#UNDERESTIMATED: AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO THE EXPLORATION OF GIRL ATHLETE IDENTITIES THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHIC SELF-REPRESENTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Sandra L. Faulkner, Advisor

Female athletes are now participating in sport at younger and younger ages (Kian et al, 2013). In 2015 it is assumed that a post-Title IX athlete lives in a world with widespread social acceptance (Kane 1989.) Kane concluded in 1989 that female athletes and events are highly underreported in the mass media and young girls and women are often presented in stereotypic ways. The sad thing is that 26 years later not much has changed. However, female athletes are still underrepresented, and trivialized in mainstream media (Messner, et al. 2015). Building on this foundational knowledge, it is important to know how girl athletes negotiate their bodies and identities in this sport domain as they construct their own female athlete identities. This dissertation examined how girl athletes prefer to be represented through self-constructed photo essays. In past research (Krane et al, 2010; Krane et al, 2011), female athletes choose to emphasize their own power and strength in the athleticism and girl athletes overall, appreciate these types of images. This exploration of girl athletes’ choice of photo representation is grounded in an multidisciplinary approach that conjoin an intersectional feminist framework and the Communication Theory of Identity as well as Cultural Contracts theory. Thirteen girl athletes constructed their own photo essays depicting what it means to them to “be a female athlete” and a one-on-one interview discussing their photo essays. Analysis of the interviews exposed 6 higher order themes that emerged from the data: school (the good and the bad); female athletes are better than male athletes; look pretty play pretty; relationships; we want female role models; I am a female athlete. Overall, the girl athletes emphasized notions of female athlete empowerment and strength. However, they acknowledged the multicity of their identities and
how those identities are contested. Ultimately each girl athlete discussed how their identities
create tension and how they have managed to relieve the tension. How these conclusions
incorporate identity gaps, mainstream media, and social media are discussed comparative to the
conceptual framework.
To my incredible parents, James and Charlene Kaunert. Thank you for always being my “number one fans.”
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Don’t throw the ball to her that hard Jason.” Coach said. It was my first day of baseball practice. Moving from New Hampshire to sunny San Diego California was going to be an adjustment. My parents thought joining a local youth baseball team would not only acclimate me to the weather, but to some kids my age. My dad, former collegiate baseball catcher, insisted that I play baseball as a way to build “fundamentals and overall appreciation for the game of baseball.” I recall my mother mildly complaining about it, yet I am not sure why. Most likely, she didn’t want me to get hurt. I recall that first day of practice vividly. I was introduced to the team one by one, the coach seemed nice and welcomed me. I was introduced to my team and he patted me on the back and told me to warm up and slowly I became familiar with my new teammates names: Kevin, Tyler, Jason, Ryan, Tommy, and Josh. My coach and other teammates referred to me by my last name just as they did to everyone else. I felt like I belonged.

I began to showcase my skills in a warm up drill. I remember sweating from nerves.

“Ryan you’re too close to her to be throwing that hard!”

“Tommy, don’t slide into her like that at home plate!”

“Tyler, you’re hitting the ball too hard!” My father’s face became tight and angry the way it did when my sister and I bickered in the back seat. He stood up walked over to the coach and said “Listen, I am aware that my daughter is female, she is just as much as an athlete as the rest of these boys. Knock off the coddling.” In my short 8 years of life, this was the first time I became aware of my own gender. Female. Female meant soft? Female meant coddling? Female meant lesser than my male teammates? These questions would linger in my head for years.

Participating in sport has made me hyperaware of my own gendered identity in a multitude of contexts, and this first gendered experience was just one among many others as I
held on tight to my own female athlete identity. This female athlete identity began to manifest itself into many forms. It was my physical appearance; it was my long pony tail, the eyeliner and mascara and even the uniform. It was also my mental state of athletic aggression while ensuring that I did not spit on the field to make my mother happy. It was finding a prom dress to show off my arm muscles. This identity eventually presented itself in all aspects of my life.

Sport is a microcosm of society, and it often reflects societally constructed norms and values. Many scholars detail how sport is a masculine domain in many contexts (Bandy, 2014; Cooky, Messner, & Musto, 2015; Duron, 2009; Kane, 1989), valuing masculine characteristics such as aggression, muscularity, and power. These concepts complicate the expectations of female athletes, which I examine in the present research. Female athletes exist in a context, which juxtaposes their identities in many ways: Female athletes are often expected to exhibit femininity in valued forms such as conventional beauty (e.g., tall, thin) and passivity. Being passive does not necessarily agree with aggression, strength, power, and sweat, however, I found myself caught between these expectations and experienced pressure as I negotiated the pull between sport and feminine identities based on context. I know what my sport and father required of me on the field, but as my father began to pressure me into lifting weights, I could not help but think about the two boys in my freshman class who commented that my arms were bigger than theirs and what they would say next. The need to excel athletically, while being accepted in my peer circles became a game of tug of war.

Today female athletes are participating in sport at younger and younger ages (Cooky, Messner, & Hextrom, 2013; Kian, Bernstein, & McGuire, 2013). Due in part to the passage of Title IX in 1972, more opportunities to participate in sport are presented to young female athletes. Title IX is a crucial amendment to the civil rights act that required all federally funded
institutions give both sexes equal opportunity. Title IX covers six main areas: athletics; science, technology, engineering, math programs (STEM); career and technical education; sexual harassment; single-sex education; and the rights of pregnant and parenting students. Essentially, Title IX was meant to be a gender-neutral piece of legislation that was designed to ensure equality in education for all students, eliminating sex-based discrimination. It wasn’t until the late 1970’s when Title IX began to apply to athletics. Since then, Title IX has become the fundamental piece of legislation providing girls and women the opportunity to play sport through college. This has increased female participation in collegiate and professional athletics. Forty-five years later we have a sporting context that assumes that post-Title IX athletes, specifically female athletes, live in a world with widespread social acceptance (Kane, 1989).

Though we see female athletes participating in athletics in higher numbers, female athletes are still underrepresented, misrepresented, and trivialized in mainstream media (Cooky, et al. 2015). In the rare occurrence where a female athlete is featured on the cover of a popular sport magazine, it is not uncommon to find her scantily clad or posed in a way that demeans her athleticism. The type of female athlete that the media utilizes also adheres to hegemonic forms of femininity. It is no secret that the mass media privilege women who are tall, thin, and white; sport media is no different. There are more than enough female athletes of all races and bodily shapes who are exceptional athletes, however, the media never features them. Ronda Rousey is a great example of this. A phenomenal athlete whose athletic prowess took the MMA (Mixed Martial Arts) fighting world by storm. However, if you look at the ESPN Magazine covers she has been featured on, her feminine identity is highlighted over her athleticism. Including both the ESPN Body Issue and Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition Rousey is sexualized. The ESPN Anniversary Edition featured Rousey surrounded by balloons smiling and jumping in the air.
Female athletes are often portrayed in this trivialized way (Cooky et al, 2015). Young female athletes are exposed to these (mis)representations throughout their athletic and social experiences. In a mediated society where female athletic ability is downplayed, this research celebrates not only female athletic ability, but celebrates girl athletes as multifaceted beings. For example, through the work of Krane and colleagues, we know girl athletes crave and enjoy the opportunity to create their own photo self-representations (Krane et al., 2010; Barak et al., revision in review). Through self-directed photo essays and open discussions on their photographic stories the girl athletes in this study had the chance to finally explain themselves.

These studies (Krane, et al., 2010; Barak, et al., revision in review) have inspired this dissertation; as a part of this research team, I discovered first hand that the female athletes in these studies experienced some of the same identity constraints that I had. In this dissertation, I am interested in girls’ perceptions of athletes, and themselves as girl athletes, specifically their self-representations. Beginning this dissertation, I had personal experiences of what it means to me to be a female athlete and the knowledge of what collegiate female athletes value in their own photo representations. My questions began to center on when does identity negotiation start in this process? Specifically, when do girl athletes start negotiating these identities? This is where girl athlete’s voices enter into my methods: Girl athletes’ representations of themselves are the crucial element to my process, the voice of female athletes have been missing, and my research fills this lacuna.

I take a historical and intersectional approach to the study of female athlete identity as suggested by Susan Bandy (2014). Bandy (2014) published a historical perspective on gender and sport studies wherein she outlined the progression of gender and sport studies that blossomed in the 1980’s. She discussed the relational approach that shifted the focus from the female
athlete to an overall critique of the culture of sport. Bandy explained through Title IX female athlete participation increased, which ultimately led to an increase in the scholarly works produced focused on female athletes. Often times these studies focused on individual case studies of female athletes. Highlighting the female context and leaving out the implications of other identities. When intersectionality emerged in the 1990’s, a paradigmatic shift occurred as scholars recognized that gender was not monolithic and female athletes were more than just female. Scholars highlighted the numerous dimensions of human experience and identity through the inclusion of race, age, ethnicity, and social class as it related to sport (Bandy, 2014). Through the incorporation of the multiplicity of identities scholars recognized there is more to being a female athlete than just the female sex. There is a need for intersectional female athlete identity research that goes beyond the race and gender interactions to include things like age. This is also why I focus on girl athletes (ages 10-12) in this dissertation.

In addition, media representations, consumerism, and body image are key reasons for the focus on female athlete identities. Consistently female athletes are sexualized, whether it is through magazine covers, social media, or advertising. In this social media age, most often times, consumers are blindly digesting such images. These consumers also include other female athletes, specifically, girl athletes who may encounter an adult female athlete for the first time. How do these images influence their own opinions and expectation of a female athlete? Through the work of Daniels and Wartena (2012) we know what young girls value in photographs of female athletes; when shown images of a sexualized female athlete, participants made more comments about their own bodies compared to the sexualized female athletes, and they also made remarks about being envious of the images represented (Daniels & Wartena, 2012). However, in the same study (Daniels & Wartena 2012), when girl athletes were shown
photographs of a female athlete being athletic, they make comments positioning the female athlete as a role model. It is clear what girl athlete’s want to see and what they value, yet the mass media fails to take notice.

Consumerism fuels unrealistic body images as young girls consume sexualized portrayals of females in general. The health and wellness of girl athletes is also of concern as they are constantly surrounded by the sexualization of female athletes as well as gendered expectations (Staurowsky, 2016). Social media allows young girls to follow their favorite female athletes, though they are still being exposed to hegemonic unrealistic body images through mainstream media. The stereotypes and body image of female athletes are relevant and affect thousands of girl athletes nationwide (Daniels, 2010; Daniels & Wartena, 2012). In addition, we cannot assume that the consumer marketplace will recognize this and provide appropriate coverage and goods for girl athletes. Just recently a Dick’s Sporting Goods store omitted girl basketball players from their 2014 fall catalog enraging many of its consumers. For example, one girl athlete sent a letter to the company expressing this neglect. She details in the letter, “I think that girls should be treated as equally as boys are treated,” more pointedly she continues,

“There are NO girls in the catalog! Oh, wait, sorry. There IS a girl in the catalog on page 6. SITTING in the STANDS. Women are only mentioned once in the catalog on page 5 for some shoes. And there are cheerleaders on some coupons. It’s hard enough for girls to break through in this sport as it is, without you guys excluding us from your catalog.” (Peterson, penned letter 2014).

The letter quickly went viral and brought to light the marketplace’s disregard for an entire sport population: girl athletes. Since then, Dick’s has included female athletes in their fall basketball catalog. This is just one example of the omission of female athletes in the mass media.
Female athletes have been “othered” within the context of sport before and after the passage of Title IX. However, as more and more women began participating in athletics, the more their performances were contested (Fink, 2015). Fink (2015) described the multitude of criticisms that female athletes face. Female athletes are contested through physical appearance, whether they are feminine enough or not. This contestation leads to assumptions regarding sexuality. Femininity, sexuality, motherhood, and personal life are prioritized over athletic performances. Fink (2015) describes it best when she states that female athletes have definitely “come a long way baby” in terms of participation and opportunity, however visibility and respect in the media does not mirror the same progression. Today, female athletes are beginning to take agency of their own identities and performances. Female athletes are doing this through social media as they are able to project their own images and messages. However, this does not necessarily solve the issues presented in main stream media.

Female athletes face backlash throughout their careers; at times their athletic ability is called into question, while other times their sexuality at the forefront. The female athlete is a literal contestation as she navigates the feminine and masculine performance spectrum. Duron (2009) called for research that goes beyond trying to break ties with the male gender, she continued by stating we need to understand the changes of women’s sport by giving female athletes the opportunities to represent themselves by giving explanation of their own situations (p. 9). When do they begin to interact with these constructed gendered performances, when do they realize they are contested, and when do they begin to reconstruct their own performances as they endure the societal expectations of each context.

My research speaks to this call. I think it is important to consider other arenas in which gender performativity can be applied. Culturally, sport is a masculine domain and is dominated
by patriarchal ideals. Female athletes are naturally othered within this culture as femininity does not fit neatly within the context of sport. Often female athletes are labeled as "butch" or "femme" within this context. Female athletes are then influenced to “perform” female while in this masculine arena. Through this contention, some female athletes choose to wear giant bows in their hair and wear make-up on the field as a way to perform societal gender expectations. These specific gender attributes, as argued by Butler (1990), are not simply just an expression, but they are performances that influence an expressed or revealed identity (p. 178). These performances also imply that there will be a response from audiences. So even though one can gain agency through performances, they cannot control how an audience will react to them (Foss, Domenico, & Foss, 2013).

This is further complicated through the hegemonic notions placed on specific sports. For example, volleyball is labeled as a feminine sport, therefore a certain expectation on placed on the female athlete’s "femme" gender performance. One of the most prevalent stereotypes that is associated with gender and sport today is the idea of “appropriate” and “inappropriate” sports for female and males (Appleby & Foster, 2013). Just as Butler describes that society has established acceptable and rejected gender performances, researchers have determined that sports that highlight stereotypical feminine characteristics like grace and beauty are considered feminine and those that highlight stereotypical masculine characteristics like strength and aggression are deemed masculine sports. Field hockey, for example, is labeled as a masculine sport, insinuating that a "butch" gender performance is expected, if a female athlete participates. Butler's theories refute all of these notions. These sport contexts and the performances that are expected within each, become very gendered. A sport is merely culturally constructed to be labeled that way; gender performance within sport should be a fluid concept all on its own. Meaning many female
athletes have begun to refute these performances by participating in these “masculine” sports. Athletes who transgress these boundaries are often subject to discrimination and violence (Appleby & Foster, 2013).

Female athletes perform their identities in the everyday mundane contexts. Through my own preliminary observations of girl athlete culture, I discovered that female athletes interact with multiple identities both on and off the field through outward gendered appropriation (cite). Female softball culture has adapted the bow as a way to express femininity on the field. Not only has the bow become a trend in softball, it has become something to be consumed and bought within this subculture of sport. The bow itself is overtly feminine and more athletes than not are wearing them adorned on their overtly feminine ponytails. This is not to say that all softball players are doing so, but those who do are making a choice. In my research, softball players spoke about stereotypes, societal expectations, athleticism, strength, and female empowerment while picking out a twenty-dollar bow. This trend has evolved into something much more than a stylistic option; it has become an identity statement. Whether that statement has to do with femininity, sexuality, or competence is left to discover. The point is female athletes are negotiating these identities every day. Identities are accompanied with stereotypes, and for some athletes, these stereotypes can be detrimental. My current research engages with girl athletes themselves to better understand their own identities. The purpose of this research is to gain the perspective of girl athletes and engage in discussions of female athlete identity. I asked girl athletes to construct their identities through self-photo representations. This work, grounded in feminist epistemology, is important as the girl athletes express their own individual lived experiences. It is important that their stories are told through their own words and photographs as we peeled back their layers of identity to better understand their female athlete identities.
In this dissertation, Chapter 2 includes the literature review, wherein I critically examine youth athletics, gendered mediated representation, and scholarly work on how female athletes want to be represented. Chapter 3 details my methodology and methods. I collected 15 photo essays from girl athletes ranging in ages 10-12 years old, and then conducted one-on-one unstructured interviews with each of them. The conversation was centered around each girl athletes’ photo essay story. I asked each girl to tell me what story and messages they trying tell from the photos that they selected. The photo essays are highlighted in Chapter 4, and I present the overarching themes of my analysis of girl athlete identity, including school (the good and the bad); female athletes > male athletes; look pretty, play pretty; relationships; we want female role models; I am a female athlete. The photo essays are also featured within this chapter. The final section, Chapter 5, is a discussion of how gender equality does not speak to post Title IX girl athletes. I examine how these themes expand the extant literature, as well as the continued gendered inequities and expectations that girl athletes still face in 2017.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This in-depth literature review highlights a myriad of scholarship that is utilized in the analysis of girl athlete identity. I explain the importance of studying youth sport and then detail and define ‘post Title IX’ girl athletes’ perceptions. I highlight the many ways that the media downplay and silence female athletes and how the female athlete paradox complicates the manner in which female athletes of all ages wish to be portrayed. This chapter concludes with the theoretical framework and explanation of gender performance.

Youth sport is a space where children learn social interaction, structural contexts and cultural symbols (Messner, 2002). Messner (2002) observed children’s performance of their gender in same sex groups and opposite sex groups in sport using ethnographic techniques. He described the visible gender inequity throughout the educational system by noting a direct difference in the way girls and boys were socialized into sport. Borrowing from Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble, Messner described the how children organize their performances as boys vs. girls. Children learn through social contexts, in this case sport, what gender performances are acceptable and which ones are not. Messner explains how gender performance in sport are two separate performances, boy and girl. From something as simple as team name differences and team colors there is constant social separations of boy and girl. Messner described an instance between two youth soccer teams he was observing, the Barbie Girls and the Sea Monsters. The youth organization had a beginning of the season parade where the teams were able to each make a parade float. The Barbie Girls (pink team colors) had music playing and were dancing during the parade. The Sea Monsters (green and blue team colors) sported serious game faces throughout the event. During the parade one Sea Monster went over to the Barbie Girls and wanted to join the girls team in their fun. His teammates ridiculed and made fun
of him, forcing him to go back to his team. This is a great example how sex segregation and gendered ideologies still affect girls and boys in youth sport. These examples can be found across the nation. Both boys and girls suffer within this system as they are forced into narrow binary gendered expectations, and when the binary is crossed, the athletes suffer.

Though we live in a post Title IX world, there are still many sports that are considered "too" masculine for young girls to participate in. Girls are forced into traditionally “feminine sports” like volleyball, gymnastics, cheerleading, and softball. The moment a girl athlete wants to digress these boundaries and play a traditionally “masculine” sport, she faces even more structural and societal constraints. Recently, we have seen girl athletes who have made their way into hyper-masculine spaces. Mo’ne Davis not only made her way onto an all-boys Little League team, but she made national news and proved to many people that she could compete (cite). Not only could she compete with the boys, but she could win. With that being said, the media did their part to ensure that the public still knew her as a feminine female. Davis donned the pages of *Teen Vogue* in a baseball uniform mirroring the ones that the women wore during WWII (uniform includes a skirt bottom), but *Sports Illustrated* did the opposite as their cover displayed Davis mid-pitch. Toni Bruce (2015) discusses these portrayals of female athletes as “hot and hard,” meaning that media will represent sportswomen as highly skilled athletes while still ensure that the are heteronormatively sexually attractive (Bruce, 2015, p. 383). I can see her concept relative even with Davis, who is a child. There is no doubt that this is troubling on both accounts.

I find Messner’s (2002) observations about gender and sport to be correct in the structural analysis of sport as an organization. Messner is very much in line with Susan Bandy (2014) and her historical perspective of sport and gender and the importance of including age in sport
research to study how age influences our sport experiences (Azzarito, 2010; Azzarito, 2016; Azzarito & Hill, 2013; Daniels, 2009; Daniels, 2012; Daniels & LaVois, 2013; Krane et al., 2010; Krane et al., 2014). This call comes 13 years after Messner’s book demonstrating the binary remains within these social sport contexts. Thus, there is still need to study youth’s participation in sports, how youth sport is gendered, and how such sport expectations are learned within the post Title IX world of athletics.

**Post Title IX Female Athlete**

The term “post Title IX female athlete” stems from the notion and concepts of postfeminism. Rosalind Gill (2007) proposes a new understanding of postfeminism that can be used in the analysis of contemporary cultural products. Gill suggests that the focus should be placed on media culture itself to “emphasize the contradictory nature of postfeminist discourses and the entanglement of both feminist and anti-feminist themes within them” (Gill, 2007, p. 149). Recently scholars (Bruce, 2014; Bruce, 2016; Tofeletti, 2016) have taken Gill’s (2007) concepts and incorporated them into the study of the mediated representations of female athletes. Tofeletti (2016) suggested that we pose the same question that Gill (2007) does in her work, “what makes a text postfeminist?” Essentially, how do we label something as postfeminist and what concepts and features need to be present in order to do so (p. 202)?

There is little research focusing on the concepts and ideologies of the term post Title IX athlete. As scholars begin to engage with postfeminist thought in the study of sport, this dissertation develops these concepts by focusing not only on media, but also on female athlete identity. Bruce (2015) recognizes the study of female athletes as a series of shifts, from masculine lesbian to hot, aggressive athlete. For example, Heywood and Dworkin (2003) questioned some of these shift when they analyzed public perceptions of female athletes, from
female athlete being stereotyped as “mannish lesbians” then glorified as “women we love who kick ass” (p. xxi). However, many questions like the cultural perception shift just explained still need answers. Some argue that we don’t need to fight for women’s rights anymore as "the fight has already been fought." This shift, or mentality, comes from many girls born from the late 1980's on who most likely had the opportunity to play sports from a young age. Some post Title IX female athletes have the perception that women have always easily accessed sport (Fink, 2015). This accessibility has exponentially increased female athlete participation and with this increase comes contestation of the female athlete (and her body) in the male dominated ideological terrain that is sport (Kane, 1996). The post Title-IX adolescent female athlete also experiences athletic development differently than early female athletes both pre and post this landmark legislation. Clark (2012), argues that “widespread achievements in women's sport have been used to argue that sport is now largely commensurate with the construction of active young femininities” (p.1178). Meaning that since the passage of Title IX women have not only been increasing their participation, but they have been successful. This gives today’s youth goals and role models. A great example of this is the Olympic year in Rio. We saw female after female breaking records and winning gold after gold. Yet, these sportswomen fell into stereotypical gendered representations. Gold medalist Katie Ledecky was consistently compared to her male teammate Michael Phelps. Commentators attributed her swimming stroke to her mimicking Phelps. While gymnasts Gabby Douglas’ hair was another topic of conversation. Though the media doesn’t shine the proper light on female athletes, Katie Ledecky, Gabby Douglas, and Simone Biles, were just a few athletes who were winning medal after medal. These are direct examples of what Azzarito (2010) defines as “alpha femininities.” This concept is best described as prioritizing achievement based goals over outdated traditional forms of femininity.
It has been 45 years since the passage of Title IX and we still see an underrepresentation of female athletes and when they are featured the media, media outlets are still trivializing them (Fink, 2015). The media tells female athletes that they should be fit, pretty, and scantily clad in order to gain attention, but sport culture tells them to be aggressive, dirty, and to win at all cost, all while being polite and “a lady.” Kane (1989) describes the assumption that a post-Title IX athlete lives in a world with widespread social acceptance, yet she found that female athletes and events are highly underreported in the mass media and young girls and women are often presented in stereotypic ways (e.g. heteronormative, sexualized, trivialized, hyperfeminine). The sad thing is that 26 years later not much has changed. This stereotypical and in some cases, absence of representation, still presents challenges to female athletes in their identity negotiation and construction.

This post Title IX era calls for wide acceptance, but the sport media campaigns represent a very specific female athlete. The commercial female athlete often is tall, thin, attractive, and hyperfeminine, conforming to hegemonic ideals of femininity (Heineken, 2013). This type of mediated female athlete doesn’t “read” athlete, she is comparable to a Victoria Secret model. As I soon realized upon talking to girl athletes, that makes the mediated female athlete invisible as her fans (girl athletes) cannot recognize her, but more importantly they cannot relate to her. The media is encouraging female athletes to be strong and powerful while at the same time telling them that in order to do so they need to aspire to an unrealistic body image.

**Mediated Images Of Female Athletes**

The reality is that though our culture might think female athletes are presented with equal opportunities; female athletes are still treated like second-class citizens (Koller, 2010). This can have many implications in the way young female athletes negotiate their own identities. Media,
most often, rarely reflect the nuances of the reality in which we live in (Kane, 1996). Youth are exposed often and early to mediated messages, and the quality of these messages varies; many scholars point to the media for perpetuating this ideologies and power structures (Fink, 2015; Kane, 1996). We know that male athletes are most often presented as athletically competent, while female athletes are often trivialized and sexualized (Fink, 2015; Kane, 1996). Male athletes also garner a majority of the media coverage, while females garner less than 2% (Cooky, Messner, Musto, 2015). Kane (1996) argued that since female athletes are rarely covered and when they are they trivialized creates a "denial of power" for sportswomen (p. 102-103). Ten years after Kane made this argument, Fink reiterated these notions in her 2015 article where she describes the same media discrimination and overall silencing of female athletes. These same depictions are featured within commercial media. First and foremost, the media coverage of female athletes is still abysmal. As part of a 25-year longitudinal project on the national and local coverage on female athletes, Cooky, Messner and Musto (2015) recently found that 3% of ESPN SportsCenter content is devoted to women sports as well as 3.2% of local sports news content devoted to women. Though these numbers have increased by only two percent from 2013 there is little to no improvement in the overall amount of coverage. Though female athletes are participating in sports at higher rates than before, the media coverage is not proportional. These low numbers explain reasons why society might have the perceptions they do of female athletes: If we rarely see women being competent athletes and when we do see them, they are sexualized and trivialized, then media audiences will naturally develop stereotypes of female athletes. The longitudinal study described above (Cooky et al, 2015) also focuses on the qualitative differences of female athlete mediated representations. They found blatant differences in terms of the way female athletes are covered by commentators. Cooky and colleagues discuss
on air commentators and reporters have an overall enthusiasm when covering male athletes. From their tone and delivery, their performance is one that is exciting and is meant to keep the viewer on the edge of their seat. However, while highlighting female athletes they found that the commentators and report use a “matter-of-fact” style of delivery (Cooky et al, 2015, p. 15). In turn, this delivery style sets the tone and expectations of both sports. The viewer naturally becomes more excited about the male athlete’s performance as the commentators build the “hype” and expectations of the athletic performance, however, it marks women’s sports as less interesting and predictable. A great example of this is the recent NCAA March Madness Tournament. Previous studies (Kian et al, 2008) explicate the differences in coverage in regards to the men’s and women’s NCAA basketball tournament. The women’s tournament, overall, receives less coverage, less money, and less hype. In 2017, many of the same concepts were present. With the University of Connecticut (UConn) favored to win the tournament by a landslide, many networks failed to highlight the women, due to the expectation of domination by UConn. However, in the regional final game between UConn and Mississippi State, UConn was defeated. This created a huge upset within the women’s basketball tournament, many said this upset was good for women’s basketball as it speaks back to the “matter-of-fact” reporting and proves that women’s basketball and the NCAA March Madness tournament can be just as exciting as the men’s tournament. That does not necessarily mean that the media will change.

Popular press has a tendency to downplay women’s athletic ability and compare women athletes to their male counterparts (Kane, 1996; Messner, Duncan, & Cooky, 2003). For example, sport analysts will often compare female basketball players to male basketball players (Kian, Bernstein, & McGuire, 2013). It is not uncommon to hear the athletic prowess of a female athlete attributed to a male athlete. Whether that male athlete is their father or a popular
professional male athlete, the attribution itself downplays the female athlete’s ability as it becomes no longer hers. In addition, sports women are still frequently portrayed in passive and sexualized photos (Bernstein, McGuire & Kian, 2013). Suggestive and passive poses are those that are not athletic. Meaning, a female athlete will be posed in a way that makes her visible as a sex object over athlete. Multi-gold medal Olympic softball pitcher, Jennie Finch was highlighted on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* in 2005. She wore a mini jean skirt, red tank top, midriff showing with her hip cocked while holding a whiffle ball and bat. Finch’s blonde hair was curled and down with a visor placed on her head. This depiction significantly downplayed her athletic ability, as well as her credibility. She was humorously portrayed as an advertisement instead of an athlete. We saw this narrative continuing through the Rio Olympic media coverage as well as our day to day media coverage. Many thought that after the 1996 Olympic Games women would begin to take the sporting world by storm and the media would increase their overall coverage of these events (Fink, 1998), but this is not the case. Fink (2015) noted that even though women are participating and excelling in athletics more than ever, little to nothing is changing in the way that the media covers them. The Chicago Tribune received heavy criticism in their coverage of the Rio Olympic Games. Corey Cogdell won the bronze medal in women’s trap shooting. However, the Chicago Tribune headline read “Wife of Bears’ lineman wins a bronze medal today in Rio Olympics.” The headline is problematic as it does not mention her name and attributes her to her husband, who just happens to be a Chicago Bears lineman. It also insinuates that if she was not the wife of a professional football player, it is no longer newsworthy. The positive in this example is the severe social media backlash the Chicago Tribune faces, ultimately forcing them to issue a formal apology.
The media tells female athletes that they should be fit, pretty, and scantily clad in order to gain attention, but sport contexts tell them to be aggressive, dirty, and to win at all cost, while at the same time society is telling them to be polite and a lady. The media also details “gender ambivalence” (Cooky et al, 2015) within its coverage. This in turn can manifest in many forms. The most common form is the qualification of presenting female athletes as female before athlete. This is often done by highlighting female athletes who are mothers. Cooky, Wachs, Messner, and Dworkin (2010) discuss that female athletes who are single, who are lesbians, or those that are not viewed as “attractive” or not given attention by media professionals. Female athletes’ who are mothers combat both the lesbian and attractive stereotype (Kane et al, 2013). Female athletes who are mothers and wives (heterosexual) are further marginalized as athletes because female athletes cannot just be athletes first, other identities are privileged before. With all of these conflicting messages, it is no wonder female athletes hold as many identities as they do (e.g., athlete, feminine female, student, mother, teammate, daughter, partner, career). From professional athletes (Daniels & Lavoi), to collegiate athletes (Krane et al., 2010), to girls (Krane et al., 2014) we see that female athletes are hyper aware of these identities and they are fully cognizant of how they feel they are represented in the media as well the advertising behind them (Daniels, 2012; Daniels 2009). Female athletes of all levels are aware of the male dominated context of sport as well as sport media. Hence, why it is important to give them the opportunity to talk back to these concepts in the form of photo self-representation.

More importantly, young female athletes also see this type of stereotypical, under and misrepresentation. According to Trolan (2013) the recent rise in the media coverage surrounding female athletes is focused on those female athletes, who do conform to societal expectations of
being female, which is similar to findings by Krane (2001). It is common to see a professional female athlete in the media scantily clad or posed in a suggestive way (Jones & Greer, 2011). Kim, Sagas, and Walker (2010) found that many female athletes are marketed as a model first, then as a female athlete. The “pretty” athlete is normally featured highlighting her beauty first, usually by an un-athletic image then her athletic ability might be mentioned later in the feature. Female athletes, when not portrayed sexually, are also often depicted within an ambivalent context by accompanying female athletes with motherhood (Cooky et al., 2015). Features often depict a highly successfully female athlete winning championships and finally ending her career to be a mother and wife. Those women who do become mothers are often times favored by the media, further reinforcing their heteronormative representations as female athlete and mother (Kane et al., 2013). Those you do not conform to this hegemonic standards of femininity are often ignored (Krane, 2001 & Trolan, 2013).

These mediated representations can have a relation to the gender performance of female athletes. Girl athletes value images of strong, athletic, and competent female athletes, though these images are largely absent in media (Daniels, 2012; Krane et al., 2011). Daniels spoke to 258 girl athletes (ages 13-18) and they were shown a series of three types of images: performance athletes sexualized athletes, and sexualized models. The girl athlete’s that viewed the sexualized comments made more comments about the body of the female athlete while making admiration and jealousy comments. Similar comments were made about the sexualized models. The photos of the performance athletes were viewed as role models and the girl athletes complimented the female athletes on form and athletic prowess. The results from the Daniels (2012) study show that if the media were to cover female athletes physically performing sport, this can positively impact girl viewers by focusing on the ability of the female body and what it
can do. Krane and colleagues (2011) found similar results when they conducted focus groups with 52 girls averaging the age of 11.5 years old. The showed these girls photos of collegiate female athletes that were self-constructed by the collegiate female athletes’ themselves. These girl athletes favored the photos that depicted and authentic athlete, those showing strength and power. The girls also liked the photos that sent messages of mental strength and they also liked the photos that they could see themselves in. They did not like the photos where the female athletes were not being athletic or those that showed apathy and poor sport behavior. However, Krane and colleagues point to one specific photo that created controversy among the girl athletes. This controversial photo depicted a female basketball player standing on a balcony overlooking the basketball court with a basketball lodged between her hand and her hip. Her hair is down and she is wearing a dress. Half the girls loved it as it showed both her athletic side and feminine side, the other half did not like it for that very same reason as they thought she should not be wearing a dress. This finding is especially interesting as it speaks to what Krane et al. (2004) define as the female athlete paradox. The contradiction between female expectations and sporting expectations is recognized by the girl athletes in the above two studies.

**Female Athlete Paradox**

One of the constraints female athletes face is the female/athlete paradox, which is used as a way to break down the highly contested societal expectations of both female and athlete. Female athletes exist within two contradictory identities: female and athlete. These identities each hold certain expectations, many of them polar opposites of one another, for example, thinness versus muscularity and passiveness versus aggression. The paradox of the female athlete is that these identities require different expectations and thus, create tension. In 2004, Krane and colleagues took the paradox into the consideration in their own study where they analyzed how
female athletes negotiate and reconcile societal expectation of femininity and athleticism. Their research contribution is important not only to the body of research on female athlete identity, but it also informs this dissertation as I aim to analyze how female athletes construct and perform their own identities both on and off the playing field. It is important to continue to study the female/athlete paradox as it can lead to negative behaviors such as: disordered eating, low self-esteem, and poor body image (Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, & Kauer, 2004). Staurowsky (2016) explains these negative health behaviors as the female athlete triad: disordered eating, amenorrhea, and bone health. These three interrelated conditions are the most extreme forms of the harmful health behavior associated with female athletes. A striking statistics presented by Nichols and colleagues in 2006 states that 20% of female athletes in the state of California exhibited at least one of the symptoms in the female athlete triad. This is a serious implication of the effects of the female athlete paradox in which we should not ignore. For this reason, it is important to further understand the implications of the standardization of femininity on female athletes.

Femininity is a concept that comes up a lot when discussing female athletes and identity. Femininity is an expectation that is rooted in history; femininity has changed and evolved to uphold certain “standards” that women are pressured to conform to (Krane et al., 2004). Societal expectations of femininity value narrow definitions of physical beauty and stereotypical femininity. Femininity is a notion that is ingrained in girls from birth. Essentially femininity is a standard constructed by society that dictates women’s appearance, demeanor, and values (Bordo, 1993). Both femininity and masculinity are rooted in performance and are grounded in race and sexuality (Butler, 1990). Meaning, the way in which we express ourselves on a day-to-day basis is deemed masculine or feminine. Female athletes need to not only “act” feminine, but they need
to physically appear feminine as well (Evans, 2006). Throughout history female athletes have been contested subjects in society, from appearance to perceived sexual orientation and stereotypes, female athletes have been fighting a gender performance battle (Duron, 2009). Female athletes negotiate self and gender performances somewhat different that those women who do not identify as athletes. Evans (2006) explains this through the “fear of masculinization theory.”

Gender norms are most often prescribed from dominant discourses; female athletes are conditioned to perform their identities based on appearance while male athletes are conditioned to perform their identities through strength and ability (Evans, 2006). Therefore, female athletes operating within this paradox can be affected by these masculine and feminine demands in both society and sport. We know that female athletes are cognizant of the female/athlete paradox (Krane et al., 2004). Though they may not refer to it in this term, collegiate female athletes know bodily attributes of accepted femininity and the demands of their body in a sport context.

Hegemonic femininity is an important component to add to this exploration of femininity because it is the dominant and “acceptable” form of femininity that monopolizes societal expectations of gendered performances. Hegemonic femininity exists and is constructed within a class-based structure that is white and heterosexual; it has a strong focus on overall appearance and heterosexuality (Krane et al., 2004). According to Krane (2001) some examples of hegemonic feminine characteristics include being emotional, dependent, compassionate, maternal, passive, and gentle (p. 117). White heterosexual hegemonic femininity is constantly being reproduced and reinforced in all aspects of society. Those women who conform to hegemonic feminine performances are privileged in society and those who do not conform (athletes) are not, therefore hegemonic femininity is not always a choice (Butler, 1990; Bordo,
Hegemonic femininity defines cultural acceptance for women (Krane, 2001). Without explicitly addressing sexuality, hegemonic femininity reinforces heterosexuality as acceptable (Mean & Kassing, 2008). As stated earlier, sport media focuses on athletes who are mothers as an obvious depiction of heterosexuality (e.g. what is more heterosexual that reproducing with a male partner).

Athleticism, however, holds many opposite attributes of hegemonic femininity. Sport performance in general values masculinity in all aspects. Female athletes, therefore, may not fit the idealized standard. Bordo (1993) brings to light this paradox where a tight, often small toned body is valued in society, yet a large muscular female athletic body represents masculinity. This creates tension between athlete and feminine identities. Therefore, it may be difficult for female athletes to fit into both identity constructions. The female/athlete paradox represents conflicting physical and social expectations. Female athletes need to be strong, but not too strong. They need to be aggressive enough to win, but not violent. They have to be pretty, but not “butch.” Sport requires an individual to be noisy, assertive, competitive, tough, sweaty, and to consume large amounts of food (Krane et al., 2004). None of these attributes fit within hegemonic femininity.

It is a constant struggle and lived contradiction to exist as a female athlete. Through previous research we know that female athletes are cognizant of this paradox (Krane et al., 2004; Krane et al., 2014; Krane, Ross, Miller, Rowse, Ganoe, Andrezejcyk, & Lucas, 2010; Mean & Kassing, 2008). Often, they are readily aware of their female and athlete expectations as they conform their gender performances to the expectations (Krane et al., 2004; Krane, et al., 2014; Krane et al., 2010; Mean & Kassing, 2008). However, we know that this awareness happens early in female athlete lives (Krane, Ross, Miller, Ganoe, Lucas, & Barak, 2011). I intend to use my work to break down how and when female athletes learn to navigate the female/athlete
paradox using visual methods to analyze the process of performance and identity construction and negotiation.

**How Female Athletes Want To Be Represented/Portrayed**

The research on female athletes and representation highlights how collegiate female athletes learn to navigate their identities in different ways. Recent research is beginning to highlight how this negotiation works for younger female athletes. Girl athletes are often made aware of their gender differences in a sport context at a young age (Messner, 2002). Since the passage of Title IX in 1972 there has been considerable progress made in both educational and athletic reforms providing women and girls more opportunities. More than forty years later we still see changes being made on larger institutional levels. Millennials have grown up within this "post Title IX world." Though this term may seem literal in its essence, it is much more nuanced than that.

Bissel and Hayes (2010), surveyed 117 adolescent female athletes exploring their media exposure, self-esteem and whether or the sports participation influenced their perceptions/expectations of ideal beauty and attractiveness in others. What they found was those adolescent female athletes who were involved in sport gave more favorable assessments of others, had lower levels of self-esteem and had a positive desire to be muscular and athletic (p. 402). The female athletes in this study also reported less time spent with media, therefore they were more purposeful and specific in the programming they chose to watch. This study however, did not measure time spent on social media. This study was completed in 2010, I would argue that today social media would be a key component in deciphering adolescent female athlete media consumption and how that influences them or not. Other studies done more recently have shown that girl athletes are very aware of components of the female/athlete paradox (Krane et al,
2011). Though they might not articulate them as bluntly as the adult female athletes, they are nonetheless present in their discussions.

As previously mentioned female athletes are rarely covered within popular media, and when they are they are most often trivialized or sexualized. The expectations of hegemonic femininity are implicitly and explicitly presented to women at young ages and can be found in all aspects of the media and in our society as a whole. This mediated representation has a great influence of the female/athlete paradox as it sets the standard for female athletes everywhere. Azzarito (2010) argues that girl “constrained physicality” is still a large issue when it comes to sport participation (p. 263). She argues that girl (athletes) have outrageous unobtainable body expectations that make it even harder for them to negotiate their own identities. Azzarito describes this media cycle as fluid, meaning that women and young girls are constantly having to negotiate or resisted femininities that are presented and redefined through the constant recirculation of visual media (p.265). Young female athletes today have landed in an in-between continuum of widespread acceptance and harsh idealistic mediated images. However, when shown images of sexualized athletes, girls often make more comments to her overall appearance than athletic ability; but when they are exposed to female athletes performing they focus on their athletic ability (Daniels, 2012). Hence, if they see more mediated images of female athletes maybe girl athletes will be more focused on athletic performance than overall physical appearance. Scholars such as Azzarito (2010) argue that today’s post Title IX athlete is experiencing sport differently than those before. In her work she has deemed them to be “Future Girls,” and describes them best as she states,

“Sport is then proposed as a site of transformation for girls, a site of self-discipline and regulation for the global market place. Inactive, fat, unhealthy girls,
girls who ‘throw like girls’ become ‘losers’ in the eyes of the Future Girl” (p.267).

To me, this passage speaks volumes to the ideals surrounding a young sportswoman in 2016. For them, sport is a perceived place where they self-regulate their own bodies and stereotypes do not apply to them. However, Azzarito (2010) claims that none of these ideals can follow through unless the education sites create a safe space where girls can learn and explore different subject positions. This utopian view of “Future Girls” is hopefully not too far into the future, however for the time being young girl athletes everywhere still negotiate the female/athlete paradox. I intend to expand more on the implications of the historical context of what it means to be a “post Title IX” female athlete. Gill (2007), Bruce (2015) and Tofeletti (2016) have all begun to do this in terms of the analysis of postfeminism and sport media. I intend to expand of their notions of addressing the complex and contradictory messages about gender identities and relations, but instead of using mass media texts I used girl athlete self-photo-representation to put the postfeminist media culture into the hands of those who are consuming it. Through this approach I address the concerns of Gill (2007) in terms of attempting to conceptualize postfeminist (post Title IX) in existing mass media parameters. Through the self-representations, I have created new texts outside of what already exists.

From these studies it is clear that female athletes have many identities, including female and athlete. I take an intersectional approach influenced by the work of Carastathis (2014). This approach acknowledges that female lives are constructed by multiple, often intersecting, systems of oppression (Carastathis, 2014). Female athletes exist within multiple system of oppression both socially and institutionally. The goal in this dissertation is to not only acknowledge the systems of oppression, but to gain knowledge of when female athlete recognizes these
oppressions and in what ways? For example, one girl athlete highlights the oppression she faces in the classroom in school, while another discusses how her body affects her participation on sport. Naturally this will be discussed in depth in the analysis. Through an intersectional approach we know that these identities do not stand alone as they often influence each other and merge in various ways within different environments (Barak et al, revision in review). They found that female athletes adapt their identities in different context. For example, many discuss athletic contexts verse social context. Specifically, how their bodies are accepted in these spaces. Muscles are hidden when going out on a Saturday night, but are out on display during athletic competition. Barak and colleagues (in revision) recognize the intersectional identities that many female athletes possess. They had female athletes construct their own photo representations where they controlled the photo. The female athlete had control of everything from the setting to what they wore. Through female athletes’ self-representations, Barak et al. (revision in review) found that traditional stereotypes of female athletes are very much alive and well as the athletes in their study spoke about them. For example, many of these athletes attempted to highlight femininity within their representations while still attempting to bring their athletic identities into the picture. This could be a subtle inclusion of wearing make-up in their photos or choosing to not wear their athletic uniform to opt for something more indicative to hegemonic femininity. However, once they interviewed each female athlete, the multiplicity of identities surfaced. They learned those feminine attributes were associated with career identities, academic identities, mother identities, among other.

Female athletes are also aware of the gender appropriation that occurs with the sport they participate in. They recognize what sports are deemed feminine and which are deemed masculine and the implications of both. For example, female athletes have shown concern for those sports
that require more muscle, such as track and field, than others when attempting to fit into the
types of femininity (Ross & Shinew, 2008). While their muscular bodies do not fit into
hegemonic feminine ideal, female athletes have appropriated other feminine characteristics, such
as wearing make-up or having a long pony tail, as a way to counter these two conflicting
identities. It is important to note that not all female athletes conform to traditional forms of
femininity, like wearing makeup during competition, as a way to still appear feminine, but some
do. Krane (2001) concluded that some female athletes perform certain aspects of femininity as a
way to defer certain types of discrimination. Such discrimination can include the stigma of being
labeled lesbian, or being deemed “too masculine” (Withycombe, 2011). At the same time female
athletes who look “too” feminine are not viewed as serious athletes (Krane, 2001). While some
female athletes attempt to perform femininity while being athletic at the same time, other female
athletes have found it best to separate the two. Ross and Shinew (2008) interviewed athletes who
argued that sport is a place where they do not have to worry about their appearance, however,
when they go out or attend a formal event then they do adhere to feminine appearance ideals.
Whatever the case, it is apparent that female athlete gender performances are very much
calculated. The female athletes highlighted throughout this gathered body of literature are
making informed decisions both on and off the field on how the appear whether that be in
accordance with hegemonic femininity or athleticism.

Collegiate and professional female athletes negotiate the female athlete paradox in
various ways. The female athlete paradox is the notion that sportswomen live within two
cultures: a sporting culture that is male dominated (masculine) and social culture at large where
femininity is valued (Krane, et al., 2004). Through focus groups, Krane and colleagues (2004)
spoke with female athletes to gain further insight on the negotiation of the female/athlete
paradox. The female athletes that they spoke with constructed their own concepts of body ideals, female performance, sexuality, physicality, and were fully aware if they did or did not fit into societal ideals of each component. For example, one female athlete discussed the ideal cultural body type as unrealistic and many of the female athletes acknowledge specific parts of their own bodies that did not fit this ideal, many of them saying they were “too muscular” (Krane et al., 2004, p. 319). The female athletes in Krane et al.’s (2004) study expressed the tension and conflict between socially acceptable femininity and athleticism. From this example it evident that they felt this tension especially in the way they perceived their own bodies existing in both athletic and other spaces. They knew that their athletic bodies were contrasted with the societal ideal. What I find most interesting within the Krane et al. (2004) findings is the consistent expressions of fear that female athletes discussed. Some athletes were afraid of being “too muscular,” others were concerned with the way they appeared in their athletic uniforms, while some mentioned being different than non-athletic girls. Though these athletes expressed these “fears” they necessarily were not consumed by them as some simply accredited having “not enough time to be feminine” as a way to alleviate the mentioned fears and concerns. Instead, they were proud of their athletic bodies and achievements. These athletes associated feminine with normality and athlete as non-conforming to the societal expectations of femininity (p. 324).

In another study by Ross and Shinew (2008), female athletes redefined femininity all together as they rejected traditional stereotypes. These athletes went beyond these traditional assumptions and claimed ownership of their own definitions of what they thought was feminine. Examples include, nontraditional feminine dress and single motherhood as “fighting” stereotypes to create new forms of femininity that should be celebrated. This is a great example of how female
athletes today may recognize feminine societal constraints, but are willing to fight them to create their identities.

**Theoretical Framework**

My experiences of growing up as a female athlete coupled with the literature on female athlete identity make me believe that female athletes construct their identities based on a multitude of factors including athletics, academics, relationships, mass media representations, social media, and peer groups. An intersectional approach guides me as it acknowledges the laying of identities and systems of oppression, more importantly it acknowledges the sites of intersections of the layers (Lewis, 2013). My intersectional approach goes beyond conventional notions of gender/class/race/disability as it goes into deeper forms of identity, specific to girl athletes (i.e. student, girl, athlete). My approach aimed to recognize the depth of the female gender by putting the identity representations into the hands of those who hold the identities (Bandy, 2014).

In order to understand representations of female athletes, I use the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) and Cultural Contracts Theory (CCT) to frame messages about female athletes that are found within popular mainstream media. Through explication of both of these theories, I provide examples and a cohesive framework that enabled me to address the identity construction of girl athletes. Through the incorporation of previous scholarship and contemporary examples, this framework also takes into consideration identity gaps found within girl athlete identity. These gaps occur at the intersections of identities, for example the friction that girl and athlete or student and athlete. CTI and CCT are used to help understand how the dominant understanding of gendered athlete representations influenced the girl’s identities, the performance of those identities, as well as girl athletes in general.


**Communication Theory of Identity (CTI).** CTI is utilized as a process in which we can essentially peel back the layers of identity for examination. CTI focuses on the communicative processes of identity negotiation and how identities are related and intertwined within each other. Hecht and colleagues (2005) establish that CTI helps us conceptualize the interplay of stability and change in identities. It also speaks to the interplay of an individual’s identities and how they change and are stabilized through communication. For example, a female athlete might change her identity based on peer groups. This change in identity could be physical (clothes, for example) or it could be the way in which female athletes verbally communicate (slang, for example). While interacting with a non-athletic social peer group female athletes may dress more feminine and speak in a different dialogue than she does with her teammates. Previously identity was researched in terms of individual roles, social, and communal aspects (Hecht, Warren, Jung, & Krieger, 2005). CTI extends this research through the integration of communication, communication with one’s self, relationships, and through community and group members. Incorporating female athletes into this framework includes integrating them with their identities in relation to one’s self, through relationships (teammates, coaches, family), and through the representations of female athletes within the media.

Identity does not stand on its own; CTI establishes that identity is a social process that exists in a very social world through communication with others (Hecht et al, 2005). Identity negotiation as it applies to the salience of layers at certain moments is helpful to my own research. Identity is a reciprocal process; individuals adjust to social climates, as certain identities are more visible at times than others (Hecht et al, 2005). For example, the female/athlete paradox that many women experience can be explained using CTI. Female athletes have been found to adapt to different social climates; they will engage in feminine
behaviors in mainstream social situations but not when they are participating in athletics (Krane, et al., 2004; Ross & Shinew, 2008).

**Four Layers Of Identity.** The four layers of identity used in CTI are personal, enacted, relational and communal. The four levels are not independent but are fluid and can work simultaneously, on their own, or in conjunction with one another (Hecht & Faulkner, 2000). These layers can “melt” into one another as well as influence each other; they can also change throughout a person’s life. The personal layer focuses on the individual’s self-cognition and spiritual well-being (Hecht & Faulkner, 2000). Essentially the personal layer relates the individual. Identity in the personal layer is concerned with the self-concept, self-image, self-cognitions, and feeling about self (Hecht, et al., 2005). The girl athletes I spoke with were concerned on how their photos represented them specifically, one girl athlete was happy that she was able to express her own self-concept in a myriad of photos as she highlighted in her interview. She liked that she was able to describe how she felt about herself through the photos. The enacted layer focuses messages that are communicated, put very simply (Hecht & Faulkner, 2000). The girl athletes were very focused on the message as they titled their photo essays with such messages like “how to become a gymnast” or “team player.” The relational layer involves the individual’s relationships and how these relationships relate to others identities. The relational layer is broken down into three levels: how one determines her/his identities through social interaction, how individuals enact identities in response to her/his relationships with others, and through the relationships themselves (Hecht, et al. 2005). The girl athletes had a big focus on relationships whether they highlighted photos with friends, coaches, parents or siblings, they all highlighted a relationship that influences an identity. Lastly, the communal layer focuses on the community/group shares an identity (Hecht & Faulkner, 2000). This communal layer was
evident with the girl athletes through belonging to a team. These layers are broken down further in Chapter 4.

**Identity Negotiation.** Layers of identity can create changes and conflict within an individual’s life (Faulkner & Hecht, 2010). As CTI calls for the intermingled layering of identities, intersectionality gives the language to describe these identities as they influence one another. Identity management is more “pervasive than ethnic or social identities” (Faulkner & Hecht, 2010, p. 832) as it is a complex process. CTI uses the term “identity negotiation” in regards to the interaction between each identity layer. These negotiations can easily be interchanged with notions of intersectionality and the idea of intermingling layers. For example, the girl athletes I spoke with spoke about their own identities as one. Though they discussed about privileging certain identities in specific context, they never fully omitted an identity, identities of girl, athlete, and student intermingled most often.

It is also important to recognize that there are potential gaps among layers as well as interplays within identities (Faulkner & Hecht, 2010). The gaps represent points of conflict within identities. These points can be harbored through how individuals perceive themselves versus other’s perceptions; these conflicting perceptions create dissonance and create a need to negotiate the tension of competing and conflicting identities (Faulkner & Hecht, 2010). In regards to female athlete identity, the gaps can be found within the societal expectations of hegemonic femininity and the conflicting stereotypes of being a female athlete. CTI influenced my theoretical framework in locating the female/athlete paradox gaps, specifically when and how they occur in the lived experiences of female athletes. In one specific study conducted by Hecht and colleagues (2002) a multi-layer method was utilized to break down mediated Jewish Identities. Through interviews they put the personal and communal layers of identity at the
foreground and found the communal mediated representations of Jewish identity were both recognized and sometimes rejected by the Jewish American participants. Communal representations through the show indeed play out in the personal and relational, while at the same time they were resisted in many other incidents. This is just one instance of group-based identities influencing individuals’ identity negotiation processes. I adapt this work as it speaks to how groups negotiate group-based identities in their negotiation of personal and relational identity. Using the idea of layered identities frames my study of female athletes’ identity negotiation.

**Cultural Contracts Theory (CCT).** The second theory that enhances my theoretical framework in female athlete identities is the Cultural Contracts Theory. As the name of the theory alludes to, it is the idea that an individual signs metaphorical contracts that adhere to our cultures’ identity expectations (Jackson, 2002). Individuals realize that they have signed to these expectations without fully understanding the implications leading to identity negotiation. For example, female athletes may participate in athletics thinking they are socially accepted until they are confronted with the societal assumption of the “butch” label. Jackson (2002) describes three contract typologies: assimilation, adaptation, and mutual valuation. These three typologies refer to the interactions within our culture and subcultures. Female athletes essentially join the cultural contract of sport and using components of this theory, I want to know what that entails. When one becomes a female athlete what are they contractually agreeing to in regards their own identities? Identity negotiation alters worldviews as well as behaviors. “The cultural contracts paradigm has been introduced to make sense of what is actually being negotiated.” (Jackson, 2002, p.361). CCT Prioritizes lived experiences. Similar to CTI, CCT considers “identity is a relational and contextual product that is constructed via a negotiable process” (Orbe, Harrison,
Kauffman, Laurent, 2015, p. 424). Cultural contracts theory allows researchers to examine individuals’ negotiation of identities.

**Theoretical Framework And Female Athlete Identities.** CTI and CCT frame my own understandings on how female athletes are represented in the media and what this can mean for female athlete identities. These theories provide a framework to explain my understandings of female athlete performance and what it means to be a female athlete, in general. The foundation part of my framework that is found within both CTI and CCT is the core concepts that identity is not monolithic. Identities are fluid, they have the ability to be constructed, reconstructed, and contested in numerous contexts. Female athletes are not just female or athlete, they are much more. Taking into account lived experiences is crucial within my framework. Every female athlete experiences sport differently making their identities different as well. Through the layers in CTI, I broke down these identities in order to recognize the gaps and tensions that both CTI and CCT employ in theory.

My own research goal is to examine how female athletes negotiate their identities through visual performance of these identities. Krane and colleagues (2004) have broken down the female/athlete paradox as female athletes existing within two cultures. The obvious sport culture which values masculine norms and social culture where hegemonic femininity is celebrated. Using CTI and CCT to frame my study helps examine the multitude of cultural influences on female athletes’ identities and performances. Going beyond just sport and gender, female athletes exist not only in a world dominated by mediated messages, but they also contend with different teams, social groups, and educational systems, while navigating their personal relationships.
I used the concepts of CCT as a guide to cultural expectations for female athletes with the four layers (personal, enacted, relational, and community) of identity that CTI advances to identify where identity gaps and how female athletes negotiate those within their own lived experiences. These layered approach to understanding identity negotiation was prevalent in Krane, Barak and colleagues’ research (2010 & in revision). Many of the female athletes decided not to put athlete to the forefront of things they valued when asked to visually represent themselves. Some chose to highlight other aspects of their identity such as student or mother. Many depicted images of power and strength (Krane et al, 2010), while others emphasized their femininity (Barak, et al., in revision). I adapt their methodology in this dissertation research on girl athletes.

Just like any identity in society there are rules and regulations to follow if one is going to exist within an identity. The female collegiate players in the Krane et al. (2010) and Barak (in revision) studies spoke about these cultural contracts. The mentioned them specifically when their identities did not align properly with the normative behavior. For example, one athlete depicted in the 2016 (in revision) posed with her infant daughter. Through her interview we learned that she was ostracized from her team as her coaches did all they could to conceal her pregnancy. Athletes are held to a high standard within society, this also includes female athletes. Society wants female athletes to be pretty, feminine, and ultimately heterosexual. However, we see in this athlete’s case the identity gap that pregnancy created within her own layered identity. Because she was a collegiate athlete who got pregnant, she became deviant in the eyes of the cultural contract.

The postfeminist discourse surrounded girls and athletes alike express to them that equality has been achieved, yet we still see so many female athletes under scrutiny for one thing
or another. Again, through the Krane et al. (2010) and Barak (in revision) works we see that there is no one solution to managing the female/athlete paradox. It is fluid and speaks to the immense and complicated layers that each female athlete possesses. It also brings to light the pressures from society, media, institutions, and relationships that each woman/girl has to navigate. Barak et al (in revision) described this best when they state, “…navigating gendered social expectations is challenging for most people, it becomes a labyrinth for female athletes” (p. 38). This “labyrinth” that is female athlete identity needs to be further deconstructed, we know how collegiate female athletes feel about their own identities, however, when do female athletes become aware? This is why I believe it is important to give this same opportunity to girl athletes. This post Title IX era is only progressing, with more and more female athletes being shown in the news, more consumer market driven campaigns geared toward girl athletes, the constant streaming of social media, girls beginning to become dedicated athletes at younger and younger ages, change is happening. These changes all have one thing in common as they are often depicted through the gender performance of the girl athletes.

Female Athlete Gender Performance. Gender performativity is a crucial concept when analyzing identity as identity can influence performance. Duron (2009) used qualitative methods in conjunction with gender performativity and symbolic interaction theory to analyze the gender role conflict experienced by softball players. Through written accounts and interviews the players displayed ways in which they juggle both femininity and masculinity in their sport. Society has labeled softball as a “masculine” sport. Since this label has been placed other expectations have followed. More than often, softball players’ (in this specific context) sexuality was called into question. Often they are labeled as butch or lesbian. Due to the discrimination found in athletics and society as a whole towards the LGBT community, female athletes often
fear this label (Duron, 2009; Krane, 2001). Taking the historic concepts of women’s integration into baseball then into softball, Duron explains how social ingrained gender performances are prevalent within society. She found that some of the softball players interviewed performed their gender the same way off and on the field, whether that be acceptable forms of performance or not. While others deliberatively changed the way they looked and acted once practice or game was over. She highlighted one experience of a softball player who was very vocal, loud and aggressive during competition. Once the game or practice concluded she showered her identity off, both literally and figuratively, she became quiet and demure in public contexts (Duron, 2009). Another interesting conclusion made from the work done by Duron, was how cognizant female athletes were of the stereotypes that surround their sport. While they might acknowledge and some might fear these stereotypes, more and more female athletes are beginning to develop their own specific identities (Duron, 2009).

Some of these gendered stereotypes span across other sports as well. Anderson (1999) used the context of snowboarding to analyze gender performances and stereotypes. She found that female snowboarders who were considered to be proficient (by her male competitors of course) were deemed lesbian, as they were better than the men (p.65). However, other men expressed a desire to be in a relationship with a fellow female snowboarder. Therefore, women have to either be in a relationship with a male snowboarder or not good enough to compete with the men. In this context, female snowboarders have a gender performance script to follow established by the heterosexual masculine culture of snowboarding, if they stray from this they are most often ostracized (Anderson, 1999). Though these are just two examples of constructed gender performances within sport, I believe that these overarching notions have become institutionalized within varying sport contexts.
Typically, hegemonic notions of FEMALE athlete identity are highlighted, those athletes who fit into accepted societal standards of femininity. Butler (2004) argues it is not intrinsically motivated, but more of an act that is presented. From the previous research I have conducted with Barak and colleagues (2016) we have learned that the intersectionality of female athletes has a heavy influence on how they self-represent themselves. In the present research, I incorporate gender performance into the intersectionality of athletes to see how these two concepts interact to inform their overall identity.

Performativity can be applied to each identity component and it can be used to describe the interplay and salience of identities. An example of this was an article written by Butler, Mocarski, Emmons, and Smallwood (2014), in their analysis of U.S.A. Olympic soccer goalie, Hope Solo. They discussed the two identities and performances displayed in the narrative presented on *Dancing with the Stars*, tomboy and feminine woman. They discuss that the tomboy stereotype is shown early in the narrative and is attributed to immaturity because of the sport she plays. Her gender performance is separated by two very different environments. As an elite Olympic and professional athlete Solo presents herself as competitive and aggressive. Through the end of the narrative, as Solo progresses in her new found dancing career she is shown as hyperfeminine. Through the television show *Dancing with the Stars*, Solo is ballroom dancing while performing stereotypical feminine attributes such as the performance of dancing itself as well as the physical performance of the makeup, costumes, and hair. It is an overt example of how female athletes juggle their gendered performances in different contexts. Solo is an interesting case as she is a controversial athlete to begin with. Her performances are often contested as she does not fit into the “acceptable” female gender performance. This occurs not only on the soccer field, but in her personal life as she was arrested for domestic violence. This is
just one example of how female athletes construct performances in different environments, but this is what we see most often.

Summary

Scholars argue for more research in female athlete identity, mediated representations, the perceptions of female athletes, and girl athletes (Daniels & Lavoi, 2013). I expand on this literature and the female/athlete paradox as I investigate girl athlete construction and representation. We know professional female athletes are often sexualized and trivialized (Cooky et al, 2015), we know how collegiate female athlete want to be represented (Barak et al, (in revision); Krane et al., 2010), and what girl athletes want to see in the mediated representations (Daniels, 2009; Daniels, 2012; Daniels & Lavoi, 2013; Jones & Greer, 2011); but we do not know how these girl athletes would represent themselves. Influenced by the work done by Heinecken (2015) we know young female athletes are already interacting with these institutionalized stereotypes through social media. While some female athletes refute the stereotypes and express themselves differently, others seem to replicate hegemonic forms of femininity (Heinecken, 2015). In a world that measures worth through likes on social media, it is an interesting, timely, and important way to gain insight into emerging girl/female athlete identities.

This led me to ask the following questions:

RQ1: How do girl athletes construct their identities?

RQ2: How do girl athletes negotiate the female/athlete paradox?

RQ3: How do girl athletes visually depict their own identities?
The above research questions frame the visual methods and feminist methodology I describe in the next chapter. In the following chapter, I discuss the rationale behind using such methods and what a feminist intersectional epistemology means.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Excited! I was so excited for my first coach-pitch game. Southern California presented a perfect day for a game of baseball, 75 degrees and sunny. There was never too much humidity, my mom always claimed that we “pay for the weather here” so it should be pleasant on a day-to-day basis. I stood in the dingy dugout with my teammates as we all waited in anticipation to learn if we would be the home team. The sun beat down on my sun-screened face, “Hey Kaunert, do you want some of this?” Ryan asked as he shoved what looked like black lipstick towards me.

“Well, what is it?” I asked.

“It is eye black, all the big leaguers wear it, duh! Real athletes wear eye black.” Ryan explained.

“Oh well, sure.” I complied. I put the thick, sticky, black substance underneath my left eye first. Instantly, I despised the feeling. I felt sticky, gross, and suffocated. I wanted to wipe it off badly. I wanted to run over to my mother, as I knew she always carried baby wipes, and tell her to clean my face. Instead, I continued to spread it under my right eye. I would be ridiculed if I ran to my mommy. They would call me a baby…or even worse, a girl. I started my internal mantra, “Athletes wear it Chelsea!” I craved acceptance as an athlete; if the boys wore it, then I would too. Thus, began my adoption of an athlete identity.

Before I begin my methodological explanation, it is crucial to establish my own positionality coming into this research. According to Judith Wuest (1995), “knowledge is shaped by the social context of the knower” (p. 126). Therefore, it important to establish myself as a feminist who operates under a feminist cultural studies paradigm while incorporating an intersectional approach (Wuest, 1995). I also need to explain my own social contexts. My own
standpoint is influenced by my middle-class upbringing. My identities as a white, middle-class, heterosexual, athletic female also influence my interpretations and lived experiences. As an interpretive scholar, I must acknowledge who I am as it does influence my research.

As I matured, my athlete identity did as well. I no longer longed to be “one of the guys.” This outlook revolved as I progressed from playing recreation coach-pitch in California to playing select travel fastpitch softball at the age of 8 in Phoenix, Arizona when my father was transferred. This was not only a critical move for my family, but for my own athletic career. Arizona was the hotbed of women’s fast pitch softball. Arizona put the “female” before my athlete identity. I felt as if I was with my own kind. Instead of Ryan passing the eye black around, Rachel asked me if I wanted a stream of yellow ribbon adorned with bees to put in my hair. I was a part of the select age 8 and under team called the hornets (hence the bee ribbon). I noticed difference after difference between the two teams I had been a part of in my short athletic career. My uniform for the hornets was different than my recreation boys team uniform. We didn’t wear the conventional baseball pant and jersey: we wore the same high socks, but wore shorts and a tank top. Holding the shorts up I inquired, “Dad, what happens when I have to slide?”

When he held up the spandex shorts lined with padding near the butt, he asked. “Well what the heck are those?” My father, who up until this point only knew baseball, decided we would call them sliding shorts. Slowly but surely, I progressed in the softball world. Another work transfer took us to Ohio where I joined another select travel softball team. My female athlete identity continued to evolve through puberty. I realized there were two types of softball players: those who rolled their shorts up higher and those who left their shorts long. In high school, I learned that this gendered performance was more nuanced than just length of shorts.
“Hey you know what Mary told me?” My mom asked. My mother, who was unapologetically un-athletic, was always my number one fan and always had team gossip from the fellow team moms. “You know Melissa, the one that wears her shorts really long, like a basketball player?”

“Yeah, she can really hit the snot out of the ball” I responded warily.

“Well, Mary said she is a lesbian, what are your thoughts on that?” my mother asked me with some sort of life lesson intent, I could already tell. My father and I had similar conversations previously. I grew up in an open household, open in terms of providing a space where my siblings and I could ask questions of things that may be considered “taboo” (i.e. sex, drugs, alcohol, and sexuality).

I quickly responded with, “Well I think Mary should mind her own business!” My mother chuckled, agreed, and we continued our drive to practice. Thirteen years later, I stood next to Melissa on her wedding day as she married one of our fellow teammates, Karly. Female athlete identity to me encapsulates the struggle with stereotypes and narrow societal perceptions.

I existed in an environment where we were asked to bring our boyfriends to team events, where lesbian was something foreign and scary. Messner (2002) would describe it as a “Don’t ask, don’t tell” environment. This meant make-up, short shorts, long ponytails adorned with ribbon, and it meant you didn’t transgress the line from feminine to athlete and self-identification.

We are in a Post Title IX era. Female athletes are participating in sport at younger ages and continuing participation into higher education. As a female athlete myself, I have faced discrimination in sport due to my external appearance. I acknowledge that outwardly I am viewed as feminine; therefore, my athletic ability was often questioned. Krane (2001) explains that female athletes have to be feminine, but not too feminine, or their athletic abilities are
questioned. At the same time, if they do not appear to be feminine enough, their sexuality is questioned. I experienced this first hand.

It was the Ohio Athletic Conference Division III NCAA tournament. I donned my Muskingum University Uniform (trends finally went back to wearing traditional baseball pants). It as a chilly April day in Ada, Ohio. I was playing left field. The Ohio Northern Softball field backed up to the baseball field. When they completed their practice, they lined the outfield fence.

“Hey 15! Work those tight pants!” a player shouted at me. I thought to myself, is he really talking to me right now. I used my defense mechanism of simply ignoring him. However, the taunting continued.

Another player shouted, “I would like to get into those pants 15!” My focus was no longer on the game, I felt uncomfortable in my own body, self-conscious, dirty. I promptly called time and approached the field umpire.

“Hey blue, the baseball players along the fence are verbally harassing me.” I stated.

“Well what did you say to them?” He huffed.

“Excuse me?” I was in shock. By this time my coach approached, and she asked me what the problem was. I explained that the baseball boys were verbally harassing me.

“Well, blue, what part of that do you not understand? My player is being harassed. You need to tell those boys to leave, and how dare you put the blame back onto a female like that. You can be assured the Ohio Athletic Conference will be hearing about this.” She explained and stalked off the field.

Female athlete appearance not only leads to the questioning of athletic ability, but from my own experiences it has included verbal harassment as well. It is also important acknowledge that I am a “post Title IX” female athlete. The girl athletes in this dissertation are also considered
to be “post Title IX.” We grew up with the opportunity to play sport at a very young age. I am able to relate to my projected participants as a former athlete, specifically an athlete who was in serious competitive athletics from a very early age. This is very different from previous generations like my mother’s and grandmother’s where they had to fight to play, wait until the men were done practicing to have the gym/practice field, at the same time fighting the hegemonic stereotypes behind sport (which current generations of female athletes are still fighting). Exploring these stereotypes requires female athletes to be able to represent themselves. Scholars have used visual methods to explore gendered sport performances in order to examine the layers of female athlete identities (Azzarito, 2016; Azzarito & Hill, 2013; Krane et al., 2010; Barak et al., in revision).

Female Athlete Identity Constructions And Performances Through Visual Methods

It is evident that female athletes are concerned with performing more identities than just female and athlete (Barak et al., in revision). In popular media, female athlete gender performances are scrutinized and often contested (Barak et al., in revision). Every gender performance requires that an individual is consciously or unconsciously transforming internalized stories into public narratives (Foss, Domenico & Foss, 2013). Many female athletes negotiate between female athlete identities, social expectations, and stereotypes. In Barak et al.’s study (in revision), one female athlete posed in her soccer uniform with her graduation gown over her uniform when asked to take a picture of herself. She wore casual sandals and wore her graduation cap. Makeup and hair down, we see that she is performing numerous identities in one fluid picture. Butler (1995) argues that “change and alteration is part of the very process of “performativity”” (p. 135). Performativity is not limited to a simple “expression,” as Butler continues to explain the origins of performativity. Butler explains that in order for a
performance to really work, it engages with and draws upon an established set of linguistics that have traditionally resulted in certain effects (Butler, 1995). The female athletes in this dissertation engaged with the stereotypical performances of female athletes, and I would argue performed a reconstructed identity. Performing student, mother, and professional is just as important to them as being athlete and female (Barak et al., in revision). These female athletes show us that female athlete identities and the performances that accompany them are more than overtly sexualized female and masculine athlete.

Through exploring collegiate and girl athlete identity negotiations and performances, we know that there is still a lot to be researched in regards to the female/athlete paradox. Visual analysis is a unique way to explore the development of female and athlete identities. Krane and colleagues (2010; 2011; 2014; & in revision) have utilized such methods in the exploration of female athlete self-representations and young girl athlete perceptions. They give collegiate female athletes the opportunity to construct their own photographic self-representations depicting what a female athlete looks like to them. Though female athletes are exposed to sexualized images of female athletes most often, they did choose these representations. In addition, the female athletes within these photo studies chose strong and powerful poses (Krane et al., 2010). Overall, they wanted to show themselves being athletes. The use of visual methods within the present study allowed female athletes themselves to have agency in the way in which they are represented. Azzarito used the same visual methods in her 2016 and 2013 pieces where she incorporated ethnically diverse young people’s photographed self-representations, as well as how girls view their own bodies in a variety of social spaces. This type of participatory research allows participants to creatively communicate their own lived experiences and make them visible to various audiences (Azzarito, 2016; Azzarito & Hill, 2013).
Scholars like Krane and Azzarito enable othered groups, in this case female athletes, to tell their own visual story through visual photos and diaries. In the Krane et al. (2010) study, collegiate female athletes discussed how they are posed and told what to wear in most organized photos. Many of the collegiate athletes in both the 2010 and the 2016 studies showed expressions of empowerment through their directed photos. Using similar methods van Amsterdam, Knoppers, Claringbould, and Jongmans (2012) analyzed young athletes’ perceptions based on how they interpreted both mediated photos and narratives. Through focus groups they concluded that their participants used masculinity and femininity as two bipolar concepts as they discussed men and women athletes fitting within the hegemonic norms.

Visual methods are also used in gaining the perceptions of others. In the second study, Krane and colleagues (2011) showed the photos of collegiate female athletes to young girl female athletes and asked them their perceptions in semi-structured focus groups. Through this study (Krane et al., 2011), we know that girl athletes prefer to see images of female athletes being athletic, whether that be in a sport location or in action; they want to see them being actual athletes and rejected photos that they deemed not athletic enough (Krane et al., 2011). Visual methods allow creative participatory engagement. Daniels (2009) also used visual methods as a way to inquire if mediated representations of female athletes had any positive effects on collegiate and adolescent athletes, as most research focuses on the negative effects. Results were similar to other studies in which images of performance athletes garnered less self-objectification language of female athletes (Daniels, 2009).
Feminist And Intersectional Methodology

This work is grounded in feminist and intersectional methodologies. Both feminist, these methodologies go hand in hand as they prioritize individual lived experiences by a marginalized group (girl athletes). Epistemologically, I am grounded in feminist thought that aims to answer the following three questions (Alcoff & Potter, 1993): Who is the subject of knowledge? How does social position of the subject affect the production of knowledge? What is the impact upon knowledge and reason of the subject’s sexed body? Feminist Epistemologies support the hypothesis that politics intersects with traditional epistemology, demonstrating that an epistemology must “attend to the complex ways in which social values influence knowledge, including the discernible social and political implications of its own analysis” (Alcoff & Potter, p.13, 1993). The overall goal of Feminist Epistemologies is to not only satisfy intellectual curiosity, but to also contribute to the expansion of democracy in the production of knowledge. They are reflexive and seek fundamental changes in the institutions that empower us to speak and work (Alcoff & Potter, 1993).

This informs my own feminist epistemology. Just as every epistemological tradition requires that some claim of knowledge must be verified, feminist epistemology utilizes women’s perspectives to specify not only interpretation, but verification as well (Jaggar, 2004). The standpoint of women reconstructs knowledge that has already been established, as it brings to light the views and knowledge of women silenced throughout history (Jaggar, 2004). Female athletes have been silenced within the world of sport. Their achievements, attitudes, and presence has often been pushed to the side. The oppression of all women is constantly changing (Jaggar, 2004); female athletes have experienced this greatly within the last 50 years with the passage of Title IX and the new opportunities and controversies have accompanied it. These upheavals have
legislatively removed the oppressions that have inhibited women’s contribution to knowledge, specifically within sport. And at the same time, sex segregation, conservative gender ideologies, and trivializes mediated representations of female athletes still continue to oppress girl and women athletes. I acknowledge the progression in terms of opportunities and participation of the female athlete population, but my feminist epistemology urges further investigation into how these institutional changes have influenced the individual experiences of female athletes.

Intersectional methodologies make visible the operations behind the intersections of identities and bring to fruition those identities that are privileged and those that are not (Warner & Shields, 2013). Some argue that intersectionality poses a methodological challenge because it only focuses on the social impact of identities and ignores the psychology behind the lived experience (Shields, 2008). This argument is rooted in conventional social and behavioral sciences. Through the focus on qualitative methods, these researchers can be more open to intersectional methods because it leads to an open process of describing the formations and interactions of categories (Shields, 2008).

Leslie McCall (2005) brings to light the complexity of using categorical methods. Intersectional methodologies break down binary categories and highlight the complexity of each of them. For example, gender as a category, is not simply female or male. We know that gender is fluid and can be categorized in numerous ways; intersectional methodology does not singularly focus on the category, but looks at the interactions of the social construction of categories as they relate to the other definitions (McCall, 2005). Intersectional methodologies incorporate the deconstruction and intersections of identity categories (McCall, 2005) and contend with the multiple complexities of reality by focusing on the overlap of individuals operating in a system of subordination. MacKinnon (2013) argued that intersectional methods do
not just add variables to the mix; instead she says that they embody a specific dynamic approach through the examination of the complexity of reality by analyzing the power relations and hierarchies where sub-systems of race, gender, sexuality, nation, class, et cetera all converge (p. 1020). Bowleg (2008) suggested that we do not use additive approach as “social inequality increases with each stigmatized identity discussed” (p. 314). Instead of ranking oppressed identities (even though participants might do so), it is not the researchers’ responsibility to do so (Bowleg, 2008). Ultimately, she suggested that questions about intersectionality should be focused on those meaningful constructs that the researcher is searching for, rather than demographics (Bowleg, 2008, p. 318).

According to Lengel (1998), when discussing the main challenges within feminist research it is important that we utilize self-reflexivity as a way to position ourselves within the communities that we are working with. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) describe reflexivity as the "heartbeat of qualitative research" (p.72). They define it as "... the process of engaging in mutual recognition of, and adaptation with, others -- enables the researcher to manage the twisting, turning road of qualitative research" (p. 72). This definition speaks to the "messy" nature of qualitative research while at the same time dealing with the contested validity of the research itself. Through reflexivity we, as researchers, are able to recognize our own standpoints not only with the literature but with the concepts and the people we are studying. As researchers we study a constantly shifting, progressing, changing world and consistent reflection helps us manage these intricate concepts. Calafell (2013) also identifies the importance and complexity of reflexivity in her paper “(I)dentities: Considering Accountability, Reflexivity, and Intersectionality in the I and the We.” Calafell describes reflexivity as a “labor” (p. 10). I like how she highlights the complex nature of reflexivity. It goes hand-in-hand with the complex
nature of feminist epistemology, feminist grounded theory, and critical ethnography. Combine all of the above together and you are most likely to end up with a “mess.” Reflexivity is tool to make sense of the “mess.” It is not something as simple as a little self-reflection and establishing one’s own standpoint as related to the research. It is going deep within one's self to flesh out the deeper meanings in the concepts and relationships. This involves questioning how does my own privilege affect the research process (Krane et al., 2012). It is something that cannot be “done alone” (Warren, 2011, p. 141). Warren goes on to explain that it is arrogant to think that we know everything even if we are members of the dominant culture and discourse.

Though I am considered an insider within this research, I still do not know everything there is to know about what it is to be a girl athlete today. I consistently considered reflexivity in this research project (Warren, 2011). I also gained guidance from Alcoff (1991), who stated, “I am engaging in the act of representing other’s needs, goals situation, and in fact, who they are” (p. 9). Though I engaged in dialogue and shared space with these girl athletes, my goal was to represent their experiences to the best of their ability. The more I engaged in reflexive process, guided by Krane et al. (2012), the more I exposed my own privileges and views which strengthened my analysis through the commitment to the process and methods themselves. Essentially, I aimed to tell their stories and experiences through my own lens guided by feminist epistemology and theory which influenced my method.

Method

I utilize visual methods (Azzarito, 2016; Azzarito & Hill, 2013; Krane et al., 2011; Barak et al., in revision) and in-depth, unstructured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008) with girl athletes in the Midwest region of the United States. Each girl athlete constructed their own 5-10 photo essay and participated in a one-on-one in-depth unstructured interview wherein we
discussed their stories and photos. I then analyzed the data to find overarching themes and interconnected them to my theoretical frameworks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do girl athletes construct their identities? RQ2: How do girl athletes negotiate the female/athlete paradox? RQ3: How do girl athletes visually depict their own identities? Using a narrative approach, I have incorporated each individual girl athletes’ story into the analysis through the use of vignettes (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

**Participants.** The participants were girl athletes ranging from 10-12 years old. I recruited girl athletes from varying sport backgrounds. See Table 1 for ages and sports played. The sport contexts in which these girls participate in sport are select teams. A select team is not connected with a public institution (i.e. public school) and is considered to be a private organization. Most often, these organizations are considered non-profit and are run by the parents of the athletes. As a member of a select team, these girl athletes have gone through a series of try-outs to earn their place on the team, or they have been specifically recruited. Parents/guardians pay a substantial fee for their child to participate as they are privately run. All of the girl athletes participated on one type of select team and played other sports recreationally. Twelve of the girl athletes participated in more than one type of sport (See Table 1).
Table 1: Girl Athlete Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girl Athlete Name</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Sport(s) Played</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Gymnastics &amp; Lacrosse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennedy</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Basketball &amp; Softball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Softball &amp; Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Hockey, Volleyball, Cross Country, Track, Golf, &amp; Volleyball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Hockey, Golf, Track, Cross Country, &amp; Volleyball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Softball &amp; Cheerleading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Softball &amp; Soccer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Softball &amp; Basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Basketball &amp; Football</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paige</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Basketball, Softball, &amp; Volleyball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Soccer, Softball, Basketball, Cross Country, Cheerleading, &amp; Volleyball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Softball &amp; Tumbling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedure. After receiving HSRB approval, I contacted local select team administrators. I utilized former connections with the softball community and sent recruitment emails to organizations within my geographical region. Using purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015), I sought out girls from 10-12 years of age in private organizations. Purposeful sampling is a strategic selection of those individuals that have rich information based on the research questions (Patton, 2015). I first contacted league administrators via phone call or email to introduce myself. Upon approval by league administration, I then contacted the coaches whose athletes fell within the age range of 10-12 years old. From there my sample snowballed, and I recruited female athletes through acquaintances of the parents.

When I gained access to a group of parents, I spoke to them first to explain my study, as the photographs could raise alarm or further questions from parents. I used this time with parents...
to go over the recruitment letter (APPENDIX C). Once I gained approval from parents, I spoke to those girl athletes who had parental consent. I was able to build rapport with the girl athletes through a brief introduction of myself as a former female athlete; it is important to gain trust from your participants and this can be done through self-disclosure (Lindoff & Taylor, 2011). I then explained that there were two parts to their participation in my research. The first component was the photo essay. I explained that this photo essay would be constructed by the girl athlete themselves. It was important that the girl athletes understood that they were the ones who were to take and choose the photos. The girl athletes could take as many photos as they wanted to, as long as they are appropriate (no vulgarity or nudity). Girl athletes were also permitted to choose photos that have already been taken, as long as they chose them. I then instructed the girl athletes to pick 5-10 of the photos they have taken as their favorites. Once part one of the study was completed, I arranged a mutually agreed upon time (myself, athlete, and parent) to do the interview. The parental role within the interview was to essentially get their child to the interview place. Once I greeted the parents and girl athlete, the parent was asked to step away during the interview. Interviews ranged in length from 18-35 minutes. I also emphasized that their participation was completely voluntary and the girl athletes could stop at any time.

The interviews were unstructured and remained open throughout the entire interviewing process. The foundation of the unstructured interview was a grand tour question (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) that opened up dialogue about the meaning and story within the photos. I began with “what story are you trying to tell in your photo essay?” From there questions differed based on the response to the first question. Many athletes spoke about the multiplicity of sports they played. I would then follow with “why is it important for a girl athlete to play more than one
Throughout, I used probe questions (Berg & Lune, 2012) to have girl athletes elaborate on their stories. For example, I would ask “what is the best thing about being a female athlete?” Often I would follow with “what is the worst thing about being a female athlete?” This allowed for the evolution of organic discussion to occur during the interview (Berg & Lune, 2012). The probing topics addressed were developed by taking previous research on post Title IX athletes into consideration (Azzarito, 2016; Azzarito & Hill, 2013). One question I used to address this topic is “what challenges do girl athletes today face?” as well as, “what do people think about female athletes?” The overall goal of the guide was to provide an outline in which the girl athletes could verbally express their photographic stories. Probing topics are listed in the interview guide (APPENDIX D). The interviews were immediately transcribed verbatim after completion.

Data Analysis

I used a dual analysis method for better organization of the data given the mixed-method approach—the analysis of the photo essays and the analysis of the interviews. The photographs have both a material and symbolic significance that are considered to be a different forms of communication (Harrison, 2004) According to Harrison (2004) photographs are sites of embodiment of identity as it gives individuals the means to narrate everyday life experiences. The photos were the foundation of the conversation in the one-on-one unstructured interviews.

Photo Analysis. Many scholars view visual methodology as a form of empowerment (Azzarito, 2016; Azzarito & Hill, 2013; Krane et al., 2011; Barak et al., in revision). Though some the female athletes took more than the 10 pictures required, I focused on those photos the girl athlete chose as their favorite to make the data more manageable in conjunction with their interviews during the visual analysis of the photos. Young girl and collegiate female athletes are
often disempowered in the ways in which they are perceived and visually represented. My method enabled girl athletes to tell their own stories. Each photo essay was kept together and analyzed in conjunction with the athlete’s interviews through narrative analysis (Smith & Sparks, 2008; Smith & Sparks, 2012) and open and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The photos complemented the interview. Instead of separating them into two processes of analysis, I used the interview as tool to query further into the meaning of the photos. I placed the photos into the following categories before the interview: athletic, posed, non-athletic, team, school, family, and friends. Then throughout the unstructured interviews I posed questions to further explore why the girl athlete chose specific photos, and asked how the picture contributed to the photo essay and her identity as a whole. The photo essay was meant to tell a story; the story would be broken if each individual picture was analyzed separately.

**Interview Analysis.** To analyze the interviews, I used open and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to pull overarching themes from the data. In the first step of the data analysis, I read the transcripts line-by-line and attached initial codes in an open coding process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) This process enabled me to take into consideration all the data through numerous proposed codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Some examples of the codes included the following: good athlete, good girl, student, multisport athlete, mean boys, mean girls, bows, glitter, mean coach, good coach, supportive parents. Axial coding was the next step, where I organized the numerous open codes through clustering related open codes to make theoretical sense. For example, I combined bows, glitter, girly girl in to the overarching theme look pretty, play pretty. I organized the axial codes to create overarching groups of related meaning: school (the good and the bad); female athletes > male athletes; look pretty play pretty; relationships; we want female role models; I am a female athlete. School (the good and the bad) centered on the
educational space as the girl athletes discussed their academic success and the trivialization of their athletic abilities. *Female athlete > male athlete* focused on the empowerment that many of the girl athletes feel through sport as many of the girls acknowledged the gendered space of sport. The *Look pretty, play pretty* narrative was discussed by many of the girl athletes as they interacted with the appearance expectations of both their female and athlete identities. Many of the girl athletes spoke about *relationships* that have been influential in their athletic careers; both the negative and the positive. *We want female athlete role models* dealt with stories of the media, specifically, the girl athlete spoke about the disparity of female athletes in sport media. Lastly, the girl athletes wanted to convey their own messages depicting *I am a female athlete* which described their day-to-day lives and how they manage their time and other activities.

As stated earlier, narrative analysis is incorporated as another level of analysis (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). As identity is at the forefront of my conceptual framework, I wanted to ensure that I addressed the narrative as a whole entity. Through the incorporation of narrative analysis, I highlighted the “how” and “why” girl athletes construct their identities through their photographic stories (Perrier, Smith, Strachan & Latimer-Cheung, 2014). Adapted from Mann and Krane (2016) narrative analysis was layered with open and axial coding by situating the stories that contained prominent higher order themes (gender expectations, athlete = numerous sports; female athletes > male athletes; girls can do anything; school is cool; we want female athlete role models) Therefore, once the codes were established through the open and axial coding processes, I present the narratives as intact stories (Mann & Krane, 2016), weaving the themes through vignettes. I used vignettes in order to tell the most complete story of each girl athlete. Each vignette was composed to tell a meaningful story around each overarching theme. Previous sport research (e.g. Waldron, Lynn, & Krane, 2011) has used this method as a means to
present a complete story in combination with creative nonfiction (Caulley, 2008). Each vignette was constructed using the girl athletes’ words, however, some were rearranged to create a more intriguing, complete, poignant story. Waldron and colleagues (2011) have used this technique previously to create a meaningful story that highlights the emotions and physical experiences of athletes.

**Trustworthiness**

As recommended by many scholars, I incorporated they eye of a critical friend. This critical friend, as suggested by Smith and Sparks (2012) not only encourages the process of reflexivity, as mentioned earlier, but also explores different interpretations and encourages alternative analysis. The critical friend’s questions encouraged me to continue to reflect on how my own theoretical conceptual framework influenced my interpretations (Pierre, et al, 2014). In this instance, the critical friend is my dissertation advisor. Through consistent re-reading my advisor posed questions to further my own reflexivity and analysis. Trustworthiness was also developed through the pilot testing of the interview protocol. Through this testing I gained not only experience, but I was able to engage with my insider knowledge of what it is like to be a girl athlete and I figured out how that would build rapport with the girl athletes. In the interviews I used this previous experience to further engage the girl athletes in deeper discussion. As previously explained, I utilized reflexivity through my previous experiences to further engage the girl athletes. The photo essays themselves also allowed for deeper discussion in terms of identity. It became easier to develop trust with the girls since they were sharing photos in conjunction with the interview. It would not have been as open if I had only utilized questions as visual forms of identity are another form (personal) of communication.
Chapter four details the six overarching themes: school (the good and the bad); female athletes > male athletes; look pretty, play pretty; relationships; we want female role models; I am a female athlete. School (the good and the bad) discusses the girl athlete’s experiences with the school space as both a student and a female athlete. Many of the girl athletes discuss the importance of education and how it is necessary to play sport. They also discuss school as a space where they are expected to succeed not only as athletes, but as females. School is a space where they perceive to have an advantage over their male classmates. However, school is a space for contestation from fellow male classmates in regards to their athlete identity. Many of the girl athletes discuss their schools as a place where the boys will criticize and questions their athletic ability. Female athlete > male athlete details the sense of empowerment that many of the girl athletes feel. Often times they were very sport specific while discussing why and how girl athletes can be “just as good” as male athletes; many stating “girls can even be better than boys” at a variety of sports. The narratives told within this theme place female athletes at the top of the sport hierarchy as told by the girl athletes themselves. Look pretty, play pretty centers around the physical appearance of the girl athletes. Many of the girl athletes recognize there is a time and a place to “dress up” and be “girly.” The concept of the “tomboy” was also discussed. Social media comes up often within this category in regards to what the girls post on their social media accounts and what they choose to not post. Often times the girls discuss the importance of posting BOTH athletic and girlie pictures. Relationships are very important to these girl athletes. The girl athletes focus on a variety of relationships within their family life, social life, and athletic life. Many of the girl athletes attribute their passion and willingness to participate in sport to the relationships they have with teammates, coaches, and their parents. However, some girl athletes attribute a negative experience to many past coaching relationships. Regardless of
the tone of the relationship, they seem to have a large impact in the lives of these girl athletes. We want female role models dives in to the sparsity of a competent representation of female athletes in the media. The narrative within this theme speaks to the silence that many female athletes face within mass media. The girls are craving a looking for female athlete role models and when asked who their favorite female athlete is many showed frustration that they did not have one. The girl athletes spoke to the fact that they cannot access sportswomen via the television, but they want to see it. The final theme, I am a female athlete, speaks the to the day-to-day life of these girl athletes. It also describes their athlete identity. Many discussed the photos they chose in terms of athleticism and the recollection of athletic success and passion.

The themes described are interconnected and woven together through the four layers of the Communication Theory of Identity (personal, enacted, relational, communal). Throughout this analysis these layers are described through the stories of the girl athletes.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter details the overarching themes derived from the photo essays and the unstructured one on one interviews with each girl athlete. The purpose of this research was to gain the perspective of girl athletes and engage in discussions of female athlete identity, and as the girls discussed their identities it became quickly apparent that they are engaging with these identities on regular basis. I utilized visual methods (Azzarito, 2016; Azzarito & Hill, 2013; Krane et al., 2011; Barak et al., in revision) and in-depth, unstructured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008) and used narrative analysis layered with open and axial coding (Mann & Krane, 2016) to develop the above themes.

The six overarching themes are: school (the good and the bad); female athletes > are better than male athletes; look pretty play pretty; relationships; we want female role models; I am a female athlete. School (the good and the bad) centered on the educational space as the girl athletes discussed their academic success and the trivialization of their athletic abilities. The found empowered through academics, but received backlash from students and teachers in terms of their athletic legitimacy. Female athlete > male athlete focused on the empowerment that many of the girl athletes feel through sport as many of the girls acknowledged the gendered space of sport. The girl athlete acknowledged that there are “boy sports and girl sports,” but that did not deter them from participating. The Look pretty, play pretty narrative was discussed by many of the girl athletes as they interacted with the appearance expectations of both their female and athlete identities. The girl athletes varied in their opinions and definitions in terms of self-identification as “tomboys” or “girllie” girls. Many of the girl athletes spoke about relationships that have been influential in their athletic careers; both the negative and the positive. Many attributed their success to parents, while other girl athletes discussed negative relationships that
forced them to quit the sport in some cases. *We want female athlete role models* dealt with stories of the media, specifically, the girl athlete spoke about the disparity of female athletes in sport media. They were angry and frustrated that they could not easily access female athletes in the media. Lastly, the girl athletes wanted to convey their own messages depicting *I am a female athlete* which described their day-to-day lives and how they manage their time and other activities. They wanted their photo essays to describe their lives and how dedicated they are to their sports. I discuss each theme in detail using the girls’ narratives and the conversations I had with the girl athletes.

In conjunction with the intersectional approach in my methodology the six themes below do not stand by themselves. These themes are connected through the stories of the girl athletes. Many girls had the uncanny ability to discuss all six themes in one sentence. Through the layered approach of narrative and open and axial analysis it was evident that the girl athletes were negotiating both identities and the contexts in which those identities are most visible. This speaks to the intersectional approach to the analysis of the girl athlete identities. Their stories also allowed for personal reflection through my own narrative that I have incorporated. The layered approach brought forth the connections and themes The six themes are therefore connected to each other just as the girls’ identities are. It is impossible to discuss one theme without the other five. I discuss the themes, and then present a vignette, photos, and analysis of that theme in order to connect the narratives of the girl athletes to my own experiences as a female athlete.

**Theme 1. School (The Good And The Bad)**

School (the good and the bad) references girl athletes’ stories and experiences in an educational space. I observed quickly that school is important to girl athletes. It became important on numerous levels: Academically school ranks at the top of the priority list in terms
of academic success and the importance of an education. However, school is also a place of contention with their athletic identity.

**The Good.** The educational setting seemed to be a space where girl athletes received the most resistance in terms of athletic competence and legitimacy. They recognize early that in order to succeed in athletics they have to perform well in school. Many of the girl athletes spoke to the importance of not only earning good grades, but also earning accolades for those grades. The girl athletes stated simply that school was important to them. Ashley, a twelve-year-old, multi-sport athlete (soccer, softball, cross country, cheerleading, and volleyball) has her homework schedule worked in to her school day so she does not have to do it at home.

Chelsea: What else are you telling people in these photos?
Ashley: That even being a young athlete I still have to keep up with school and stuff.

Chelsea: What about school? How are able to keep up?
Ashley: Most of the time I get my homework finished in AA, which is like end of the day, it is like a study hall at the end of the day. There are two, one before lunch and then one at the end of the day. Then I have study hall on Thursday mornings. By the end of the week I am able to get most of my homework done at school during this free time.

Chelsea: How important is school to you?
Ashley: Very important

Chelsea: Why?
Ashley: I need to be smart to be able to get in college and play sport in college and high school.
The girl athletes recognize the importance of getting into college academically, but they also recognize the relationship of school and sport. To them, these two concepts go hand-in-hand. Chloe, a twelve-year-old, multi-sport athlete (volleyball, hockey, cross country, track, and golf) was also very aware of this connection as. She implied that if she did not succeed in school then athletics would no longer be an option for her.

Chloe: Because to a be a female athlete you might not be able to play if you do not have good grades.

This student identity is interwoven within the “female athlete” identity as pointedly stated by Chloe. Chloe showed true concern and interest in her academics and when discussing potential places to go to college, academics over sport was her top priority. It is also important to note that she said to be a FEMALE athlete, you have to get good grades. Her statement would hold a different weight if she would have just said athlete, it would apply to all genders. Here, she is very pointed when she states that female athletes have to be good students as well. This later connects to other comments made in terms of academic expectations of female athletes. Ashley continued to discuss the importance of school when we talked about the ways in which female athletes are underestimated. Evelyn, a twelve-year-old, multi-sport athlete mirrored the words of Ashley as did Paige, another twelve-year-old multi-sport athlete. They identify strongly with their academic identities as they essentially “call out” their male counterparts. Many of the girl athletes said that they felt underestimated in athletics, however, they did not feel the same way in terms of academics. As a matter of fact, they felt that school was a place where they were
expected to perform. Ashley said “in school the girls are usually smarter than boys and we all know that” Evelyn mirrored her when she said “you have to get good grades to be able to play the sport, I don’t know how boys play sport…they usually suck at school.” Other girl athletes recognized that boys did not seem to be a part of many of the education clubs and awards. Paige explained, “You have to a 3.5 GPA or high for national honor society and that is important to me, you can see there are a more girls in it.”

Many of the girl athletes discussed the importance of education and how it is necessary to play sport. They also discuss school as a space where they are expected to succeed not only as athletes, but as females. As Ashley discussed, school is a space where girls perceived they have an advantage over their male classmates. They viewed education as a win for female athletes over their male athlete classmates. There is an obvious connection of sport and education, however they contrast this connection to their male counterparts. They discussed that they are often criticized in sport spaces and contexts, but it is reversed in the classroom. This was paralleled with their “wins” within this space as they qualify their academic prowess with the way that the boys treat them in school. However, school is a space for contestation from fellow male classmates in regards to their athlete identity.

Ashley: We get all the crap from the boys in school. Them telling us that they are better, and they really are not.

Chelsea: In what ways do they do that?

Ashley: They just tell us that softball is easy and I am like no, if you got out there and tried you would not be able to do it.

Chelsea: Do they say these things to your face?

Ashley: Yeah, and it doesn’t bug me.
Chelsea: When do they say things? Like in class, gym?

Ashley: It is both, we just get into conversation about sport and they say, oh we are better than you… nope! No, you are not.

The Bad. Many of the girl athletes discuss school as a place where the boys will criticize and question their athletic ability as Ashley describes above. Alexis, a twelve-year-old, multi-sport player was one of the girl athletes who discussed the turmoil she has faced in school in regards to the legitimacy of her athletic ability. Through my discussion with Alexis, school was a place where she had to fight for herself and her teammates. This oppression was from both her coaches as well as male teachers. I posed Alexis with the same question above: Are female athletes underestimated in only athletics?

Alexis: Okay, I’m just going to throw something random in there but…I think the reason why people, especially the boys and teachers, the guy teachers at our school they like give us so much negative impact on our sport and it makes me mad because we are all a big team right now.

Chelsea: What kind of things…the teachers say stuff?

Alexis: Well one male teacher has really been mean and he is a social studies teacher and he goes over things like the medieval ages and Rome. He mostly pinpointed the women and how they were treated. I am not saying that is a bad thing, but he was like saying like a ton of mean things, like that is what it should be like now and that’s not what it should be now because we [women] didn’t get credit at all back in the day and medieval times too. He also made us watch Trump’s inauguration speech, and it was painful because we were trying to work on something else and he was like turning the volume all the way up in our class.
He like forced us to watch it. My mom got really mad at him, and I didn’t really understand how serious it was because there are these guys in our class in social studies that are like really big Trump supporters and they were like saying what good of a guy Trump was and how he should build a wall and how he should treat women wrongly and it makes me sad because it doesn’t feel like we are getting anywhere like it feels like we are going back down, but we can’t lose hope and that type of stuff.

Alexis faces this pushback not only in regards to athletics, but also in the classroom itself. She spoke about this particular teacher the same way she spoke about her middle school male classmates, who happen to be athletes as well. As we got more sport specific, I learned that Alexis felt uncomfortable and violated through such discourses with her male classmates and teacher. This contestation was something that really seemed to bother Alexis as she continued with this instance as a launching pad for other bad experiences that she has had.

Chelsea: Is that how a lot of the girls in your class feel?

Alexis: Yeah I think they feel violated too, like guys are gross in middle school.

Chelsea: Oh really?

Alexis: Yeah some guys are really gross.

Chelsea: What type of person do these boys target?

Alexis: They target the female athletes.

Chelsea: What kind of things do they say?

Alexis: The 7th grade boys have a 14-0 record in basketball and we didn’t win all of our games, but it’s hard because they are always super mean about it and kept on saying that they are the better team because we are guys. I am like, I guess you
can say you are the better team based on record, but you can’t say because you are
guys.

Alexis was not alone in this schoolyard battle. Many of the other girl athletes discussed the
educational setting as site of athletic questioning, again from their male classmates. Sydney, an
eleven-year-old competitive gymnast said she feels like she has to prove herself as a gymnast as
many people do not believe her. She attributed this to the fact that gymnastics is not necessarily a
mainstream sport, meaning her team is not associated with her school. Still, she believed that
should not be a reason enough to not believe that she is a gymnast.

Chelsea: Who challenges or questions you being a gymnast?
Sydney: These boys at my school.
Chelsea: Oh really? What do they say?
Sydney: Like can you do a back tuck, or can you do a layout and I say yes and
they say show us. I mean I can’t do them now. I am not going to go in the hall
way or the gym and just tumble.
Chelsea: Right…I mean that is not safe.
Sydney: Exactly.
Chelsea: Why do you think they want you to prove that?
Sydney: I don’t know.
Chelsea: Maybe because they are just…
Sydney: BOYS!

Sydney described this situation very matter-of-factly as she simply gave the rationale of gender
as an explanation as to why boys question her athletic ability. Though she recognized this, it did
not seem to lower her spirits as she explained through a “show and tell” activity she brought in
all her medals and trophies that those boys “shut up really quick.” She proved to them, through external rewards, that she is indeed a legitimate athlete. Emily, a ten-year-old competitive gymnast and lacrosse player faces similar issues as Sydney. I asked her what her classmates thought about her being a competitive gymnast and she found humor in the questioning.

Chelsea: What do your classmates think of you being an athlete?
Emily: (giggling) The boys…they think that our stuff is really easy.
Chelsea: Why do they say that?
Emily: (giggling) Yeah they do, they think that boys [sports] is harder.
Chelsea: Well what kind of things do they say?
Emily: They just they are like...gymnastics is really easy, but they do not even know how to do a cartwheel.
Chelsea: So what do you say back?
Emily: Well I do know how to do gymnastics so…I usually don’t say anything…they won’t understand anyway.

Emily decided it was not worth her time or energy to defend herself. Within the school space, the only contention described was this questioning by the boy athletes to the girl athletes.

Paige (twelve-year-old, multi-sport athlete) describes a time where she was directly confronted with resistance from her male classmates. She described the moment as a time where she was shocked as the girls’ team had been very supportive to the boys’ team.

Paige: Girls and women are all underestimated.
Chelsea: What ways do you see today where women are discriminated against?
Where are we behind still?
Paige: Because guys think that they are better than us. At least the guys in my grade think that. When we had basketball we would go watch the guys play when we could. They did too, but one time this guy came up to us and said you guys are going to lose, I am like whatever. It kind of made us feel negative about him. We were like really? We are supporting each other? Then they won their league championship and we just wished they would have lost.

As many girl athletes did describe this as an issue for them in school, other girl athletes did not have a problem. Molly, a twelve-year-old soccer and softball player said that she doesn’t have any problems in school in terms of her athletic identity.

Chelsea: What about in school? How do your classmates treat you as a female athlete?

Molly: Pretty good, I feel like a lot of them [classmates] are girls that do not do athletics, so they don’t really care. Most of my friends interact with me better if they do athletics. We have common ground.

Chelsea: Boys and girls?

Molly: Yeah most girls and boys.

Molly depicted her school experience as a pleasant one with little to no resistance. If anything she was celebrated and appreciated as a female athlete as that social identity was privileged within her specific educational setting. For many of the girl athletes this was not the case. As I conversed with these female athletes I began to question my own educational settings, in retrospect I faced similar situations, however mine happened later in my educational career.
Vignette And Analysis Of School (The Good And The Bad)

April 2007. Finally, junior year prom! This event was highly celebrated within my high school. It was a big deal; something that people would talk about for years to come (or so we thought so…). Junior year was a big deal on numerous levels. This was the year that athletes would hopefully figure out what schools would offer them athletic scholarships and naturally that initiated a very competitive environment. As a competitive softball player since the age of 8, I was in the middle of my most pivotal year. I had trained all my life for this year. I went to speed training three times a week and was lifting weights. I had just gotten back from playing on an international softball team. I was named conference player of the week, and our high school softball team was one of the top five teams in the state. Our small, conservative Midwest town began rallying around the women’s softball team, simply unheard of. The Monday before prom we sat in homeroom and my friends and I were discussing the color of our dresses as well as potential prom plans before the big event. Two Junior Varsity baseball players made a comment from the back of the room, but I couldn’t hear what they said.

“What did you say?” I inquired very well knowing that it was going to be something that I did not want to hear.

“Did you find a dress with no sleeves?” one of the boys asked me.

“What are you even talking about?” I asked in an attempt to blow them off.

“Well I doubt you will be able to find a dress to fit those guns you are working on these days.” One of the boys laughed.

“Oh don’t worry, I had no issues.” I stated. I was embarrassed. My friend then commented that the boys were just jealous.
“Oh they are so dumb, they are just mad because the baseball teams are terrible and you all are kicking their butts.” Many of my friends explained. I can remember feeling angry and embarrassed. Were my arms really that big? Are my arms not supposed to be big? I was confused, up until this day I have only received compliments on my muscularity. This instance left me feeling confused as I put my prom dress on and examined myself, specifically my arms. I stood in front of the mirror, looked from the side, the back, the other side, then back to the front. I looked great.

As my friends and I gathered at a friend’s house before and posed for pictures, I saw the two baseball players standing on the driveway. Posing with two girls from my team, my dad shouted “Show us those muscles girls!” In unison we raised our muscular arms and flexed and smiled with pride as we glared at those two boys.

**Resistance.** Gendered sport resistance can be found in many contexts. For me, the battle began much later than middle school. The girl athletes that I spoke with found the educational setting to be full of contestation. Many of the girl athletes expressed this frustration while others focused on the importance of their own education.

![Figure 1: Evelyn School](image)

However, many of the girl athletes seemed unapologetic in terms of their own athletic abilities, and qualified this with the argument that girls perform better in school anyway. They were very dismissive in terms of the resistance; they found it ridiculous. Few girls chose to incorporate
photos of academics, but many incorporated them into their narratives during the interview. Throughout these examples, it is evident that the four layers of CTI are prevalent.

For example, the personal and enacted layers of the girl athletes collide within this theme. They have internalized (personal) that academics is an important aspect in their lives and have decided to perform this through their behaviors and expressions (i.e. honor society, honor roll, awards). Their performance of “good student” does not only express the importance of education but it becomes a part of their identity.

Engaged through this specific context of school, the girl athletes were able to negotiate their identities as they saw fit in order to thrive within this social setting. Many of the girl athletes were focused on personal success in the classroom. As many of the girl athletes showed photos of themselves being “academic” it was quite obvious that education was something that they did for themselves as they discussed the future implications that academics can have in their future careers. Evelyn was one girl athlete who chose a photo depicting her academic life (Figure 1). Other girl athletes enacted academics through their athletic performances. While discussing herself in action photos, Ashley was clear in her vocal message that she wants to be portrayed in a light that shows her “being a good athlete” and getting “good grades at the same time” (Figure 2).
Throughout these interviews, the relational layer was apparent when the girl athletes reflected on their own identities through discussions with their classmates, as well as teachers. Depending on the positive or negative interaction within these relationships it was evident that there was tension and friction between their enactment and personal identification of being a good student depending on who they were engaging with. Overall, the girl athletes were expected to perform well in school and this came from the teachers. However, through their social interactions in school, specifically with boy athletes, their academic identities were pushed away and their athletic identities were questioned within the same space. This created frustration with the girl athletes. It also shows the tension within one environment against a two identities of girl athlete and good student.

Through Alexis’ story we can see that her own identities were put into question as she listened to her social studies teacher discuss gender roles and the current political climate. She described herself as feeling “uncomfortable” during those discussions as her own identities were put into question through this social interaction. In response to this tension, she explained that she posted a picture on social media to show her athleticism as a way to not only prove her own athleticism, but to also show her strength (Figure 4.3).

Collectively as a female athlete community, it is evident that the girl athletes value their education. Their outlook on education and athletics seem to be one and the same. Female athlete equals outstanding student. To these girl athletes, you cannot have one without the other. In this
educational setting the girl athletes could not remove their athlete identities as they became very involved with their student identities. Creating tension between identities, the girl athletes navigate this space in terms of athlete, student, and female. Essentially, they are limited in their choice to do so as the cultural contract of female athletes seems to include academic success. Athletic and academic success go hand-in-hand to these girl athletes.

**Theme 2. Female Athletes > Male Athletes**

The girl athletes that I spoke to often discussed the empowerment that sport has given them. Though they did not use those words exactly, the middle school girls used their own dialect to navigate the male-dominated world of sport. At ages 10, 11, and 12 they are fully aware of the cultural expectations of masculinity and sport and what the athlete at the top of the sport hierarchy physically look like. Though they are aware that there is a perception of male domination, they simply do not care. This theme speaks to this reaction. These girl athletes have decided to flip that hierarchy in their own favor as they place themselves at the top. They recognize what the public perception is and use their photo essays as a way to combat this perception. Many girl athletes stated why and how girl athletes can be “just as good” as male athletes; many argued that “girls can even be better than boys” at a variety of sports.

**Look Boys We Are Good!**. The girl athletes represented this theme through dialogue with the boys (in general) who think that “girls are not as good as the boys” in terms of sport. The photos that they chose seemed to be in rebuttal of these perceptions and comments made toward them as female athletes. Paige (twelve-year-old, multi-sport athlete) wanted her audience to know that she is just as good as the boys and if they decided to not watch her than it was their loss.
Chelsea: What is the story behind these photos?

Paige: Like it kind of has to do with my shortness, I still like can do a lot of things like a guy can, I can do all sorts of things.

Chelsea: So why did you choose these photos? What exactly are you trying to tell people?

Paige: To show like I’m a girl, but I still can be aggressive like a guy, I can still be just as good as a guy, just watch me.

Chelsea: Why do you think we have to compare ourselves to boys?

Paige: Because what happened back in the day, how women didn’t get to work and they had to like stay home like we are reading this stuff in social studies and it’s about how women would just stay at home and cook and clean and watch the kids while the men went out and fought and hunt and have all the fun. I don’t know I just don’t think it was fair really. I am glad Susan B. Anthony and the other women’s rights people helped us become more recognized, but we still are not, I don’t know why we don’t get the same attention as guys.

Paige takes it a step further in her analysis as to why people view male athletes in a higher position over female athletes. Taking a historical approach, she takes into account the historical rationale of the issue. However, she still cannot come up with a reason why girl athletes do not get the same attention as “guys.” This type of tension was also present in my conversation with
Sarah (eleven-year-old multi-sport athlete). Sarah, who happens to play on boy’s hockey team, acknowledges that boy athletes have an advantage from the beginning.

Chelsea: What is the hardest things about being a female athlete?
Sarah: I guess they kind of get an advantage.
Chelsea: Who gets an advantage?
Sarah: The boys sometimes.
Chelsea: In what ways?
Sarah: Well I don’t know; I guess it feels easier for them because it is like, they are usually the ones playing the sports, they are expected to, but girls can do it too.

Sarah is acknowledging the gendered cultural expectations within sport. At age eleven she recognizes that boys are expected to play sports and girls have to make more of an effort within athletics. This discussion also surfaced with Ashley (twelve-year old, multi-sport athlete) as she explained the expectations of what it means to be a female athlete.

Chelsea: What is the best thing about being a female athlete?
Ashley: Boys think that we are not as good as they are and everything and playing a lot of sports like this it shows them that we can do anything that they can do.
They don’t think we are good at anything
Chelsea: Why do you think that they think that?
Ashley: Because they think boys are stronger than girls, that’s a complete lie because I am stronger than a lot of boys in my grade. I hope it shows that we can do anything that they can do.

Chelsea: What does that mean?

Ashley: It means that girls can do anything that boys can do, we are underestimated a lot and it is irritating because you can see all these girls doing stuff and they don’t think we can do it as good as anyone else. They think we are not good.

[Figure 6: Ashley Sliding]

Ashley and Jordan (eleven-year-old, multi-sport athlete) mirrored their thoughts as Jordan discussed how hard it is, as girl athletes, to be noticed in the first place.

Chelsea: What is the best thing about being a female athlete?

Jordan: Getting noticed…um like they always point out the boys. Boys this, boys that…and never the females.

Chelsea: Why do you think that is?

Jordan: The males are like “oh we are better” “we are better than you” softball doesn’t mean soft. [It] hurts just as much as a baseball.
This competition between baseball and softball seemed to resonate with many of the girl athletes. Evelyn (twelve-year-old, multi-sport athlete) fought with this battle between which one is harder as well.

**Chelsea:** What is the hardest thing about being a female athlete?

**Evelyn:** A lot of boys think that baseball is better than softball. They say it is way different, but I don’t know I think it is the same

**Chelsea:** Same level of hardness?

**Evelyn:** Yeah the only thing that is different is the ball.

**Chelsea:** Do the boys say these things to you?

**Evelyn:** Yeah they we will be like, I don’t know, I get excited to go away on tournaments and I will want to tell people and they just say softball is not even good, baseball is better and stuff.

**Chelsea:** Why do you think they say that?

**Evelyn:** I don’t know- trying to show that they are tough, they are not.
Evelyn, Jordan, and Ashley all used their photo essays as an outlet to their frustration. They are frustrated that they continuously have to prove themselves to their boy counterparts. It seems to be a battle that the girl athletes all face. Many used their essays to tell boys that they can be just as athletic as them, however many other girls took it a step forward through their discussion to make a statement to gain not only respect, but to prove that girls can be even better than the boys.

**Girls Can Be Even Better Than Boys.** The girl athletes I spoke with felt empowered. They felt empowered not only through their pictures, but they felt empowered through their words and actions. Ashley (twelve-year-old, multi-sport athlete) and Sarah (eleven-year-old, multi-sport athlete) sent messages of power and strength through their photos.

Chelsea: Can you give me one to two sentences or a hashtag to give a title to your photo essay.

Ashley: #GIRLPOWER

Chelsea: What do you mean by that?

Ashley: Girls are powerful just like boys are, sometimes we are even better!
Ashley discussed the power and strength that it takes to be a female athlete and to her this power and strength was equitable and greater than those of boy athletes. Sarah continues this notion as she takes it a step further and states that girls and boys can play the same sports.

Chelsea: So what story are you trying to tell here?

Sarah: Well… that girls can play same sports as boys can.

Chelsea: Okay, how do the pictures do that?

Sarah: It tells that in like the hockey picture that I was the only girl on the ice and I bet that I am better than some of them.

These two girl athletes have acknowledged two things. First, female athletes are not allowed within certain masculine sports. Second, they do not care. They play these sports anyway and when they do, they are better than those boys. Other female athletes acknowledge the fact that this assumption of sport often times results in the underestimation of female athletes. Varying reasons contribute to this underestimation, but for Paige (twelve-year-old, multi-sport athlete) it has to do with physicality. Instead of blaming her short stature, she celebrated it.

Chelsea: So what is the best thing about being a female athlete?

Paige: Well I think it’s female and being short. I’m really underestimated, people when they see me and are not intimidated by me then when I go out to the field or
court they say “wow look at that little girl.” I am just really underestimated, then I show people what I can do and you don’t have to be a guy to be good at anything.

The narrative of “you don’t have to be a guy to be good at sport” ran through many of the interviews and photo essays. The girl athletes were very concerned and troubled that people still think this way. This type of resistance also appeared in the social mediated life of the girl athletes. Alexis (twelve-year-old, multi-sport athlete) faced a lot of backlash in terms of the photos she chose to post on her Instagram account. She discussed numerous instances where she received resistance in terms of her athletic identity, specifically social media was a place where she found negativity.

Alexis: Women can be a ton better than any of the guys combine. It just made me mad. So that picture (Figure 11) I like to show that. I posted it on my Instagram, but I deleted it.

Chelsea: Why?

Alexis: Because I was getting a lot of negative comments about it. Like people were criticizing my shot.

Chelsea: What were they saying?
Alexis: I was shooting with two hands. I kind of was, but it was still annoying how they try to look and see all the imperfections that I have in my shot and yell at me about it.

Chelsea: Who were the people who were criticizing you specifically?

Alexis: These were random strangers, so I made my account private.

Chelsea: Were they men or women/boys or girls?

Alexis: Oh they were men. It is sort of annoying too…I don’t know I just thought it would be better and they would be mature about things like that.

Alexis faced backlash from random individuals via social media. This is relevant as it shows that this type of cultural backlash is coming at these girl athletes from different channels. It goes beyond their boy classmates. Alexis continued with her story as she went deeper into what these gendered expectations meant to her and she expressed how these gendered performance expectations seeped into her other identities.

Chelsea: Are you happy with your photos?

Alexis: Yeah.

Chelsea: Why?

Alexis: They show how a woman can do things that sometimes some men can’t even do or it shows how a woman can do things that men can’t do.

Chelsea: What kind of things can women do that men can’t?
Alexis: Women can be like men and women are equal, well kind of. They are somewhat equal. Like men can do things girls can do and girls can do things that men can do. Right now girls can’t do some stuff, but people don’t accept it. So it is just hard.

Chelsea: Are people ever going to accept women?

Alexis: Yeah if we put a lot of hard work into it. We are taking really big steps right now. A ton of step. I don’t know if I should talk about this, but the women’s march just really shows how much we are fighting for what we deserve because yeah…we put a lot of work into some of these things. Sports, in general, needs a lot more work in terms of equality. The men do not want change.

Chelsea: Why do you think they don’t want change?

Alexis: They want the power. They want to be in control of things that we should be in control of too. My mom said something about how women get paid less when they do the exact same job as men. That ticked me off too because there is no other reason why they should get paid less. I mean they just want to be in power, they just want to have the control.

Chelsea: When you hear of these inequalities, what does it make you want to do?

Alexis: I want to go to marches. I want to like interfere with his plans, with Trump’s weird plans.

This twelve-year-old girl athlete shocked me during this conversation. As I reflected on my own thoughts as twelve-year-old, I can recall feeling different as a girl in terms of my sport participation and peer groups, but I just could not see myself using this language at twelve. I had to contain my own emotions during this part of the interview as I kept my composure. Our
conversations started with her photo representation focused on proving the boy athletes wrong and showing her athleticism to equal pay and The Women’s March on Washington to our recent president. Alexis was detailed in her frustration. Out of all of the girls she took her frustrations to identities outside of female, athlete, and student and discussed societal opinions on a broader scale. Relating her experiences as a female athlete to contemporary social issues, she was able to use her platform as a female athlete to fight the broader issue of gender inequality and politics. Alexis, as well as many of the other girl athletes is fully aware of the ways in which gender and gender expectations influence our roles and participation within society. The girl athletes also recognized the gendering of sport itself.

**Masculine Versus Feminine Sport.** The girl athletes recognized that socially sports are categorized in two categories (in their own words): girl sports and boy sports. Though they recognize this binary, they refused to conform to it. They believed that as long as the athlete was happy playing the sport she/he chose then that is all that matters. However, they still recognized that there would be a backlash if an athlete chose to transgress those cultural boundaries. Kennedy (eleven-year-old, multi-sport athlete) interacts with these boundaries frequently.

Kennedy: I play football with my friend and they [boys] once let me played.

Chelsea: Flag football?

Kennedy: I used to play.

Chelsea: Oh on a team?

Kennedy: Yeah with all boys.

Chelsea: Oh that is cool, how was that experience?

Kennedy: It was very fun, there was once time where I went up against another girl in flag football, but other than that I was the only girl.
Chelsea: Why do you think you were the only girl?

Kennedy: Because most girls think that they can only do girl sports, and not boys sports

Chelsea: What sports are girl sports?

Kennedy: Softball, maybe soccer? Tennis, volleyball and I guess Cheerleading?

Interviewing: Is cheerleading a sport?

Kennedy: Yeah it is as long as they are flipping.

Chelsea: Ok so what are the boy sports?

Kennedy: Basketball, football, baseball and hockey.

Through this story, I learned that the girl athletes are fully aware of the sports in which they (as females) are expected to participate. They remained hopeful that one day these gendered sport boundaries would no longer exist. Chloe (twelve-year-old multi-sport athlete) and Sarah (eleven-year-old multi-sport athlete) want more girls to participate and try different sports and do other sports besides the stereotypical girl sports.

Chelsea: So what does it [photo essay title] say?

Sarah: Female athletes will take over.

Chelsea: What do you mean by that?

Sarah: Hopefully one day we will all beat the boys and we will get more of a population of girls in sports that they usually do not play like football and hockey, stuff like that.

Chelsea: How will that happen?

Sarah: By the girls trying new sports and stuff like that?

Chelsea: Why don’t girls try hockey?
Sarah: I guess they just think it is hard or sometimes they think, well that it is kind of crazy, or that they should just stick with one sport or a sport that mostly girls do like dance or something.

Chelsea: Crazy that a girl plays hockey?

Sarah: Yeah then I prove them wrong.

Chelsea: Why do you think people think it is crazy for a girl to play hockey?

Sarah: Maybe because they think it’s hard maybe because there are not as many girls, and no girls do it.

Both Sarah and Chloe used their photo essays as a form of proof. Proof that they could not only play hockey with the boys, but they acknowledge that their participation is not normal. In one form or another they have received feedback from others that they participation seems “crazy”

Chelsea: So what message are you sending in your photo essay?

Chloe: Like girls can play any sports that boys do.

Chelsea: Okay and it what ways did you try to prove that?

Chloe: Because hockey is a lot of boys and to show that like gender does not affect what sport you play.
Sarah and Chloe both play hockey in a league where they are the only two girl athletes. They both stated that other people probably find it “crazy” that they play with the boys. They also recognized that girls are probably more comfortable staying within the feminine sports (e.g. dance). They recognized the need for more girl athletes to be in these types of sports and they are able to acknowledge the reason that they do not participate. Simply put, it is not a “girl sport.”

Alexis and Paige also recognized other cultural stereotypes that limit girls from participating in certain sports.

Paige: They all [boys] think girls aren’t good at anything. You know annoys me the most, “you throw like a girl”

Chelsea: Tell me more about that.

Paige: Because I throw hard, I always say I will change it up “you throw like a boy” I will just say that! It just bothers me so much. I throw the ball so hard. I hear other guys saying it to other guys. I am like that means that they throw hard, so you should be saying the opposite.
“You throw like a girl,” has been a long-standing insult within female athlete culture. Appropriated by male athletes as a form of criticism to other male athletes, it ultimately trivializes female athletes and their ability. Paige has taken this insult personally and in an attempt to reclaim the saying, she has flipped it to “you throw like a boy.” She is not alone her train of thought as Alexis (twelve-year-old, multi-sport athlete) wanted girls and women to know that they can make a positive impact, only if they believe that they can.

Alexis: Women can have a positive impact on the world in they THINK that they can.

Chelsea: So think is in all caps and underlined?

Alexis: Because if women are not fully into making an impact then they are probably not going to make it. They have to be like really into it.

Chelsea: The mentality?

Alexis: Yeah exactly. They have to have the right mindset; they can’t let people’s words get to them.

**Girls Who Play With The Boys.** A couple of the girl athletes shared their own experiences of being the only girl on an all-boys team. Caroline is a ten-year-old who plays football and basketball. Since there are no youth girl football leagues, she has to play with the boys. In a league of over 200 kids, she is one out of 3 girls participating in this league.

Chelsea: So to you how do your photos describe being a female athlete?
Caroline: It shows that I can keep up and I can hang with the boys!

The girls who played or currently play with the boys relish in the fact that they are the only girls on the team. Many expressed that more girls should play “boy” sports, but these girls loved the fact that they were the only girls on the team. Kennedy (eleven-year-old multi-sport athlete) has played flag football on a boys’ team and since then she has taken competing with the boys off the playing surface.

Chelsea: So what is the best thing about being a female athlete?

Kennedy: Being athletic.

Chelsea: What else?

Kennedy: That you can do the same things as boys.

Chelsea: Oh okay do you mean just in sports or other things?

Kennedy: Other things too.

Chelsea: Like what?

Kennedy: Video games!

Chelsea: Do you beat the boys at video games?

Kennedy: Yes, I do!

Through competition these girl athletes built their own athletic legitimacy. It is not only a way to further prove that they can compete with boys, but also that they can prove others wrong in the process. Sarah, who plays on a boy’s hockey team, enjoyed scoring on the boys during games.
Sarah: You can prove them wrong if they think that “oh she’s just a girl and she probably can’t do it” Then I score and I prove them all wrong.

Chelsea: Do you score a lot?

Sarah: Yeah…kind of.

Chelsea: When you say prove them wrong, who are you talking about?

Sarah: All the boys!

Technically they are proving the boys wrong by playing with them, but these girl athletes found it important to do even better than the boys. Caroline (ten-year-old football and basketball player) explained her experience playing with the boys by stating that sport should be accessible to those who want to play, regardless of gender.

Chelsea: How would you title your photo essay?

Caroline: Okay I got it, Football for girls.

Chelsea: Great, what do you mean by that?

Caroline: It’s not just a boy sport.

Chelsea: Why do people think it is only for boys?

Caroline: It should be just for tough people, doesn’t matter if you’re a boy or girl!
Nice Boys. Some of the girls did mention that the boys that they play with treat them with respect. Chloe (twelve-year-old, multi-sport athlete), Emily (ten-year-old, multi-sport athlete), and Caroline (ten-year-old, multi-sport athlete) stated that the boys treated them like any other teammate.

Chelsea: So how do you like it [playing on a boys’ team], how do the boys treat you?

Chloe: They are nice to me.

Chelsea: What about when you play other teams? Do the boys on the other team every say anything to you about being a girl?

Chloe: Um no not really, I am treated like one of the guys.

To these girls being treated as “one of the guys” meant that they were accepted. Emily discussed how the athletic competition was different during her experience.

Chelsea: So, you played on teams with boys before?

Emily: Yeah! I did flag football and it was really fun playing with the boys because it is kind of like more challenging with the boys.

Chelsea: Yeah tell me a little bit more about that.
Emily: Well, kind of like I was the only girl on the team and I was running back and they would always like pass to me and I was the one who usually made the scores and it was actually fun.

Chelsea: Yeah that is awesome, so how did the boys treat you?

Emily: They treated me like everybody else.

Caroline, who played tackle football in a pee-wee league, felt that she was treated “like a guy,” but her acceptance removed her gender completely.

Chelsea: How do the boys treat you on the football team?

Caroline: Like a normal boy that joined the team.

These girls had positive experiences on their own teams. They had positive relationships and interactions with these boys; however, they still wanted to do better than those boys to prove their own athleticism. Through these experiences I was reminded of my own experiences participating on an all-boy’s baseball team.

**Vignette And Analysis Of Female Athletes > Male Athletes**

**Eye Black.** In the middle of my first season on this specific team, I too had become one of the boys. I wore my eye black just like them, I wore the same uniform and had secured the perfect curve to the bill of my hat. I felt like I belonged, the boys all invited me to their birthday parties and the coach slapped my helmet after a good hit just like everyone else. My dad was proud of me, and I was proud of me. In a space where I thought I didn’t belong I ended up
melting in. Just as I thought I was the same as everyone else, I heard Kevin’s dad giving him a talk before he went to bat in the Glendale, Arizona recreational coach pitch world series.

“You need to focus in there Kevin, you are 0-2 at the plate. Chelsea is going 2-0 today. Are you really going to let a girl do better than you?” he whispered (or so he thought).

The moment I believed I was fitting in, I soon realized that my gender was never salient. In this space, it followed me around like a shadow. Though I did not realize it at the time, in retrospect it obviously affected my own sport experiences. In this space, and other sport spaces I would learn that female always came before athlete no matter the context.

Our stories illustrate the perceptions of the male dominated sport culture and how aware young girl athletes are of it and its implications. They are fully engaging with masculine expectations of what it means to be an athlete. They know that athlete identity is assumed to be inherently male, referring to the male dominance within sport. They also recognize what sports girls should play and what sports boys should play. On the other hand, they still confront and transgress those boundaries. They recognized gendered expectations and a few of the athletes do not care. Meaning they know what sports they are expected to play; those sports considered okay for girls to participate in. Many of the girl athletes, though they recognized that it might be viewed as “crazy” still decided to participate This seems to be embedded within the cultural contract to which female athletes adhere. The expectation is that an athlete is an athlete. They know that they will encounter resistance on numerous levels, but they participate anyway. More importantly they have fun doing it and relish in success as well as hardships. This form of identity is very gendered, but at the same time they do not let it limit their experiences nor their gender performances. These girls as a group speak through empowerment and strength. Few waver in their responses in terms of their athletic competence. Meaning, they are all confident in
their athletic ability and performance. Through their personal enactment of their athlete identity it is evident that their gender is something that is never salient. The girl identity is consistently cloaking the athlete identity. The girl athletes recognized this. The enacted identities perceived by others does not align with the self-concepts that they girl athletes have of themselves. This creates a gap, or tension within this theme. To the girl athletes the messages that they are conveying are ones of strength, athleticism and power as a response to the tension. The tensions being the perceptions and stereotypes that many have in regards to female athletes in general. Though they might encounter those who do not believe that they are athletes, this does not seem to affect their own self-perceptions of athleticism. They all have the determination to go beyond the stereotypical feminine sport as a majority of these girls have participated on an all-boys team.

**Theme 3. Look Pretty, Play Pretty**

Female athletes and physical appearance have had a long history. I am reminded of one of the iconic scenes in the movie *A League of their Own* when the members of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League were forced to take etiquette and beauty classes as part of their “spring training” program. Female athletes have been criticized or celebrated for their physical appearance for decades. Many of those expectations depicted in *A League of their Own* are still relevant today. The girl athletes, in their narratives, did not let this concept go unnoticed. Many of the girl athletes spoke back to the societal expectation, by not complying with them. As depicted in the photo essays many of the girl athletes chose more in action and athletic photos over posed and stereotypically “pretty” photos. Meaning, many of the girls chose athletic, in action photos over photos where they appear feminine (make-up, hair primped, and posed). However, the girls were very much aware of the judgment placed on the way they physically
Paige (twelve-year-old, multi-sport athlete) claimed not to have experienced judgment based on her own appearance, but still recognizes there are expectations.

Paige: It is being underestimated in every single way.

Chelsea: When you say every single way does that go beyond athletics?

Paige: Yeah, judgment by appearance, smartness, even though it is proven that girls are smarter than guys.

Chelsea: What do you mean when you say appearance?

Paige: Like some guys, it hasn’t happened to me but, they will say, “why are you wearing those shoes?” Boy will judge girls by stupid little things you are wearing or something.

Chelsea: What do they expect you to wear?

Paige: Oh I don’t know, a dress? I don’t know, nicer tennis shoes? Who even cares.

Paige was very dismissive in her reaction to the emphasis placed on physical appearance, specifically as it relates to her athletic identity. Evelyn (twelve-year old, multi-sport athlete) discussed the way that girl athletes combine both a female identity marker with an athletic identity marker by wearing the softball bow. The bow within softball culture has exploded into a
commodity. Softball players have incorporated the bow as a part of the uniform, making it not only something to be bought and sold, but a way to express one’s identity.

Evelyn: In this picture we are showing our bows and how pretty they are.

Chelsea: Does everyone wear bows?

Evelyn: Some do; I don’t wear mine anymore. That was our team picture from last year.

Chelsea: Why don’t you wear one all the time?

Evelyn: Because sometimes it gets in the way of my helmet or my facemask and I just want a normal ponytail.

Chelsea: What does that mean…to be a girl? Why does girl equal bow?

Evelyn: I chose this one to show that we can get in the mud and all of that, but we are still girls. I guess because people think of girls as dressing up all the time and not wearing sweat pants and sweat shirts or even a softball uniform.

Evelyn equates girls with dressing up (i.e., being feminine), not wearing sweat pants or softball uniforms. The bow, as she explains, is a way to project “girl” while still being an athlete. The bow itself becomes a feminine marker. It projects girl, which projects pretty girl. A pretty girl that is not afraid to get dirty and play in the mud. Other girls spoke about the physical appearance of girl and women athletes in the form of objectification. Alexis (twelve-year-old,
multi-sport athlete) discussed the ways that she has felt objectified (the word used by Alexis herself). In this honest narrative, she described the way in which she has felt like an object:

Alexis: I feel that female athletes and women are just objectified, you know treated like objects.

Chelsea: In what ways do you think that female athletes are objectified?

Alexis: Objects? We are just treated like, ugh I don’t want to say it, I feel like it is gross.

Chelsea: You can say anything you would like.

Alexis: Well I posted this one on my Instagram. This one had mixed (Figure 22) reactions, some guys felt the need to comment on my figure. They were like whoa you’re really pretty. They can’t even see my face, only my body. It is like annoying to me because it is not just about what I look like. It is my personality, too.

![Figure 22: Alexis Playing First](image)

Chelsea: Did you respond to those comments?

Alexis: I wish I did, but I just blocked them and left them alone and left the picture up!

Chelsea: Does this happen to you in other instances too when you’re playing sport?
Alexis: Yeah sometimes. Like, one time we were in Maine, it was a blast there. We [team] walked past these guys. I was in shorts, it was really hot it was in the middle of summer, shorts and like a tank top that I guess was like, I don’t know, I guess tight? It wasn’t even that tight. It was a loose tank top. Then they were staring at us and talking to each other. I just don’t like the feeling of knowing what they are staring at.

Chelsea: Yeah, I don’t either.

Alexis: It is just sad, I am like if you are staring I am going to turn around and punch you in the face. I mean, I don’t know, I just don’t like it. It makes me sad. They are making me uncomfortable. I just want to pull down my shirt or hide behind something to try and block.

Chelsea: I know. I am sorry.

Alexis: I know, me too…and you know what? They don’t want change, we, I want change, but they don’t. They want everything to be, well some guys, want it to be all about them. I am not saying all guys are bad. Some guys are really nice and some are very passive on these types of things. Like I have a guy coach who is great and my dad is great.

At the young age of twelve, Alexis is totally aware of not only the term objectification, but has experienced it on numerous levels. Through social media and physical encounters with people this is something that is constantly on her mind. The photo she described is one of athleticism, yet she was met with remarks on her physical looks. The girls again, are fully aware the female athletes are expected to appear feminine in certain ways, whether that be a bow in their hair, or
the way their bodies are perceived in public. These perceptions become an assault of the female body and psyche as displayed by these girl athletes.

There Is A Time And A Place To “Dress Up” And Be “Girlie.” Some of the other girl athletes spoke about the context in which their identities are acceptable. Meaning there are contexts where being and performing athlete are valued and those contexts where performing feminine girl are valued. They spoke about it as a hybrid identity. I define “hybrid identity” as an individualized enactment of a combination of identities, in this case female and athlete. I adapted this concept from “hybrid consciousness” developed by Asher (2002). Overall, it is an awareness that emerges out of a struggle in relation to the tensions found at the intersections of identities (race, culture, gender, socioeconomic status) (Asher, 2002, p. 85). They did not separate female and athlete but spoke about them together. For example, we can still be athletes and dress girlie, or we can still be girls and get dirty. The girls below all interacted with this hybrid identity.

Chelsea: What is your essay saying? What is the story?

Evelyn: That even though you can like dress up and have fun with your friends it is important to still focus on softball. Sometimes it means me not wanting to wear a dress or not wanting to get all dressed up or wear makeup

Chelsea: Do you feel people expect you dress up and wear make-up?

Evelyn: No, but on certain occasions like a wedding in that picture (Figure 23), I have to. Like even though we play dirty and all that and show our toughness we can still be smart and dress all nice I guess.
Athletic and girlie are two identities that have previously been explained in terms of a paradox. The girl athletes do not specifically mention the paradox, but they discussed the importance of doing both in terms of being a well-rounded person.

Chelsea: How do you describe yourself?

Molly: Athletic girl, but sometimes I can get all dressed up for certain occasions.

Chelsea: Is it important to do both?

Molly: I don’t think it is as important to get dressed up, but it is important to have both sides in your life so you are not always doing the same thing, you should have something else to do besides being athletic or being pretty.

Chelsea: Which side do you enjoy more?

Molly: Being athletic because like when I am athletic I can show pride in my teams, when I am girlie girl, that is not really having to do with sports so…being athletic is more important.
Both Molly and Evelyn enjoyed their athletic sides more, but they speak to this “girlie” side as necessity. The idea of only projecting an athletic performance or exterior does not seem to be an option to either of these girls. At the same time the expectations of them, considering their ages (twelve-years-old), are still putting pressure on these identities. They may not always be expected to wear make-up, but if the context requires the overtly feminine performance (e.g., a wedding) then they are stripped of the choice to comply.

**Define Tomboy.** There were other girl athletes who did not recognize the hybrid identity of female and athlete and chose to ignore the “girlie girl” expectation or requirement. Many of these girls chose to self-identify as a “tomboy.” I had always viewed the term tomboy as a celebration of female athletes, growing up many of my teammates and I defined ourselves in those terms. To us it meant a girl who chose to play sports. I quickly realized that the term has evolved in the eye of later post-Title IX girl athletes. Kennedy, Evelyn, and Molly are three examples of the definition of the tomboy identity.

**Kennedy:** Girls can play any sport that they want. It doesn’t just have to be girl things and you can also choose your style. It doesn’t have to be just girlie girl; you can wear boy clothes if you want.

**Chelsea:** Do you describe yourself as a girlie girl?

**Kennedy:** No.
Chelsea: How do you describe yourself then?

Kennedy: Tomboy.

Chelsea: What does that mean to you?

Kennedy: Uh girls like wearing boy clothes.

Chelsea: What kind of clothes do you wear?

Kennedy: Like basketball clothes, shorts, t-shirts, like athletic clothes.

Chelsea: Do people in school care what you wear?

Kennedy: No not really, and even if they did I would not care enough to notice.

Kennedy is unapologetic in the way that she described her identity. It is obvious that she is aware of that her attire might not always be accepted, but she does not seem to care. In contrast, Evelyn also identifies as a tomboy, but still conforms to getting “all dressed up” when she has to. Both Kennedy and Evelyn related tomboy to masculine clothing and lack of make-up. However, this tomboy identity becomes salient in contexts where it is not accepted.

Chelsea: Which photo least describes you?

Evelyn: That one where I am hold my cousin and I am all dressed up (Figure 23).

Chelsea: Why?
Evelyn: Because I don’t ever dress up, sweat pants and a shirt is how I live normally, I am a tomboy.

Chelsea: Would you describe yourself as a tomboy?

Evelyn: Yeah.

Chelsea: What does that word mean to you?

Evelyn: It means me not wanting to wear a dress or not wanting to get all dressed up or wear makeup.

Chelsea: Okay I get what you’re saying, do you feel people expect you dress this way?

Evelyn: No, but on certain occasions like a wedding in that picture, I have to.

Molly also described the tomboy identity, but did not identify with it the same way that Kennedy and Evelyn did. Molly added to the definition to make it more monolithic. She acknowledged the same type of appearance remarks as Evelyn and Kennedy, but added that a tomboy’s life is centered around sports. So, if your whole life is centered around sports then, to her, that means your wardrobe contains just athletic clothing.

Chelsea: okay, so how would you define the term tomboy, what does that mean to you?

Molly: More of an athletic person, like having nothing to do with girlie girl or anything like that, like basically your whole life is sports

Chelsea: Would you describe yourself that way?

Molly: No because some days I don’t wear athletic stuff, sometimes I wear different things to school.
Tomboy seemed too much of a commitment for Molly. She seemed offended when I asked her, if she valued her “girlie” identity more than her athletic identity. Tomboy held too much weight in terms of a commitment to one aspect in her life. These physical appearance identities were also a topic of conversation when it came to the usage of the photos they chose.

**To Post Or Not To Post?.** Social media was important to many of the girl athletes. Not all the girl athletes had a social media account, but a majority of them did. I asked all of the girls if they were to post any of their photos to social media, which ones would they choose? Ashley, for example, chose to not post those athletic photos. She attributed this choice to the amount of “likes” she gets on certain photos.

Chelsea: Is your social media more athletic pictures or posed selfies with friends?

Ashley: Selfies, definitely.

Chelsea: Why not athletic ones?

Ashley: I don’t know, I have been thinking about it more lately, and I am going to post more. I just want to make sure they will get a lot of likes. It is all about the likes! I got 100 likes on this one (Figure 26).

![Figure 26: Ashley Serving](image)

Ashley (twelve-year-old, multi-sport athlete) explained to me that selfies, photos with friends, and pictures of her dog get the most attention on her social media accounts. She said a lot of family members liked the athletic ones she posts (when she posts them), but she was more focused on the numerical likes than what the picture was. She portrayed her friend and girl
identity more than her athletic identity on social media for this reason. Often the girls discussed the importance of posting BOTH athletic and girlie pictures.

Both Molly and Alexis have Instagram accounts where they post pictures frequently. These girls (both twelve-years-old) were cognizant of ensuring their Instagram accounts were representative of their whole self, including both female and athletic identities. Social media is a space where an individual can create a platform indicative of themselves. The girl athletes used them in a myriad of ways and reflect multiple identities through these spaces.

Chelsea: Which one would you post on Instagram?

Molly: Probably the team, or uniform one.

Chelsea: What would you caption them, the caption is always tough right?!

Molly: Maybe like good job girls at the tourney or something like that? The uniform maybe like getting ready for a softball tournament, something like that. I also post pictures with my family and my dog.

Molly and Alexis were very involved with social media. They referenced it numerous times in terms of what photos they choose and which they didn’t. Molly discussed that she features many posed photos on her pages, while Molly posted in-action athletic photos. Both garnered different reactions.
Alexis: Yeah I posted this one where I am swinging and I had this one where I am catching the ball at first up for a little bit, oh and this one where I have the eye black on (Figure 28).

Chelsea: Oh yeah. What kind of reactions did you get?

Alexis: Reactions? Positive reactions on this one (Figure 28) People were super positive on the one where I am swinging and they were mostly girls though.

Vignette And Analysis Of Look Pretty, Play Pretty

Female/Athlete. This hybrid identity of female athlete reigns true to my own personal reflections of what it means to be a female athlete. Personally, I enjoyed both. I was able to seemingly exist within both arenas of the cultural expectations of a female and an athlete. I personally chose to wear make-up both on and off the field and didn’t necessarily did not identify with a tomboy identity. Therefore, I often was not criticized for my appearance being not feminine enough. I experienced criticism in another way. My athletic ability and competence was often questioned due to my outward experience. I can recall my first visit to Muskingum University where I was going to go to college and play softball. The tour guide was a junior at the institution and he was very friendly to my mother, father, and me. As he gave us the grand tour of Muskingum University, which took 40 minutes, at most, he began to ask me questions.

“So Chelsea what major are you thinking about?” He asked.

“Speech communications, I want to go into sport broadcasting.” I answered.
He responded with “Oh I bet you would be a great sideline reporter!” My mom giggled as she watched me roll my eyes into the back of my head upon ingesting that comment. He continued “Any plans to participate in sports, I see here on your form it says athlete. Do you play volleyball?”

“No, I got recruited by Coach Newberry to play softball here.” I said with a certain amount of uneasiness.

“Oh really! You don’t look like a softball player at all.” He stated.

“Well what does a softball player look like?” I inquired. This was not something that I had not heard before. In the beginning the comment used to anger me. It angered me that people still let stereotypes influence their own perceptions.

“Oh you know what I am talking about.” He quickly changed the subject to the brand new communication building on campus.

A majority of people I encountered always assumed that I was a volleyball player. For the longest time I always thought it was the fact that my thighs looked like volleyball player thighs, meaning they were muscular and not pencil thin; the more I thought about it the more the stereotypes of the sports themselves came into my view. Yes, I received backlash in the form of questioning my athletic capabilities, but that doesn’t compare to some of the social scrutiny that some of my “tomboy” friends received.

Flashback to another prom, this time it was my senior year prom and my childhood friend and longtime teammate Samantha (Sam) was going this year as a junior. Sam fit into what Molly described as “more of an athletic person, like having nothing to do with girlie girl or anything like that, like basically your whole life is sports.” Sam was dreading looking for a prom gown and even worse dreading the whole night. I watched as her mom forced her to look for a dress
and Sam’s face when she asked me to do her make-up, it was literally the last thing she wanted to do. Rumors had been flooding around school since last year about Sam and Britney from the basketball team, an alleged romance. I watched Sam fight the rumors by starting a relationship with a guy on the basketball team. I saw her argue with her mom about shopping for a dress and I also saw the tears in her eyes when she asked me if I could take her to Britney’s house after school. Gendered performance awareness comes in all forms, but for female athletes these stereotypes are brought to our attention at very young ages. Above there are ten, eleven, and twelve year olds discussing the same things that I experienced. We may not be using the same language, but in the end it is the same message. The physical appearance of a female is one that is often scrutinized, in my experience this has been further enhanced through my own female athlete identity as well as those around me. Gendered performance of female athletes leads to stereotypes and assumptions, often times stemming out to further forms of oppression and discrimination.

This theme is a great example of the female athlete paradox. As previously explained the female athlete paradox is the idea that sportswomen exist within two cultures: Sport and the larger social culture (Krane et al., 2004). The ideals of these two cultures clash, as the sport context requires muscul arity, aggression, and competition; while the broader social culture requires the femininity, passiveness, and the adhesion to beauty standards. The girl athletes are speaking back to this paradox. However, for many of the girl athletes this seems to stay with the personal identity layer. Many acknowledge their own choices and offer that their friends may portray themselves in a different way. Other girl athletes spoke to the expectations. For example, Evelyn self-identifies as a tomboy and she does not like to wear dresses or wear make-up. However, she still chose a photo of herself dressed up at a wedding. Though this is contradictory
of her identification, she acknowledged that even though she might identify as tomboy, that performance is not accepted in all contexts. Similar to my friend Sam, the tension between these identities (athlete and feminine female) create gaps. Sam complied just as Evelyn did and showed up to prom pictures smiling, hair in a fancy up do, beautiful dress, heels, and face made up perfectly. This tension, or gap, have to be relieved and filled. How do the girl athletes do this? It seems that in this current stage of their lives they can be unapologetically themselves. Evelyn seemed to just accept have to be more “girlie” at the wedding she attended, while my friend Sam was miserable when she described having to wear a dress. Some girl athletes have used social media to relieve the tension. Social media allows them to represent themselves how they want to be. With the exception of Ashley, the girl athletes liked to post athletic pictures of themselves they also enjoyed posting pictures of their family, friends, favorite sports teams, and pets. It is space that has given some a sense of agency as Alexis stated “social media can be the best things, which it usually is, or it can just be a place full of haters, the key is to ignore those haters! Block them!” She brings up a good point, too bad there is not a block button in day-to-day life.

**Theme 4. Relationships**

In interviews, the girl athletes focused on a variety of relationships within their family life, social life, and athletic life. These relationships are pivotal in many of their expressed identities and are very important to them. Their relationships are reasons why the girl athletes participated in sport in the first place, and many girls described how important it is to be a team player. For example, Caroline (ten-year-old, multi-sport athlete) and Emma (10-year-old, multi-sport athlete) both identified as a team player and they wanted their photos to depict that.

Chelsea: Okay Caroline we are going to talk about your picture. So can you create a story from the photos, what were you trying to tell?
Caroline: That I am a team player

Putting the team before themselves was important to many of the girl athletes. They wanted to convey this importance through their photos. Some girl athletes chose photos that featured teammates while others chose photos where they felt that it represented what a team player should look like. Emma chose a photo of herself to represent her as a team player.

Chelsea: How do your photos show that you are a team player Emma?

Emma: I wanted to show that I work hard for the team. I want not only myself to do good, but I want my team to think I am a good team player.

Caroline chose a photo in her photo essay of her entire team. She chose this photo because she wanted to show how much she cared about her team.

Chelsea: Caroline, how do you think your photos show you being a team player?

Caroline: Well I chose pictures with me and my teammates to show, like, we are all good friends and in it together.
Teammates. Many of the girl athletes spoke about their teammates specifically as an important aspect to being a female athlete. They value their friendships on the team and consider that a pivotal aspect of their own athletic experiences. Many of the girl athletes described how much they enjoyed these friendships. Their reasoning’s varied, but many of the girls attributed this to the fact that they do not go to school with their teammates so it makes their relationships different from the ones they had before joining their select teams. They considered it a privilege to be on a select team and recognized the exclusiveness of getting to bond people outside of school. The following conversation with Emily highlighted this importance.

Chelsea: What do you like about being a girl athlete?

Emily: It is really fun to hang out with all of your friends like if you have friends in gymnastics that you go to school with. You get to hang out with them after school so that is really fun.

Figure 31: Emily and Team

Chelsea: What about this picture when you are with your whole team? Why did you include this photo?

Emily: Because I like to show what me and my team do together as a team.

Chelsea: Does the competition ever get to your friendships? Technically you are all competing against each other right?
Emily: Yeah we are close but we all encourage each other like my best friend Cara, I lost my kip (a specific gymnastics skill) on bars and she encouraged me to do it and I did it!

The world of gymnastics is very competitive and can be considered both a team and individual sport, much like Track and Field is. The girls work together as team to compete against other teams during competition, but they are also competing against each other in the events as gymnasts win based on an all-around score and for each individual event. Even though there is a potential for a competitive environment, Emily values her teammates and they encourage and support each other. In another example, Chloe (twelve-year-old multi-sport athlete) spoke to the fact that she does not have a lot of boy friends in school, but since she is an athlete she is able to build those types of relationships outside of school on the hockey team that she plays for.

Chloe: I like playing with the boys because at school we don’t have a lot of boys in our class so I don’t have any like male friends, and I have a lot of friends that are boys from hockey.

Chloe gives a different account on the reasoning as to why she values her teammates. As the only girl on her hockey team she feels included, therefore she enjoys those friendships. Ashley (twelve-year-old multi-sport athlete), Caroline (ten-year-old multi-sport athlete), and Molly (twelve-year-old multi-sport athlete) continued discussing the importance of teammates as they commented on these friendships being one of the best things about playing sports.

Chelsea: So what else are you sharing in the photos. I see that you have pictures with teammates and parents. What were you trying to share there?

Caroline: I love my teammates and family.

Chelsea: Okay great! What is the best thing about being a female athlete to you?
Caroline: The friends that are on my team, we all have fun together.

Caroline highlighted the connection between teammates, friends, and fun. Ashley highlighted that many of the teammates that she considered herself lucky as sports has given her the opportunity to meet new people.

Chelsea: What other aspects of athletics do you like?

Ashley: I like the friendships I have made and meeting new people in basketball because sometimes when other schools do not have enough they come to our school and we all play together. My friend Katie played softball and basketball with me and I am lucky to meet all these new people.

Molly discussed the importance of unity within her team and the leadership of her coaches.

Chelsea: What about the one when you’re in the pre-game huddle?

Molly: Because like again, we are a team we are going to go out there and listen to our coaches, we are getting ready for game that we will play together as a team! If we are not together than things can go wrong.
Like Caroline, Molly, and Ashley, Jordan (eleven-year-old multi-sport athlete) she discussed the importance of teammates and the support system that they have developed within her own team.

Jordan: In the field sometimes your teammates won’t have your back, but they pick you up in the dugout.

It goes along with being supportive with your teammates. This one (Figure 34) in the ready position-- It is about preparation, you have to get ready before each game, each play. This one, even though I haven’t performed as well as I planned, I am still happy to just be on the team…The coaches they are just the darn best. If you think that they are being mean, they are just trying to push you harder. As the season went on, they pushed harder and harder. Work on this and work on this…showing up to practice is important. Then the season was over, then you can’t wait till the next season. This year we had younger girls on the team, so it was important to teach them how our team operated.
Jordan is satisfied with being on the team and having the relationships that she does. She is discussing her softball team that she loves to play on. She described the coaches and teammates as a support system. This support system was the foundation of their hard work during practice. They all are working toward a common goal, and supporting each other, to hopefully win each game. Jordan identified with this group and acknowledged how important it was to teach the younger girls the team structure that they had established.

**Family.** The girl athletes also spoke about the importance of family in their athletic identities. They value their family members for various reasons. They recognized their parents and siblings as forms of inspiration, and recognized the sacrifice of family members as they participate in multiple sports as they acknowledged the amount of money and time that goes into their opportunities. Caroline (ten-year-old multi-sport athlete), Sarah (eleven-year-old multi-sport athlete), Jordan (eleven-year-old multi-sport athlete), Ashley (twelve-year-old multi-sport athlete), Emma (ten-year-old multi-sport athlete), Alexis (twelve-year-old multi-sport athlete), and Molly (twelve-year-old multi-sport athlete), all found common ground in their inspiration: their parents. The relationships with their parents are highly valued. The girls had varying reasons as to why their parents inspired them.

Caroline: My dad.

Chelsea: How does he inspire you?
Caroline: Just by playing sports and watching me and helping me.

Caroline and Sarah are inspired because their dad’s both have played the sports that they currently participate in and that has inspired and motivated them to continue to work hard.

Sarah: My dad.

Chelsea: In what ways?

Sarah: Hockey, golf, not really gymnastics, but mostly hockey and golf. But then my mom she inspired me for running and volleyball. Mainly both of them and my grandma and grandpa in other ways.

Jordan credited her mother for continuing to push her in sport. She discussed the fact that many times she wanted to quit playing softball, but her mother would not let her and she was grateful for this.

Jordan: The one that inspires me is my mom because she tells me to not quit and push myself. I wanted to quit a couple of times, but she wouldn’t let me. So I stuck with it and eventually I was happy with it.

Ashley recognized that her parents were the reason as to why she is able to participate in multiple sports. She was aware that money is required to play sport and she considered herself lucky to have parents that are able to give her the opportunities that she has. This is inspired her because she recognized that other girl athletes may not have the same opportunities as she does.
Ashley: My parents. I am lucky that my parents can afford it and put me in all of these sports because you have to pay in these leagues. I am definitely lucky and I am really thankful, I don’t know what I would do without it! I would be so bored… I am not amazing at it but I am not the worst, I don’t know I am just lucky to play them all.

Emma was inspired by her mother because her mom values physical activity. Through Emma’s observations of her mother, she felt inspired in her own athletic career.

Emma: My mum, I watch her working out and like it just makes me want to do better. She also pushes me to practice and during the games she is always the loudest one cheering. I complain that she is loud, but I do like her there.

Molly echoed many of the same sentiments as Emma in regards to her source of inspiration. She referred to her mother numerous times as her number-one fan and the important role that she played in Molly’s life.

Molly: My mom. She is the really the only one that goes to all of my events so I call her my number one fan.
The girl athletes appreciate these relationships with their parents and refer to them as their inspiration to play sport in the first place. Continuing in the appreciation of family, Jordan (eleven-year-old multi-sport athlete), and Paige (twelve-year-old multi-sport athlete), also recognized the relationships with their siblings and valued the identity of being a sister.

Jordan: This one over here, with my sister. Even though you and your sister are on the same team or other siblings you know that they have your back. Plus, if you are at your house practicing it becomes a super duper big help, so practicing with siblings is better because sometimes your parents are just too busy.

Evelyn also discussed her sister and how important their relationship is and it is further enhanced through their sport participation.

Chelsea: Why did you pick this photo?
Evelyn: I just have a great bond with my sister and we love the game together, it makes it special.

![Evelyn and Her Sister](image)

They value their sisterhood through the bond of being family as well as sharing the love of sport. Their sister and athlete identities create more meaning in both. Being a sister and sharing the love of a common sport results in a better bond with their sister and makes playing the sport more meaningful. Other athletes spoke about the positive and negative relationships that they have had with their coaches.

**Coach.** The relationship of a coach and an athlete can be both a positive and a negative experience. The female athletes chose to speak about both types of these relationships. The girl athletes that spoke about the positive player coach relationships celebrated them and showed appreciation and accredited them for giving them a positive experience. Other girl athletes pointed toward a negative player coach relationship that resulted them either quitting the sport or switching teams. In both cases, this relationship was one of importance throughout their young athletic careers. Ashley (twelve-year-old multi-sport athlete), Sydney (ten-year-old, gymnast), and Paige all spoke highly of their coaches and related to them both athletically and through their personal lives as they chose photos that included their coaches.

Chelsea: What about this picture, who is this?

Ashley: That is my last year’s coach, she is my favorite coach of all time, sadly she coaches the younger 12u team [teams made up of girls who are the ages of
twelve and under]. There are three girls that got to play with her again because they either didn’t make our team or didn’t want to play for our team. My best friend since I was little, she got to go play on her team. She didn’t want to play with us.

Chelsea: What makes her a good coach?

Ashley: I don’t know, she is just like good with us and she understands us, she has a younger brother so she understands that what is going on with us. She is a great coach!

Chelsea: Does her being female have to do with it?

Ashley: Yeah a little bit, cause she a girl, having a girl coach that gets you is really helpful, you can tell her anything.

Ashley liked the fact that shew was able to relate to her coach based on their shared gender identity. Paige felt similarly in the relationship that she has with her coach. She discussed the struggles that she faced in basketball due to her height and how her coach was able to help her through her issues.

Paige: I play basketball and my coach is really short too and sometimes she saw the discouragement in me because I was getting blocked a lot, even though I had three blocks this past season, I was proud. She would see my face and try to get me back up again, she is trying to teach me about basketball and my shortness.
Sydney appreciated her relationship with her coach because he pushed her outside of her comfort zone in gymnastics.

Sydney: I like my coach a lot, he kind of pushes me to like to do new things…
like today at practice I was doing tap swings on high bar [gymnastics skill] and he said they were really good and then he told me that someday I need to get on the strap bar with him and do giants because they were so good.

These girl athletes have developed strong relationship with their coaches and being able to relate to those coaches is important. These relationships are a pivotal contributor their sport experience. However, some girl athletes attribute a negative experience to many past coaching relationships. Kennedy (eleven-year-old multi-sport athlete), Jordan (eleven-year-old multi-sport athlete), and Alexis (twelve-year-old multi-sport athlete) all shared negative experiences with previous coach relationships.

Chelsea: So you do not like this picture while you were playing on this team, why not?

Kennedy: While playing with the Heat it was not a good season. Mostly the coach was not good.

I asked Jordan what she wanted to convey in her photos. She mentioned numerous times that she is not a “quitter” even though she had faced many challenges in softball that have made her want
to quit. However, through an experience she had with a coach in cheerleading, she decided to quit cheerleading.

   Jordan: I am enjoying the sport and I am not a quitter. Cheerleading is another story, it is not my thing. My coach was pushing me a little too hard and I couldn’t keep up and I just didn’t have time for that. I rather focus on softball.

   Alexis also recalled a negative coach relationship that she had that almost ruined her perceptions on what it was like to play softball.

   Chelsea: So you didn’t enjoy your coach before this one?

   Alexis: She was really mean. It was just hard for me to stick with it because someone was like giving me like the worst feedback ever, she would say negative things about the team and that was just like when I wanted to quit. If this is what softball is then I do not want to do it. But I don’t think I really understood that there are better coaches out there.

   These negative relationships resulted in the girl athletes changing teams or switching sports all together. Not only are the positive relationships crucial, but the negative relationships have influenced the girl athletes as well. The coach athlete relationships described have influenced the girl athletes in both positive and negative ways. As the girl athletes described the resistance that they have faced in school or through other avenues, they spoke about these relationships as a relief of that resistance. This speaks to the larger issue of the gendered expectations in sport.
These expectations limit girls’ participation in sport, especially those sports deemed masculine. Regardless of the nature of the relationships, they have a lasting impact on how the girls experienced sport. These relationships become crucial in the fostering and encouragement of girls in sport, more importantly girls staying in sport.

**Vignette And Analysis Of Relationships**

**The Good And The Bad Of Relationships.** Relationships can alter an experience greatly. As I reflect back on my own relationships in terms of my athletic identity, I am able to relate to these girl athletes on varying levels. I had great coaches, and bad coaches. My parents were also a crucial aspect to my sport involvement as they were essentially the backbone of my entire sport experience. Without them, I would not have begun to play sport or play on a select team. However, the experience of the negative coaching experience struck me. As the girls spoke about these negative experiences they became uncomfortable. Alexis was very disturbed by her former coach and seem to still be recovering from the experience; this relationship created friction between her love of the sport and the drive to play that sport. What also strikes me is that fact that the girl athletes who experienced these negative coach and player relationships experienced them at such a young age. This speaks to the pressure that is now placed on young post-Title IX athletes. There is an assumption that youth sport should teach girls and boys necessary life skills (e.g., teamwork, respect, time-management, social skills), however due to the serious competitive nature of select sport, many of the girl athletes are learning “tougher” life lesson (dealing with negative feedback, criticism, and backlash). At the ages of ten, eleven, and twelve they are being pushed so hard that they end up quitting and leaving teams.

I did not experience a negative coach relationship until I entered college. My collegiate coach was one who practiced an “old school mentality” of personal criticism, threats, and body
regulation. My very first collegiate game was the during the Spring of 2013 in Florida. Our collegiate team went on a spring break trip every year where we competed against other collegiate teams who were also on spring break. I can remember feeling nervous as I stepped out on the red dirt and I recalled the story that a senior outfielder told me about the freshman that made an error in her first game and never played another inning after that fateful day. The story pounded in my head on repeat as I took my position at third. I had been playing this game for 11 years and there I was, trembling. The third pitch was a hard shot down the third base line, flawlessly I fielded the ground ball and threw it to first base. Though the retrieval of the ball was errorless, the throw was not. I watched the ball soar over the first base women’s head and I wanted to run. Run all the way back to Ohio to my dorm room where I could lock myself in my closet and hide. I thought, what is coach going to say to me? Luckily the error I had did not result in a run and my teammates were able to secure three outs and the inning was over. I thought I was in the clear, the run did not score, and coach would just let it go.

“Kaunert, what the heck was that!” coach Newberry snarled. She rarely said anything nicely.

Knowing very well that I made an error, I responded with, “My bad coach.”

“Yeah it is your bad. Kaunert you need to show me confidence, you know what you really need? You need a towel.”

The team looked confused, as did I. Not knowing what to respond with, I simply chose not to. She continued, “You need wipe the urine that is running down your leg and play softball like I know you know how to.” Coach screamed. She screamed so loud that the entire 10-field complex could hear.
To say that I was embarrassed and ashamed was putting it mildly. All the fans and parents could hear her, even my own parents who sat right next to the dugout. I was sick to my stomach. Throughout my four years in college I had many experiences that created tension between my willingness to play and how much I loved playing. When Kennedy, Jordan, and Alexis described their negative experiences I could not help, but to feel what they were feeling. This dissonance and friction creates not only negative experiences, but can force an athlete to hate what they are doing. Every single year of my college career I dreaded the season to begin and I couldn’t wait for it to end. I have yet to attend and play in the annual alumni game and have no plans to ever go back.

Faulkner and Hecht (2011) discuss social support as an important factor in terms of social acceptance, comfort, and identity. Relational circumstances can influence decisions of identity (Faulkner & Hecht, 2011). Within the exemplars highlighted in this theme, it is apparent that the types of relationships that the girl athletes engage with often lead them to both enjoy and continue playing sport, or to quit. These relationships have influenced the athlete identity of many of the girls. Positive relationships outweigh the negative ones as many of the girls refuse to let the negative coach relationships they have had in the past affect them in the future, ultimately keeping their athlete identity intact. The gaps that the negative relationships have created result in a shift. The shift either occurs within choice of sport or a switching of teams. As conceptualized by Schwartzman & Sanchez (2016), personal-relational identity tensions can play out as differences between the self-constructed identity the girls have developed and identity as attributed by others, in this case the coach (p. 37). The girl athletes defined themselves as strong and powerful athletes and when their coaches pushed back on that identity, it left the girl athletes feeling their athlete identities were threatened. However, other relationships were celebrated and
those personal-relationships with teammates and parents enhanced their athlete identity through the encouragement they received. They also felt as if they could give back within those relationships (e.g. supporting teammates and thanking their parents and siblings). Personal relationships with family, teammates and coaches were crucial in many of the girl athlete lived experienced. Another crucial relationship that many of the girl athletes discussed was with role models. Many girl athletes spoke about these relationships in terms of mediated content.

**Theme 5. We Want Female Role Models**

The media were present in many of the conversations with the girl athletes. The girl athletes are very aware of the mediated representations of female athletes within mainstream media. Many girl athletes acknowledged that they have a hard time finding female athletes to emulate.

**Frustration.** The girl athletes showed frustration in the fact that they do not see girl athletes on the television or on the internet. I asked many of the girl athletes who their role models were. A majority of the girl athletes named a professional male athlete as their athlete role model. I inquired further and asked them specifically who their favorite female athletes were. Many of the girl athletes struggled in explicating why they struggled with thinking of a female athlete that they liked. These stories are a reflection of the silence that many female athletes face within mass media. They are simply invisible to the girl athletes and it turns out that girls are craving and looking for female athlete role models. Kennedy (eleven-year-old multisport athlete), Jordan (eleven-year-old multisport athlete), Paige (twelve-year-old multisport athlete), Evelyn (Twelve-year-old multisport athlete), Alexis (twelve-year-old multisport athlete), and Sarah (eleven-year-old multisport athlete) all showed their frustration in their search for female athlete role models.
Chelsea: Do you by chance have a favorite female athlete?
Kennedy: Not really, no…I honestly do not know any…they are all boys.
Chelsea: Why do you mostly watch boys?
Kennedy: I don’t know?
Chelsea: Have you ever thought about it?
Kennedy: No.
Chelsea: Do you see a lot of girls on TV?
Kennedy: Not really.
Chelsea: Do you think maybe that is why you don’t know of any?
Kennedy: Well yeah, it has so to be.
Chelsea: Well why do you think that is? Kennedy: Because maybe the boys are better.
Chelsea: How do you think people in general view female athletes?
Kennedy: Uh they’re girls and they’re not as good.

Kennedy had never even considered why she did not have a female athlete role model. She was so used to consuming male sport via the media that it took her a while to rationalize why she had not viewed female athletes on the television. Her response also speaks to the previous themes
where the girl athletes discussed the stereotypes that face female athletes in a sporting context.

Kennedy acknowledged the cultural stereotype that female athletes are not as good as male athletes, hence why they are not highlighted. Paige also brought this up in our discussion.

Chelsea: Who are your favorite players?
Paige: I have three, LeBron, Russel Westbrook and Isiah Thomas

Chelsea: Okay and any WNBA players?
Paige: I really wish that I did, I just don’t know what channels they are on.

Chelsea: Right I know it is hard to find them.
Paige: I think they put them on random channels. I think I have seen Maya Moore before?

It took Paige a second to rattle off male basketball players. She was a passionate fan of the NBA players that she mentioned. However, she was longing for WNBA players to follow as well.

Paige also acknowledged the fact that female athletes are shown on channels that are not easily accessed, however after some thought, Paige was able to name a female basketball player. She later acknowledged that she needed to study Maya Moore further as an athlete. Evelyn discussed the overall interest in female sport and she tried to look for female athlete role models.

Chelsea: Do you have a favorite female athlete?
Evelyn: Not really, I don’t know

Chelsea: Any softball players? Can you think of one?
Evelyn: No…I don’t know.

Chelsea: Why can’t you think of one?
Evelyn: Because, like, you know, female athletes are not on TV.
Chelsea: So what does it mean to be a female athlete, meaning how do people perceive female athletes?

Evelyn: I feel like softball is not on TV a lot so like they show men’s baseball because they think people will be more interested in that.

Chelsea: Why aren’t people that interested in female athletes?

Evelyn: Because they are girls and they don’t want them to get dirty.

Evelyn’s rationalization speaks to the stereotypes still presented by the media. Through the trivialization of female athlete ability, the girl athletes struggle to think of them as athletes first, therefore they do not recognize them as athletic role models. The girls used gendered stereotypes as reasoning behind the silence. Evelyn attributed her rationale to stereotypical gender performances and the idea that girls are not supposed to get dirty. Alexis also spoke to the stereotypes still plaguing female athletes in the media.

Alexis: Oh no I can’t pick, but probably LeBron James!

Chelsea: Okay what about a female athlete?

Alexis: Honestly, I just have never had one. I don’t want to sound mean or anything, but no one has ever really talked about it, so I just have never watched it because they make it seem like female athletes aren’t as good or as like, they don’t get that much credit for what they do.
Chelsea: Do you see them a lot on TV?

Alexis: You know I don’t really see them a lot of TV either, I think there’s like a couple of channels, maybe...

Chelsea: Have you tried to find a female athlete to look up to?

Alexis: Yeah to have an actual female athlete role model in basketball, especially professional would be cool. There is not that much stuff on the internet, I mean ton of stuff on the internet, but it doesn’t really…I don’t know, it does not add up to me.

In her honesty, Alexis confided in me her frustration of the lack of female athletes represented in the media. Jordan echoed Alexis as she described the same stereotypes.

Jordan: Well we don’t get pointed out as much as males do. Yeah you’re more likely to see a female on the news who gets attacked than a female athlete winning a game, but they don’t put us on the TV.

Chelsea: So it is hard for girls to be recognized on their own?

Jordan: Yes, exactly, we can be more amazing than boys! Media is so interested in boys and not girls, it makes it hard
Kennedy continued this discussion as she encouraged the media to cover female athletes more.

Kennedy: Boys are always on TV, they’re like number one.

Chelsea: So we see them more, so people like them more, are they right?

Kennedy: Well, no.

Chelsea: No…why not?

Kennedy: Girls are just as good as boys.

Sarah further explored the reasoning as to why male athletes are shown more than female athletes and states her case very well.

Sarah: I see more boys on magazines.

Chelsea: What are the male athletes doing on the magazines that you read?

Sarah: Playing their sport and in action.

Chelsea: Is that what you see for female athletes too?

Sarah: No…it is mostly boys. I want to see more females!

Chelsea: Why do we see just the boys?

Sarah: Well it really depends on what sport it is. You see more girls in gymnastics, but you see more boys in hockey. Usually you see more boy golfers, swimming is both mainly girls though.
The sport itself seemed to influence the girl athlete’s responses to the lack of female athlete role models. Ashley (twelve-year-old multisport athlete) and Emily (ten-year-old multisport athlete) discussed their respective sports in terms of female athlete role models.

Chelsea: What about your favorite female athlete?

Ashley: I like Sierra Joy because she plays for Michigan Softball and like Michigan and since she plays softball which is my favorite sport so that is why.

Chelsea: Do you follow her on social media?

Ashley: Yeah I like to keep up with her and she does a bunch of camps and I want to do one, I have been asking my parents

Ashley found her female athlete role model via social media. She is able to continue to follow her through that medium. Emily, who is a gymnast, gives a different perspective than many of the other girl athletes. Due to the recent Olympic year, she commented on the amount of coverage that was devoted to the female gymnasts.
Chelsea: Do you see more female athletes on TV or male athletes?

Emily: Female, because I don’t know there are just more female athletes in
gymnastics, though this is just in the Olympics...they are a lot of female athletes
in the Olympics.

In another interesting conversation, Paige spoke to the lack of female athlete role models, but
took an historical approach to her current favorite athlete.

Chelsea: Who is your favorite athlete?

Paige: Jackie Robinson

Chelsea: Oh why is that?

Paige: I look up to him, even though I am not the same skin color, he broke the
barriers and just amazes me.

Chelsea: Do you have a favorite female athlete?

Paige: I wish I could watch more women’s sports, but all you see is boys.

Chelsea: Why don’t we see as many women on TV?

Paige: Because women are very underestimated.

Chelsea: In what ways?

Paige: What they can do...well like they will have NBA commercials, I am a
NBA fanatic and they will show a bunch of stuff about the WNBA, but the NBA
Channel should be the NBA/WNBA channel, or something like that!
Listen To Us Media!. Paige went as far as to give a suggestion to mainstream media. The girl athletes were searching for someone significant and more importantly great to talk about. As shown, many of the girl athletes expressed that they wanted female athletes to watch and follow, they just are not easily accessed. Jordan (eleven-year-old multisport athlete) and Chloe (twelve-year-old multisport athlete) have taken this into their own hands and appropriated their own female athlete role models.

Chelsea: Who is your favorite female athlete?

Jordan: Well I can’t name one because I just can think of one, but I would choose the person who got me into this is my mom, so I will say my mom is my favorite female athlete.

Jordan did not want to not have a favorite female athlete, as she spoke about who inspired her later, she decided that her mom is her favorite female athlete. Chloe viewed herself as a potential role model for future girls trying to play hockey with the boys.

Chloe: Since some sports don’t have a lot of female athletes, some people might get angry since there are not a lot female’s playing hockey.

Chelsea: So how does that influence your choice to play hockey?

Chloe: I don’t know, maybe I am like a role model, to some younger girls…a lot of people look up to older people and there’s not a lot of all women sports and people can be influenced by women sports because they are not used to it. People, girls, will learn to play so it is getting better and girls now can play more sports.
Chloe and Jordan were very creative in their approach to who their favorite female athletes were and who they viewed as role model. Many of the girl athletes expressed their frustration in the lack of female athlete representation in the media and urged the media to show more female athletes. Though these girls exist in within a post Title IX world that gives female athletes more opportunity than ever to participate in sport, this progress is not represented within mainstream media. Many of the girl athletes are longing for this representation; the demand is there.

**Vignette And Analysis Of We Want Female Athlete Role Models**

**My Role Models.** The girls are reaching for female athletes to watch, admire, and emulate and are coming up empty handed. Through their stories, rationale, and explanations I see my ten-year-old self. As a young female athlete, I too searched for female athletes on TV. Specifically, I searched for softball players. As the internet was not as readily available and accessible, in 1999 my house was equipped with dial-up internet, it was difficult to find the female softball players I was looking for. This all changed the following year. The year 2000 was a summer Olympic year and the games were held in Sydney, Australia. Before I even realized what was going on, my TV Guide was filled with female athletes. I watched the Serena and Venus crush the international competition and win gold. I can remember watching the women’s basketball team led by Lisa Leslie and Sheryl Swoops, who commanded the court all the way to gold. Most importantly, I became obsessed with the women’s softball team. Pioneers in the sport like Michelle Smith, Lisa Fernandez, Stacey Nuveman, and Dr. Dot Richardson, who became my
idol. I watched these women play every single game, every single play I sat at the edge of my seat. My family would all watch together and cheer on the U.S.A. team. I was a sponge as I listened to Bob Costas interview the women after they played in the NBC studio. I came to idolize Dr. Dot Richardson not only for her stellar performances, but for her identities off of the field. She had two gold medals and throughout those years was able to become an orthopedic surgeon.

My dad is a “quote master,” he would find inspirational quotes and apply them to athletics or anything else that may be happening within our lives, he still does this today. At age eleven his favorite quote to repeat was “Chelsea, softball will open doors for you, but education will get you through those doors.” Needless to say, that is why I gravitated to Dr. Richardson. Shortly after their gold medal win in Sydney, the time came to shop for a new bat for the upcoming season. As my father and I walked into Dick’s Sporting Goods I debated which bat I would choose. The latest Easton bat or the Worth bat. Two options…that is what I was usually faced with. One bat would most likely be purple and the other would be red, white and blue. As we passed through the baseball equipment, then the baseball apparel and made it to the last aisle and a half where the softball stuff was located I was soon blown away. We turned that corner and there she was, Dr. Dot Richardson. There she was in all her cardboard cut-out glory. My eyes lit up as I floated over to her, I reached out to touch the bat that she held in her hand. Naturally, all I felt was cardboard when I heard “Oh Chelsea look at this!” It was my dad and there he had in cradled in his hands like a new born baby. THE Dr. Dot Richardson official bat. I needed it, no question, it could have been the worst performing bat there, it didn’t matter. It had a high performing black comfort grip which led up to a royal blue aluminum barrel; across the barrel it read in candy apple red “Dr. Dot Richardson.” Without even asking me if that is the one I want,
my dad found my size and we went to look at batting gloves. As we walked through the aisle and half I saw more familiar names. Lisa Fernandez had a bat as well, Michelle Smith had her own visors for sale, I was mesmerized. I can still recall the sharp “ting” that bat made as it came into contact with the ball. This was the first recollection I have of finally being able to purchase products that were endorsed by female athletes. I had the same feelings many of the girl athletes do today, in 2017. However, you can go to any sporting goods store today and find a slightly larger section, adorned in pink, purple, and yellow softball equipment endorsed by a few professional softball players like Jennie Finch and Cat Osterman. Girl athletes today may have a few more choices than I did, but the female athletes we crave are still not as easily accessible as male athletes.

As previously mentioned, the communal layer in the Communication Theory of Identity refers to the idea of identity in group-based identification (Faulkner & Hecht, 2011). Essentially, it pertains to how female athletes, as a collective group, define and establish their identity as “female athletes.” This identity is a way that a group can bond and develop rituals and group norms. The tension found within these examples and layer pertains to the group identity and the identity as attributed by society. Here the girls are describing the gap--they want to be represented in the same way as the male athletes are. The girls identify as strong, capable athletes who perform their sport at a high level, but the perception of the media and the public depict them as “not as good as the boys.” The girls showed frustration, anger, and revelation in this identity gap. Many of the girl athletes “just didn’t get it” when they attempted to rationalize why female athletes are not in the media. However, they were very strong in their opinion on why female athletes should be shown more. Not only did the girl athletes want to watch female athletes, they wanted the public with the possibility of proving their perception on female
athletes as invalid. This theme leads to the final theme where the girl athletes really break down what it means to them to be a female athlete. The commitment and time that they have at such a young age is remarkable.

Theme 6. I Am A Female Athlete

Many of the previous themes speak the athlete identity or the female identity of the girl athletes. This theme speaks to the combination of both female and athlete. For many of the girl athletes their photo essay was an avenue where they can tell their full stories on who they are as people, more importantly who they are as girl athletes in 2017. They highlighted accomplishments, toughness, and their day-to-lives. The photo essays became an anthem and proof to those who may doubt their female athlete identities. Two questions (1. What is it like to be a girl athlete today? 2. What is the hardest thing about being a female athlete) ignited the girl athletes to describe to what their busy young lives are really like. Ashley (twelve-year-old multisport athlete), Sydney (eleven-year-old, gymnast), and Molly (twelve-year-old multisport athlete) described the time commitment and hard work it takes to be a girl athlete on a select team.

Chelsea: So tell me what it is like to be a female athlete in 2017

Ashley: It is definitely kind of stressful, I have had knee problems since I was in third grade. I have floating kneecaps and tendinitis and I have to wear braces, even though I don’t because I forget them. It is stressful getting everything done, there is no break, I am always tired it is like crazy, it has me going non-stop.

Every time of the year I am doing something.

Ashley described the scheduling that has happen in order for her to play soccer, softball, basketball, cross country, cheerleading, and volleyball. She had a level of commitment that was
centered completely around sport. Previously she spoke about finishing her homework while in school because there are simply not enough hours in the day for her to complete it. It is possible that some days she attends practices for three different sports. Sydney, the competitive gymnast discussed her time commitment to the gym.

Chelsea: So what is the hardest thing about being a female athlete?

Sydney: The time. I have to practice three hours three nights a week, so it takes up my whole week of relaxing and doing schoolwork.

Molly, softball and soccer player, continues to describe how much time and practice goes into playing competitive sport. Molly also described the things that she us unable to do due to sport.

Chelsea: So what is the hardest thing about being a female athlete?

Molly: I don’t have a lot of time to hang out with my other friends. Today was my only free day and

I was like working on homework and this little guy next door wanted to hang out but I had to do my homework.

Chelsea: What does your week look like?

Molly: Well this week Monday I was free, but I did a lot of homework. Tuesday I had soccer practice and I play on two travel softball teams, so I had softball practice too and we watched my brother play on Tuesday. Wednesday is a free day. Thursday is practice both softball teams. Friday I have a game and Saturday I have a soccer tournament. Sunday I have a softball double header and later that evening then I have my magic softball practice!
Needless to say, these girl athletes are heavily scheduled. Their lives, their parent’s lives, and their sibling’s lives are centered around practices, games, and training. The scheduling becomes a necessity in order for them to be successful.

**Athletic Success.** Throughout my discussions with the female athletes many of the girl athletes focused on their success as an athlete. This was very important to them as it made everything that they go through (judgment, practice, and criticisms) worth it because they have succeeded in one-way or another. Sydney (eleven-year-old gymnast) was very adamant in ensuring that her audience understood what it takes to be a competitive gymnast.

Chelsea: So if you had to create a story from these photos what kind of story would you be telling?

Sydney: How I have excelled through, when I was little, to where I am now.

Chelsea: So how do your pictures all go together, what would you title your photo essay?

Sydney: The story of a gymnast.

Chelsea: What do you mean by that?

Sydney: The steps that you need to take to be a gymnast.

Chelsea: What are the steps?
Sydney: Hard work, you need coaches, you need parents to support you and uh you need motivation.

Chloe (twelve-year-old multi-sport athlete), similar to Sydney, was focused on telling her journey as well. She wanted to convey everything that she had done up until this point that has made her into the athlete that she is today.

Chelsea: So if you had to create a story from these photos what kind of story would you be telling?

Chloe: This one was my first track meet high jumping and then this was the championship meet in cross country and then this was at my grandparent’s lake where I am water skiing, just learning. I am really good now. Here I was learning how to play hockey, and this is my first swim meet. I wanted pictures from when I was younger and older and when I used to Minnesota and lived here. These two are in Minnesota and the rest are here. I just wanted a variety of ages and sport to show how I got to where I am today.

Paige was focused on highlighting her athletic prowess as it is something that is often contested to her “shortness.” She was very concerned with ensuring that her photo essay showed her tenacity as an athlete as well as her overall commitment to success.
Paige: This one just shows my shortness (Figure 53), my shoes make me taller. This one shows like I am like really fierce at softball (Figure 54) yeah like catcher or shortstop.

![Figure 53: Paige and Team](image)

I am fierce and basketball too. I love both of them, I have a tendency to just go after the ball like today when I was playing I played for the other team [center field] the ball was all the way up the field and I just ran all the way around to third and my teammate is coming and I got her out. It was funny. This one shows my accomplishments; this is the World Series in Columbus this summer, I got three MVP awards. I got three out of five.

![Figure 54: Paige Catching](image)

**Passion.** The love of sport was something that the girl athletes spoke frequently about. They wanted to represent their passion for their sport throughout the photo essays. They took into consideration the time commitment, sacrificed, and said that it was all worth it because they love what they do. Caroline (ten-year-old multi-sport athlete) started this conversation on passion.
Chelsea: Why are you happy with the photos?

Caroline: I like playing sports and it is my favorite thing to do.

Ashley (twelve-year-old multi-sport athlete) continued talking about passion in our conversation as she described how the sacrifice makes it all worth it.

Chelsea: What story are you trying to tell by putting them together?

Ashley: I don’t know, what my life is like and how busy I am. I really don’t get a break and its time consuming, everything. But I still love to do all of it. That is why I do it!

The love of the game is an important factor to the girl athletes, at the end of the day the relationships, practice, time commitment, and scheduling are just part of their lives. Ultimately, it becomes ordinary to them. Jordan (eleven-year-old multi-sport athlete) continued discussing her passion.

Chelsea: So if you had to create a story from these photos, what type of story would it be?

Jordan: knowing that you are doing something that you love and not because someone is forcing you to but because you want to.

The girl athletes discussed how their parents and coaches push them to do better. Jordan described it as “not being forced” to do it, but through her passion she does it because she
chooses to. Paige (twelve-year-old multi-sport athlete) took her reasoning to a deep, personal level. Sport is who she is.

Chelsea: So the last thing we are going to do is title your photo essay. You can use a hashtag or one to two sentences.

Paige: #underestimated because I work hard at everything, maybe I don’t get credit for something, or some of the guys know I do well at sports, because I used to play basketball with them, but just my shortness being a female. I am just very underestimated in anything that I do, basketball, softball you name it.

Emily (ten-year-old multi-sport athlete) acknowledged there are rewards if she works hard and does well in her sport. This was something she enjoyed as it was a form of proof that she does work hard in her sports.

Chelsea: So how do your photos describe the life of a girl athlete?

Emily: It shows how hard we work in our sports and if we do good that is what we earn, we earn like first places and goals in lacrosse

Evelyn (twelve-year-old multi-sport athlete), could possibly consider a realist. At her young age she comprehended that sport is not forever. Living in the moment was important to her and her message in her photo essay.
Chelsea: How would you title your photo essay?

Evelyn: #LIVELIFE it means before you get older do you what you love, like I guess before you get older and you can’t play sports anymore or leave your family because you might have to move away. You can’t always play forever!

![Figure 57: Evelyn Sliding](image)

I am a female athlete was personal to each one of the girl athletes (see figure below for all photo essay titles). They wanted to convey that their athletic identities may cause issues with other thing that they have going on in their lives like school and other social activities. Ultimately, sport is what they wanted to do and continue to do. Through this acknowledgement and through their photo essays being a female athlete technically requires one foundational component: the will to play sport in the first place.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Girl Athlete</th>
<th>Photo Essay Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Teams Help Each Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>The Story of a Gymnast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennedy</td>
<td>Girls Can do Anything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>I Want to be an Athlete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Female Athletes Will Take Over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Girls Get Tough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>Team Player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn</td>
<td>#LiveLife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td>Football for Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paige</td>
<td>#underestimated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Girls are Athletes Too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>#GirlPower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Photo Essay Titles
Vignette And Analysis Of I Am A Female Athlete

Hectic Schedules. Schedules were a very important thing in my household growing up. Though my sister and I were both single sport athletes, we were training year-round. As I listened to the girl athletes describe their schedules and they day-to-day activities I imagined that this is what I probably sounded like at their age. My sister is a competitive gymnast, and she progressed rapidly through all of the levels. By age twelve she was in the gym practicing close to 24 hours a week. As she progressed to each level, more and more of her teammates were being pulled out of their public school and were home schooled instead. The gymnastics facility was 30 minutes away from our house. My schedule on the other hand was packed, but required constant transportation. I went to speed training on Monday, Wednesday, Friday. I had pitching lessons on Thursday. Depending on the season I either had summer practice or winter practice twice a week and on top of that I had weight training three times a week as well. Until the age of 16, my mom and dad were certified chauffeurs and they had our schedules down to a science. They could not wait until I turned sixteen and could drive, by then my little brother, who is 6 years younger than me, would also be entrenched in another athletic schedule. Though my parents had our schedules figured out, there was the occasional mix up every now and then. The day my father left me stranded at the pizza place across from the middle school has become folklore in the Kaunert family. I walked across the street after school. I was in 8th grade. I sat on the bench, just as I sat every Thursday since 6th grade and waited for my dad to pick me up so we could go to pitching lessons. He was never late, always right on time, 2:30. The time came and went, it was now 2:45. I pulled out my Nokia pay phone and dialed his cell phone number. My father quickly answered and said “Hey Chelsea, is everything okay?” he still answers the phone this way as if he is always expecting the worst.
I responded, “Are you on your way to come and get me?” I was met with silence.

“Chelsea, I got caught up in work, Shoot. I forgot it was Thursday! I will be right there, we are going to miss pitching lessons, but your mother is on her way to take your sister to the gym, you’re going to have to hang out honey, I am so sorry.”

I waited patiently and twenty minutes later (realistically I knew it should have taken thirty minutes) my dad sped in to the parking lot. He apologized for that day until I was twenty years old. The sacrifice both of my parents made in order for us to play the sports that we loved was immense. The time and money that goes into select sport is a commitment. The girl athletes seemed to be mature beyond their years, as many of the readily acknowledged this. This was a part of the personal identities. Being a female athlete makes all those sacrifices worth it.

This personal layer of identity is grounded in their passion for the game. The girl athletes’ self-concept was centered in their passion for the sports that they play. The athlete identities ran thick through their experiences as girl athletes. Many of the girl athletes spoke about other identities including, daughter, student, and female but they were all included within their athlete stories. This very well could be due to the fact that I asked them to create a photo essay based of the phrase “this is a female athlete.” However, overwhelmingly the girl athletes chose athlete pictures. Yes, they chose a few photos of them with their friends, in school, or with family, but a majority of their message was focused on that athlete identity. Here I take into consideration that Personal-enacted identity frictions that often involve dissonance between privately held views of self and observable behaviors that exhibit identity to others (Schwartzman & Sanchez, 2016). They view themselves as hard working athletes because they love the game, however, people from the outside looking in may not be focusing on the passion of the girl athletes. In a world that over-trains youth athletes and leads to a lot of athletes experiencing burn out and quitting, it
could appear that these girl athletes are being forced to practice and play numerous sports by their parents. Though I do not know this is not the case, I do know what the girl athletes described. I know that they said that they want to play sport, they know their parents spend a lot of money and time in order for this to happen, and that the girls love their teammates and coaches.

Summary And Conclusions

As an insider/outsider looking into the girl athletes’ lived experiences, they are not monolithic beings. These girl athletes are complex, mature, and are not quiet about it. They recognized that the athletic world is not a place of acceptance for them, however, they did not let this hold them back from perusing the sports that they wanted to play. Through the overarching themes (school (the good and the bad); female athletes > are better than male athletes; look pretty play pretty; relationships; we want female role models; I am a female athlete) it is apparent that the girl athletes are negotiating multiple identities within a multitude of contexts. They recognized each of these identities differently, as expressed through the subthemes in each overarching theme. This speaks to the individual experience of each girl athlete. For example, within the relationship theme there were girl athletes who credited relationships for inspiring them to play sport or stay on a specific team, while other girl athletes had the opposite experience where those relationships forced them out of sport. The girl athletes attempted to express their individual constraints and issues as female athletes while still engaging in the larger context of what it means to be a female athlete. For example, Paige discussed the broad assumption that female athletes are underestimated. Meaning, that this assumption is already written in cultural contract of a female athlete. She described that if you are a female athlete then you know society will underestimate you and personally she had experienced that in terms of her
short stature. She makes a connection between her community and her personal identities while recognizing that she doesn’t let the assumptions constrain her enacted identity as she will continue to perform as a female athlete. These are just two examples of the tension that many of the girl athletes have to negotiate Individually, each girl athlete experienced identities differently and that was important for them to explain and show within their photo essays. Chapter five continues to break down these tension points of identity to better understand the construction of girl athlete identity.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

I entered this research as a former girl athlete fully expecting to relate to the girl athletes of 2017. However, what I quickly realized is that yes, we did have things in common, but the girls who are supposed to live in a world of more acceptance actually have to deal with more forms of oppression than I have ever had to. Listening to them describe their experiences made me angry at times. When I listened to Alexis (twelve-year-old, multi-sport athlete) describe how she feels objectified by boys and men I felt angry. Angry to the fact that a group of twelve-year-old girl athletes should not have to worry about being “cat called” from across the street. I was angry that she even knew that word in the first place. I listened to Paige describe how people make fun of her for being short trying to play basketball and Sydney, the competitive gymnast, talk about the boys in her class continuously questioning if she really is a gymnast or not since it is not a school sport. I recalled the same taunts and conversations, but not at ten, eleven, and twelve years of age. Memory is a complex thing, maybe I just blocked them out? I soon realized through my feminist researcher perspective lens that when I do look back into my childhood, I noticed more sexism than I did at the time of these instances. I can recall my teenage years as sites of athletic contestation and challenge and through my collegiate year. The pinnacle of these memories happened my senior year of high school. The softball team at my high school dominated in the league, while the baseball team often struggled. Many times we would share a bus to away games and the male baseball players were often the quiet as we rode home in laughter. This all came to a head when a baseball player made a comment on the way back from an away game one Thursday evening. “Chelsea I bet I could smash your fastball!” Quickly the whole back of the bus, which was made up by the softball team, busted in to roaring laughter.
We all knew there was no way he could hit my fastball, let alone my change-up. I responded with a quick, “Hey coach! Can we turn on the lights when we get back? Cam thinks he can hit off of me!”

My coach responded, “Kaunert of course we can” as he turned and smirked toward the baseball team. We arrived back to the high school and Coach turned the lights on. My catcher and I warmed up for ten minutes and I was ready. I took that mound and stared into the eyes of my “male counterpart.” Before I knew it I saw every single boy, male coach, and even my female teachers who told me I wasn’t good enough. I heard those people who told me I was not big enough, or strong enough, those who told me that I did not look like an athlete, and others who criticized my parents for pushing me. My teammates lined the third base fence line and the baseball team lined the first base fence line. Chanting and cheering for their side, it was my own small town Ohio “battle of the sexes.” I was Billy Jean King taking down Bobby Riggs not only to prove that female athletes have what it takes to be competitive, but that we deserve the opportunity and respect to be there. My catcher, who had been catching me since I was ten years old gave me my favorite pitch, a change-up. My mind cleared as I wound up, I wound up all those feelings of contestation, judgement, and gendered misconceptions as I finished the perfect circle with my arm and released the ball. The ball had the perfect amount of backward spin as it floated toward the plate…”WIFF" Cam completely missed the ball. The third base line exploded with cheers and screams as I stood there. Amongst the screams from my teammates and the laughter from the baseball team I felt composed. A drop ball and a fastball later, I struck Cam out. With that strikeout also came a sense of relief. I felt as if I was done proving myself to those who doubted. The only one I need to impress was myself. I got this same sense of relief from speaking to these girl athletes. They acknowledged the discrimination and the stereotypes, but
they gave the impression that they simply did not care. They expected the comments and remarks from the boy classmates and realized that society was not accepting of female athletes like they are of male athletes, but they remained unapologetic in their athletic participation. They know how they work and they will continue to play sports, no matter the backlash. These girls were empowered through their athleticism. Through these girl athletes I recognized that many of the same issues that I faced are still very much prevalent and at times, more visible.

This research addressed the following three questions from an intersectional feminist approach: 1. How do girl athletes construct their identities? 2. How do girl athletes negotiate the female/athlete paradox? 3. How do girl athletes visually depict their own identities? I responded to Susan Bandy’s (2014) call for the need for research on female athletes from an intersectional approach. Therefore, I aimed to bring to light the multifaceted identities of girl athletes. The feminist methodology allowed for the representation of the multiplicity of girls’ athletes lived experiences, which they depicted through photographs and explained though discussion with me. Specifically, through the use of visual methods, the girl athletes who participated in this study were able to visually depict who they were and discuss how they view themselves as female athletes. Through the photo essays the girl athletes used their photos to discuss broader concepts like societal stereotypes, relationships, and politics through the girls’ discussion of personal experiences. In this conclusion, I will discuss the major findings and describe applicable implications, and directions for future research.

**Major Findings**

Using the CTI, I focused on how the girl athletes interacted with their social environments (Hecht et al, 2005). Girl athletes constructed their identities in numerous ways. However, many of the girl athletes seemed to construct their identities through their relationships
and communities. This may be speaking to the age of the girl athletes, as they are still considered to be children, they are highly influenced by their parents, coaches, and peer groups. Many of the girl athletes spoke to the relationships that have influenced their sport participation as well as the relationships that kept them engaged while playing sport. These girls valued their relationships and privileged them in their identity construction both in their photographic essays as well as through our discussions. Their interpersonal relationships with teammates, coaches and parents were the focal point in this identity formation. They have constructed their girl athlete identity through many of these interpersonal relationships. Their relational orientations influenced their relationships within the team and with their parents. These relationships become integrated within their athletic identities and motivate the girl athletes to continue in their athletic pursuits and the CTI relational layer also suggests that we enact identities in RELATION to our other identities. So, the relationship between identities is also important as the girls engage with their girlie girl, sister, athlete, daughter, friend, teammate, etc. identities.

The female athlete paradox was the concentration of the second research question. The paradox was alive within the discussions and photos that they girls described. The tension of female and athlete performance expectations were recognized by many of the girl athletes. This speaks to the cultural expectation of a female athlete in 2017. This juxtaposition of feminine girl and masculine athlete was something that the girl athletes discussed in length at times. From a young age these girl athletes were cognizant of gendered expectations about what being a girl and what being an athlete means in a multitude of social spaces. This was an area of contestation for some girl athletes. Many privileged the identity of tomboy and they were unapologetic in their representations and explanations. This negotiation of cultural identity (female athlete) is one way that the girl athlete reduced the conflict of the paradox (Jackson, 2002). Girls described
the importance of being both athletic and girly, while others identified as tomboys, but still recognized the spaces where this identity was not acceptable. Therefore, they recognized that the contract of a female athlete adheres to feminine stereotypes, however they both rejected and adhered to the contract, depending on how negotiated these identities in a multitude of contexts. Young girl athletes obviously recognize the gendered cultural expectations early as many of the images they depicted were similar to those of the college girl athletes in the Krane et al study done in 2010. These girl athletes talked about athletic competence and strength and interacted in their own way with the female athlete paradox. Molly discussed that it was important for her to have both sides, girlie girl and athlete, while Audrey discussed her tomboy identity, but still chose to include a picture of herself being “girlie” at a wedding. Audrey acknowledged that this specific picture described her the least, yet she found in necessary to include as it “shows people that we can be pretty too.” Many of the girl athletes spoke about the paradox as “matter of fact,” meaning the way that they present their gender in certain spaces is something that is just expected. They are expected to be aggressive and athletic when they are being athletes, but if they are going to a formal event (i.e. wedding) then they had to dress up, wear make-up, and be “girlie.” Many found this to be a non-negotiable expectation. However, many girls made it a point of empowerment and celebration of being a girl athlete. Numerous girl athletes spoke to the fact that it is important that their photo essays represent that they are more than just an athlete. They can be a student, friend, girlie girl, athletic girl, and a daughter all at once. According to the girls, this is something to celebrate and proof to many that girl athletes are strong.

This female athlete expectation of being both girl and athlete that the girls describe can become problematic as we have learned that these expectations can eventually limit female athletes later in their careers. These limitations include a pay gap, less professional sport
opportunities, unfair mediated representations, sexual orientation discrimination, and the trivialization of athletic ability. The negotiation for these girl athletes at this point in their lives is easy to them, it is just something that they do. They describe forms of oppression and discrimination that they encounter in school. Whether it is the boys making fun of their sports in school, their teachers explaining “acceptable” gender roles, or the boys having to skate for hurting their girl teammates, the girl athletes just deal with them. They have already learned to navigate these expectations of society’s acceptable form of a female athlete and many of these girl athletes have adhered to them as they have accepted this form of the contract. That is not to overgeneralized, meaning identity is fluid and these girl athletes can change within this context as the mature. However, through this group of girl athlete it is apparent that girl athletes are indeed negotiating the female athlete paradox at a young age and that they are navigating their own identities within it. They are also cognizant of the stereotypes of female athletes. Many of the stereotypes discussed in Chapter 2 came to life within their interviews. For example, female gender performance stereotypes are still relevant in 2017. Evelyn spoke directly to the stereotype that girls are not supposed to get dirty. She obviously did not agree with this stereotype, but still was able to acknowledge its existence. Alexis and Sydney discussed the stereotype that female athletes are just not as good as male athletes on a variety of levels. Whether they were discussing female athletes in the media or the comments that the boys in school make toward their athleticism, they acknowledged that they felt underestimated in a multitude of arenas. This is a major finding as it speaks to the environment of a post Title IX female athlete. The girl athletes that I spoke to, have in many ways, “signed” the cultural contract of what it means to be a female athlete. They have fully accepted the fact that they are considered “lesser than” they male counterpart within society, but they still continue to play. Through relationships these girl
athletes have negotiated this backlash through empowerment. They have assimilated to find other female athletes to relate to. Their girl athlete world is important to them, the depicted and described toughness, attitude, commitment, strength, perseverance, and competitiveness. The girl athletes today do not exist in a world of acceptance even though their “post Title IX” world assumes that they do. These girl athletes have to continuously prove, through their athletic, academic, and physical appearance, that they do deserve to be taken seriously as girl athletes.

Visually the girl athletes have represented themselves as multifaceted, much like the collegiate female athletes did in their self-constructed photos in the Barak et al. study (in revision). More importantly the girl athletes found it important to visually describe them as “girl athletes”, and it is evident that girl athlete goes beyond the field of competition and sport in general. The girl athletes overwhelming chose photos of them physically being athlete, showing their athletic competence. However, they included many other types of photos. Going back to relationships, many of the girls included photos with their teammates, coaches, parents, and siblings. Other girl athletes depicted them being good students, whether that was awards or other group involvement (e.g. Honor Society). While other girl athletes wanted their audiences to understand their daily lives. Essentially, the girl athletes wanted to visually depict who they are on a deeper level, while doing so many proved that they can successfully negotiate gaps and tension within their identities. They are not just girls who play sports, they are girls who are good students, who enjoy being on a team, inspired by their parents and coaches. CTI takes in to consideration the important aspects, through group roles and perception of self, as one of the foundational components to how identity is formed and enacted (Hecht et al, 2005). Therefore, many of the girls described forms of their personal, enacted, relational and communal identities and it appeared that the relationships they developed through sport was often the source of
tension release between these layers. For example, when many of the girl described an occurrence where they felt discriminated against as girl athlete they found relief from their relationships with teammates, parents, and coaches. Essentially, as long as they had someone in their corner willing to fight with them, then it was worth it. For example, when Alexis described her feelings of objectification by males, she found relief and inspiration from watching the Women’s March on Washington and discussing it with her mother. In this instance we see how a conversation on girl athlete identity led to a broader discussion on the overall treatment of women within our society. This is significant as it recognized the complexity of girl athletes and their experiences. It becomes more than just a sport, as girl athletes negotiate many identities outside of athlete.

Another major finding within this analysis was the importance of social media within the lives of the female athletes. Not all the girls interacted via social media, but they were all aware of it and how culturally significant it is. The girl athletes acknowledge social media as a part of their social lives and relationships. Many wanted to project a certain social media image, this became another form of identity. Many of the girls mentioned what types of photos are acceptable and they described the importance of gaining as many “likes” as they can. This social media identity was often represented in the photos that they chose as a group. They spoke about the reactions that they had received or imagined they would receive for many of photos that they chose for their essays. It was fascinating how the female athlete paradox was related to their social media identity. The enactment of identities in the media became a balancing act of what identities were visually represented within their social media identity. The described finding the perfect mixture of athletic pictures within these social media channels. Their social media identity was the only identity where the girl athletes spoke in term of approval. They sought the
approval of their followers through the amount of “likes” they received on the photos. Many of the athletes discussed that athletic photos do not get as many “likes” as selfies or photos with friends. Many attributed this to the fact that girl athletes are undervalued compared to their male counterparts. Though they still post athletic photos, they have certain expectations and knowledge on what will be the best received. Again, they did not show frustration, but seemed to accept and expect it. This was also discussed in other ways when some of the girl athletes (specifically those you played on “boy teams” discussed how girls can be better than boys. This seemed to be part of their culture as females and as athletes. As girl athletes they acknowledge the fact that girl athletes are not as popular as the boy athletes. They may accept this fact as part of the dominant culture, but they do not seem to care. They validate their athletic identities through their relationships. They may not be as well received as male athletes in their own cultures or the broader social context, but these girls are still empowered. They still believe that they can do anything; they acknowledge those who do not and simply move forward to achieve their goals.

The girl athletes did show frustration in mediated coverage of female athletes. This was very significant, as described in the review of literature, female athletes are often trivialized and sexualized in the media. What these girl athletes described mirrored the finding in the latest installment of the longitudinal study of female athlete mediated representations (Cooky et al, 2015). They discussed the silence of professional female athletes and more importantly they were angry at this fact. They expressed their desire to see more female athletes, but found them hard to access. Though they exist within a social media culture, they find it difficult to find female athletes as they do not even know where to go to access them. Social media could be a
channel where girl athletes can consume better representations of female athletes. This major finding becomes even more relevant as I discuss the practical implications of this work.

**Applicable Implications**

The findings within this dissertation provides several implications for sport media, sport marketing, and sport professionals. First, sport media professionals need to take notice of the demand put in place by girl athletes in terms of the amount of female athlete coverage in sport media and change their sexist representations. These conclusions contribute to the literature that describe the needs and wants of girl athletes in terms of media representations. Sport media is one of the main contributors to the stereotypes that surround female athletes. Girls athletes are frustrated because they do not see themselves represented in the media. They can recite numerous male athlete’s names’, but struggled when trying to think of one female athlete that they like. The idea that “the demand for women’s sport is not there” does not hold true with these girl athletes. Sport media needs to recognize that the demand is there, more importantly they need to reevaluate where the demand is coming from. Instead of catering the sport media market to the heterosexual male gaze, they should take notice to the girl athletes who are searching for strong female athletes throughout their media consumption. This discourse continues into other sport markets including collegiate athletics. They have a great opportunity to promote female athletes to youth fans as well. To get these type of people interested it is important to bring to light that girl athletes now comprise half of the youth athlete population. This half is often ignored in terms of mediated representation. Therefore, they are not marketing to half of a population, in turn, missing out in profits. If we frame it terms of marketing, then media professionals have no choice, but to take notice. We know both collegiate and youth female athletes want to be represented as strong, powerful, and athletically competent and when
given the opportunity to create their own photographs these concepts are often highlighted (Daniels, 2010; Daniels & Wartena, 2012; Krane et al., 2010). However, we do not often see female athletes portrayed this way. This study further explicated the demand, by girl athletes, for equality in gender representations in sport media.

Sport marketing and advertising professionals should also take note regarding the gendered representations of their own campaigns. Decades after the passing of Title IX girl athletes still feel as if they “do not belong” in sport and that “boys have it easier” in sport. Yes, there have been instances of the empowerment in women through advertising, however, these campaigns are often short lived and lead by gendered feminine products. For example, Pantene’s “Strong is Beautiful” campaign and Always’ “Like a Girl” campaign. Though these campaign still exist, they are only among a few products that market themselves to female athletes specifically and they are not even sport focused products. I would challenge the larger sport product conglomerates (i.e. Nike, Adidas, and Under Armor) to advertise to girl athletes with athletes instead of the models they use. This is one market that is often ignored, but makes up half of the youth sport population. There is also room within the local level for sport media gender equality. For example, local forums could feature self-constructed photo essays chosen by girl athletes. This type of grass roots representation can lead to a local push towards equitable representation. These practical applications lead to further questions in terms of what girl athletes value in sport marketing campaign and what influences them as athlete consumers.

Directions For Future Research

In the future scholars should continue to explore the lived experiences of female athletes from a variety of cultures. This specific research was focused in the Midwest. It would be interesting and valuable to engage with a multitude of girl athletes to further examine forms of
identity construction and negotiation. Further research should directly engage further with post-feminist thought as these female athletes engaged with this concept. They are most engaged within their own self presentation within their social media identities. According to Bruce (2016), “Third wave feminism proposes that young women, no longer reliant on traditional media, understand the pleasure and power of popular culture, are telling their own multiple truths” (p. 368). Girl athletes have the choice to tell their own multiple truths via social media. The girl athletes within this study touched on social media in a variety on contexts, but it would be beneficial with this population to further explore their social media presence. This connection of social media and identity construction needs further exploration as many of the girl athletes interacted in this medium.

Future efforts should also explore the interpersonal relationships that girl athletes engage in and how these relationships influence their sport experience. Specifically, how influential these relationships are in terms of sport choice and participation. This research focus would identify how important the relationship becomes for the female athlete. Similar studies might also consider how these relationships empower female athletes to enter a male dominated sport domain. This focus would further explore how female athletes become empowered through sport even though they face backlash in a variety of forms.

The purpose of this study was to add to existing literature on female athlete identity in hopes of bringing girl athletes lived experiences into the conversation. This study has further explicated that girl athlete hold multiple identities and that these identities are fluid in nature. Specifically, this study adds to the scholarly work done by Krane and colleagues (2011) in terms of the types of images girl athletes value. This study has extended this previous through a different methodological approach. Through the photographic essays, narrative and open and
axial coding I was able to really dive into the personal stories of each girl athlete. My approach was very beneficial in terms of stories. The stories were in-depth and rich. The findings also add to the existing literature in form of a response. Through the work done by Daniels (2009; 2012) and Daniels and Lavoi (2013) we know that girl athletes want to view images of competent strong female athletes and when they do view sexualized photos of girl athletes they often make comments of self-evaluation. This study shows that when given the opportunity to represent themselves through photographs they display athletic competence and strength over the sexualized photos that they most likely consume. Further explicating a reasoning that marketing female athletes as sexualized objects does not represent the way girl and collegiate athletes want to represent themselves.

The progression of female athlete identity construction is important as female athletes navigate the male dominated environment of sport. It is time that female athletes represent themselves as they choose; as competent, powerful athletes. The feminist intersectional approach led me to these conclusions as it first privileged the girl athletes’ individual lived experiences as well as formation of identities. Through reflexivity I was able to connect my own positionality and experiences to the girl athletes of today. This also brought to light my own privileges as well as the girl athletes’ own privileges’. I learned a lot more about myself and my own experiences than I thought I would. I related to the girl athletes, I felt their emotions, and I was angry for them. I was angry that they have to deal with many of the same things that I had to. Call me naïve, but part of me was hoping that I would speak to these girl athletes and they would convey stories of acceptance, yet there is still forms of discrimination. Through this dissertation I realized that many of the adolescent girls were wise beyond their years. They engage with
culture in a sophisticated manor as they navigated their own identities within the societies that they engaged in.

Given the context of select sport, many of these girl athletes were of middle class socioeconomic status and were privileged in this way. From my own experiences I know that select sport is not something that everyone can afford to do financially. These girls are afforded in this way, just as I was. The girls interviewed were also all white; this influences the experiences as well as their whiteness also influences their experiences. Their whiteness gives them a level of privilege as does their socioeconomic status within their families to play select sport. McDonald (2005) describes whiteness as a “performative social interrelation” within sport as it is not necessarily a “stable performative social interaction” nor is it a “stagnant identity” (p. 250). I would like to address this component in future research. Acknowledging this as a component of my research is important as well as recognizing it as a limitation in terms of diversity and demographics. Through CTI and CCT the interviews and photos brought to light the gaps, and negotiations though the recognition of how the girl athletes and their social environments interacted with each other. They feel empowered and they desire for society to recognize their athleticism. It is paramount for all sport media professionals to engage with these identities as they continue to perpetuate detrimental female athlete stereotypes that continue to plague female athletes at a young age.
AFTERWORD

To the Girl Athlete of 2017,

I have been there. My athletic ability was put into question. My body has been scrutinized as “too feminine” and “not athletic” enough, within the same week. I have felt the pressure in the classroom and been harassed by male classmates. I have been cat called walking across the street. But let me tell you what else I have done: I was a first team All-Ohio state softball player. I was deemed conference player of the year in 2008. I was class president in high school. I played softball in college. I got a master’s degree and now my doctorate. The moral of my the story of my own life is that the positives outweigh the “haters.” Those male classmates that made fun of my muscles in high school became my motivation. I will not lie, I imagined their faces on the ball as I hit .420 my senior year.

At the ages of 10, 11, and 12 you are fierce athletes, fierce girl athletes who love to compete. I encourage you to keep that fire. I encourage you to continue to be yourselves and to not apologize for it. I often heard “life is tough, get a helmet.” Life will not always be sunshine and rainbows, as many of you know. Throughout life people will continue to judge you based on your gender. Acknowledge it and move on. Easy said than done, right? NO! Be the strong female athletes that you want to be. Most importantly, have fun! Enjoy your time as a girl athlete and let it carry through throughout your life. Enjoy the games under the lights and the Friday nights hanging out with friends. Ignore the haters and let everyday be a day to celebrate you.

Whether on the playing surface, classroom, playground, or online be kind. I encourage you to follow your dreams, wherever they take you. Be strong, powerful, smart, kind, and be unapologetically you.

Sincerely,
A Fellow Female Athlete
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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

DATE: December 6, 2016

TO: Chelsea Kaunert
FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: [978768-2] Intersectional construction of girl athlete identity through photographic representations

SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: December 5, 2016

EXPIRATION DATE: November 6, 2017

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is available as a published Board Document in the Review Details page. You must use the approved version of the consent document when obtaining consent from participants. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.

This approval expires on November 6, 2017. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.
This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board's records.
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT AND ASSENT

Parent Informed Consent Form

Project Title: Intersectional Construction of Girl Athlete Identity Through Photographic Representations

Research Group: Chelsea Kaunert, School of Media & Communication

First and foremost, I thank you for taking the time to read this consent form. My name is Chelsea Kaunert and I am a doctoral student at Bowling Green State University. Under the supervision of my Advisor Dr. Sandra L. Faulkner, I am conducting research on girl athlete identities. I believe the benefits of this study will not only benefit your own daughter, but girl athlete culture, scholarly literature, and the sport media industry. In a mediated world that downplays and ignores female athlete ability, this research is a celebration of girl athletes and their abilities. I believe it is important that young athletes are able to tell their own stories about what it really means to be a female athlete in 2017. Creating these photos may be empowering for young girls as they express what is important to them and share their sport story with an interested adult (and former athlete). This study will help us understand how young athletes view themselves. The photos and interviews that are collected during this study will be analyzed by myself and my advisor only.

As the parent or guardian of the child,

I willingly provide my consent for my child to participate in a research study examining how young girl athletes represent themselves in a photographic essay. My child’s involvement in this project includes creating a photo essay (about 5-10 photos) taken by themselves. Then they will participate in an interview that will further examine the athlete’s photo essay, titled This is a Female Athlete. The interview discussion will focus on them explaining the story being told through the photographs. The researcher will lead the interviews, yet they will be loosely structured so that the athletes can provide their opinions. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed word-for-word (for analysis purposes only). In the written transcripts of the interviews, all names and identifying features will be removed or coded. It is possible that someone might recognize your daughter in a photo. The photos will only be shown to academic audiences (conferences, publication and journal articles). The photos, transcripts and recordings will be secured in a locked computer. The decision to participate or not participate will have no impact on any relationship that you may have with Bowling Green State University, or your sport organization.

Participants in this study will create a photo essay with 5-10 photographs of themselves being female athletes. After taking the photos I will have a one-on-one interview with your daughter that will be audio-recorded. We will schedule the interview at a mutually agreed upon time and will take around 90 minutes to complete. The risks of participation are minimal; no more than encountered in daily life.

Additional questions about this study can be directed to me, Chelsea Kaunert, 513-827-0442 or ckauner@bgsu.edu or my advisor Dr. Sandra L. Faulkner, 419-372-6525 or sandraf@bgsu.edu. Any concerns about the study should be directed to Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu.

My signature below indicates I have been informed that:
• all information provided during the interview will be confidential,
• all photos provided during the study will be used for academic purposes only,
• my child’s coaches will not receive any information about this study in which individual responses can be identified,
• my child’s participation is entirely voluntary,
• she may stop participating at any time during the project,

[Signature]
she will be informed of the procedures prior to beginning the study.

__________________________  __________________________
Child's name                  Printed Name

__________________________  __________________________
Signature                    Phone Number / e-mail

__________________________
Address

__________________________
Date

BGSU HSRB - APPROVED FOR USE

IRBNet ID # 978768
EFFECTIVE 12/05/2016
EXPIRES 11/06/2017
Athlete Informed Assent Form

Project Title: Young Athletes’ Sport Experiences

Researcher: College Student: Chelsea Kaunert

I agree to be in a research study. I will take 5-10 photos of what I think it means to be a female athlete. I will then talk about my photos with the researcher. This talk will take about an hour and a half. I will be audio-recorded during this interview. The researcher promises that those recordings will not be heard by anyone but her and her advisor. The things you say in this interview will not affect the relationship that you have with your coaches or your parents. Also, my name will not be used in anything that may be written about this study. My photos will be used for academic purposes only.

By being in this study, I will be able to show myself being a female athlete. Being in this study also will help the researchers learn about how girls my age think about what it means to be a female athlete in 2017. If I do not want to answer any question, I do not have to. I can stop talking during the interview anytime I want. I can even leave if I want to.

I want to take five to ten pictures of myself being a female athlete and then talk about them with the researcher. This means that I will be in a study and share my opinions with the researcher.

Additional questions about this study can be directed to me, Chelsea Kaunert, 513-827-0442 or ckauner@bgsu.edu or my advisor Dr. Sandra L. Faulkner, 419-372-6525 or sandraf@bgsu.edu. Any concerns about the study should be directed to Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu.

_____________________________________________________________________________

Signature

_____________________________________________________________________________

Printed Name

Date

BGSU HSRB - APPROVED FOR USE
IRBNet ID # __978768__
EFFECTIVE __12/05/2016__
EXPIRES __11/06/2017__
January, 2017

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I’d like to take this opportunity to inform you of a research project that is being conducted with athletes in your daughter’s [sport] league. I am interested in how young girl athletes construct their own identities as female athletes. I am asking girl athletes to create their own photo essays (5-10 photos) titled “This is a Female Athlete.” Upon completion of their photo essay, I plan to interview each athlete individually inquiring why and how they constructed their photo essays.

I have spoken to your coach about this study. The athletes will be asked if they want to create their own photo essays and their participation in the study will be voluntary. If an athlete agrees to take her own photos and be interviewed, the interviews will take place at an agreed upon, convenient location. I will interview your daughter and discuss the photos with her. I am interested in learning what photographs the athletes will take and why they choose the contexts that they do. The athlete will construct the photos themselves. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed word-for-word (for analysis purposes only). In the written transcripts of the interviews, any names and identifying features will be removed or coded. The photos themselves will be used for academic purposes only (conferences, publications, and journal articles), they will be analyzed by my advisor and myself only. The audio-recordings, transcripts, and photos will be secured in on a password protected computer. Also, coaches and parents will not receive any information about this study in which any individuals can be identified. You may receive a summary of the study upon request.

As a participant in this study, your child will be able to show what it means for her to be a female athlete. As the media often downplays female athlete ability, this photo essay gives young girl athletes the opportunity to represent themselves in the way they want choose. I believe it is important that young athletes to be able to tell their own stories about what it really means to be a female athlete in 2017. Creating these photos may be empowering for young girls as they express what is important to them and share their sport story with an interested adult (and former athlete). This study also will help researchers understand how young athletes view themselves. The risks of participation are minimal; no more than encountered in daily life.

Athletes under the age of 18 must have parent/guardian consent to participate in this study. I have included a Parent/Guardian Informed Consent Form with this letter. If you would like your child to have the opportunity to volunteer to take part in this study, please complete this form and give it back to me. If you have any questions about the study or procedure, please contact me at 513-827-0442 or ckauner@bgsu.edu or my advisor Dr. Sandra L. Faulkner, 419-372-6525 or sandraf@bgsu.edu. Any concerns about the study should be directed to Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu.

Sincerely,

Chelsea Kaunert, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate, School of Media and Communication
Bowling Green State University
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Unstructured Interview Questions:
Interview: Will begin with gathering the photos that the girl athlete has chosen (5-10 photos). I will then remind the girl athlete that the interview will take around 90 minutes and she can stop the interview at any time since she has already signed the assent form before taking the photos.

“Thank you again for taking these photos and sitting down with me. I want to remind you that you may or may not choose to answer or respond to a question”

A. Background information (also collected on the background form)
   1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
      a. Name
      b. Age
      c. Sports played (favorite sport)
      d. Social media
      e. Media consumption
      f. Favorite female athlete

B. Background information (also collected on the background form)
   2. Overarching main question: Can you create a story from these pictures?
      a. What is the story?
         i. What are you sharing in all photos (how do they go together)?

C. Identities
   a. What is the best thing about being a girl athlete?
   b. What is the hardest thing about being a girl athlete?
   c. Tell me what it is like to be a girl athlete
   d. What does it mean to be a girl athlete?
   e. What do you like about being a girl athlete?
      i. How do you describe yourself?
      ii. Other identities?

D. Inspiration
   a. Where did you get your ideas for the photos?
   b. Who inspires you?

E. Social Media
   a. Would you put these photos on social media?

F. Female Athlete
   a. To you, how do your photos describe a girl athlete’s life?

G. Satisfaction
   a. Are you happy with your photos?
      i. Why
      ii. Why Not?
   b. Possibility of changing them
      i. Would you?

H. Tag Line:
   a. Give me one to two sentences as a title for your photo essay.
   b. Or a description of the photos
APPENDIX E: PHOTO ESSAYS

Emily, 10 years old, Multi-Sport Athlete
Sydney, 11 years old, Gymnast
Kennedy, 11 years old, Multi-Sport Athlete
Alexis, 12 years old, Multi-Sport Athlete
Chloe, 12 years old, Multi-Sport Athlete
Sarah, 11 years old, Multi-Sport Athlete
Jordan, 11 years old, Multi-Sport Athlete
Molly, 12 years old, Multi-Sport Athlete
Evelyn, 12 years old, Multi-Sport Athlete
Caroline, 10 years old, Multi-Sport Athlete
Paige, 12 years old, Multi-Sport Athlete
Ashley, 12 years old, Multi-Sport Athlete
Emma, 10 years old, Multi-Sport Athlete