5% of collegiate volleyball coaching positions and 30.1% of collegiate soccer coaching positions were occupied by women at the Division I, II, and III levels (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004). During the 2004-2005 academic year, in the county where this study was conducted, 70% of the high school volleyball coaching positions and none of the high school soccer coaching positions were occupied by women. Given these statistics, in most cases, female soccer players were more likely to have a male head soccer coach. The chances for female athletes to experience a head female coach in volleyball are improved in comparison to soccer players. However, the opportunity to have a male head coach still exists for many volleyball athletes. This being said, in order to assess the visibility of male and female coaches for the athletes in this study, it is important to discuss the gender of the coaches that they were exposed to in high school athletics.

Soccer players revealed that throughout their soccer careers (recreational, club, high school, and college levels), they were exposed to more male head coaches than female coaches. However, a few athletes indicated that they had female coaches at some point in their soccer careers and others had female coaches in other sports that they played. For example, Mia stated that she had one female coach for a soccer team that she played on in middle school, but all of her other coaches were male. Brandi said that she
had never had a female soccer coach, while Sarah only had one female head soccer coach. During high school, Sarah’s head soccer coach for her school team was female and the assistant coach was male (the coaches were married). Tracy revealed that during her soccer career she only had one female soccer coach and that the rest of her soccer coaches were male. Tisha disclosed that while she grew up playing sports, more of her soccer coaches were male and many of her basketball coaches were female. When she played softball, she had both male and female coaches.

Volleyball players appeared to have had more female coaches throughout their athletic careers in comparison to the soccer players in this study. Sophia shared that the majority of her coaches for all of the sports that she has played have been female and that her high school and college head volleyball coaches have also been female. A significant portion of Elizabeth’s coaches have been female, as well. She stated that she has only had three male coaches. Two of her club team head volleyball coaches were male and the assistant coach for her college volleyball team is male. Amy and Marcie indicated that throughout their sports involvement, they have had a combination of female and male head coaches—approximately half were female and half were male. Marcie added that her high school head volleyball coach was female and that the assistant coaches were male. Nicole fit into her teammates’ pattern of having a female head volleyball coach. She had a female head coach for her club volleyball team. The team was assisted by a male coach. Ashley’s and Dominique’s exposure to coaches was more similar to the pattern that was developed by the soccer team than other members on their volleyball team. Dominique’s head volleyball coach in high school was female, but all of her other coaches were male. Ashley said that she only had three female head coaches during her
athletic career (high school volleyball coach, high school softball coach, and college volleyball coach), while all of her other coaches were male (club volleyball, soccer, track, basketball, and softball prior to playing in high school).

Based on the female coaching statistics that were provided via Acosta and Carpenter’s (2004) study and the OHSAA (2005) (statistics that correspond to the percentage of head athletic coaches at the high schools within the county utilized for this study), it appears that these athletes’ exposure to male and female coaches corresponds to those study’s statistics. Soccer players had fewer head female soccer coaches in high school and volleyball players were more likely to have a head female high school volleyball coach. The gender of their college coach also fits with the statistics revealed in Acosta and Carpenter’s (2004) study. The percentage of female college volleyball coaches is higher than the percentage of female college soccer coaches.

While visibility of male and female coaches contributed to shaping the sports experiences of the athletes in this study, they also shared how their college recruiting trips shaped their sports perceptions and involvement. This is discussed more in depth.

**Reflecting on recruiting experiences**

Pressures attached to recruiting may also be a product of the male sport/product-oriented model that is common in collegiate sports today as previously discussed by researchers (Blinde, 1989b; Blinde & Greendorfer, 1992; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1990). This association is based upon the fact that in order to receive an athletic scholarship, especially at the Division I level, athletes are most often recruited. As mentioned earlier, during the AIAW versus the NCAA governance struggle, prominent AIAW leaders such as Christine Grant were concerned that if receiving collegiate scholarships became an
option for female athletes, then the focus would shift to colleges having to recruit athletes as opposed to athletes recruiting colleges (Festle, 1996; Suggs, 2005; Wushanley, 2004). Athletics would have the potential to take precedence over academics (Festle, 1996; Suggs, 2005; Wushanley, 2004).

The recruiting experiences that several athletes shared in this research were quite surprising to me. I was amazed at how cut-throat some Division I athletic programs and their coaches were when it came to awarding scholarships to athletes. What made learning about these experiences even more palpable was hearing the stories directly from the athletes who endured them. Prior to conducting my focus group and individual interviews, I realized that a considerable number of recruiting experiences were likely not going to be the most ideal, especially considering the recruiting scandals and negative publicity that have surrounded collegiate athletics within the past couple of years (though most of these scandals have surrounded men’s teams).

In 2004, the NCAA formed a task force to investigate collegiate athletics recruiting practices. The creation of this task force was prompted by allegations aimed at the University of Colorado’s football team for using sex and alcohol to lure athletes to their program during recruiting trips (Lopresti, 2004). A year earlier, another incident occurred at Baylor University that provided support to investigate recruiting practices in collegiate athletics, as well. After the murder of Baylor University basketball player Patrick Dennehy by his teammate Carlton Dotson, additional information surfaced implicating head basketball coach Dave Bliss in recruiting scandals. A full investigation revealed that Bliss and his coaching staff were guilty of several recruiting violations, including paying for some of his basketball players’ tuitions, failing to report positive
drug tests, purchasing clothing and meals for recruits, and paying for lodging and transportation accommodations for recruits (NCAA, 2005). By contrast to notorious scandals afflicting men’s collegiate sports teams, I was still surprised to hear some of the examples that were relayed during this study. I was also able to attach a face to each story. The stories were no longer just random accounts that had been quantified or discussed in previously conducted research. In this research study, athletes’ emotions, hopes, and dreams were behind each of their examples. Because the stories and problems were personalized, the negative and positive aspects of recruiting became more palpable; they became more real to me.

While conducting the interviews for this study it was also disappointing to hear how the athletes at times during their recruiting and competitive experiences did not even feel like they were people. Some of them felt like they were “pieces of meat” and that their purpose was to achieve an end demanded by their coaches and athletic program. Elizabeth captured the nature of these sentiments as she also discussed the valuable role that her teammates have had in shaping her athletic experiences:

We absolutely rely on each other for complete and total emotional support. When you get here [college], you find out you’re a piece of meat. You’re not a person. Coaches, I think, on any level will do a good job of trying to make you feel like you matter. They want to know about you personally, but in the end, all that matters is if you’re healthy and if you can contribute to the game’s outcome. If you can’t, then somebody else will replace you. I feel like it’s been a very difficult transition from when you’re younger. Then, it’s more about your happiness and health in sports. Your coach is
In high school, it’s a little bit less of this and is slightly more about winning. When you get to college, it’s all about wins and losses. Personal stuff doesn’t really matter (personal communication, April 28, 2006).

Enduring the collegiate athletic environment became a new experience for some of the athletes in this study (although, many of them experienced role conflict in high school when they participated on high school and club teams). New pressures became attached to the role they filled as a student-athlete. While these new pressures were difficult for the athletes in this study, they found ways to cope with them. As Blinde and Greendorfer (1992) suggested earlier, the male/product-oriented sport model stresses competition and achievement. In order to be competitive and successful, it is argued that sport must be treated as a business. This topic presented itself to the athletes in this study.

As deceitful as some recruiting experiences were for the soccer and volleyball athletes in this study, a few of them excused the negativity associated with their recruiting trips and claimed that college sports are a business. Athletes believed that coaches are just doing their jobs when they convince athletes to come to their school to play for them even if everything they are “promising” the athletes is not necessarily true. The excuse, “it’s a business,” was given frequently. However, if these athletes were lied to similarly by other people they knew, I do not believe that they would excuse it as readily as they excuse it in their recruiting experiences. I believe that with the way that the sports environment is currently constructed, because competition and toughness are emphasized, some athletes do not feel as if they are able to negatively comment on a system that they are within. Admitting that the environment is somewhat flawed would
be admitting that perhaps they are not as tough or competitive as they would like to view themselves or be viewed by outsiders. By admitting that a system that has socialized them and has allowed them to form their individual identities is flawed, they may also be admitting that there is something wrong with them.

While most of the athletes in this study experienced recruiting difficulties, I found it shocking to a degree that they were active members in allowing deceit to continue for younger recruits. To be fair to the athletes, I do believe that they are in a difficult situation when a recruit asks them about their experiences at a particular University and asks them about their coaches. The athletes obviously want skilled players to join their program so that their team is more successful, i.e., wins more games. Athletes also are in a difficult position when they are asked to critique their coaches. Coaches provide athletes with things that they desire such as recognition and playing time. It would likely be in the best interest of athletes to speak positively about their coaches, even if the truth is slightly stretched. Also, it is likely that an athlete will not speak too negatively about a system or a team with which he/she is affiliated because that may be a negative reflection of their abilities and character. Thus, athletes remain dissatisfied with the sincerity of recruiting practices but still collude with the deceit that takes place.

Personal reflections on recruiting

While my recruiting experiences were not nearly as traumatic as some that were shared by the athletes in my focus groups, I do recall the pressures associated with trying to make the right academic and athletic choices that would shape the next four years of my life. Making the right choice as an eighteen year old was certainly not easy. I also remember how I reacted during the middle of my freshman year in college when I came
to the realization that a considerable portion of what I had been promised during my recruiting visit (i.e., playing time) was all for naught. Disappointed with the fact that I had been lied to, I considered transferring. I was convinced by athletic administrators at my college not to transfer and eventually chose to stay. While the experiences were not the most enjoyable to endure and while my relationship with my coach became relatively strained, it led me to form a stronger relationship with my teammates.

*The Role of Peers and Teammates*

Peers and teammates play an invaluable role in shaping the life/sports experiences of adolescents/athletes (Clark, 2004; Greendorfer, 1993; Lewko & Greendorfer, 1988; McPherson, 1981; Sabock & Sabock, 2005). This reliance on peers and teammates was reflected by the soccer and volleyball players in this study. Nicole shared that when she had to make a decision about which sports to play and to focus on when she was younger, she chose to play the sports in which she had better friends. Most athletes indicated that the sport(s) that they participated in and the teammates they competed with provided them with an identity. Their sport(s) and their teammates provided them with a clique and with something that they could easily associate and identify themselves. Being able to identify oneself with a group or a particular cause during adolescence is vital (Clark, 2004). Nicole noted that this identification with teammates was important when she and her teammates went to other high school sporting events together. Other students and community members saw them together frequently and because of this, they were considered to be members of an important group. This outsider awareness helped to further solidify their group cohesion.
Group and team identity also have the potential to be strengthened when teammates encounter and experience adversity together. Soccer player, Tisha, revealed that her college team’s identity and reliance on each other were enhanced when a fellow team member passed away during her freshman season. Furthermore, Brandi felt that her soccer team’s camaraderie was reinforced when her team did not receive as much support from her University and students when compared to other teams on campus. She felt that her team’s commitment towards each other was fortified in the attempt to receive more recognition from University constituents and suggested that if her team won another conference championship, then maybe more people would realize that they were worthy of attention. However, until then, Brandi and her teammates believed they would have to work harder to win more games. In this process, a common vision brought the team closer together.

A reliance on teammates due to a lack of support that was generated for their team was also present in Pelak’s (2002) research that addressed conflicts and constraints that female club hockey members endured at a large Midwestern University. The hockey players in Pelak’s (2002) study faced difficulties when their team was provided with inadequate resources to perform as well as they would have liked. Often, as previously discussed, the team dealt with less than ideal practice and game times on the ice; the team was often shoved aside for community groups to use the ice rink; the team was provided little visible recognition and opportunity to promote their team; and the team was verbally ridiculed for playing a “masculine” sport. In order to survive these abuses, the team members relied on each other for support. Additionally, to fight the gender inequities that they experienced, the team members believed that they were stronger
united than they would be if they were separated. Teammates in previous research that has been conducted (Blinde, et. al., 1994; McClung & Blinde, 2002; Pelak, 2002) have provided considerable support to each other whether the support is in the form of creating and sustaining an athlete’s individual and/or team identity or in the form of enduring conflicts and constraints imposed upon them by social factors. That being said, athletes in this study revealed that teammates did not always create the most encouraging environments that were conducive to improvement and having fun in sports. Two particular issues that were raised concerning the role that teammates have in creating a negative sports experience included the issues of hazing and politics.

**Negative experiences with teammates: Hazing and politics**

In August of 2000, Alfred University conducted a study to better understand the rates of occurrence and the nature of high school hazing. The study estimated that more than 1.5 million high school students in the United States experience some form of hazing every year. According to Nuwer (2000), hazing, though sometimes difficult to define, can generally be described as:

> Committing an act against a student, or coercing a student into committing an act, that creates a substantial risk of harm to a person in order for the student to be initiated into or affiliated with a student organization, or for any other purpose (p. 22).

More popular forms of hazing practices have included both mental and physical assignments and often, because individuals want to be accepted into a group, they engage in the activities that are asked of them. Excessive alcohol consumption, other forms of substance abuse, paddling, and whipping are some activities that can be categorized as
physical forms of hazing whereas stripping, wearing costumes or other outfits, or simulating lewd sex acts have been categorized as mental forms of hazing (Nuwer, 2000). Hazing activities tend to establish a power differential between rookies or recruits over veterans or leaders of a group (Nuwer, 2000). Some who engage in hazing activities argue that the rituals are meant to create a bond and trust amongst group members and teammates. Janis (2004) states that “it has long been known that group solidarity increases markedly whenever a collection of individuals faces a common source of external stress, such as the threat of being injured or killed in military combat” (p. 22). Perhaps this is a primary argument and/or defense for carrying out hazing activities.

However, the negative experiences associated with hazing cannot be ignored. Accounts relayed by individuals who have endured hazing practices reveal a much different picture, one that shows the negativity that is more often associated with hazing practices.

In this study, volleyball player, Elizabeth, shared that she experienced hazing during her freshman year on her high school volleyball team. Aside from being excluded from team functions and activities, seniors on her team wrote profanities on her family’s driveway and did not allow her to have a locker in the team’s locker room. Instead, she was only allowed to keep her clothes and other practice items in a grocery cart. This cart served as a constant visible reminder to her and to her teammates that she was not equal to them in their eyes. It also reminded her that she was not a part of the “team.” Actions such as these can become difficult for group and team members who are seeking acceptance from their peers (Alfred University, 2000; Nuwer, 2000).

The Alfred University hazing survey that was conducted in 2000 suggests that children in high school “are just learning to distinguish between appropriate and
inappropriate behavior” (p. 1). Without adult supervision, hazing and other dangerous activities are more likely to occur (Alfred University, 2000). The methodology employed with the Alfred University (2000) study included mailing 20,000 surveys to high school juniors and seniors. While there are fifteen million high school students in the United States, study conductors Nadine C. Hoover and Norman J. Pollard drew a random national sample of 20,000 students. Of the 20,000 surveys distributed via postal mail, 5.46% of the surveys were not able to be delivered, thus lowering the total number of surveys assumed to have reached their destination to 18,600. The number of surveys that were completed and returned to the study’s conductors totaled 1,541 (8.28% response rate). Additionally, of the students who responded, 90% attended public school, 5% went to church school, 5% were enrolled in a private school, and 1% were home-schooled.

Based on the surveys that were returned, it was determined that 91% of high school students belonged to at least one group (sports team, music/art/theatre group, scholastic/intellectual group, church group, social club or organization, peer group or gang, cheerleading squad, newspaper or yearbook, political or social action, vocational group, fraternity or sorority) and that 48% of the students who responded to their surveys indicated that they had been subjected to hazing activities. Furthermore, of the students who returned their surveys, 43% of them experienced humiliating hazing activities and 30% performed potentially illegal acts during their group initiation (Alfred University, 2000). The Alfred University hazing survey also revealed that male and female high school students reported high levels of hazing. However, male students were at a higher risk for dangerous hazing. Of the males who responded to the survey, 48% shared that they were subjected to humiliating hazing, whereas 24% stated that they were involved
with substance abuse, and 27% were involved with dangerous hazing. Girls who responded to the survey indicated that 39% experienced humiliating hazing, 18% were involved with substance abuse, and 17% were subjected to dangerous hazing. Dangerous hazing includes “hurtful, aggressive, destructive, and disruptive behaviors” (Alfred University, 2000, p. 4). Humiliating hazing on the other hand includes “socially offensive, isolating, or uncooperative behaviors” (Alfred University, 2000, p. 4) and hazing that includes substance abuse includes the “abuse of alcohol, tobacco products, and/or illegal drugs” (Alfred University, 2000, p. 4). Another important and relevant statistic reported in the Alfred University (2000) hazing survey stated that in the United States, “the greatest number of high school students were subjected to hazing for sports (24%)… this 24% is equivalent to approximately 800,672 high school athletes per year” (p. 6).

While only one athlete out of the total twelve in this study shared her experiences with hazing, it is still a serious matter in high school sports. This is especially true for the athletes who endure forms of hazing. Elizabeth’s hazing experiences almost led her to quit playing volleyball and made her feel like an “outsider” and “unaccepted” on her team. Though Elizabeth did not go into explicit detail about how her hazing experiences made her feel, there are a variety of negative affects that hazing victims live through. Some of these negative consequences include suffering an injury, fighting with parents, hurting other people, having trouble eating, sleeping, and/or concentrating, considering suicide, getting physically sick, breaking ties with other friends, and death (Alfred University, 2000). Overall, hazing is difficult for anyone to endure, however, it may be more difficult for high school students to experience due to the fact that they are so
dependent on being accepted, finding a group with which to associate, and are still
learning to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.

Aside from Elizabeth’s example that discussed her hazing experiences in high
school sports, athletes in this study also explained how it was difficult to deal with
political agendas that presented themselves. In some cases, the “politics” of high school
sports almost led athletes to quit their sport, as well. Many athletes shared stories
revolving around the political climate of their high school teams. For example, Marcie
felt that her sports involvement was made more difficult because she did not have the
“right last name.” Because of this, she felt that she had to work harder to get to where she
was than other athletes on her teams. Ashley revealed how two athletes on her high
school teams (basketball, softball, and volleyball) controlled coaches of the teams of
which she was a member. If these two athletes wanted a coach fired, it happened. These
two athletes made sure that they played as much as they wanted and that their agendas
were followed. The athletes apparently had the “right” last name and other administrators
within the school system failed to challenge the athletes. Ashley concluded her story by
sharing how these two athletes quit their college volleyball teams after their freshman and
sophomore seasons.

High school sports included both negative and positive experiences for athletes in
this study. Athletes’ parents, coaches, and their peers played primary and complementary
roles to each other in shaping sports experiences. While the media is another socializing
agent, the athletes did not explain their relationship with the media and their sports
involvement in depth. The media was briefly discussed, however, and this relationship to
the athletes’ sports experiences is discussed in the next section.
The Media

The media plays an influential role in presenting, evaluating, and shaping the sports experiences of female athletes (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983). While a variety of studies have been conducted to analyze the coverage and treatment of female athletes and their sports (AAFLA, 1990, 1994, 2000, 2005; Duncan & Messner, 1998) and while the media is considered to be an agent of socialization, the soccer and volleyball athletes in this study did not reflect as extensively on the media as one of their primary socialization agents. The athletes tended to discuss much more the role that their parents, coaches, and peers/teammates played. The media did however play a critical role in how these athletes secured the latest sports information. Many of the athletes indicated that they received a majority of their sports information from television programming. Ten of the twelve athletes in this study admitted that they frequently watched ESPN, a station noted in the AAFLA studies (1990, 1994, 2000, 2005) for not promoting women’s sports equitably in comparison to men’s sports and for contributing to the sexualization and trivialization of female athletes.

The fact that the athletes in this study did not readily mention the socializing affects of the media, and this raises a potentially interesting idea. Similar to the attitude that my high school and college teammates had with regard to limited fan support at our games, the athletes in this study may also feel that the media’s presentation of female athletes is the way that it is [italics added] and/or nothing will change that [italics added]. If that is the case, hegemony is preserved yet again. The soccer and volleyball players in this study have been socialized into living with their lower-tiered status in the athletic realm and have learned to accept, merely out of habit, having to work harder to receive
fan support and recognition from their constituents. When athletes reveal that they would rather watch men’s sports over women’s sports they regurgitate an acceptance and provide support to the trivialized coverage of female athletes. However, in all fairness, it still must be recognized that the athletes in this study are partially a reflection of their socialization. Some athletes grew up without girls’ sports leagues and even more athletes encountered some form of a constraint in high school sports. As college athletes, their sports are not provided as much support and recognition when compared to men’s revenue sports, especially football and men’s basketball. However, the athletes did acknowledge the concept of the lack of support resulting from their sport and not from their gender. While this may be true, increased media coverage and increased tasteful coverage of their sports, may help to convince members of society that women’s soccer and women’s volleyball are worthy sports and deserve to be recognized. The athletes in these sports deserve attention not because of how attractive they look in beach volleyball bikinis or after ripping a soccer jersey off (i.e., Brandi Chastain), but because of the talents and the skills they exhibit in the games to which most of them have dedicated their lives. Trivialized and sexualized coverage represents a disservice not only to the female athletes who are competing but also to the fans who do watch and/or follow their sports, to the fans who may otherwise watch their sports if the coverage were different, and to the remainder of society.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

*Personal Reflections*

The process of writing a Master’s thesis provided me the opportunity to learn on a variety of levels. Not only has this process allowed me to learn more about social, historical, and philosophical conditions that surround women’s sports, but it has allowed me to learn how sports fit into the lives of female athletes today. It has also granted me the opportunity to learn more about myself and how sports fit into my life. My decision to analyze the influence that various socializing agents such as parents and other family members, coaches, peers/teammates, and the media have on the experiences of female athletes developed as a result of my own personal experiences in sports. Using my own sports experiences as a template, I was specifically interested in studying the sports experiences of female athletes while they participated in sports in high school. Recognizing that sports experiences are also developed and enhanced in youth, club, and college sports, it was virtually impossible to avoid discussing sports at these levels. Exploring sports experiences at these levels provided a more nuanced explanation of the *female sport experience* [italics added]. Selecting my topic was essentially borne out of a culmination of experiences that I have faced with regard to the social agents in my own life.

The specific sports that I became involved with while I was growing up (soccer, softball, and basketball) were merely a result of opportunities that were present, a matter of personal appeal, early success in them, and encouragement from my parents and family members to continue my involvement in them. At a young age, I formulated a
positive relationship with sports, and as I grew up, sports became a part of my identity. My involvement in sports shaped important aspects of my life such as how I spent my time, the people with whom I spent my time, and the goals and aspirations that I held for my future. There were even times where sports were my motivation for wanting to do well academically. Without top-notch grades, I would not have been able to play sports, and I considered life without sports to be unthinkable. Sports allowed me to differentiate myself from other people but also provided me with my closest friends and some of my greatest memories.

Once I was involved in soccer, softball, and basketball, continued success and encouraging, yet realistic, feedback from my parents, direction from my coaches, and positive interaction with my teammates and friends kept me involved and kept me wanting to play sports at a higher level. This is not to say that I did not experience troubles in youth, club, high school, and college sports. Like many other athletes, I had my fair share of difficult coaches, and had to endure the political agendas of high school and college sports, spoiled teammates, and less than ideal collegiate athletic recruiting trips.

Reflecting on my negative experiences in sports also led me to research the topic that I chose. Ultimately, I wanted to discover what the constraints (i.e., limited social activities outside of sports, politics of high school sports, uneducated and/or verbally abusive coaches, not being accepted by teammates, etc.) were that other female athletes faced and what kept them motivated to continue participating. For me, as well as the athletes in my research, sports often become a significant part of one’s lifestyle, and quitting is just not an option. Being able to identify oneself as an athlete and being able to
satisfy cravings to compete play pivotal roles for most athletes in their decision to continue participating. These factors motivated me as well as the athletes in my research to remain involved in sports.

Additionally, as a former travel league girls softball coach (ages 12, 13, and 14), I often searched for answers as to why players on my teams elected not to try-out for their junior high and high school softball teams. In some cases, it certainly was not due to a lack of talent. Some of the better players, whom I coached, decided not to play on the school teams. I made the assumption that the reasons must have been social in nature, but speculation is all that I can offer, because I did not include these softball players as subjects in my research. In order to formulate a more nuanced explanation as to why this discontinuation may have occurred, I focused my research on the high school sports experiences of female athletes and also reflected on their sports participation prior to and after high school. Based on my own experiences as an athlete and the role that socializing agents played in the development and the creation of temporary constraints in my life, I wanted to discover similar and contrasting experiences that could be compared to mine.

Practical Implications

This research has practical implications for all of the socializing agents that were addressed. Parents can learn that communicating about sports while children are young can impact whether or not their children decide to initially become involved. Mothers and father can discover the importance of discussing mothers’ sports involvement or the lack of opportunities that were present for mothers while they were growing up. Children need to understand that their mothers’ lack of previous participation and perhaps their mothers’ current lack of skill and/or interest in sports may
be largely a reflection of the social environment that existed when they were younger. It is important that children do not automatically assume that their mothers’ lack of involvement is due to lack of interest or skill. Additionally, if mothers are interested in joining sports teams, it is important that they become involved. As time passes, however, it is quite possible that opportunities to participate in sports will be more available. Hopefully, not being able to participate will be an issue of the past. It is my hope that opportunities will never be as difficult to obtain as they were prior to and directly after the passage of Title IX in 1972 (and even between 1984-1988 when the *Grove City College v Bell* decision removed the teeth from Title IX by stating that the legislation did not apply to programs within colleges, i.e., intercollegiate athletics, that were not directly receiving federal financial aid dollars). Knowing the history of women’s sports is important because it will allow society to measure how far it has come with regard to providing opportunities for girls and women in sport. While women have come a long way in sport, based on media coverage and coaching opportunities, improvements still need to be made and women need to be provided with more opportunities. Because parents are a primary socializing agent, if and when sports are discussed, they need to communicate to both sons and daughters that sports can be an option for them. Children should not be limited and should be allowed to pursue any opportunity that they choose. Tolerance and equity are thus learned. These qualities can be taught via communication between parents and children.

Communication is also a two-way, reciprocal process that is important at all stages of childhood and sports involvement. Parents should allow their children to select which sport(s) they want to join and continue their participation. Often, children will
select the sport(s) with which they have more positive social experiences. Developing positive social experiences with sports and other children is vital to continued involvement.

Concepts discussed throughout this study may also be practical for coaches to learn from and apply. Coaches may be able to learn more about how their coaching methods and practices have the potential to affect and/or may currently be affecting their athletes. More specifically, coaches possess the opportunity to learn how specialization with young athletes has the potential to impact their growth and development in other areas of their lives. With regard to recruiting, college coaches at all Divisions (I, II, and III) and within various Associations (NCAA, NAIA, NJCAA), will be better able to understand how their recruiting efforts affect the female athletes that they are recruiting. This study can also be an educational tool for coaches because it may enable them to better understand the role that they have the potential to fulfill in athletes’ lives. Coaches need to understand that athletes do look for their guidance and approval. The potential mentoring relationship that exists between an athlete and a coach has the ability to influence the athlete’s future involvement with sports and overall confidence in his/her abilities/worth.

Individuals involved on athletic teams themselves will be able to learn from this research, as well. All athletes need to recognize the dangers that are associated with hazing and should avoid participating in hazing initiations for their teams or groups. Athletes can also learn that encouraging their teammates is beneficial regardless of the level of participation. Teammates rely on each other for support both on and off the field and their influence contributes significantly to the athletic and personal development of
fellow athletes. Furthermore, this research has the potential to allow athletes to better understand themselves, their athletic experiences, how their involvement in sports fits within the historical context of women’s sports, and the role that socializing agents play in their sports involvement.

Media executives, anchors, reporters, and other people affiliated with disseminating information to the public sector can benefit from this research because as athletes mentioned, their sports are not always on television (perhaps, one of the more popular mediums to access sports information/competitions). While women’s team sports such as soccer, basketball, and softball have experienced recent increases in participation rates, this has not been reflected by the media. There have not been comparable increases in coverage for women’s sports on television networks and channels (in fact, there have been declines in coverage). Specifically, these increases have not been presented on ESPN. While ESPN and other television networks and channels continue to trivialize and sexualize the athletic accomplishments of female athletes, the opportunities increase for women’s sports and female athletes to be taken less seriously. The potential exists for females to question their involvement in sports if they do not match the portrayal of female athletes available through the media.

Any individual who reads this study will be presented with specific examples as to how certain athletes’ sports experiences developed as they progressed through sports. Additionally, readers of this study will have the opportunity to learn the different and complementary roles that are filled by athletes’ parents, coaches, teammates/peers, and the media. For individual athletes who have not had to overcome legislative obstacles denying them opportunities to engage in athletics, it is hoped that this study will
introduce them to a deeper appreciation for their chances to participate in sports. It is imperative for them to know that many female athletes sacrificed and struggled considerably to enable them to participate in sports today.

Limitations

This research was conducted during a limited time frame and due to time constraints I was not able to fully reflect on the second focus group transcript prior to conducting subsequent individual interviews with members of the volleyball team. Because of this, I may have missed out on opportunities to further clarify responses or concerns that were raised after I was able finish transcribing the second focus group interview.

Recommendations for Future Research

In the future, I would also like to explore the role that social agents have on sports experiences of female athletes who compete in individual sports as opposed to team sports. Because my high school and collegiate sports experiences were solely with team sports (soccer, basketball, and softball), I believe that learning more about individual sports may shed additional light on the sports experiences of female athletes and may introduce issues and patterns that were not presented during my own sports experiences and this study. I am curious to discover whether or not socializing agents play a similar complementary role to the development of athletes in individual sports as they appear to play for athletes in team sports.

Conducting studies with socializing agents such as parents and coaches may also prove to be beneficial in the future in that it may enable readers to better comprehend the impressions and experiences of these agents along with the impressions and experiences
of the female athletes themselves. It would likely be valuable to understand why parents socialize their children into and within sports the way that they do. Understanding why coaches interact with athletes the way that they do would also be important. If changes need to be enacted with the socialization processes that are carried out by both of these agents, it would be necessary to know the purposes behind their current sports philosophies and practices. It is possible that socializing agents feed off of each other and learn from each other. For example, while the media was not mentioned as frequently as other agents were in the sport socialization of the athletes in this study, it is quite possible that parents and coaches are heavily influenced by the media. This requires additional research.

Future research would benefit from targeting former high school female athletes who ended their sports participation prior to college. It would be interesting to analyze what leads to some athletes continuing their development and involvement in sports so that they are able to compete on a collegiate level and what leads to some athletes discontinuing their participation either prior to college or during high school. I would also like to conduct future research on sport specialization to determine if it is something that happens more often in particular sports or if it is becoming a trend for all sports. Additionally, it would be interesting to explore the role that socializing agents play in the specialization process and whether certain agents influence athletes more than others to specialize.

It may be interesting to research the sporting experiences of female athletes who compete at different Divisions in college, i.e., Division II and III, to determine how much of a role athletic-based scholarships play in developing experiences for female athletes.
While some of the athletes in this study expressed how difficult collegiate sports have been at times, how they resemble a job, and how they are motivated by their athletic scholarships and the opportunity to be with their teammates, it would be worthy to conduct future research on the sports experiences and motivations of athletes at Division II and III levels (comparative studies of Division I and III have been conducted focusing on the male-sport model and forms of conflict that female athletes experience, however, more studies of these nature may prove to be beneficial). Though I would assume that teammates play a valuable role for athletes in all athletic Divisions, future research could be conducted that compared the motivational role that teammates play for fellow athletes.

Additionally, because snowball sampling was utilized to find research participants, participants were relatively similar with regard to class, race, and ability. Therefore, future research is necessary to discover the high school sports experiences of female athletes that take class, race, and disability into account.

Finally, future research could also include learning about and comparing the experiences of athletes in revenue and in non-revenue producing sports. Because money has the ability to motivate athletic programs and has the ability to motivate certain agendas in sports, it is possible that athletes in revenue producing sports are influenced differently than athletes in non-revenue sports.

Practical Contributions Provided by this Study

As this study revealed, within the past ten years, participation rates have continued to increase for girls in sports. In fact, high school sports participation rates are at an all-time high (NFSHS, 2005a, 2005b). Unfortunately, these increased rates and interest in sports have not been reflected in the media. Girls and women continue to
receive less coverage for their sports involvement and while sexualized and trivialized coverage have arguably been improved within the last decade, serious problems still exist. Sports coverage needs to better reflect participation rates and interest that are exhibited by girls and women in sports.

*Enacting Changes for Improvement*

When athletes in this study were asked if they would select a male or a female coach if presented an opportunity to choose, nine out of twelve athletes indicated a preference for a male coach. This selection was based primarily on prior experiences with both male and female coaches. Athletes in this study also indicated that they strongly disliked when female coaches tied “feelings” and “emotions” into their sports involvement (i.e., post-game discussions, practice sessions). If this is something that athletes truly feel needs to be changed, it is suggested that coaching clinics be offered for women to participate in. This is not to say that women are in need of repair. However, conducting clinics may enable more women to learn about coaching practices and techniques and may enable more women to be introduced to coaching opportunities.

Conducting clinics may also prove to be beneficial for athletes’ parents. These clinics could provide parents with opportunities to learn about and how to best support, instruct, and coach the sports that their children are active in. Furthermore, they could teach parents the benefits that are associated with encouraging and maintaining realistic expectations for their children’s sports involvement.

Having the opportunity to view sports relics was another theme that presented itself in this research multiple times. During my personal recruiting reflections, I shared how I assigned an automatic respect to my college basketball coach after seeing his
college basketball pictures and newspaper clippings. In this study’s review of literature, newspaper clippings, trophies, pictures, and other visible sports awards were addressed in Shakib and Dunbar’s (2004) research as tools that initiated sports communication between athletes and their fathers. Volleyball player, Nicole, disclosed during her interview session how viewing her father’s yearbooks and sports pictures helped her to develop her interest in sports participation. The common theme with these sports relics was that they were only available for fathers. As Title IX becomes older and as women are provided more opportunities to participate in sports, it is hoped that girls and women will have more trophies, newspaper clippings, and other awards signifying their sports involvement. It is encouraged that women share and visible display these relics so that their daughters and other young women can be socialized into knowing that sports participation is something that girls and women should be proud of. The effect that these sports trophies, newspaper clippings, and awards had on developing communication between daughters with their fathers can also be applied to initiating conversation between daughters and their mothers.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Focus Group and Individual Interview Informed Consent Form
Informed Consent

Investigator: Megan L. Valentine

Phone:

Project Title: Through her eyes: Exploring the experiences of high school female athletes

Purpose:
You are being asked to participate in a research project that is exploring the high school sports experiences of female athletes, the role that socializing agents play in these sports experiences, and how certain constraints and/or opportunities influence high school female athletes’ experiences. As a second-year Master’s student, I am collecting this information in order to help fulfill the Master of Education degree requirements. Focus groups and individual interviews will be used to better understand these experiences.

Procedures:
This study will ask you to participate in one focus group session and one individual interview session. During focus group conversations and individual interviews, you will be asked to reflect on your high school sports experiences. More specifically, you will be asked to describe the role that your (1) parents, (2) coaches, (3) peers, and (4) the media played in your high school sports participation. The focus group session and the individual interview session will be recorded via audiotape. The first focus group session will last approximately two (2) hours and the individual interview will last approximately one (1) hour. You may stop your involvement in this study at any time without penalty. You do not have to complete this study even if you begin.

Risks:
While participating in this research, the anticipated risks to you are no greater than those normally encountered in daily life. However, since you will be required to reflect on your high school sports experiences and the role that social agents played in the development and creation of these experiences, it is possible that this reflection may lead you to experience a negative change in your emotional state. If you experience such emotional changes, you may contact the Bowling Green Counseling Center (www.bgsu.edu/offices/sa/counseling; phone number: 419-372-2081), whose services you will be responsible for paying for yourself.

Benefits:
You will be provided an opportunity to learn more about the role that socializing agents played in your high school sports experiences and will be provided with an opportunity to voice your opinions and share your high school sports experiences with other members of
the study. As a member of this study, you will learn how your experiences relate to the experiences of others. On a personal and on a societal level, this study will raise an awareness of gender equity issues, feminist issues, activist issues, issues pertaining to participation and employment opportunities for girls and women in sports and will also reveal perspective with regard to the operation of social systems/practices/theories such as hegemony, patriarchy, feminist theory, and the Sociological Imagination. Additionally, if socializing agents such as parents, coaches, peers, and the media are made (more) aware of the impact that they have on high school female athletes, their future actions may remain the same or may be changed to be more conducive to the learning and/or sports environment that exists for female athletes.

Confidentiality:
Information you provide during focus group sessions and individual interviews will be kept confidential and the identity and experiences of focus group members are not to be revealed by you and will not be revealed by other focus group members, my advisor, or by me. Focus group discussions and individual interviews will be recorded with an audiotape. Tapes will be accessible to only my advisor and me, will be locked in a container and kept in a locked office at Bowling Green State University, and will be destroyed after the study has been completed. You have a choice to be quoted using a pseudonym (fake name) or the choice to not be quoted at all.

Voluntary Participation:
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may discontinue your participation and/or withdraw your consent in this study at any point without penalty. You are not required to answer any questions during focus group and individual interview sessions. If you choose to end your participation, you may do so without explanation. No questions will be asked by the primary investigator.

Contact Information:
Questions pertaining to this research may be directed to me and/or my advisor.

Researcher: Megan Valentine, meganv@bgsu.edu

Advisor: Dr. Nancy Spencer, nspencer@bgsu.edu

If you have questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716, (hsrb@bgsu.edu).
By signing this form, I agree to participate in this study and to have my focus group and individual interview comments recorded via audiotape. I have been informed of this study’s purpose, its benefits, and its risks. Upon signing this consent document, I will be provided a copy of all consent documents.

__________________________  _______________________
Participant’s Signature        Date

Please initial your preference:
___ Yes, you may quote me, if you use a pseudonym
___ No, you may not quote me
APPENDIX B

Sports Participation Survey
Sports Participation Survey

Name of College Sport you play (if applicable): __________________________________

Today’s Date: _________________________________ Time: ______________________

Youth Sports Background:

1. How did you first become interested in playing sports? Please explain.

2. Was there anyone who influenced you to become involved in sports? Please explain.

3. Was there anyone who discouraged you from participating in sport? Please explain.

High School Sports Background:

4. What sport(s) did you play in High School?

5. What was the highest level of sport that you played in High School (e.g., Varsity, JV)?

College Sports Background:

6. How many years have you attended college? (please circle)
   1  2  3  4  5  Other (please explain)

7. What is your primary sport at the collegiate level?

8. Are you on scholarship? If so, please indicate what kind of scholarship you receive.

9. Have you played any sports at a higher level than high school or college? If so, please indicate what sports and the highest level you played (e.g., national, international)? How long did you play at the highest level?
APPENDIX C

Focus Group Question Guide
Focus Group Questions

My focus in this session is on your high school sports experiences. As a result, I am interested in knowing what sports you played, who influenced you in a positive way to play those sports, and whether anyone or anything had a negative impact on your sports experiences.

1. So, to begin with, what did each of you say about when and how you began to play sports? (refer to question #1)

2. Was there anyone or anything that particularly encouraged you to play sport? Explain. (see question #2).

3. Was there anyone or anything that discouraged you from participating in sports? Please explain. (see question #3).

4. What did you like most about playing sports when you first began to play as a youth?

5. What did you dislike most about playing youth sports?

6. What factor(s) were most important in your decision to continue playing sports in school?

7. Did you play sports for any other school teams before you went to High School (e.g., elementary or middle school)?

8. When you got to High School, who or what encouraged you to play sports? Explain how they encouraged you.

9. In High School was there anyone or anything that discouraged you to play sports? Please explain.

10. What did you like most about playing sports in high school?

11. What did you like least about playing sports in high school?

12. How did you decide that you wanted to play sports in college?

13. Was there anyone or anything that influenced you (positively) to play sports in college?

14. Was there anyone or anything that discouraged you from playing sports in college?

15. Were you recruited to play sports in college? If so, what was/were those experiences like?
APPENDIX D

Individual Interview Question Guide
Individual Interview Questions (General)

1. How active have your parents been in your sports involvement, while you were growing up, while you were in high school, and even in college?

2. How important overall has it been to your parents that you be successful in sports do you think?

3. Did your parents participate in sports while they were growing up?

4. While you were growing up did you communicate about sports a lot with your parents?

5. While you were growing up, did you view your parents being active in sports whether they were coaching, playing, or officiating, some other capacity?

6. Was there ever a time during your involvement in sports where perhaps you relied a little less on your parents’ input and relied more heavily on someone else’s input?

7. While you were participating in sports, whether it was in high school or while you were growing up, was there ever anything that happened to change your level of involvement?

8. While you participated in high school sports or also sports at a younger level or a select level, also in college, did you and your teammates ever have to overcome any sort of obstacles? If yes, what was this obstacle and what did you and/or your teammates do to overcome the obstacle?

9. How would you describe the role of your teammates in your high school sports involvement?

10. How would you describe the role of your teammates in your college sports involvement?

11. What traits do you feel an ideal coach should have?

12. Given a hypothetical situation, if you had an option to have a random coach, if you had to pick whether or not you wanted a male or a female coach, would you select one or the other or it doesn’t matter whatsoever at all to you?

13. Have you had mostly male head coaches, female head coaches, or a mix of both as head coaches?
14. Was your high school athletic director male or female?

15. Were there any female administrators in your athletic department in your high school?

16. Were there any female administrators within other administrative departments in your high school?

17. How would you describe the level of community, school, and student support at your games for your high school team(s)?

18. Do you feel that the level of support that your high school teams were receiving was comparable to the level of support that the male high school teams were receiving?

19. How would you describe the level of community, school, and student support at your games for your college team(s)?

20. Do you feel that the level of support that your college team(s) receives is comparable to the level of support that the male high school teams receive?

21. What sports, if any, would you say that you are most interested in following?

22. Which media forms, if any, do you tend to use most often to keep yourself updated with sports?

23. Do you plan on continuing your sports participation when your college career is finished?

24. What tends to motivate your performances the most and did you find that what motivated your performances changed at any point while you were growing up?
APPENDIX E

Electronic Mail Participant Request
Dear Student-Athlete [Replaced with student-athlete’s name]:

My name is Megan Valentine and I am a second year Sport Administration Master's student conducting thesis research on the sports experiences of female athletes. I am e-mailing to request your assistance with my research.

I am looking to collect information from female athletes who currently compete for University teams. My thesis specifically focuses on the role that socializing agents (i.e. parents, coaches, peers, the media, etc) play in the sports experiences of female athletes. In order to gather my information, I will be using focus group interviews and individual interviews. The focus group interview will likely last between one to two hours and the individual interview will likely last around thirty minutes to one hour. In case you are not familiar with the set-up of a focus group, questions will be asked of you and three to four other people in the group with you.

I would like to conduct my focus group and individual interview sessions this week and next week [specific dates included in the e-mail]. If you would like to share your insight for my thesis, I would appreciate your assistance. If you have any questions, feel free to send an e-mail to this address. If you are unable to help with this project, that is perfectly alright, however, if you could get back to me as soon as possible to let me know one way or another that would be helpful. If you are interested in partaking in this research, please let me know what times would work out best for you to meet. I will be able to conduct focus group and individual interviews at any time and on any day. Thank you for your time and consideration!

Megan Valentine,

Graduate Student, School of Human Movement, Sport, and Leisure Studies