WHY WOMEN DON’T WATCH WOMEN’S SPORT: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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The Ohio State University

2006

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ABSTRACT

Though women’s sports have seen an explosion of growth and popularity during the past decade, it cannot be ignored that many women do not consider themselves fans of female sports. While women are increasingly becoming vested fans of men’s football, baseball, hockey and basketball, the perceived barriers—sociological, psychological and practical—to watching women’s sports still appear formidable for many female fans.

The purpose of this study was to investigate female consumption of women’s basketball through the voices and perspectives of female spectators of men’s basketball. By utilizing a qualitative methodology, I explored the foundation of female spectator disinterest in women’s sport. Twelve female season-ticket holders of university men’s basketball, with no recent attendance at a women’s basketball game, were interviewed using a semi-structured format.

Numerous themes were suggested by the data and are presented for analysis. Participants discussed their experiences as spectators, perceptions of men’s and women’s sport and reflections on the components influencing their consumer decision-making. The study sought to expose factors contributing to female spectator disinterest, as well as explore the foundations of perceptions and attitudes concerning women’s sport.
Dedicated to my sister Laura, who hates sports but loves me.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

One of the wonderful things about The Ohio State University is the caliber of advisors and scholars willing to lend time, support, advice and wisdom to students on the quest for knowledge. While none of those people would admit me, Dr. Janet Fink was kind enough to take me on as a charity case and I am a better person for it. Her passion for teaching, dedication to students and insightful research continue to inspire me. Throughout my graduate career she has pushed me to become a better student and I am grateful for her guidance, faith and friendship. I can only hope to be half as good a scholar as she.

I walked into Dr. Sarah Field’s office and without ever previously meeting her, I asked her to be my cognate advisor. After her initial response—a question asking what the hell a cognate advisor was—she agreed. Her depth of knowledge and passion for advising made this study possible. Her remarkable sense of humor, quick sarcasm and affinity for Saved by the Bell reruns made countless meetings memorable.

Dr. Packianathan Chelladurai (Chella) has been a wonderful mentor throughout my graduate study, challenging me to explore areas of sport management beyond my comfort zone. He is both brilliant and humble, and I have been lucky to work with him.
I am indebted to the faculty members of Policy and Leadership who introduced me to the world of qualitative research, making methodology both accessible and rewarding. I have learned a great deal from Peter Demerath, Douglas MacBeth and Patti Lather throughout my four years at Ohio State.

Thirteen women offered their time, stories, laughter and experience for this dissertation project and I am thankful they allowed me into their world. I would not have been able to collect such a diverse group of spectators without the generous support and help of Richelle Willis and The Ohio State University Athletic Department.

While I have toiled and stressed for months writing my dissertation, I did not take this doctoral journey alone. Katie Quatman and Jim Strode served as my copilots, sharing countless cups of coffee, trips to Panera and bad jokes. Heidi Parker’s assistance on this project during the stress of her General Exams was much appreciated.

My academic studies have been greatly supported by my friends at the Department of Recreational Sports. In particular Dr. Danell Haines and Dave DeAngelo provided the flexibility needed to undertake this project.

Over the past four years I have had the extraordinary opportunity to serve as a rugby coach at two outstanding schools, Ohio State and Denison University. I have learned a great deal from these remarkable athletes and I am grateful for the opportunity to be part of their college career. Particular thanks to the women of Denison University.
rugby for their support, advice, laughter and encouragement during the trials of writing this dissertation. Remember to get low in rucks and initiate the tackle.

While my graduate studies culminated in this dissertation I would be remiss to ignore the place my education began. My interest in sports management was born out of my profound experience at Mount Holyoke College, both through the friendships created in its halls and the mentorship of Laurie Priest. I would not be here without Laurie’s support and advice. My Mount Holyoke friends continue to inspire and sustain me. As Wendy Wasserstein ’71 wrote, “We knew we were natural resources before anyone decided to tap us.”

Wendy Hankle has literally lived with this project for over a year now and, while she only attends sports for the beer consumption, she has contributed her time, opinions and vast knowledge of the most intricate grammar rules to this project. She continues to make my work readable and my life enriched. I am forever grateful for her support, love, sarcasm and Snapple contributions.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgments......................................................................................................................... iv

Vita................................................................................................................................................ vii

List of Figures ............................................................................................................................... xi

Chapter

1. Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1
   Statement of Inquiry .............................................................................................................. 2
   Rational and Justification ..................................................................................................... 3
   Purpose of Study ................................................................................................................... 8
   Significance of Study ........................................................................................................... 9
   Research Questions ............................................................................................................. 10
   Limitations .......................................................................................................................... 10
   Delimitations ....................................................................................................................... 11
   Definitions ........................................................................................................................... 12

2. Review of Literature ........................................................................................................... 13
   Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 13
   Fans and Spectators .............................................................................................................. 13
   Sport Consumption ............................................................................................................ 15
   Theories Related to Sport Consumption ............................................................................ 16
   Fan Motivation .................................................................................................................... 18
   Team Identification ............................................................................................................. 24
   Women’s Sport Consumption ............................................................................................... 26
   Consumption of Women’s Sport ......................................................................................... 29
   Women’s Sport and the “Media” ......................................................................................... 35
   Media Effects ....................................................................................................................... 36
   Cultural Values and the Media Machine ............................................................................ 42
   Media Manipulation and Coverage of Women’s Sport ....................................................... 45

3. Methodology ....................................................................................................................... 60
   Research Methodology ....................................................................................................... 60
LIST OF FIGURES

3.1 Categorization of Qualitative Research Interests ............................................ 61
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

America’s obsession with sports stretches from the Little League baseball fields of Maine to the pick-up basketball games in California. We are a nation clothed in athletic jerseys, fanatical about fantasy football and hooked on our 24/7 satellite sports networks broadcasting games from the corners of the world into our living rooms. Never has sports been so accessible, not only is it on television and radio, it’s at our fingertips on the Internet. And new sports leagues are emerging, battling for our attention with historically dominant sports.

Sport consumption can be judged by multiple criteria and in various arenas. One key aspect of sport consumption is spectator attendance. While sport represents a significant industry, the nation’s obsession with it can best be exemplified by stadiums and arenas filled with screaming fans. Sport spectating can be seen as relating a value to a particular sport or a particular gender.

The passage of Title IX ushered in a more inclusive era. A new generation of women became committed to participating in and consuming sport with the same devotion as their brothers and fathers. New female professional sporting leagues sprouted up alongside millions more high school female athletes. While some have had short-lived
success like the Women’s United Soccer Association (WUSA) and American Basketball League (ABL), a handful, including the Women’s National Basketball League (WNBA) has survived its initial years and will share the spotlight with other female leagues such as roller derby, softball and football.

Statement of Inquiry

One underlying assumption in the creation of these new women’s leagues and the boom in female participation in sport is that women would support women’s sport. Much of the prevailing images of the 1999 Women’s Soccer World Cup final were young girls in ponytails, faces painted red, white and blue, wearing the jersey of their hero, Mia Hamm, cheering the National team on in a packed Rose Bowl. While the World Cup may have served as the pinnacle of spectatorship of women’s team sport, the current snapshot of spectatorship of women’s sport tells a different story. While women are increasingly becoming vested fans of men’s football, baseball, basketball and NASCAR, the perceived barriers, both psychological and practical, to watching women’s sports still appear formidable for many female fans. Women make up 47.2 percent of Major League Soccer (MLS) fans, 46.5 percent of Major League Baseball (MLB) fans, 43.2 percent of National Football League (NFL) fans, 40.8 percent of fans at National Hockey League (NHL) games and 37 percent of National Basketball Association (NBA) fans (Women’s Sports Foundation, 2001). Yet at the same time, more than half of the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) viewers are men. Furthermore, men made up more than half of the minuscule television audiences for women’s professional soccer. The audience
for the 2003 championship game in women’s college basketball was 57 percent male, while Annika Sorenstam's appearance in the Colonial Golf Tournament drew an audience 65 percent male (Tierney, 2003).

Rationale and Justification

While there is considerable amount of research in the field of spectator motives and media effects, it is stunning how many questions still have yet to be addressed. The literature detailing why people are attracted to sport spectatorship centers on various theories developed to explain sport consumption patterns. People are attracted to sport for the pleasure and entertainment; it’s also a source of arousal and escape from the stresses of daily life (McPherson, 1975; Sloan, 1985). A sport’s violent content has also been cited as a potential draw for a fan (Sloan, 1985; Bryan, 1989). Furthermore, the need for vicarious achievement through team association has been observed to play a significant role in fan consumer behavior (Mael and Ashforth, 2001; Trail et al., 2000; Fink et al., 2002a).

The role of gender has been observed, both as it relates to the spectator and the athletes. While several studies have explored motives and behaviors of female sport fans, there lacks a research consensus regarding gendered motives for spectating. Fink et al. (2002a) concluded vicarious achievement as a more significant motivator for women, while James and Ridinger (2002) found men recorded higher scores concerning the motives of aesthetics, achievement, empathy, knowledge and family. Two studies shown
men to be more enthusiastic consumers of sport (Dietz-Uhler, End, Jacquemotte, Bentley and Hurlbut, 2000; James, 2002), while McPherson (1976) suggested socialization differences may account for gendered identities related to sport consumption.

Regarding the consumption of women’s sport, richer research is needed to provide more clarity as to the role of the athlete’s gender. Fink, et al. (2002) showed spectators of women’s basketball reported the environmental influences of promotions, social support and ticket pricing all posed a significantly greater influence than those attending men’s basketball. Studies have shown two particular factors to be more influential regarding women’s basketball than men’s basketball, notably self-fulfillment (Kahle, et al., 2001) and players as role models (Funk, Mahony and Ridinger, 2002).

Particularly of interest in the study are the perceptions of women’s sport held by those who solely attend men’s basketball. Human behavior is greatly guided by our perceptions and attitudes, so getting to the heart of feelings of non-spectators may shed light on the root of their disinterest. The literature concerning women’s sport is greatly interested in the role of media outlets in helping shape attitudes concerning female athletes.

However, a quick glance at communications and media studies will show the conflict present within the literature. While the scope of media impact is heavily debated, there are some areas of consensus. In 1963, B.C. Cohen wrote a seminal declaration on the impact of mass media. He asserted that media “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling readers what
to think about.” This control by media outlets comes in three primary forms: agenda-setting, social construction of reality and framing. Agenda setting refers to the process by which mass media, aided and influenced by interest groups and social norms, choose to place issues at the forefront of news while others garner little attention. This has been observed in women’s sport by the lack of attention afforded to female athletes by television, print and radio media.

Social construction of reality references significance of media in our everyday reality. Media outlets provide understanding of other people, places, cultures and values of different individuals and groups, thus painting a portrait of the social reality of our lives (Hall, 1982). Coupled with framing, characterized by the systematic choice of language and images to package an event, women’s sport is portrayed by media outlets as second tier to men’s sport, often de-emphasizing aspects of the events that would appeal to consumers.

Three principal ways in which media address gender in women’s sports have emerged through numerous studies regarding media portrayal. The first element is the sexualization of female athletes. Athletes are shown merely as an object for men, highlighting the female athlete as a heterosexual, feminine, non-threatening creature. Media consistently downplay the athleticism of women, choosing to accentuate femininity and traditional family roles.

Secondly, media coverage of women’s sport tends to include ambivalent language
referring to female athletes as “girls” or by their first name. This is reflective of the casual nature of the presentation of the game, as well as using the term “girl” in a demeaning fashion to characterize a woman.

The third primary way news media outlets address women’s sport is through simply ignoring female athletes. Recent studies have shown shows like CNN’s *Sports Tonight* and ESPN’s *SportsCenter* devote 7 percent and 5 percent respectively to women’s sport. Numerous studies concerning Olympic coverage have noted cameras are primarily fixated on men’s athletic endeavors (Higgs and Weiler, 1994; Eastman and Otteson, 1994; Eastman and Billings, 1999; Tuggle and Owen, 1999). This lack of media exposure results in fewer spectators and fan interest, as well as little interest by potential sponsors.

Though females are becoming vested consumers of men’s sport, little is known of the attitudes of these fans regarding their lack of interest in women’s sport. Though no research has been conducted to date examining their spectator motives, the future success of women’s sport may rest in their answers. Leagues such as the WNBA and Women’s Football League (WFL) currently work under the assumption that women will support female athletics. While the WNBA’s continued existence has been partly due to vested lesbian spectators, this population may not be enough to ensure long-term success (Tanenbaum (2002). A qualitative exploration of female consumer attitudes concerning
women’s sport is needed to fill research voids in multiple fields from sport management to gender studies. A richer understanding of female sport fans is needed now more than ever.

The sample in the study proposed involves female spectators of men’s sport who have not attended a female athletic event. While basketball is the sport under the microscope, the study has a variety of potential implications for other sports. Basketball is the most obvious choice of analysis for several reasons. Categorized as a NCAA revenue-producing sport, basketball is typically allocated more resources, particularly in the area of promotions, than other women’s team sports. Historically, basketball has been a popular sport for participants as well as spectators, generating both media attention and an infrastructure of participants who begin in early adolescence.

While the focus of the study is noteworthy, one aspect of the methodology sets it apart from other explorations of spectator motives. Though the canon of research in spectator behavior is rich, the questions are posed to those already at an event. While this allows for the creation of knowledge of these spectator attitudes, those choosing not to attend are left with no voice.

From this perspective, this study is quite unique. It is quite common in corporate research to conduct focus groups of both direct product consumers and those individuals not currently customers. This allows companies to better retain their clientele, while also receiving information on how to better position their product and grow their consumer
base. The current literature on sport spectator behavior has yet to adopt this approach. It seems logical that to acquire the most candid perspective of attendance motivation researchers should explore people not at athletic events.

Purpose of Study

While there is considerable research detailing consumer motivation and purchasing decisions, there exists a significant void of research describing female spectator disinterest in women’s sport. To obtain a robust understanding of why female fans of men’s sport would choose not to attend women’s sport it is imperative to (1) give a voice to female fans of men’s sport to reflect and speak candidly about their lack of consumption of women’s sport, (2) uncover the perceptions and attitudes existing among non-spectators regarding women’s sport, (3) determine how these attitudes and perceptions impact their consumer decisions, and (4) find out what factors, both psychological and social shape their current perceptions of women’s sport.

The purpose of this study is to investigate female consumption of women’s sport through the voices and perspectives of female fans of men’s basketball who do not attend women’s events. The focus of this investigation will also seek an understanding of how their attitudes and disinterest may be related to gendered media portrayals, socialization and distinct spectator motives. To explore these aspects, a qualitative methodology will be employed, as it allows for the flow of participant feelings, perceptions and attitudes. Although the purpose of the study was to examine spectator behavior through the lens of female non-spectators of women’s sport, it was not the intention of the researcher to
insist or suggest that females have the sole responsibility for the success of women’s sport events. However, given women’s leagues’ focus on capturing the female spectator, it was deemed important to understand female fans of men’s sports and their disinterest in attending women’s sports.

Significance of Study

This study is significant for numerous reasons. The literature concerning women’s sport spectatorship rarely focuses solely on the female fan. Women are often part of the sample, but not the exclusive focus of a sport spectator study. By concentrating on women, the canon of literature will gain a richer, deeper examination of female consumers of sport.

Since women constitute more than half the world’s population and are an increasingly growing segment of sport fan communities, a keen understanding of women as consumers is essential. Collegiate athletic marketers of women’s basketball often struggle to fill seats. Any research that can aid them in understanding why certain consumers choose men’s sport over women’s sport will serve as a place to reassess their current promotions and marketing plans. Moreover, this study will investigate the often ignored group of non-spectators, those who do not attend games. Marketing departments are constantly engaged in growing their spectator base, so it is imperative that those who are charged with selling sport understand those they are trying to effectively reach.

While there is considerable literature addressing the portrayal of women’s sport by media outlets, little information exists regarding the direct implications of these
portrayals on consumer behavior. By seeking out perceptions of women’s sport, where these attitudes originate from, and their impact on consumer purchasing decisions, a clearer picture can be created regarding aspects of media impact.

Moreover, since gendered experiences in sport are particularly of interest across different disciplines, this study will have much crossover ability into women’s studies, sociology, sport humanities and marketing.

Research Questions

1. Why do female fans of men’s sport choose not to attend female sporting events?

2. What factors exert the greatest influence on attendance decisions of these non-spectators?

3. What attitudes do female sport spectators hold about women’s sport?
   a. Where do these attitudes originate from?
   b. What potential role do news media outlets play in the formation of attitudes concerning women’s sport?

Limitations

As per the tenets and philosophical assumptions underlying qualitative research, the data collected may be interpreted differently by different researchers. The constructivist tradition is highly interpretive; with the researcher as the primary instrument of analysis, bias is accepted as part of the research process. Researcher subjectivity is minimized, though never eliminated, using peer review, member checks, negative case analysis and a reflective journal. It is the goal of the researcher to provide a
great degree of transparency between participants’ voices and assertions made. Utilizing a systematic and rigorous process of data analysis, as espoused by testing evidentiary warrants (Erickson, 1996), transparency will be achieved.

Delimitations

Within the tradition of qualitative research, the desire to seek generalizations is not the primary objective of the study. Instead, the researcher sets out to provide rich, robust interpretations with limited ability for generalization. What results is detailed data representing a smaller number of participants. A limited group of individuals were asked for their thoughts and perceptions concerning the subject. Therefore, while the research has sought maximum variance in the small sample, the study only directly reflects their opinions and attitudes. However, in the naturalistic paradigm, the transferability of findings to other situations depends on the degree of similarity between the original situation and the situation to which it is transferred (Hoepfl, 1997). The degree of transferability is not known to the researcher, yet it is her or his responsibility to provide clear and adequate data and results, leaving the reader to determine whether these new findings can be applicable to a new situation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Furthermore, the researcher was bound by certain constraints regarding data collection. Participants were generated from spectators at a large, midwestern university, and reflect the spectating experience of individuals in reference to that university.
Definition of Terms

Fan: Fans are individuals who are devoted to a team, athlete or event. They are characterized by various levels of identification and loyalty. Fans may or may not attend sporting events as spectators.

Spectator: Spectators are individuals who watch and observe an event. While they may or may not be fans, I am adopting a strict interpretation of the term spectator.

Media: The term “media” refer to the most common sources of sports programming and news, namely, print, radio, television and Internet. The purpose of these media outlets is to provide information and entertainment for consumers.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a broad overview of viewpoints and
current literatures relevant to the major themes of the study. A discerning literature
review has allowed for the construction and preparation of the theoretical frameworks
which has guided and helped shape the research questions presented. The chapter is
divided into two key aspects. The first section chronicles the existing knowledge base
regarding spectator motivation. This segment will explore basic of spectator and fan
motivation, as well as a detailed examination of the role of gender. The second portion of
the chapter will address the role of news media outlets in shaping attitudes concerning
women’s sport. This section of the chapter draws heavily from media and communication
studies, gender and sexuality literature and sport sociology writings

Fans and Spectators

Throughout the literature, researchers have used the term fan and spectator
synonymously. It is vital to explore and address the differences between these two often
overlapping groups.
Sloan’s (1989) distinction between fan and spectators is still considered an important delineation between both terms. In its strictest sense, Sloan states, spectators are individuals who watch and observe an event, while fans are devoted to a team, athlete or event. Sometimes spectators and fans do overlap, but not always. Wann, Melnick, Russell and Pease (2001) clarify the difference between the two terms:

Sport fans are individuals who are interested in and follow a sport, team and/or athlete. Sport spectators (also called sport consumers) are those individuals who actively witness a sporting event in person or through some form of media (pg. 2).

It’s important to understand a fan is not simply a fixed notion, but also the means of action. As Crawford (2004) reminds, “being a fan is not just a label or category, it is also an identity and a performance (p. 20).” He argues that rather than debating the nature of fans vs. consumers, researchers should simply view fans as consumers since fan culture is primarily focused on some level of product consumption.

Other researchers have reasoned that the key difference may be that fans and spectators correspond to different levels of identification, with spectators being more highly identified than fans (Trail, Robinson, Dick, Gillentine, 2003). Funk and James (2001) proposed a four level scale to assess level of fandom; it begins with awareness, moves into a greater attachment to a favorite team and concludes with a level of allegiance marked by significant attachment. Fink, Trail and Anderson (2002a) divided motives into those that apply primarily to spectators and fans of successful and unsuccessful teams, as well as looking at overarching themes that apply to all spectators and fans.
Trail, et al. (2003) cite the three-level framework proposed by Sutton, McDonald, Milne and Cimperman (1997) to distinguish fans and spectators. The first level includes people who consider themselves social fans, they enjoy the opportunity to engage socially with people through sport, but they do not have anything invested in the outcome of the contest. The next level is more focused fans, their level of identification is greater than the first level and they find some attraction to the sport. The third level represents the most highly vested fans. They possess a strong emotional attachment to the team, are heavily invested in the outcome of contests (p. 217).

Sport Consumption

As technology has expanded our outlets for entertainment, so too has it brought people more opportunities to consume sport. The Internet, digital cable and satellite television and radio can provide around-the-clock access to games and sport coverage. As a nation obsessed with sport, it is important to clarify the modes of consumption that will be examined.

While watching a game on television or through an Internet broadcast is still spectating, it must be distinguished from the elements of consumption and particular motives of those at a live sporting event. Therefore, direct consumption relates to those attending a live sporting event, while indirect consumption characterizes those participating through a medium, such as television, radio or Internet.

Wann, Melnick, Russell and Pease (2001) cited Kenyon (1969) in clarifying the difference between direct and indirect consumption. They write:
The key distinction between direct and indirect sport consumption is that with the former, the spectator becomes a part of the sporting environment and has the opportunity to impact the event. Thus, an individual who attends the Super Bowl in person would be classified as a direct sport consumer, while someone watching the same contest on television would be classified as an indirect sport consumer. This distinction is important because the situational context in which a spectator witnesses an event may impact his or her response to the event (Wann, et al., p. 3).

While Wann clearly draws a strict distinction between both indirect and direct consumption, Crawford argues this view fails to recognize both types of consumption are heavily mediated (Crawford, 2004).

Theories Related to Sport Spectating

For centuries people have questioned why humans behave as they do. While many scholars focused on biological or power-hungry motives for human behavior and complexity, Maslow (1943) utilized two classifications of behavior motives – deficiency and growth needs – leading to a hierarchy of basic human needs. The hierarchy begins with the essential human need of satisfying physiological desires, followed by safety, with the third and fourth level comprising a sense of belongingness and esteem. Maslow furthered his basic hierarchy by adding the levels of cognitive desires, aesthetic needs, self-actualization and self-transcendence (Maslow, 1971; Maslow and Lowery, 1998).

While it may be a stretch to connect the desire to watch sports as relating to the human need for safety or food, the requirements of belongingness, acceptance and esteem can be connected to sports consumption. Through watching and following sport teams, individuals can become part of collective fan communities, find a connection to their
communities and peers, as well as become competent in the rules and customs of a sport and team. Through sport they can gain approval from others and enhance their self-esteem.

Several theories have been developed to explain sport consumption patterns. Sloan (1985) was among the first to articulate these theories, which later have been investigated by numerous scholars. The first theory proposed is the Salubrious Effects Theory, alternatively labeled the Recreation and Diversion Theory. This theory states that people are attracted to sport for the pleasure, as well as the physical and mental well-being that can be attained through consumption. This theory positions sport consumption along similar motives as sport serving as an escape (McPherson, 1975; Sloan, 1985). The Stress and Stimulation Theory argues that sport serves as a place for arousing and simulating experiences in life. Through participation and spectating, individuals can seek out both positive and negative stress releases. The Catharsis and Aggression Theory has attracted much attention for its connection to spectator deviance. It states that people are attracted to sport for its aggressive and violent content. The theory goes a step further by asserting the impact sport then has on an individual’s conditioning toward violent acts (Sloan, 1985; Zillmann, Bryant and Sapolsky, 1989).

The Entertainment Theory can be clearly understood by a quick glance at the name. It simply asserts that sports provide pleasure. The motive of entertainment has been shown to be a primary incentive for sport consumption.
Finally, the Achievement Seeking Theory relates directly to the motives of fan identification. It states that through sport consumption, people can identify with the achievement of others. By watching teams be victorious, people inherit self-esteem effects by vicariously sensing achievement through identification with those who succeed in sport.

Fan Motivation

It’s important to clarify the purpose of Wann’s scales of fan motivation and how they relate to spectators. As previously examined, spectators and fans are not synonymous terms for a variety of reasons. Wann’s framework cannot forecast attendance patterns, instead it serves to explain what motivates people to become sport fans, often leading to an individual becoming a spectator.

While research concerning motives of sport spectators has been numerous throughout the fields of psychology, sport sociology and sport management, there is much consistency across decades of study. When the literature has evolved it has done so by adding new variables to existing frameworks and testing available models on new populations and sports. For instance, concerning identification and psychological reactions, BIRG and CORF have been expanded to include other noted fan and spectator reaction. The changing face of sport has also brought about new questions to approach. The emergence of females as sport spectators and participants has led to greater interest in examining how gender impacts sport spectator behavior. Technological advancements
are leading to more research on alternative ways to consume sport. While the research on the Internet as a mode of consumption is still emerging, it is likely there will be a boom in studies concerning the Internet and satellite television and radio.

As the role of sport has evolved in society, so have the motives and attitudes explored by researchers. While in the past stadiums merely housed the sporting event, changing consumer interests are forcing stadiums to provide multiple sources of entertainment, often with the game becoming a secondary source of entertainment at arenas and stadiums. Attend an Arena Football League (AFL) game, packed with dancing, scoreboard games, lasers, magic demonstrations, music blasting, roaring motorcycles and pyrotechnics, and one could get the sensation that the game is secondary to the overall entertainment experience.

While the literature has evolved, one constant motive identified was the entertainment motive. This intention centers on the desire for people to be amused through sports consumption. Wann (1995) noted that entertainment was the most significant level of motivation; this was later affirmed by Armstrong (1999). Zillmann, Bryant and Sapolsky (1989) challenged the simplistic conception of entertainment as simply watching a game, arguing that it is a more complex process rooted in the fundamental disposition of a spectator (Wann, et al., 2001).

Trail et al. (2000) described eustress as a sense of excitement and arousal felt while watching sporting events. While some researchers have focused the attention toward the positive stresses, eustress can also encompass negative stress associated with
sport consumption. The inherent drama of sport produces stress and arousal responses within the body, which are desired by spectators. Hillman, Cuthbert, Cauraugh, Schupp, Bradley and Lang (2000) noted that individuals experienced increased arousal and positive feelings when viewing photos of their favorite teams. It has been argued that humans lack the opportunity for arousal in everyday lives and hence look to sport to fill this void (Trail, Anderson and Fink, 2000). Interestingly, a negative relationship has been shown between drama and length of time as a fan. It is assumed that for some fans, as an individual becomes more attached to a team, the desire to see a close game may decrease, as their desire for victory is greater than their need for drama.

The motive of self-esteem has been represented in a variety of ways, sometimes under the terms “achievement” or “vicarious achievement”. It states that sport provides an opportunity for the spectator to feel better about him or herself. Sloan (1985) presented the motive of vicarious achievement as key for sport spectatorship. Later, Fink et al. (2002a) found vicarious achievement explained a significant amount of variance regarding team identification. Through a connection with a team or player, individuals can share in a sense of goal attainment which may boost their self esteem (Mael and Ashforth, 2001). Trail et al. (2000) summed up the impact of vicarious achievement motives:

Consequently, the sense of accomplishment among fans from the vicarious achievement may provide social prestige and self-esteem (Fisk 1992) and a sense of empowerment (p.157).
When individuals watch a sporting event they can seemingly “get lost” in the action and pace of the event. Sport has been shown to provide a diversion from the daily stresses of life, offer a means of escape for individuals. Escape has provided mixed results in the research (Trail et al., 2000).

Group affiliation corresponds to the social outlet that sports can provide, often presenting an opportunity to spend time with others (Mael and Ashforth, 2001). One vital component of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Human Needs is the desire to belong to a community, family and group. Sports can help fulfill this requirement by providing a community of fans for individuals to identify with. Group affiliation has been shown to be less significant than vicarious achievement as a motive (Fink et al., 2002a), yet it may factor differently for fans of different ages and attachment levels.

The aesthetic quality of sport was defined by Wann as relating to the artistic beauty and grace of athletics. This value has been expanded by other researchers to include competence and the acquisition of athletic excellence as a product of aesthetic motives (Smith, 1988). Fink et al. (2002a) noted the importance of the visual qualities of sport to spectators.

Family and sports are often related. It’s not difficult to envision a packed field on Saturday morning littered with kids playing soccer while parents coach and cheer on the sidelines. The motive of sports providing an opportunity to spend time with family
members can be a powerful incentive for sport patronage. But the motive of family has been shown to have little bearing on the variance of spectator attendance (Fink, et al., 2002a).

Researchers have examined other motives, with varying degrees of consistency. Wann (1995) examines the potential economic gains afforded by gambling related to the sport industry. Economic gains were shown to have the least significant influence by Wann (1995) and Armstrong (1999). Trail et al. (2000) included the acquisition of knowledge as a motive for an individual’s consumption of sport. Along with research by McPherson (1975), they noted the interest fans have in learning statistics, following standings and gaining an awareness of the intricacies of the rules of specific sports. Additionally, Fink et al. (2002a) proposed two additional motives: physical skill and physical attractiveness of the participants. Their research showed the potential motive of physical skill to have little influence, while attractiveness was not permitted to be assessed by the athletic department involved. However, Madrigal and Howard (1999) found physical attractiveness was a relevant motive for both men’s and women’s sport.

It is important to remember what Sloan (1985) cautioned: These motives are not fixed in their importance, and can vary depending on the type of sport involved, as well as fluctuate between situations and individuals. McDonald, Milne and Hong (2002) examined various motives, in reference to Maslow’s Human Needs Hierarchy, for a multitude of sports, ranging from baseball to fishing. Significant differences were noted, particularly relating to social facilitation, self-esteem and competition between sports.
Moreover, Robinson, Trail, Dick and Gillentine (2005) found that individuals attending Division 1-A football were more motivated by vicarious achievement more than spectators at other levels of football.

Research has revealed that stadium factors do influence individual decisions to attend a sporting event (Hill and Green, 2000). In addition to stadium factors, there are numerous game characteristics that can impact an individual’s attendance decisions, like individual players. For instance, the desire to see a star player from either the home or visiting team can influence spectator decisions (Hansen and Gauthier, 1989). The team record, as well as talent of the opposing team, can weigh on spectator choices. Special events and entertainment during the game can also provide an influence, such as a pre-game concert or Bobblehead giveaway for those attending.

Increasingly, more entertainment options are battling for a consumer’s dollar. The rise of extreme sports, home entertainment innovations and a variety of other new industries are placing pressure on sporting outlets to compete for consumers’ attention and money. There exists a variety of economic variables that contribute to consumer decision-making. The price of an item can be particularly influential, regardless of if you are referring to a vacuum, automobile or sport ticket. Ticket costs do influence spectator decisions (Carmichael, Millington and Simmons, 1999). Additionally, household income has also been shown to be a predictor of spectator attendance (Hansen and Gauthier, 1989).
When exploring human behavior and social sciences, demographic characteristics are an often explored variable. While this paper will address the impact of gender in more depth, it must be noted that researchers have explored the impact of population, ethnicity, age, level of education attained and geography.

Audiences also have preferences specific to individual interests and conveniences. For instance, weather can play an important factor in ticket purchases, as well as the stadium, accommodations afforded, schedule and team history. Does the team have good relations with the community? Is the stadium brand new, being a separate attraction to lure spectators?

Team Identification

There are numerous ways to discern what team an individual may identify with. From wearing team paraphernalia and being an avid spectator at events, to emotional mood swings during close games and elation during victory, fans behave in certain ways to allow others to see where their loyalties lie. Team identification is a construct that has been greatly studied and defined in numerous ways, yet all characterizations tend to revolve around a central theme of connectedness. Ashforth and Mael (1989) defined team identification as an individual’s perception of connectedness to an athletic team. Trail, Anderson and Fink (2002) characterized team identification as “an orientation of the self in regard to other objects including a person or group that results in feelings of sentiments of close attachment” (pg. 165-166). Research has revealed team identification is a
predictor of attendance at sporting events (Swanson, Gwinner, Larson and Janda, 2003; Gwinner and Swanson, 2003; Matsuoka, Chelladurai and Harada, 2003; Sloan, 1985; Wann and Branscombe, 1993).

An understanding of team identification is essential to understanding the motives for spectator attendance and vice versa. Various researchers have found that identification may be the most influential psychological factor impacting an individual’s decision to attend a sporting event (Wann et al., 2001; Pease and Zhang, 1996). Furthermore, the motives of an individual for sport consumption explained a significant amount of variance in team identification (Trail, Fink and Anderson, 2003).

An aspect of Maslow’s hierarchy is the need for individuals to attain a sense of belonging. It is the desire for a social identity, as well as a personal identity that fuels identification with community groups and social outlets (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). The sentiment that teams belong to a community is an aspect that separates sports from other industries. Anderson and Stone (1981) identified that sport teams represent a community, and through supporting a team people can feel a sense of association to a community. Crawford noted that “sport is extremely powerful in stimulating local, regional and national pride, and apart from war, sport is one of the few things that binds people to place simply through ascription” (Crawford, 2003, p. 67).

Various studies have identified the numerous points of attachment for fans (Robinson and Trail, 2005; Trail, et al., 2003). Fans and spectators may identify with a host of related figures and symbols, from individual athletes, university, coach and sport.
The process of socialization toward sports fandom and identification with certain teams has been considered through the literature. Socialization agents have a profound impact in the way that people cognitively develop into sport fans. James (2001) defined cognitive development as “the process by which people learn to recognize the larger world around them, to process information, and to make distinctions between different objects and situations (p. 236).” Considering the process of cognitive development, Wann, Tucker and Schrader (1996) explored the reasons why people identify with the teams that they do and found that parents exerted the most influence (McPherson, 1975), followed by player and skill characteristics. Geographic considerations and the influence of peers tied for the third most important motive, while success of team was fifth. Jones (1997) offered somewhat conflicting evidence concluding that the geographical motive of following the local team was the most prominent motive of team identification.

Women’s Consumption of Sport

The topic of women as sport fans and their motivations is an emerging topic of interest, particularly as women become an ever-increasing percentage of sport spectators and fans. Several studies have explored motives and behaviors of female sport fans, yet there lacks a research consensus regarding gendered motives for spectating. However, it must be noted that divergent results among studies may be due in part to researchers using different instruments for their analysis.

Wann, a prolific author on the subject of spectator motives, proposed in 1995 that men and women differ in numerous motive areas of sport spectating. Men scored higher
on measurements registering self-esteem, escape, entertainment, economics, aesthetics and group affiliation, while women recorded higher levels of being motivated by family (Wann, 1995). These differences have been affirmed and disconfirmed throughout future research to varying degrees (James and Ridinger, 2002; Wann, Schrader and Wilson, 1999; Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End and Jacquemotte, 2003). Fink et al. (2002a) suggested vicarious achievement to be a more significant motivator for women, while men recorded higher scores for acquisition of knowledge. Researchers have often produced conflicting results regarding the levels recorded of certain motives, as well as the significance they play in decision-making. For instance, while Wann et al. (1999) affirmed that males scored higher on certain subscales, the study produced contradictory results regarding different levels of entertainment motive registered by men and women.

James and Ridinger (2002) found men recorded higher scores concerning the motives of aesthetics, achievement, empathy, knowledge and family. However, it must be noted the three most significant motives of escape, action and drama registered no gender differences.

James (2002) found men reported a stronger connection to sports in general, though women did report being fans of sport in a significant way. This was reflected in the findings of Dietz-Uhler, End, Jacquemotte, Bentley and Hurlbut (2000) that participants thought that men were more enthusiastic and attracted to sport than women. However, Dietz-Uhler et al. (2003) noted when applying the Sports Spectator Identification Scale (SSI), women and men identified themselves as sport fans in similar
ratios, though men stated they were more likely to watch sports on television. The technical aspects of games were of little interest to women, while women tended not to gain a significant social identity through sport spectating (James, 2002). These findings support the analysis by Fink, Trail and Anderson (2002) and Robinson and Trail (2005). In general, the study concluded men and women rarely differed concerning the most significant motivation factors. However, this article did not affirm, as other research has, that women are motivated more by the social aspect of sport and view sport an opportunity to spend time with their families (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2003). Nevertheless, it did correspond to findings by James (2002) that women did not rate the opportunity to spend time with their family or social interaction higher than men. Women enjoyed the drama and action of sport, while the opportunity sport represented as an escape from their daily routine was rated more favorably than sport as a social outlet (James, 2002).

Though past studies have found females were sport fans for social reasons while men were fans because they enjoyed sport more (Dietz-Uhler, et al., 2000), the study produced by James did not find any notable difference. In fact, James suggests sport marketers ignore the gender of the players in marketing, merely marketing the sport and not the gender (James, 2002). While men and women may perceive themselves in their relationship to sports differently, James concludes their reasons for being consumers of women’s basketball as opposed to men’s basketball are virtually identical.

Fink et al. (2002) presented two key findings regarding gender variance. First, women were more likely to purchase merchandise at an event, though prior research has
found this to be consistently true, since women purchase more than 70 percent of licensed merchandise (Lopiano, 1997). Second, women did not respond to traditional news media outlets, like newspapers, and they were less likely to show a strong interest in statistics (Fink, et al. 2002).

There has also been conflict as to the impact of social forces on both men and women. McPherson (1975) argued that men and women are socialized differently, hence resulting in several factors exerting different levels of influence on men and women. For men, he says, the order of influential forces determining sport conception is friends, family and school, while women are most impacted by family, peers and their community, with school offering very little influence. This has been challenged by Wann et al., (2001) who assert that in a post-Title IX educational environment school influences factor significantly in the socialization process of women becoming fans of sports (Crawford, 2004).

Consumption of Women’s Sport
Various authors have tackled the factors relating to the sport spectator experience within women’s sports. Fink, Trail and Anderson (2002b) analyzed the differences between genders and between spectators at men and women’s intercollegiate basketball games. The authors used three categories to evaluate the spectating experience: environment, present behavior of spectators and future behavior of fans. Their study showed spectators of women’s basketball reported the environmental influences of promotions, social support and ticket pricing all posed a significantly greater influence than those attending
men’s basketball (Fink, et al., 2002). Moreover, spectators at women’s games were more likely to attend future games, buy more merchandise and be influenced by their friends concerning their ultimate attendance decision. Spectators at men’s basketball were more likely to reference their desires to keep track of their team in news media and wear team-related merchandise.

Funk, Mahony and Ridinger (2002) sought to characterize the motivations behind spectator behavior of women’s versus men’s sport. Their study analyzed the motivations for watching both men’s and women’s sport, segmenting their sample by sex and age, while utilizing the Sport Interest Inventory to categorize potential factors. The study focused on women’s soccer, primarily U.S. World Cup spectators, though the findings may have numerous implications for a wider range of women’s sport.

Their study revealed the perceived character of athletes was particularly important to fans of women’s sport. The existence of players as role models was the most important factor for their patronage (Funk, et al., 2002). Following the role model identification was entertainment value of the sport, wholesome environment of the sport, interest in soccer, family environment and lastly, vicarious achievement (Funk et al., 2002). The article made several key recommendations to sport marketers, including providing a fun and entertaining game environment, maintaining a wholesome environment, reasonable ticket pricing and continuing to market players as role models (Funk et al., 2002).

Hansen and Gauthier (1993) examined spectator motives of attendees of the Professional Golf Association (PGA), Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) and
the Professional Golf Seniors Tour. The study revealed those attending LPGA events prioritized the excitement and suspense, fitness associated with following the action and golfer’s swing and play finesse more than those observing other leagues.

Ketra Armstrong (1999) used the American Basketball League (ABL) as a backdrop to investigate consumers of professional women’s basketball, and present a case for the marketing implications involved. Armstrong used a 21-item questionnaire to assess consumer motivations and behavior. In terms of game attendance, the most important motivations for attendance were broken down by sex. The most influential factor for female spectators’ decisions to attend games was being a fan of women’s basketball, followed by wanting to observe the athletes. For male spectators, the most important factor was being a fan of women’s basketball, followed by the need to support the ABL and female sports. The entertainment value also favored heavily for men (Armstrong, 1999). Armstrong continues to make various recommendations to sport marketers concerning methods to maximize their fan base, consisting of both genders.

Kahle, Duncan, Dalakas and Aiken (2001) chose to concentrate on the social values of fans. Utilizing surveys, the study echoed the previous article (James, 2002) in displaying that the four most important motivation factors are the same for men and women. The values of warm relationships with others, self-respect, sense of accomplishment and enjoyment in life were all ranked in order of importance. Women’s basketball fans were slightly more apt to select the value of self-respect, but it did not represent a statistically significant difference (Kahle, et al., 2001). The key difference
cited in the article related to the value of self-fulfillment. Self-fulfillment was de-emphasized by women’s fans, which contrasted to men’s basketball fans and the general public (Kahle, et al., 2001). The authors suggest a focus on self-fulfillment experience and entertainment value would be less effective when attempting to connect with women’s basketball fans (Kahle, et al., 2001).

To further detail the experience of women’s basketball spectators, Kerstetter and Kovich (1997) created an involvement profile for Division I women’s basketball spectators. Notable for sport managers, the profile found the majority of fans of Division I basketball decided, on average, a week before the game to attend. Not surprising the study found that as fans attended more games and became more vested, they tended to agree with statements relating to the importance and pleasurably of women’s basketball (Kerstetter and Kovich, 1997).

Central to the article are Laurent and Kapferer’s (1985) Involvement Profile (IP), which addresses the multidimensional nature of the term “involvement.” The four criteria included in the Involvement Profile are: perceived importance of the product, perceived risk, symbolic value and hedonistic value of the product (Kerstetter and Kovich, 1997). In terms of Division I women’s basketball, the more vested the consumer, the greater sense of hedonistic value present. This should come as no surprise since vested fans represent a vital economic basis for teams.

Perceived risk can encompass many items, from monetary costs to physical dangers. From new fans to the most vested spectator, the Kerstetter and Kovich study
found—across the board—women’s basketball was universally perceived as posing minimal risks (Kerstetter and Kovich, 1997). Respondents reported they believed the cost to be low, little social risks presented and the time investment was insignificant.

Symbolic value can be represented by cost, defined as the relationship between what the consumer is getting to the price being paid. An aspect of symbolic value is rooted in status, achieved from the product purchase or experience (Kerstetter and Kovich, 1997). Though women’s sports didn’t necessarily convey a similar status as men’s sports, survey respondents consistently noted the value presented.

Hedonistic value is a synonym for an emotional appeal or the ability to derive pleasures from a product or experience (Kerstetter and Kovich, 1997). Though the article failed to address the results in relation to hedonistic value, it can be inferred through previous values that the experience brought consumers pleasure. Members of sport booster clubs were among the most vested fans, with a high level of hedonic value (Kerstetter and Kovich, 1997).

Research concerning women as sport consumers could be described as limited and overly specific to certain sports, notably basketball and soccer. However, the research is also lacking in specific demographic subgroups of women. One study successfully addressed a growing and influential group of female consumers by exploring the teen and pre-teen marketplace. The Bradish and Lathrop (2001) study examined sport consumers between the ages of 8 and 14. In the United States alone, girls account for $48 billion in annual spending: $15 billion of their own money and $33 billion through their
influence over family purchases (Cleaver, 1999). Bradish and Lathrop distributed more than 500 surveys to explore the consumer behaviors of this thriving market segment. In 1998, the Sporting Good Manufacturing Association reported 73 percent of the $12.5 billion spent on sports apparel in 1997 came from women. They bought 94 percent of women’s sport apparel, 89 percent of children’s and 45 percent of men’s (Sporting Goods Manufacturing Association, 1998).

Results from these studies present a very optimistic outlook for females in sport. Although many of the respondents feel their families support them, paradoxically they feel society continues to disadvantage female athletes. They viewed themselves as athletes in a society that provides little professional opportunities in sport and little media coverage of women’s sport (Bradish and Lathrop, 2001). As consumers, they tend to purchase athletic clothes and products approximately once a month, and tend to spend an average of $100-$120 for every pair of athletic shoes. Additionally, they cited their mothers as the primary influencer over purchases (Bradish & Lathrop, 2001).

In terms of brand loyalty, survey respondents desired companies to promote women’s sport to a greater degree in marketing materials, while advancing social and civic responsibilities. They also believe health initiatives play an important role in their participation decisions, which ultimately impact their sport consumer behavior (Bradish & Lathrop, 2001).
Women’s Sport and the “Media”

While understanding sport spectator motives is essential to understanding potential explanations for disinterest in sport, it only fails to see women’s sport placed in the context of greater social attitudes and perceptions of female athletes and their athletic endeavors. While there are numerous ways to approach the cultural positioning of women’s sport, many scholars have examined the representations of women’s sport through mass media outlets and their profound impact on societal perceptions of women’s athletics.

The images and portrayals of female athletes often take on a sociologically manipulative nature, assigning women to a status of second-class citizens. Yet, it is important not to demonize news media outlets or insist that they—whomever the “they” might encompass—is to blame fully for the lesser status of many female athletes and leagues. News media outlets have an incredible function in our society, wielding great power and authority in our lives. Considerable research has been documented concerning the often-conflicted relationship between media and women’s sport.

Before discussing the framing of women’s sport by media outlets, it is vital to discuss the contentious issue of media effects. Do media outlets exert significant control and impact over our decisions? There is no consensus within the fields of communication and media studies, and many lively debates have mounted throughout the research literature.
“The media.” It is an ambiguous term, often blamed for a variety of social ills. However, it is essential to offer a definition providing clarity as to what exactly, “the media” is. For the purpose of this paper, “media outlets,” “mass media” and “news media” will refer to the most common sources of sports programming and news, namely, print, radio, television and Internet. The purpose of these media outlets is to provide information and entertainment for consumers.

While print, radio and television journalism and communication has been a long-studied entity, Internet communication represents a much newer medium, one that has only recently been explored. The Internet has changed the way news and sports information enter the home, becoming for many Americans a primary way to access both entertainment and news sources. This innovation has been particularly revolutionary to the field of sports, where global Internet broadcasts, online sport pages and fan blogs are altering the relationship between consumer and producer of sports news. Boyle and Haynes (2003) explain:

The global availability of sports information and analysis via digital networks is transforming the way in which breaking news about sports is gathered, selected and disseminated. The speed at which journalists can send information to each other and to online media is radically altering our expectations of sports news and our capacity to consume it (p.96).

While new research is emerging regarding the impact of the Internet on the sports world, much has yet to be learned concerning this powerful medium.
While historically news has been distributed primarily through the medium of newspapers, television and Internet have revolutionized the production and distribution of news and entertainment. However, newspapers still reach a considerable portion of the population, with the sport section drawing much interest. The Newspaper Association of America (2000) reported that 65 percent of the population reads newspapers during the week, with the sport section ranking second in readership (43 percent of adults reading) behind general news. Regarding television, a whopping 98 percent of homes have a television, with 68 percent of televisions connected to cable service (Parks and Quartermann, 2003). Research has shown that 54 percent of the population watches sports news daily, while of the 43 highest rated programs of all time, 21 were sporting programs (Famighetti, 1998).

In 1963, B.C. Cohen wrote a seminal declaration on the impact of mass media. He asserted that media “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling readers what to think about” (p. 13). In the subsequent 50 years, many scholars have explored the methods employed by mass media to direct and control what individuals think about. Pamela Creedon likened the impact of mass media to other cultural elements:

> Contemporary mass media, like the plays, epic poems, fairy tales, fables, parables and myths before them, preserve, transmit and create important cultural information...[influencing] our language, clothing styles and concepts of heroes and heroines (Goodman, Duke, Sutherland, 2002, p. 374).
The influencing agents within mass media are diverse, yet three chief ways have emerged from the canon of communication and media studies to explain media impact: agenda-setting, social construction of reality and framing.

*Agenda Setting Theory*

The concept of agenda setting is the process by which mass media, aided and influenced by interest groups and social norms, choose to place issues at the forefront of news while others garner little attention. Various studies have fleshed out the process of agenda setting, most notably when Lang and Lang (1981) created a four-step model depicting the sequence of news media coverage of the Watergate scandal. Moreover, several studies have highlighted the connection between news media coverage and public concern over issues, finding that mass media can impact what people view as important issues through their coverage of those matters over other potential issues (Behr and Iyengar, 1985; McCombs and Shaw, 1972). This influence by media is referred to as “priming hypothesis” and can be found throughout media studies literature, often examined in relation to mass media and political campaigns (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Iyengar and Simon, 1993).

*Social Construction of Reality*

The notion of a social construction of reality reaches across a variety of disciplines from media studies to psychology to sociology. Mass media are important windows into our understanding of what happens in the world, what kind of place our world is. Yet media are also essential to provide understanding of other people, places,
cultures and values of different individuals and groups, thus painting a portrait of the social reality of our lives (Hall, 1982). Sport is a social construction. There is no intrinsic meaning of athletics and athletes, only that which we assign. Gender is another social construction, whereby society assigns norms, controls and socially appropriate behavior to sex classifications. News can also be viewed as a social construction; events never speak for themselves, they are couched in narratives and given priority over other newsworthy events.

Consider this: When you are watching a televised sporting event, what would it look like if it was stripped down to just the game itself? The truth is televised sports are a packaged and constructed story of the game, utilizing slow motion and stop motion videotape, enhancements like colored lines indicating first-down yardage, music, instant replays, officials and coaches with microphones and split screens. Several studies have examined the differences in framing between women’s and men’s sport, including the AAF (1990) television study that found profound inequities in areas like quality and use of camera work, editing and sound, noting that women’s sport was characterized by a lack of technical resources (Duncan and Messner, 1996). Within the depiction of male sports, what remains is a skillful masterpiece of spectacle, highlighting violence, brutality, skill and the magnification of individual players and actors (Burstyn, 1999). This is done to repackage sport as more than just a game, but rather voyeuristic entertainment.

*Media Framing*
Framing is often cited within literature regarding media effect within society. McCombs defined framing as “the selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media agenda when a particular object is discussed” (McCombs, 1997, p. 6). Media framing in sport can be through the on-air broadcaster commentary during live events, to the language utilized in a newspaper column, a sports radio talk show or a segment on *SportsCenter*. It can be a central theme in a story, like an athlete overcoming adversity.

Researchers employing an experimental design demonstrated that individuals who watched a hockey game with broadcasters purposefully illustrating rough, violent play, reported the game to be more aggressive than others watching without such commentary (Comisky, Bryant and Zillmann, 1977).

There are countless ways of looking at a baseball game or viewing the events of a close tennis match. The framework utilized by broadcasters and mass media outlets constructs and describes what viewers and individuals are looking at. The impact and nature of framing is related to prospect theory. Dietram Scheufele wrote concerning the cluster of conceptual items regarding framing:

> Framing is based on the concept of prospect theory; that is, on the assumption that subtle changes in the wording of the description of situation might affect how audience members interpret this situation. In other words, framing influences how audience think about issues, not by making aspects of the issue more salient, but by invoking interpretive schemas that influence the interpretation of incoming information (Scheufele, 2000, p. 309).
The frames most available through mass media tend to shape audiences’ attitudes or reactions to particular events (Price and Tewksbury, 1997). Framing and agenda-setting represent two substantial ways in which media outlets craft messages to consumers. A current debate within media studies centers on whether media outlets reflect cultural norms or create them. The answer, though greatly dependent on your vantage point, may lie somewhere in the middle. However, what is not debatable is the predominance of men, particularly white men, as on-air broadcasters. Men are set up as the “voices of authority” in sport, hence they have incredible control over how the action is framed for both men and women’s sport (Messner, 2002).

Duncan and Messner (1996) presented the impact of framing within the context of audience building. They define audience building as priming and hyping an audience through promotions, advertising, game production and athlete marketing to build anticipation for watching the sporting event. Television producers and executives actively build audiences for such events as the Super Bowl and NCAA Men’s Final Four using media strategies not employed when dealing with women’s sport. Duncan and Messner (1996) write, “this failure, coupled with the inferior production values, virtually guaranteed less audience interest in the women’s competitions.”

A substantial amount of research exists regarding the framing of women’s sport by media outlets (Duncan, 1990; Halbert and Latimer, 1994; Messner, Duncan and Jensen, 2001; Eastman and Billings, 1999; Tuggle and Owen, 1999). The history of
women’s sport can be summarized as a challenge to the dominant hegemony of sport, namely, athletics as a masculine preserve. It is important to explore the relationship between media outlets and the maintenance of male superiority in athletics.

Cultural Values and the Media Machine

The world of sports was constructed by, for and about the male athlete. In a world where gender order and rigid gender classifications reign supreme, sport, as well as the military, continues to remain an institution where boys become men and male superiority is affirmed.

Michael Messner, a prolific author on the subject of gender and sport offers a warning to those who assume co-ed teams and T-ball leagues are exempt from the powers that assign strict gender definitions. He writes, “Organizations even while appearing gender neutral, tend to reflect, re-create, and naturalize a hierarchical ordering of gender” (Messner, 2002, p. 9 –attributed to Acker, Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies, 1990). Messner goes on to describe a “gender regime of sport, a dynamic institution which seeks to maintain and promote male hegemony in sport.” He writes that female athletes must cope with the institutional structures of sport which were an “historically formed, entrenched system of rules, conventions, allocations of resources and opportunities, and hierarchical authority and status systems, much which resists progressive action toward equity” (Messner, 2002, p. 65).

Furthermore, media can help maintain male hegemony in sport by positioning male athletes and sport as the model of male masculinity. Often times, broadcasters liken
male football players to warriors or invincible machines, strong and eager to conquer their foe as if they were in war (Trujillo, 1995; Jansen and Sabo, 1994). Duncan and Messner (1998) reference an analysis of advertising in male body building magazines, conducted by White and Gilbert (1994). The authors concluded:

The advertisements in *Flex* naturalize the desirability of male musculature thus producing meanings about the significance of physical gender differences—that the larger, more muscular male body is biologically superior to that of the lesser female body (Duncan and Messner, 1998, p. 175).

Creedon explores the nature of mass media culture to explore its maintenance of gendered hegemony. She argues that the nature of the field of sports journalism, a male-dominated bastion where covering women’s sports is considered the bottom rung of the office totem pole, maintains the hegemony of a gendered media system. She writes, “hegemony refers to an infrasystem of values that overshadows our awareness and helps dominant groups maintain their power. The sports coverage hierarchy model is a manifestation of it” (Creedon, 1998, p. 93).

Though women have made great gains in the sporting arena, breaking down once impenetrable barriers though legal action, court decisions and cultural progress, the sports world still presents many challenges to the advancement of women. While doors have been opened to women, the gendered order of sport still places women as athletic sideshows to their male peers.

Media outlets are central to maintaining the gender order of sport, and the continuance of athletics as a prime vehicle of masculinization. Varda Burstyn writes “the
influence of sport as a gendered cultural practice and spectacle is a result of its marriage to the communications industries” (Burstyn, 1999, p.105). Cultural values exert great pressure on media outlets to couple images with a certain frame or explanation. These pressures come in a variety of forms, yet ultimately the marriage of money and power in an industry where increasingly fewer mega-corporations own a larger share of media outlets helps construct programming content. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) studied the construction of media messages as a priority of the cultural elite, citing the process as a “two-step flow” of information sharing.

Furthermore, while the number of women participating and watching sport grows, television executives commonly refer to "supply and demand” forces as a reason for excluding coverage of women’s sport. Duncan and Messner (1998) explain, “Television producers have sometimes argued that the sports audience is comprised mostly of men who aren’t interested in women’s sports; therefore, producers are simply giving viewers what they want by devoting more resources to men’s games (p.173).

These messages and pressures imparted by mass media are creations of those who produce the stories and programs that encompass sport media outlets. An examination of the newspaper industry clearly shows that the people generating the messages and frames are men. In a 2003 study, Pedersen, Whisenant and Schneider, (2003) found that men make up 91 percent of reporters, nearly 79 percent of photographers and a whopping 100 percent of sports editors. The authors explain:

In keeping with the symbiotic relationship between sports and the newspaper media, the results of this study revealed that the newspapers
reaffirmed the hegemonic masculinity found in sport by focusing their coverage on boys’ athletics. Not only was there an affirmation of a male bias in the amount of coverage, all of the components of the newspaper personnel were found to be the generic preserve of men (p. 387).

Media Manipulation and Coverage of Women’s Sport

Through this collection of knowledge, three principal ways in which media address gender in women’s sports have emerged. These manifestations, either intentional or inadvertent, inflict an extraordinary burden on women’s sport, depicting women as substandard to their male counterparts (Kane, 1989). Media depictions serve to show women as an “other,” something distinct from their male athlete peers or female non-athletes.

The first element of the portrayal of women’s sport in media regards the sexualization of female athletes. Utilizing photographs and written text, media tend to emphasize the physical and sexual differences, instead of reporting on athletic skill and accomplishments (Kane and Parks, 1992; Jones, et al., 1999; Eastman and Billings, 1999). Media consistently downplay the athleticism of women, choosing to accentuate femininity and traditional family roles.

While gender distinctions structure the human experience (Griffin, 1998), female athletes pose a threat to socially constructed rigid gender classification. Thus the notion of sexualization also can extend to the use of the “lesbian label” to control and intimidate female athletes. Since female athletes pose a threat to the perceived distinctions between men and women, the use of labeling someone a lesbian is to restrict their ability to challenge gender norms. Pat Griffin, a notable author on the subject of homophobia in
sport, connects the feminine descriptors placed on female athletes and the fear of lesbians in sport. She writes, “Femininity, however, is a code word for heterosexual. The concern is not that women athletes are too plain, out of style, or don’t have good grooming habits. The real fear is that women athletes will look like dykes, or even worse, are dykes, (Griffin, 1998, p. 66).”

In 1995, a newspaper quoted CBS golf commentator Ben Wright describing how the LPGA was being ruined by lesbians parading their homosexuality (Cahn, 1994). While not all instances of homophobia in mass media are that blunt, often times media outlets employ the use of “heterosexualizing female athletes through emphasizing their relationships with men (Knight and Giuliano, 2003, p. 272).”

Moreover, the scrutiny regarding Martina Navratilova’s gender following her announcement of being bisexual affirmed media outlets gendered and homophobic portrayal. Some within news media questioned whether she was physiologically a woman or was a manipulation of both genders. Susan Cahn (1994) explained:

The kind of homophobic responses evoked by Navratilova and other lesbian athletes are most intense when female excellence or demands pose a threat to traditional sources of men’s power. This is often the situation with professional sport, collegiate athletics, and women’s sport advocacy groups, arenas in which women have commanded attention and demanded equality (p. 266).

The WNBA is particularly vulnerable to being characterized as a “lesbian league” by commentators and critics. In response, the WNBA has sent mixed messages in how it markets to and acknowledges its large lesbian fan base. Often times this reality is in
direct contrast to the league’s desire to position itself as entertainment option for families. Tanenbaum (2002) notes:

The WNBA, which consciously tries to project a “family-friendly” wholesome image, handpicks its stars for their feminine (read: heterosexual) appeal as much as for their abilities on the court (p. 291).

While some teams have been quite progressive in marketing themselves to the lesbian community, others have been less interested. While the Miami Sol and Seattle Storm have organized gay pride nights and sponsored player appearances in lesbian bars, the New York Liberty has struggled with a contentious lesbian fan organization, “Lesbians for Liberty.” Accusing the WNBA and Liberty management of ignoring their significant presence at games, the group organized a “kiss-in” and protested with giant banners that read “Lesbians fill your seats.”

Secondly, media coverage of women’s sport tends to include ambivalent language (Duncan and Messner, 1996; Higgs and Weiller, 1994). The authors found that particularly in women’s basketball and tennis, commonly used language minimizing athletes’ strength and power. During tennis commentary, broadcasters made mention of male strength attributions four times as much as they used weakness descriptors, while during women’s tennis, the use of strength and weakness attributions were even. Likewise, in basketball, the ratio of strength-to-weakness commentary for men was 6 to 1, while it was noted that women’s basketball was 2 to 1 (Duncan and Messner, 1998). In their analysis of NCAA men’s and women’s basketball, Eastman and Billings (2000) noted that broadcast commentary often included language regarding female athletes’
slower speed and team effort, rather than a focus on individual performance. This was also apparent in the 2000 analysis of NCAA men’s and women’s Final Four coverage, when Billings, Halone and Denham (2002) noted:

Even within the context of the Final Four – male athletes were evaluated as being significantly more physical and athletic in nature. Conversely, female athletes were accounted for primarily with respect to (a) where they come from, (b) having a good night, (c) having a good personality, and (d) what they look like (p. 313).

Moreover, on-air broadcasts have exposed gendered attributions of success and failure. Halbert and Latimer (1994) examined the exhibition match between Martina Navratilova and Jimmy Connors. Their study exposed the prevalence of gender disparity in the application of commentary that praises and observations that are critical. During the Navratilova/Connors match, Halbert and Gilbert observed more criticism than praise for Navratilova, while Connors was praised more than four times as often as he was the focus of criticism. This praise gap has been observed in different sports throughout the literature (Eastman and Billings, 1999). Moreover Eastman and Billings (1999) observed the different ways commentators attribute the success of athletes, often proscribing success differently for males and females. Commentators primarily used four themes to indicate the basis of male success in sport: athletic ability, composure under stress, experience and courage (Eastman and Billings, 1999). Moreover, commentators disproportionately mention the mental health of women athletes, blaming the athlete’s struggles and failure on assumed fragile emotional states (Hilliard, 1994; Halbert and Latimer, 1994; Daddario, 1994).
Messner, Duncan and Jensen (2001) described the tenets of gendered success attributions in sport:

Men appeared to succeed through a combination of talent, instinct, intelligence, size, strength, quickness, hard work, and risk-taking. Women also appeared to succeed through talent, enterprise, hard work, and intelligence. But commonly cited along with these attributes were emotion, luck, togetherness, and women. Women were also more likely to be framed as failures due to some combination of nervousness, lack of confidence, lack of being comfortable, lack of aggression, and lack of stamina – men appeared to miss shots and lose matches not so much because their own individual shortcomings, but because of the power, strength and intelligence of their (male) opponents (p. 89).

This commentary professes that men lose because they are at the losing end of other powerful male athletes, yet women’s lack of success is because individual psychological and physical flaws.

Not all forms of media oppression are as obvious as the two previously cited. A more subtle manipulation of media is through prioritizing women’s sports that emphasize more traditional aspects of femininity, like grace, balance and aesthetics (Coakley, 1998). For example, in Olympic sports, figure skating and gymnastics are often profiled in lieu of other events with more masculine ideologies. Tuggle and Owen (1999) observed how during the 1996 Atlanta games, television focused their women’s coverage to sports where participant physical attractiveness were highlighted, including gymnastics and diving, while relegating events such as softball, soccer and cycling to downtime segments (Tuggle and Owen, 1999).

Various studies have been conducted to reflect these three main media elements. Weiler, and Higgs (1999) conducted a descriptive study of media representations of
women’s golf, as opposed to the men’s professional tour. There were numerous key differences presented, involving both visual representations and the use of descriptive language.

Foremost, commentators primarily used first name identification for female golfers, while the men’s game featured mainly last names. Though this may seem like a minor difference, it is reflective of the casual nature of the presentation of the game (Weiller, et al., 1999). This was also apparent during the previous study examining tennis when Martina Navratilova was commonly referred to as “Martina,” while her male competitor was referenced as “Connors” (Halbert and Latimer, 1994). During observed basketball games, women were referenced by their first name 31 times, while this only occurred on 19 occasions during men’s games (Messner, et al., 2001).

There are important differences related to how athletic tournaments are visually presented and their importance articulated. Often, men’s sports are featured as a spectacle that cannot be missed, the highlight and pinnacle of the sporting world. The entire month of March is transformed by the men’s NCAA March Madness tournament, while the women’s championship tournament is portrayed by news media as being a second-tier event with little fanfare (Messner, Duncan and Wachs, 1996).

This overemphasis on men’s tournaments also manifests itself in the visual displays accompanying the media hype. Men’s tournaments are introduced with a longer and more sophisticated coverage than women’s tournaments. For instance, both the Masters and P.G.A. tournament relied heavily on the historical legacy of those events,
using an excessive amount of slow-motion clips to illustrate the mystical figures of the past (Weiller, et al., 1999). In contrast, L.P.G.A. tournaments were introduced by showing highlights of other tournaments from the year and previous tournament winners. There was a minimal sense of emotionality in the narrative used to introduce women’s events, compared to those on the men’s tour. The authors accurately concluded that the limited use of music, slow-motion replays and the focus on “greatness of the champions” resulted in a less interesting and less impassioned portrayals of the women golfers (Weiller, et al., 1999).

The study continued its visual focus on tournaments, noting that the closings of tournaments were also treated differently. The P.G.A. and Masters tournaments all featured the trophy presentations and extensive interviews with winners and participants. Alternatively, the women’s tournament ended more abruptly, with a quick announcement of the winner, and incredibly limited interviews (Weiller, et al., 1999).

It has often been noted in sport research that race and gender play a role in how commentators describe successes and failures. The study conducted by Weiller and associates found the world of golf is not immune to this occurrence. Commentators often would add dialogue to the women’s tournament pointing out athletes’ status as mothers or wives, in contrast to the men’s tournament where personal non-golf related information was kept to a minimum. The authors summed up their observations by noting when personal information was given about women it had to do with marital status, what they were wearing or how they looked (Weiller, et al., 1999). This was later affirmed in
additional studies which observed television commentators utilizing domestic narratives of athletes as working parents, caregivers and heterosexual partners (Vande Berg and Projanky, 2003). Online versions of television media outlets have also fallen victim to the motherhood narrative frequently found in more traditional mass media sources. Two recent articles on ESPN.com showcase this manipulation. An ESPN.com feature story focused on WNBA standout, Taj McWilliams (Voepel, ESPN.com). Instead of discussing her role in leading her team to the finals, the author instead chose to focus on her family demands, leading the article with the statement, “Missing 10 shots is nothing compared to feeding your kid on $1.50.” The article concludes that she gains her “full life” by the experience of getting married and having children, a label rarely if ever placed on male athletes. The article states:

Now, she’s married with two daughters. She has a full life, which includes taking care of her family, sewing, designing clothes, cooking and writing. Oh, and she loves watching pro wrestling, her favorites include The Rock and Shawn Michaels.

The article chronicles her fears of her husband being deployed by the military, as well as the stresses of being a mother and athlete. While McWilliams enjoys success as a WNBA All Star, the article positions the stresses of playing basketball against those as a parent, concluding, “And so, a 1-for-11 shooting game is never going to keep her awake (at night).”

Gender-based language also continues with the use of the term “girl” during tournaments. The word “girl” was used on 27 occasions to describe women golfers during the Du Maurier Classic (Weiller, et al., 1999). During basketball and tennis
events, women were referred to as “girl” and “young ladies” (Messner, et al., 2001). Many would agree the term “girl” is demeaning and retains negative connotations when applied to anyone over the age of 15.

In addition, the use of the term “girl” helps establish another gendered narrative of broadcasters, one that characterizes women as subservient figures whose successes are dependent on the wisdom of their male coaches. In a study examining television coverage of women’s and men’s professional basketball, Vande Berg and Projansky (2003) noted that female athletes were relegated to simply taking orders from male experts, instead of acting on their own athleticism, agency or experience. Furthermore, the game commentators framed women athletes as “children who needed to be scolded, disciplined, and given orders by expert adults” (VandeBerg and Projansky, 2003, p. 34).

Another way news media outlets reduce women’s sport to second-tier status is by a lack of coverage. Recent studies have shown that shows like CNN’s Sports Tonight and ESPN’s SportsCenter devote 7 percent and 5 percent respectively to women’s sport. Numerous studies concerning Olympic coverage have noted that cameras are primarily fixated on men’s athletic endeavors (Higgs and Weiler, 1994; Eastman and Billings, 1999; Tuggle and Owen, 1999). The newspaper industry, while more inclusive of women’s sport coverage, still only dedicates 37 percent of its sport coverage to female athletics (Wann, Schrader, Allison and McGeorge, 1998). In a review of university newspapers, Wann et.al. (2001), found that articles regarding female athletes are shorter and less likely to be placed with photography. The recent AAF study of gender in
televised sport found, amongst other inequalities, that women’s sports receive less coverage than they did five years ago, garnering only 6.3 percent of airtime compared to the 1999 average of 8.7 percent (AAF, 2005). Michael Messner summed up the disparate coverage of LPGA stars Annika Sorenstam and Karrie Webb, against the backdrop of waves of coverage offered up to Tiger Woods, their comparable male star on the PGA circuit:

Tiger Woods is a household name, far fewer people know the names Karrie Webb or Annika Sorenstam. And the reason for this is simple: the major sports media and commercial sponsors constantly serve up images and commentary on Woods while ignoring Webb and Sorenstam or relegating images, commentary, and advertisements featuring them to marginal media and smaller commercial markets…if SportCenter, the major TV networks, and Sport Illustrated don’t show us Karrie Webb or Annika Sorenstam, then as important cultural symbols, they do not exist (Messner, 2002, p.109).

Furthermore, when women do grace the pages of newspapers and sport magazines, they come from sports accentuating femininity. The athletes are featured not in athletic poses and often the only thing they are sporting is makeup (Fink and Kensicki, 2002). One study examining the amount of coverage afforded to men’s and women’s college basketball found no difference between genders (Cunningham and Sagas, 2002), yet it must be noted that the study only observed university-controlled Web sites, not independent media outlets.

While the 1999 Women’s Soccer World Cup championship represented one of the decades biggest sport stories, it attracted little initial attention from news media outlets.
Largely ignored by media sources, Michelle Kaufman of the *Miami Herald* had to pay her own expenses to cover the championship match, only to be reimbursed after the event (Longman, 2000).

Longman, whose book chronicled the World Cup team, discussed the lack of media coverage and the pinnacle moment in sports wholly disregarded by mass media:

> The World Cup provoked, imperiled, stunned male dominion. Mitch Albom of the *Detroit Free Press*, who is regularly voted the top sports columnist in the country by sports editors, accused the media of behaving “shamefully” and “irresponsibly” in leading the American bandwagon. In fact, the only irresponsible behavior was in ignoring the Women’s World Cup. And there was no media bandwagon (Longman, 2000, p. 28).

The lack of media exposure has a ripple effect throughout women’s sport. First, the most immediate outcome is a lack of awareness by consumers of a local sport product, national league or individual athletes. The story of the Columbus Quest, from the now defunct American Basketball league (ABL), serves as a cautionary tale for other women’s leagues. At the pinnacle of the sport, the Quest led the league in wins and was dead last in attendance. One reason for stifled attendance was competition from the Ohio State women’s basketball program, yet lack of media coverage certainly contributed. The woes of the Quest did catch the eye of a *Sports Illustrated* reporter, Steve Lopez, who administered an unscientific survey as part of an article about the Quest. He wrote:

> Yet almost no one goes to watch the games. If anybody could explain why, it had to be these people in the park, many of whom lived within walking distance of the Greater Columbus Convention Center, which houses the Quest’s home court. O.K., folks. Any of you ever hear of the women’s pro team in town? And if so, what’s it called? Ten people were given a fair shot at answering those questions. They did not test well. Five of the 10 weren’t aware that there was an ABL team in Columbus. Seven
of the people couldn’t name the team. None of the 10 had been to a game, and not one of them – including a young man who had been given the tickets to a future game as a gift – had a clue where the Quest plays its home games (Lopez, 1999, p. 64).

Lack of media exposure can lead to lack of consumer awareness, thus making more difficult the ability of women’s teams to achieve the same level of brand equity as their male peers. The vast majority of team sports garnering significant media attention are men’s sports. Turning on the television and seeing a women’s team focused is generally an exception, rather than the norm. This has led to what Gerbner (1978) labeled as the “symbolic annihilation” of women’s sport. Mary Jo Festle puts the impact of media exposure into perspective:

> Viewers and reader intermittently receive scores and updates, but they do not become devoted followers of women’s sports since the media do not report its day-to-day drama. Potential fans do not discover the personalities of the main characters—the super-talented stars, the hustling overachievers, the dependable role players—nor the plot lines of winning streaks, altered strategies, and upsets (Festle, xxiv).

Media disinterest often leads to similar sentiments on the part of sponsors, and potentially sport consumers. For instance, studies have shown potential sponsors tend to favor those athletes who are perceived as powerful and successful. Media often portray women athletes as being supportive and encouraging, instead of risk-takers and bold individuals (Messner, 1998). Moreover, popular media outlets often downplay women’s successes in competitive sport through the use of degrading and often sexist language and images (Messner, 1998). The culmination of these factors often leads to a lack of image
equity and definition in women’s sports, making it very difficult for fans to become psychologically connected to teams or athletes, particularly those motivated by vicarious achievement.

Media representation of women has been observed and studied in other sports as well. Christopherson, Janning, and McConnell (2002) examined media discourse surrounding the 1999 Women’s Soccer World Cup. The 1999 World Cup was seen, and is still considered today, as the pinnacle event in modern sports for women. Observed by the world and a sold-out stadium, the United States team won in dramatic fashion against the team from China. Yet, even as the women’s soccer team showed the world and the nation that women could compete in dramatic and athletic fashion, media covering the event fell into the gender game, using language as a weapon to connote society’s insistence of a cultural hierarchy placing women solely beneath their male counterparts. Christopherson and her colleagues collected hundreds of articles from major newspaper and magazine publishers, analyzing them for content and tone. As they hypothesized, a significant amount of newspaper coverage of the Women’s World Cup contained a high amount of gendered commentary (Christopherson, et al., 2002). Their study discovered nearly half the articles made reference to the status of women in some way, while just under one third of all articles mentioned the appearance, body or sexuality of players and/or the audience. Similarly, 36 percent of the articles described the players or audience in conventionally feminine ways (Christopherson, et al., 2002).
Sports Illustrated has been at the forefront of sports journalism for the last half-century. Scholars Michael Salwen and Natalie Wood examined 504 magazine covers for the use of gender-specific visualizations of female athletes on Sports Illustrated covers from 1957-1989. Though it is important to note that this time period represents enormous culture shifts in opportunities and perceptions of women, the study is still worth consideration.

The study confirmed females received less coverage than males, and females were more likely than males to be depicted in stereotypical traditional poses (Rintala and Birrell, 1984; Leath and Lumpkin, 1992). Duncan and Messner (1998) characterized the visual depictions of female athletes throughout the media:

Sportswomen were more likely to be photographed in postures connoting deference (lower physical positions, smaller size, head and body canting) than men, while men were more likely portrayed in postures connoting dominance (higher physical elevation, larger size, positions of protectiveness and distance) than women. If men and women were shown together, men would often be placed in the center (the power position) with women on the periphery (the subordinate position) (p.176).

When female athletes did grace the cover they were far less likely to be portrayed in active poses. Furthermore, nearly 45 percent of the time women were on the cover of Women’s Sport and Fitness Magazine, the individual was not an athlete, but a model (Leath and Lumpkin, 1992). The scholars who conducted a longitudinal study of Sports Illustrated, confirmed there was no evidence of increased coverage of females on the cover (Salwen and Wood, 1994).
There is one issue of *Sports Illustrated* chock full of women, both on the cover and gracing the pages. The swimsuit issue, while beginning with a variety of articles emphasizing men’s and women’s fashion, has been replaced by a collection of scantily-clad female models. While the connection between the swimsuit issue and sport is weak, especially since *Sports Illustrated* fails to cover swimming in depth the other 11 months of the year, the majority of females in the swimsuit issue are models, not athletes. The intent of the swimsuit issue is obvious: the commodification, objectification and voyeurism of the female body as simply a product for male consumption (Davis, 1997). It is for these reasons the swimsuit issue is immensely profitable, demanding higher advertising rates than other issues of *Sports Illustrated*. Laurel Davis (1997) wrote concerning the impact of this depiction of females and its connection to male hegemony in sport:

The problem with *Sports Illustrated*’s practice of securing a large audience of men by creating an atmosphere of hegemonic masculinity is that on the way to the bank it tramples over women, gays/lesbians, people of color, and people from the (post)colonialized world…the hegemonic masculine ideal is sexist because it defines women primarily in terms of their sexual/beauty appeal to men, and men with respect to their power over other people (p.121).
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As stated previously, the purpose of this study is to investigate female consumption of women’s sport through the voices and perspectives of female fans of men’s basketball who do not attend women’s events. I will also explain how their attitudes and disinterest may be related to gendered media portrayals, socialization and distinct spectator motives. Qualitative methodology will be employed because, related to the goals of the study, semi-structured interviews will allow for the communication of study participants’ thoughts, feelings, experiences and reactions in a way that would not be feasible using other research methods.

This methodology has been defined in numerous ways, all related to the different strategies employed to study similar overarching themes. According to Glesne (1999), Tesch (1990) establishes four areas of research that have come to characterize qualitative research. Figure 1.1 depicts the four areas of research interests within qualitative methodology.
Areas of Interest | Methods Utilized
---|---
Characteristics of Language | Discourse Analysis, Ethnoscience, Symbolic Interactionism
Discovery of Regularities | Grounded Theory, Critical Research, Ethnography
Discerning Meaning | Phenomenology, Case Study, Life History, Hermeneutics
Reflection | Educational Connoisseurship, Reflective Phenomenology, Heuristic Research

Figure 1.1 – Categorization of Qualitative Research Interests (Glesne, 1999)

Setting out to produce a concrete definition of qualitative research can be difficult because it has materialized in different forms utilizing different methods. Basic definitions of qualitative research broadly mean “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 17). While many of these early definitions positioned qualitative research against the backdrop of quantitative research, these philosophies and methods do not need to be seen as universal opposites and instead should be defined and conceptualized independent of each other. Golafshani defined qualitative research as “a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, such as a real world setting where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600).
important aspect of qualitative research is the researcher’s intent to seek illumination and understanding of human phenomenon and meaning (Hoepfl, 1997) while also coming to embrace her or his involvement and role within the research (Patton, 2001).

Situating the Study Methodologically

In her acceptance speech of the 2004 Earle F. Zeigler Award, researcher Wendy Frisby challenged the sport management community to embrace multiple paradigms to understand the numerous element of sport management. She writes:

The paradigms we operate from as researchers, whether it be positivism, pragmatism, interpretivism, critical social science, post modernism, or a combination of these paradigms, shape the questions we ask, the methods we use, and the degree to which our findings will have an impact on society (Frisby, 2005, p. 2).

Frisby, while not making value judgments concerning certain paradigms, speaks to the importance of writing with paradigmatic lenses in mind, seeking to situate the researcher’s work within her or his view of the world. While this can be a complex undertaking, it is the foundation of qualitative research.

For qualitative researchers, the process of knowledge creation is deeply rooted in the ontology, epistemology and methodology embraced by the individual researcher. For this study, aspects of social constructivism and critical theory will frame the author’s interpretation.

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism asserts that humans construct knowledge using collective social instruments such as language and cultural practices. Writing through the
constructivist paradigm becomes an authoritative account of a constructed reality. This framework is based on dialogue of transactional exchanges of meaning. Schwandt summarizes social constructivism as:

Constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience. Furthermore, there is an inevitable historical and sociocultural dimension to this construction. We do not construct of interpretations in isolation but against the backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language and so forth (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197).

Critical Theory

The study of women in sport is, in essence, a study of gender struggles against male hegemonic values embedded in the construction of sport as a male preserve. Critical theory lends itself well to a more deliberate investigation of the power structures of sport in this study. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) affirm that paradigms incorporating post-positivist inquiry can, in fact, be commensurable, fitting comfortably together in order to maximize the best of both worlds (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). The values, accommodations, positions on hegemony, epistemology and methodology of constructivism and critical theory allow for researchers to use both to guide social inquiry.

Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) describe the relevancy of critical theory to the study of cultural practices, such as sport:

In the research context (critical theory) does not determine how we see the world but helps us devise questions and strategies for exploring it. A critical social theory is concerned in particular with issues of power and
justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system (p. 281).

Critical theory, while accepting the limitations of the research process, is deeply and openly ideological. Its epistemological assumptions incorporate the value mediation of research, stating plainly that data interpretations are shaped in part by the researchers’ own backgrounds and values.

Paradigmatic Considerations

The incorporation of both paradigms is also ingrained in the beliefs and worldview of the researcher. Qualitative research situates the researcher as the instrument. Therefore, the questions asked, topics sought and methods employed must be a natural outgrowth of the researcher’s experience, interests and values. As Glesne (1999) explained:

> Our constructions of the world, our values, and our ideas about how to inquire into those constructions, are mutually self-reinforcing. We conduct inquiry via a particular paradigm because it embodies assumptions about the world that we believe and values that we hold, and because we hold those assumptions and values we conduct inquiry according to the precepts of that paradigm (p. 8).

Both these paradigms view humans as complex beings, with multiple motives and variables for their behavior that can be difficult to measure. While quantitative fields primarily seek to predict action, provide causal explanation and generalize results to larger populations (Glesne, 1999), the purpose of qualitative methodology is to richly
describe and understand human phenomenon through inductive, naturalistic and personal prolonged engagement. Both these paradigms accept the study as a robust interpretation of social worlds.

Qualitative research is rooted in a rich interpretive tradition. Piantanida and Garman (1999) wrote concerning interpretation, “as reflective human beings, we construct our realities, for the most part, in discourse communities.” It is the intent of qualitative research to discover meaning and present the interpretations of those meanings by the researcher.

The Setting

In order to explore female consumer disinterest in women’s sport, a single sport was selected for review. Basketball was chosen for a number of important reasons. First, both men’s and women’s basketball are considered revenue-generating sports by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and have rich histories within university communities. Secondly, women’s basketball is among a select few women’s team sports that garner media interest, have a development system that stretches from childhood recreational opportunities to professional leagues and are promoted and marketed by athletic departments. A 2003-2004 NCAA attendance study confirmed the popularity of women’s college basketball programs, which at the Division I level enjoyed a net attendance of 6,718,289 spectators of 324 programs (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2004.)
The setting of this study was a large midwestern university with a rich tradition of success in both men’s and women’s basketball. The men’s program ranked in the top 20 for attendance, while the women’s program was in the top 40. Both teams played in a recently constructed arena. While the men’s program had been saddled with a post-season participation ban, the women recently enjoyed a record breaking season, sharing a conference championship and advancing far in the NCAA tournament. With several noteworthy players on both squads, there exists considerable excitement about the future of these programs.

Interviewing

While qualitative researchers utilize multiple methods, three prevailing forms of data collection typically associated with qualitative inquiry are observation, interviews and document analysis. In order to gather rich, detailed accounts of human behavior, semi-structured interviews will be utilized, in conjunction with document analysis.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) begin their discussion on interviewing by reminding the reader we live in an interview-rich society. While the breadth of Denzin and Lincoln’s work has touched every corner of qualitative disciplines, Kvale’s (1996) book on interviewing has made a substantial impact in the way I approach interviewing. Kvale defines qualitative interviewing as “attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold meaning of people’s experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (Kvale, 1996, p. 8).
The interviews are conducted with the aid of an interview guide (Patton, 1990), listing essential questions that will be asked of each participant to ensure consistency across interviews. May (2004) explains the necessity of the interview question guide:

This guide is prepared to ensure that basically the same information is obtained from each person and the interviewer is free to probe and explore within these predetermined inquiry areas. In keeping with the emergent nature of qualitative research designs, interview guides should be modified over time to focus attention on areas of particular importance, or to exclude questions the researcher has found to be unproductive for the goals of the research (Web).

Interviews provide qualitative researchers the vehicle with which to begin an analysis. By asking open-ended questions, I will elicit quotations which will comprise the raw data to be analyzed. These quotations will become the narratives revealing the participants’ voices. Patton (1990) reflects on the role of quotations within interviewing: “Quotations reveal the respondents’ levels of emotion, the way in which they have organized the world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions” (p. 78).

Kvale (1996) proposes seven stages for designing and implementing a qualitative study. As part of a rigorous, systematic approach to research, I have embraced the structure that Kvale has prescribed, while allowing the research to deviate from predetermined courses.

The first two stages involves thematizing and designing the study. This stage can be as basic as exploring the purposes of the study and creating interview questions to secure funding for necessary resources. The third step involves the interview process and
refining the instrument. Within qualitative research, the interviewer is the instrument (Guba and Lincoln, 1981). The next step concerns transcribing, where the interview is transformed from speech to text for a deeper analysis by the researcher. The fifth and sixth steps are analyzing and verifying. While both will be covered in-depth later, verification relates to the ethical responsibility of the research to report knowledge that has been secured and verified throughout the research process. The final stage is reporting of the research. As Kvale reminds, “Working toward the final report from the start of an interview study should contribute to a readable report of methodologically well substantiated, interesting findings” (Kvale, 1996, p. 257).

Individuals were recruited through a series of mailings in collaboration with the university athletic department. Letters were mailed to female season ticket holders of university men’s basketball who has not purchased tickets to women’s basketball games in the past five years. Potential participants were sent a detailed letter explaining the study and confidentiality details. Those who were interested in participation contacted the researchers directly. Interviews were scheduled during a six week period, taking approximately 40 minutes and held in the same conference room on campus.

Importance of Triangulation

While interviews serve as a plentiful platform to collect data, in order to produce knowledge assertions it is vital for qualitative researchers to utilize multiple sources and
methods in their research. For the purpose of this project, I have incorporated elements of data triangulation. Data triangulation corresponds to the use of a variety of data sources in study.” (Janeick, 2000, p. 379).

Sampling Selection

As with most qualitative research cases, non-probability sampling methods will be utilized. Sampling procedures will reflect both convenience sampling and aspects of purposive sampling, since the group of people (female fans of men’s basketball with no interest in women’s basketball) is a highly specific consumer group.

In order to gain access to this group, information was collected from The Ohio State University Athletic Department ticket office regarding season ticket holders. The information collected afforded the researcher names and contact information of both Ohio State men and women’s basketball season ticket holders. These lists were cross-referenced, and approximately 250 women were identified as season-ticket holders of only men’s basketball games. These women were contacted via the postal system and those who fit characteristics of the desired sample were invited to participate in the study. It is important to state by using these sampling methods, as well as the nature of qualitative research, generalizing data becomes a quandary, and often is not the focus of the research. Rather the production of raw, detailed accounts of perception or phenomenon is of greater interest to the researcher.
Corresponding to sampling methods employed, I have embraced the use of maximum variation within my sample. Patton (1990) explains the need for variation throughout the group examined:

[Maximum variation sampling] aims at capturing and describing the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across a great deal of participant or program variation. For small samples a great deal of heterogeneity can be a problem because individual cases are so different from each other. The maximum variation sampling strategy turns that apparent weakness into a strength by applying the following logic: Any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program (Patton, 1990, p. 172).

For the purpose of the current study, maximum variation sampling will include the incorporation of students, community members and season ticket holders, as well as individuals of various age, ethnicities, races and sexual orientation.

Data Analysis

The procedure of data analysis is a continual process within the collection of data. Since qualitative designs are emergent by nature, prolonged analysis during collection is used in order to identify emergent themes for further study. Demerath (2005) describes the composition and purpose of the emergent nature of qualitative research:

Because what we learn, in part shapes where we next look and what we next ask, our designs are flexible and emergent. Thus, while quantitative studies are typified by rigid controls, qualitative researchers and ethnographers often, astonishingly, have to actively give up control if they are truly going to get close to the local or emic point of view (Demerath, speech).

Qualitative research embraces the process of induction and inference as a means of
creating knowledge. Induction is the practice of inferring a general rule from direct observation of particular cases. These observations become the foundation of knowledge assertions and claims made throughout the study.

**Constant Comparative Analysis**

The foundation of qualitative data analysis is the practice of constant comparative analysis through the use of coding. Coding is a subjective process, in which the researcher creates, defines and refines codes that are traceable to the data. These codes are then refined through the method of constant comparison, where the essential features of the data are explored. While the process of coding is subjective, codes have been developed through a systematic, robust analysis that provides the reader with a transparent and traceable route from the raw data to the codes developed. Codes are collected and a codebook is organized, allowing for the comparing and contrasting of like-minded data. While the core of the post-modern critique of qualitative research is focused on the process of coding, I intend to incorporate robust codes rich in both context and the local voice by utilizing a system of constant comparison and evidentiary warrants.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) identify the process of constant comparative analysis used to organize data analysis. Through this process, the essential features of the data are examined and inferences from the data are produced. To refine the inferences and potential assertions, Erickson offers the procedure of testing evidentiary warrants as a systematic way of further developing assertions. Erickson lays out the process of testing
for warrants, defining the process as, “reviewing the data corpus repeatedly to test the validity of the assertions that were generated seeking disconfirming evidence as well as confirming evidence (Erickson, 1996, p.12). The outcome of both assertion building and warrant testing would be the creation of key linkages among the data, which best can be characterized as patterns of generalizations in the data (Erickson, 1996). Through testing evidentiary warrants, the research can search for both confirming and disconfirming evidence of the key assertions within the data. As stated by Piantanida and Garman (1999), “Warrants are the essential logics that give the research its authority and its sanction” (p. 255).

Assertions and Assumptions

Through the process of assertion building and the rich task of interpretation, qualitative researchers can make a substantial contribution to science by generating concepts that can be further developed to understand social behavior. While qualitative research is not concerned with the application of generalization, as understood by positivist quantitative methodology, it does incorporate its own distinct manifestation of generalization. Hamilton (1981) explains the assumptions embedded in the positivist notion of generalization:

First, that nature is uniform in time and space; second, that closed populations can be unambiguously defined; and third, that the defining attributes of a population are shared by all its members (Hamilton, 1981, p. 233).

While the assumptions above clearly conflict with post-positivist notions of knowledge creation and social worlds, Hamilton argues that post-positivist research, particularly
those within qualitative research, can embrace the concept of generalization as well. While the burden of producing generalization claims rests on the quantitative researcher through the use of parametric statistics, qualitative researchers place generalization claims in the hands of the reader. Can the person reading the text see connections between the stories in the text and their own lives? This manifestation of generalization is an aspect of the relationship between the author and reader of qualitative texts. In the naturalistic paradigm, the transferability of findings to other situations depends on the degree of similarity between the original situation and the situation to which it is transferred (Hoepfl, 1997). The degree of transferability is not known to the researcher, yet it is the responsibility of the qualitative researcher to provide clear and adequate data and results, leaving the reader to determine whether these new findings can applicable to a new situation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Data Management

One challenge for all researchers exists in how newly acquired data will be organized into a manageable system for analysis. Lending itself well to the goals and methods of this study, NUD*IST was utilized as a tool for both data storage and systematization. Each interview was transcribed, typed and entered into the NUD*IST program. Once an interview transcript was entered, various levels of nodes (codes) were developed, organized and refined, per the process of constant comparison.
Trustworthiness and Validity

Qualitative research is not, as Foley describes it, an open window into the lives of others. While quantitative research produces independent instruments for collection of data, coupled with statistical platforms for an analysis at arms-length of the researcher, qualitative research situates the researcher as the primary instrument of analysis. The researcher brings to the study a wealth of experience and opinions, which comprise the research lens. Therefore, data is filtered through the subjective lens of the individual researcher. This is particularly important when researchers approach the task of interpreting interviews. As Fontana and Frey (2000) explain:

More recently, sociologists have come to grips with the reflexive, problematic, and, at times, contradictory nature of data and with the tremendous, if unspoken, influence of the researcher as author (p. 661).

To account for this concern, as well as the post-modern critique of qualitative research, it is vital for qualitative researchers to write an honest, transparent account of human behavior that is candid and reflective concerning their own subjectivity. This is the tension qualitative researchers must confront.

Though the tenants of validity and reliability are often more associated with quantitative research, it is important to employ various methods to ensure a level of validity and reliability within the qualitative framework.

Due to the nature of qualitative research, many researchers have argued that the term validity is not applicable. For this study, I will refer to the concept of traditional validity within quantitative formulas as “trustworthy,” “relevant,” “credible” or
“representative” research outcomes. Thus, in qualitative research the most basic aspect of validity centers on how representative the results are and how justifiable the findings become (Winter, 2000). I will use the following methods to find a greater sense of trustworthiness and credibility in my research:

- Negative Case Analysis
- Member Checks
- Panel of Experts
- Outside Researcher Review

By employing these tools, I intend to establish relevant research in relation to the questions proposed. Recently, Becker detailed an alternative approach to validity criteria, utilizing the tenets of accuracy, precision and breadth (in press). All these items relate to the need for prolonged, rigorous engagement with the subject matter.

Qualitative research, being a particularly innovative and evolving discipline, continues to struggle with the applicability of reliability within research. Many scholars have argued that the basis of interpretation discourse renders the concept of reliability meaningless, since there is no single correct interpretation (Wolcott, 1995). Perhaps Mason best stated the most essential consideration within my qualitative study. He wrote, “Reliability issues should address demonstrating to your audience that you have not invented or misinterpreted your data and that you have not been careless in your data recording” (Mason, 1996).

*Negative Case Analysis*
Understanding human behavior is a complicated process. While there exists many patterns within human action and thought, there also exists a rich diversity that rarely lends itself to rigid categories and neat descriptions. Negative case analysis is a procedure built into research methodology which actively seeks out and provides a forum for outlier and contradictory cases that emerge. Through this practice, researchers can help foster confidence within the reader that they are not simply excluding data that does not fit into their explanations of phenomenon or the perspectives and hunches the researcher brought with her or him into the study. Moreover, the use of negative cases allows the researcher to refine assertions being developed from the data.

Erickson has described qualitative research as the search for falsification, which is at the core of negative case analysis. He writes:

> It is the author’s responsibility to document this process for the reader, to show in considerable detail (a) that the author was open to perceiving, recording, and reflecting on evidence that would disconfirm the author’s preconceived notions and commitments (as evidenced by the fact that the author’s thinking and data collection did change during the course of the study); and (b) specific ways in which the changes in interpretive perspective took place (Erickson, 1996, p. 18).

Corresponding to the goals and topic of the study, my negative case analysis sought out females who attended women’s basketball with no interest in consuming men’s basketball.

*Member Checks*

The roles of researcher and research participant have been heavily scrutinized within qualitative communities for some time. Reacting to the historical legacy of
“othering” and dehumanizing individuals in the research process, many scholars have come to view the act of conducting qualitative research, particularly interviews and observation, in a new light. Fontana and Frey (2000) characterize these new assumptions arguing “ Increasingly, qualitative researchers are realizing that interviews are not a neutral tool of data gathering but active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results” (Fontana and Frey, Handbook, p. 646).

Member checking is a way of confirming or disconfirming transcripts, interpretations and assertions with the people who directly provided the data. It provides participants with the ability to view and respond to how they are being portrayed in the study. These checks are built in throughout the research process, reflecting the emergent nature of qualitative inquiry.

Peer Review

Peer review consists of the process of getting impartial and meaningful feedback concerning the clarity of assertions and production of salient and relevant details. Colleagues who are not intimately connected to the data as the primary researcher can serve as an outside perspective to view the multidimensional practice of qualitative research. Peer reviewers are involved throughout the process, offering not only a soundboard for feedback, but also yet another perspective to review assertions demonstrated.

Built into the qualitative philosophy is the understanding that the researcher cannot separate her or his own feelings and opinions from the research questions and data.
collected. However, as stated previously, the focus my instrumentation on increasing trustworthiness rests through properly recording and interpreting data collected (Kerlinger, 1986).

Pilot Testing and Question Analysis

Pilot testing is often a method used to create certainty in research methods, as well as fine tune instrumentation. Relating to my qualitative study, I will use a varied method of pilot testing in the form of a preliminary review of questions by knowledgeable colleagues. I will enlist a group of “experts” from the fields of research methods, sport management and sociology, to examine the questions for item appropriateness, clarity, cultural sensitivity and the relation to the overall research. Furthermore, any written materials, such as cover letters or participation waivers, will be reviewed for content, format and readability.

Additionally, a pilot test of the semi-structured interview experience was used to gain greater insight into the questions, as well as acquaint the researcher to the interview setting and logistics. Individuals were recruited for the pilot test through snowball sampling. This non-probability method is generally employed when the desired characteristic of the sample is rare. Snowball sampling is a type of convenience sampling where individuals involved in the study identify others who share common characteristics to those needed by the researcher.
Personal Statement

In many ways I stumbled upon this topic, yet the foundation for an examination rooted in women’s sport had been planted years ago. I have always been fascinated by sport. It became my passion, escape and outlet as a child. I played sports year round, decorating my bedroom with pictures of the New York Yankees and Los Angeles Lakers. I watched sport religiously, often scoring baseball games at home along with the television. Before I could read at my reading level I knew what balk, ERA and OBP stood for. As a child, my access to women’s sport was limited. All my coaches were men and my only outlet to watch women compete was during the Olympics. I knew that colleges had women’s teams, but they seemed so isolated. The mid-to late 1980s was before the boom of travel elite teams and well before the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) and women’s college basketball reached prominence.

Yet while my experiences in sport were numerous, I can still vividly recall my first women’s college basketball game. Growing up in the shadow of Princeton University, my father would routinely take me to football, basketball and ice hockey games. Though I fully did not grasp levels of competition in Division I basketball, I thought Princeton University was the center of college basketball. And in my tiny world of New Jersey, it was. My father would bring me to games as he supported and nurtured my interest in sport. One evening we arrived at Jadwin Gymnasium early and I found the Princeton women’s team playing to an empty arena, the sound of the ball echoing throughout the field house. I became fixated with the action, completely engrossed in
every shot, pass and dribble. After that game I became an avid fan of Princeton Women’s Basketball, with my father taking me to more women’s games than men’s. My interest in Princeton basketball led to a greater interest in other teams, including nearby Rutgers. I can remember watching in awe as Sue Wicks dazzled her way to the 1988 Naismith Player of the Year award. As I entered middle school and high school, my interest in women’s basketball grew as my participation in sport began to dwindle. By my sophomore year in high school I was only participating in softball, as my interests in politics and debate took time away from pursuing other sports.

I remained interested in sport throughout college, playing rugby and working in numerous positions within the athletic department. I had chosen to attend a women’s college, where all focus in sport was centered on women. I found the environment to be supportive, challenging and a bold change to the status quo in athletics. It was at this point that my passion for sport and my academic and intellectual life became intertwined. I interned for a national political advocacy group for women’s sport, was among a handful of women in sport management classes at a nearby university and began pursuing independent study projects concerning women’s sport.

One constant throughout my experiences in education and sport has been the lack of interest of my peers in attending women’s sporting events. I would plead with my friends to drive to Hartford to catch an ABL game or offer to pay for tickets to go catch a University of Massachusetts women’s basketball game. My suggestions would always fall on deaf ears. Even my friends who were eager to go watch the New York Knicks,
scoffed at the thought of attending a New York Liberty game. And the stands at my
women’s college would primarily be filled with supporters from the community and
parents—the students apparently MIA. Many of my friends were athletes who followed
men’s sport intently, watching football, baseball and basketball on television but refusing
to go catch a women’s game. It frustrated me. It felt like an insult to these female
athletes. While I have been able to create distance between my passion for women’s
sport, particularly women’s basketball, and others’ lack of interest, it still leaves me
confused as to why fans of men’s sports would feel so strongly against attending
women’s events.

My interest in the subject has seeped into conversations I, as a coach, have with
female student athletes. While many of them pack the stands to see the men’s lacrosse
team defend their conference championship and national ranking, they have no interest in
supporting the women’s team, also a highly successful squad. Often the men’s lacrosse
games would need to be moved to the football stadium to provide enough seating, while
the women’s team play to a handful of spectators.

I have been shaped by my experiences as an athlete, fan, spectator and coach, as
so too have my research interests. My reason for including this narrative is to share my
personal background with the subject and how it will inevitably influence my approach to
this study. I love women’s sport and obtain great enjoyment from being a spectator.
However, I am eager to talk with women who do not have the same experience, attitude
or desire to attend women’s sport.
CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION OF FINDINGS

*If the empty seats at sporting arenas could speak, what would they say?*

In order to approach the subject of consumer disinterest in women’s sport, 12 women who attend men’s college basketball games with no recent attendance history at women’s college basketball games were asked to share their experiences as spectators and fans. While the subject centered on their spectator habits and lack of attendance at women’s sport, the conversation often flowed into many varying arenas, from the way men and women talk about sport to the perception of women’s sport as being boring and less dramatic than men’s sports.

The following chapter seeks to present the story of these women, using their own words to expose the underlying reasons and motives for their spectator decisions. Participant experiences were drawn from 45-minute interviews with the researcher, which were taped and later transcribed. The transcripts were entered into QSR N6 for coding and analysis. The data and themes were reviewed by a peer researcher for robustness and clarity. Chapter 4 presents these findings utilizing Erickson’s system of evidentiary warrants, articulating themes through systematic reporting using participants’
own voices to convey themes. It was the hope that the data presented and themes examined are transparent to the reader, and the participants are drawn out of the text to be more than simply a name, but a three-dimensional person with experiences, attitudes and beliefs. I have sought to place the reader in the vantage point of looking over my shoulder during the interview, hearing what I have heard.
Walk through any suburban mall and the sight of young men in baseball hats is as abundant as Starbucks coffee stands. From the clothing they wear to the amount of time, money and attention they dedicate to sporting endeavors, men and sport have been inextricably linked throughout our social culture. Various scholars have studied the connection between sport and masculinity extensively, noting the way sport is used to socialize men and boys and alternatively, defining and fixing social constructions of what it means to be a woman (Messner & Sabo, 1994, Eitzen, 2001, Messner, 2002).

While the interview questions sought to explore women’s experience within sport, each participant reflected on the influence of men in their lives as sport spectators and fans. These influential forces often reached deep into their past, brought to life in their stories of fathers and grandfathers. Yet, the influence of men is not fixed to a certain relationship (father, grandfather or brother), instead it spans generations and time, linking the women’s impressions of fathers throughout their childhood to the present-day influences of husbands, sons, boyfriends and nephews.
While men influence women’s sporting habits in a variety of ways, it became clear that many women attended men’s basketball as a direct result of the attendance patterns of men. As spectators, women attend sporting events to spend time with their male significant others. However, their significant others attend men’s sport, rather than women’s sport. Therefore, female’s initial entry into sport as a spectator is heavily influenced by the spectating preferences of males who exclusively watch men’s sport.

The theme of male influence was the most robust influence of women’s sporting attendance articulated by participants, spanning generations, marital status, and previous sport participation experience. While aspects of socialization and gender roles was explored prior to this study, the theme of male influence grew directly out of participant experiences.

Grace was eager to chat about men’s basketball when we sat down on a cold January afternoon. After a long day at work as a human resources consultant, she seemed ready to talk about sports instead of organizational development. She had a reserved soft tone to her voice that morphed into an engaging, excited exuberance when the topic shifted to her experience with sport. She played club field hockey in college, but admitted to somehow finding herself surrounded more by sport fans than actual sporting opportunities.

I’ve always been surrounded by people who love sports. My college roommate was a huge basketball player. So then I married someone who is a huge sport spectator, not really a participant, and his first passion is baseball and second is college basketball. This is his favorite time of year because spring training begins
as does March Madness. So, I would say I am more of a lover of people who love
sports, than a lover of sports. If I wasn’t married to the person I am married to, I
probably wouldn’t go to sporting events, quite frankly. He is a huge influence on
my sport consumption, but it’s not like he forces me to go. I enjoy spending time
with him and he loves it. So it’s a way for me to do something that he loves.

Grace is quick to note that her interest in sport is deeply rooted in the people in her life,
particularly her husband. She is quick to point out, however, that he doesn’t pressure her
to attend games, her attendance is brought about by the desire to spend time with him
involved in something he truly enjoys. Yet, spending time with him at sports means
spending time at men’s sports, not women’s. Grace explains:

So, why don’t I go to women’s basketball? Well, it’s all my husband’s fault. It’s
clearly what he enjoys, I go because it’s what he wants to do. He prefers men’s
basketball. He definitely influences why I am in the sports world and what I do in it.

Grace pinpoints that her husband is a key influence, not only guiding her to attend
sporting events, but also influencing what events they attend. In this case, like many that
will be presented, when the male figure decides what games to attend they are men’s
sport.

Hannah considers herself somewhat of an outsider in her family since neither her
parents or siblings like sports. Her passion for her teams has left her in tears after tough
losses and clapping into a television set during game-changing moments. Hannah works
as a secretary in a student affairs division at the college and sport is a big part of her
experience as an employee. She is a loyal football and men’s basketball season ticket
holder, sometimes going to games by herself if she can’t find a friend to bring along. This
season she bought football season tickets with a male friend from work. Hannah
remarked that she believes that men and women have a different relationship with sports, partly because men can connect with the athletes and the experience more. She explains:

The guy I go to football with will talk about injuries he has had, like stingers and certain plays, ‘oh you know they got a stinger,’ he says. I think they get more into it because they played it and know what that hit must have felt like. As a rule sports are more a men’s thing. I think women get into it because of who they are dating or something like that. They go along because he is into it.

Going along to sporting events has been part of dating for as long as she can remember. She became interested in drag racing because a previous boyfriend rode a motorcycle and would take her to events. Hannah notes:

The guy I am dating is into NASCAR racing so that is new for me. I’ve been into drag racing, going to some of those things and seeing that, but NASCAR is new to me. I am getting into that now. I couldn’t imagine what all the excitement was watching car go around a circle, I never could. Then he took me to one and it’s more the noise, the excitement, the speed. It’s like all the sports, I like being there more than watching it on TV. He got me into it and now I am hooked. I can’t wait we are going to a race in April and I am just so excited. Daytona was last weekend so that was exciting to me.

Hannah’s current boyfriend introduced her to NASCAR, a sport she previously thought was boring. Not only did he get her watching NASCAR, but also took her to an event.

Diane wanted me to know that she had been involved in athletics her entire life. As a fitness instructor for nearly 30 years she made athletics her career, working in Recreational Sports at the university since her own graduation. At the age of 50 she still works out daily, her intense workout regime being a key priority. While she only offered small windows into her own participation, she spoke extensively and proudly of her husband’s athletic endeavors.
He competes in basketball, softball, football intramurals but he went further than that. When he was in the service he played in the Air Force softball league that traveled all around, so he was a pretty high-level competitor. He played for the city here and they won the city championship a couple years. It was wonderful.

Diane beamed when she spoke of his athletic accomplishments, noting that as a mother and wife, sports takes on a whole new dimension. “Well when you have a son, if they play, or even your husband, I mean it’s like it becomes more emotional,” she said. You want them to succeed and do well.” Diane spoke from her perspective as a mother articulating how this role became a key connection to sport as she watched her son’s participation.

As a spectator, Diane’s initial entry into men’s college basketball was a direct result of her relationship with her husband. She reflects on her introduction to attending games:

I didn’t start going to basketball games until I started going out with him, so that was probably 1973 and he loved basketball so I would go with him. As a student I didn’t go to basketball, which my father would just go nuts about. ‘How could you go to (the university) and not be going to the basketball games?’ (Mimicking the way her father would speak).

Diane chucked after her quick impersonation of her father, which portrayed him in a chastising tone. As a student, Diane had not attended games, much to the dismay of her father. It wasn’t until her future husband entered the picture that Diane seized the opportunity to attend games. This story would become a familiar one throughout the interview process as women portrayed their relationships with men as an entry to the sporting arena.
Karen told the story of her courtship with her husband through the lens of sport. She met her husband 45 years ago, long before she became a nurse and hospital administrator. Karen noted the joy her husband experiences opening the ticket envelope for men’s basketball, “It’s such a treat to him to open the ticket envelope that when I see it come in the mail I leave it for him to open. He leaves me the Christmas cards to open and I leave him the athletic applications,” she says laughing. Karen can name many of the current and past men’s basketball players, a tribute to the fact she has been attending games for 35 years. She describes her relationship of her husband and their courtship:

I was smitten with my husband at an early age and so he was an excellent swimmer. He swam, so I swam. He took life-saving, so I took life-saving. This was when we were in our teens. We came up here our senior year in high school and he took a WSI course, so I took it. This way we could have a date every Friday night and he could drive me. Without a doubt, he influenced me the greatest and I have known him probably 45 years. Sports were important to him, so when we got done with work it was time for us to do what he wanted to do and for him it was not to miss an Ohio State game, basketball and football. So those were the things we did together. After the kids left I went back to school and get my masters. And he said why because we had all the time to do what we wanted. But all the things he wanted were to go to sports. So that’s why I go to sports, to be together, to do things together. It’s fun, but if he weren’t here, I probably wouldn’t be going. I enjoy his enthusiasm, I enjoy seeing him so happy. He’s a very reserved person so when you see this level of excitement and interest it’s interesting to me because it’s another facet of this relationship I can enjoy. Basketball is important to my husband. And if it’s important to him it’s important to me.

Swimming allowed Karen an outlet for dating, as well as an opportunity to spend time with her future husband. After they were married sports remained an activity they would do together. Like Grace, Karen feels that if she was not married to her husband she would not attend men’s basketball. Her desire to spend time with her husband is also reflected in
her interest in witnessing his enthusiasm and love of sports. Karen likened going to
sporting events to going on vacations with her husband. She felt it was important to
express her desire as a life-partner to share in his interests and activities that hold great
significance to him.

Karen was able to succinctly boil down her sport spectatorship to the influence of
her husband. While making this point she was direct and brought up how she was
discussing with friends her participation in this study. At a recent dinner party she
mentioned to her neighbors that she was planning to speak to me concerning why she
doesn’t attend women’s sport. Apparently, the topic grew into a larger discussion,
eliciting various comments from the husbands in the room. She recalled their reaction:

Well, I told them the criteria and all, you know I think there is one question – why
I don’t attend women’s games, yet attend men’s, and I said that’s a no brainier.
Immediately the husbands will speak up and say all kinds of things. All my
friends say well you go because of John (husband). Bingo. That’s it. Would I go if
he wasn’t here? I dunno. But that’s it, that’s absolute fact. The other husbands
would say, ‘oh you go cause the team is better. Or it’s because there’s winning,
you’re interested in this player or that. Or their ranking went up. Nope, it’s none
of those things, it’s because my husband wants to go. That’s the main thing.

While the men in the room attributed Karen’s game attendance to team and player factors
(their winning, you like a specific player, etc.), Karen did not waver in her insistence that
her husband’s desire to see games was the reason she was attended basketball games.

Like Karen, Shirley was greatly influenced by her husband as a spectator.
Growing up in rural Minnesota, she spent many summers swimming at her local swim
club. For the past 30 years she devoted her life to recreational sport opportunities,
beginning as a physical education teacher before her administration career began as an
aquatics director. She spoke passionately of her love of movement and competition. While Shirley’s participation in swimming had a tremendous impact on her life, she rarely attended sporting events prior to meeting her husband. She echoes a general sentiment concerning male influence. “The whole reason of attending the men’s was because of my husband,” she says. “Let’s say I never met my husband, I probably would not go to men’s basketball games.”

For Shirley, like several other participants, their sport spectatorship is directly connected to the sports passion of their husbands. Since their husbands only attend men’s sport, they in turn, only attend men’s sport.

Theresa didn’t walk into the room, she glided into area, energetic and talkative the entire way. Her accent immediately pointed to her roots in Brooklyn before she ever spoke about growing up in a city where baseball was king. Theresa noted that she hasn’t paid all that much attention to sport throughout her life. When she was single she realized having a basic understanding of sport was a good tool to meeting men and became part of her well-rounded repertoire. “I thought if you’re going to talk to men you really need to be able to talk about all sports. So I would read all that kinda stuff and be well versed.” Eventually her desire to understand sports in order to talk to men transformed into a desire to be involved with sports in order to spend time with her husband. She reflected on her motives for attending sporting events:

I am not a sport fan because if my husband was not involved I wouldn’t probably watch it on TV, I wouldn’t follow it. When I was a single person I kept up with a lot of sports and read a lot of sports stuff so that I could be a well rounded person
when I was out dating. He’s a real enthusiast and he really likes basketball, so that is really a big thing. I go to most sporting events to be with him, I probably wouldn’t go otherwise.

Theresa made it a point to declare that sports were a large part of her marriage. She noted that before she and her husband were married, her husband insisted on that if they ever got divorced, he would be able to take the men’s basketball tickets.

Similarly, mothers can be impacted by their sons’ interest in sport and be drawn into spectating. Diane witnessed the pattern of influence through her life, particularly surrounding the desire of men in her life to watch sports programming on television. “Well it was my dad, now it’s my husband or my son. They watch sports all the time.” Like many mothers, Diane spent considerable time watching her son participate in sport. Diane reflected that “I spent hours and hours from the time he was a tiny little tot watching baseball games and being in ballparks.” His participation in sport was connected to a growing interest in watching baseball on television and attending games. Diane often attended sporting events at the urging of her son. These games were always men’s sports, particularly baseball, football and basketball. Diane reflects:

I went to one of the Cleveland games when my son was in high school and wanted to go. That was for his benefit, also a Browns game. I also went to the professional basketball game in Cleveland, gosh, about 20 years ago because my son wanted to go.

Diane found herself attending sporting events for the benefit of her son, while Shirley discussed how her son’s interest in hockey and golf has led to her following golf and collegiate hockey:
We’re listening to the news and I hear that OSU ice hockey won. I’ll yell to my son, ‘ah, guess what OSU hockey won and so and so scored two goals’ or we’ll kind of follow the Big Ten and who is number 1 and who’s number 2. I just started to watch golf because my son is into it. I’ll watch Tiger Woods and if he’s playing in a tournament we’ll kind of follow where he’s standing every day.

While, Shirley noted the influence of her son, Jackie was quick to point out her desire to be with her husband as he enjoys sport:

I go to Indians games because my husband is crazy about them and has always been loyal, even in their darkest worse days – which there have been many of. It’s not a passion of mine, I will go with him because it’s what he likes to do.

While Diane was more reserved in their appearance and demeanor, from the moment Jackie strolled in she was chatting and laughing wildly. She has been attending men’s basketball games for 30 years and had season tickets for 20 years. While her husband does exert a profound influence on her spectatorship, the influence of men on her relationship with sport as a spectator began years before her wedding. Her basketball roots are tied to her childhood in Indiana, as well as her admiration for her older brother, a basketball star in their hometown. The approval her brother won as a basketball player helped define her sense of worth and contributions. She reflected on this relationship:

I only had one brother, but he was the one doing something of value because he was involved in sports. Other than sports the only thing that really mattered was scholastic achievement, so you either achieved athletically or academically and since I didn’t have that choice, all my efforts were put into academics. There was a lot of energy put into his athletic career; it was like it was so obvious. My dad was a golfer and it was accepted that if he had a game such and such couldn’t happen, because he is playing. There was nothing of an equal value that girls did.

This reflection depicts the type of family climate that positioned men’s sport and athletics
as key contribution. Since Jackie didn’t have athletic opportunities, the only significance she had was through academic achievement. This notion was reaffirmed through many relationships in her life, where men’s basketball was constantly the focus.

The influence of men is not simply isolated to husbands, boyfriends and sons, it stretches across nearly all relationships with males and throughout the participant’s life. This widespread influence of men has a profound influence on women, socializing individuals into a society that elevates certain men’s sport to a high status, while creating a variety of obstacles to women’s sport consumption. **The influence of men in the spectator lives of women span generations creating a pattern of influence that prioritizes and values men’s sport, while ignoring women’s sports, leaving an indelible impression on life-long female spectator habits.**

Sophia was a child of Title IX. Born in the mid-1980s, she had an abundance of sporting opportunities as a child. As a basketball and track athlete, she shined in high school. This experience as an athlete led her to major in sport humanities, a blend of sociology and history disciplines related to sport. Her best friend’s father introduced her to the seduction of sport spectating:

> When I was younger my best friend’s dad would take us to games (Browns). I think that’s what started my love for sports so much. I liked the way it felt when I went to those games. I wouldn’t say there was a particular reason, I just thought it was exciting.

But while Sophia would speak at length regarding her experience as a female athlete, she also reflected on a general lack of interest in watching female athletes. She noted that the majority of men in her life were avid followers of men’s basketball and she spent much
time around men’s basketball. “I just always was around it growing up, that’s all my background is, playing basketball. I had no choice but to watch and kind of learn a little bit and pick up on it,” she says. “While she will watch “any sport, even curling,” she also notes that these generally depict male athletes.

Like Sophia, Claire and Sarah never could recall a time when the door to sporting opportunities only allowed men to enter. They participated in multiple sports and enjoyed balancing school and sports throughout high school. Claire, now a senior in college, was excited to come to the big university partly because of the rich athletic culture that surrounded men’s basketball and football. Claire laughed when discussing how her interest in sports sometimes intertwine with her interest in meeting men, explaining that she started to watch the National Basketball Association (NBA) in order to have something to talk about with a cute guy that she often saw working out in the university fitness facility. Claire explained how she met her current boyfriend:

I went to the game (Cincinnati Reds) because my boyfriend wanted to go. That was my first major league baseball game and he wanted to take me It was my first game, but we started watching baseball before. It’s kinda how we got together. He was watching Boston and he invited me to come watch. So I pretended to like baseball and went over (laughs). I watched and really actually enjoyed it (laughs).

Claire pretended to like baseball in order to meet men, yet this experience led to her enjoying watching baseball. This initial access to sport through the men in her life gave Claire access to watching men’s sports without the same opportunities to consume women’s sport. As a cheerleader in high school, Claire spent considerable time watching
men’s sport. This consumption was further emphasized in the sport consumption of her family and boyfriend:

I can’t imagine my boyfriend being like, hey let’s go to a women’s basketball. My dad wasn’t that big into sports, but whenever we would watch sports as a family it was always men’s sport. In high school, I was a cheerleader and I loved watching the football and basketball games. I would get so into it. I never got interested in watching women’s basketball.

Claire’s sport consumption is greatly influenced by her boyfriend. When she watches sporting events on television, it is often because her boyfriend is watching. Since he can’t imagine her boyfriend suggesting attending a women’s basketball game, the likelihood of Claire attending is also minimal.

The legacy of watching men’s sport was instilled by her family and later continued by her boyfriend. Claire noted, “Sometimes with my boyfriend I will watch golf. I don’t know why I like watching golf. My grandpa always watched golf.” The patterns of consumption being influenced by men continue throughout a woman’s life.

Sarah smiled as she reminiscenced about watching sports with her father. That love of sports extended to participation in softball and volleyball, which she played throughout her life. Her experience in sport has led to a student job as a lifeguard at the university, something she is quite proud of. Sarah loves to wear university sport apparel, noting the sense of pride she feels in supporting her school’s football and men’s basketball teams. Her participation in sport was greatly influenced by her desire to be like her brother, while her sport fan behavior was influenced by the sports her father would watch on television throughout her childhood. Sarah stated:
The only reason I started playing softball at five was because my brother played baseball. I just wanted to do what he was doing. So that’s why I started. Just, I don’t know, it was what I was good at. Growing up with a brother and dad, sports was just something that was going on in our house, something that was important. He loves basketball, particularly college basketball.

Sarah directly connects the experience of having a father and brother around with the consumption of sport. Not only were sports available for viewing, they were also important, particularly college basketball because her father loved the sport. Much of Sarah’s fandom of particular teams is connected to her father:

I grew up liking the Reds and Bengals. I liked those teams because of my dad (laughs). Everything of my likes and dislikes growing up were because of him. It has really fostered into now. My mom wasn’t interested in sports. She didn’t participate much in high school. It’s just the amount my father watches, she has grown to like watching with him. She isn’t that into it.

Clearly, Sarah has been greatly influenced by her father’s sport consumption, as well as modeling her mother’s experience watching sport. Since her father primarily watched men’s sport, Sarah, in turn, primarily watched men’s sport. Sarah reflected that her mother wasn’t interested in sports, but does watch sports with her husband.

Jackie’s family spent an incredible amount of time throughout her childhood attending the sporting events of her male relatives. This experience helped shape her interest in men’s sports:

My father, brother and all three of my nephews were captain of their basketball team and we went to all their high school games. They fostered it (attending men’s basketball) because every week or twice a week you were tuning in either via radio or TV to watch a game.

While Jackie was quick to point out the influential men in her life, Marisa paused before reflecting on the pattern of influence men have had in her life. While working in
the medical field seems to leave little time for attending sporting events, her family has been able to carve out time to make attending men’s games a priority. Marisa mentioned that she had never thought of why she didn’t attend women’s games, but the potential reasons lingered heavy on her mind since responding to my participant recruitment letter. She grew up in the shadow of the university campus, with the athletic department being a constant figure in her life. Her husband, an avid university fan, has several “rules” concerning game attendance, Marisa recalls:

All the games are on our calendar. Anything that comes up, family obligations, whatever, you always make sure there isn’t a game that night. The time of the game - our whole evening revolves around whether there is a basketball game. You gotta get out of work on time, you gotta get dinner, and you need to get to the game on time. Your butt has to be in the seat an hour before tip-off. That’s my husbands rule. You have to have all the paraphernalia and the colors, the beads. The whole nine yards.

While Marisa attends both men’s basketball and football religiously and considers herself a fan of the university in general, the passion that schedules her life around university men’s basketball and football hasn’t translated into an interest in attending women’s basketball. She relates this disinterest to the socializing forces in her life that enabled her to become interested in men’s sport, while not creating opportunities to spectate women’s sport. Marisa reflects:

I think that over the years, from the time of was a kid to now, my interest in sports has been influenced by the men in my life. And the men in my life, father, brother, boyfriends, husband probably favor men’s sports, they can related. Maybe I am more of a follower. They go, so I go too. It became a shared interest,
so I got involved in that. Since they weren’t involved (in women’s sport), I never became involved. The men, they’re more interested in men’s basketball because that’s what they enjoy more, I guess I’m a bit of a follower.

Since the men is Marisa’s life were not interested or involved in women’s sport, she never became involved.

The pattern of influence of men in the spectator lives of women is carried through a woman’s life by fathers and grandfathers, later to be assumed by brothers, boyfriends, husbands, sons and nephews. The men in their lives consume and prioritize men’s sport, allowing women to become spectators and fans of men’s sport. Alternatively, the mens’ lack of consumption of women’s sports offers no initial entry into attendance at women’s sport. This lack of initial entry will be compounded by the lack of awareness of women’s basketball by female fans of men’s basketball. This barrier will be discussed in the following section.

While men influence the spectator habits of women, sports play a tremendous role in society, often cited as a socializing force for men. While women have broken down many barriers to participation in athletics, sports still remain a male-dominated sector of community life. Participants reflected on the notion that sports hold a different place in the lives of men, compared to the relationship women have with athletics. Participants believed that men and women have dissimilar relationships with sports. They noted, utilize sports to bond with other men, as well as use sports as a means of
communication with their male peers. Because of this, participants felt men have a heightened connection with sport. Women, however, do not use sport for similar social purposes according to the study’s participants.

Diane has witnessed how sport factors into the relationship between her husband and father. She beamed when she discussed the way sports has become something they find commonality in, and sometimes rivalries:

Well my dad was a New York fan and my husband was a Boston fan. They would joke around all the time. They would play each other and then my husband would put a little TV in the opposite room and say that was for my Dad so he could watch them in there in black and white and my husband would have Boston on the big color TV (laughs).

The fierce rivalry between their teams has become a point of connection between the two men. Diane laughed as she described one example of how her husband would give the smaller television to her father to connote that his allegiance to his team. Though Sarah doesn’t have a husband to observe, she has learned much about the bonding power of sports. An athlete herself, she reflected on the nature of men when they are participating in friendly pickup games:

Dealing with my guy friends, whenever they wanna play sports together, even a pickup game, anything, they want it to be just guys. They want no rules, tacking in football. If I would want to play, I just don’t understand why they can’t just play a friendly game of two-hand tap. They can’t do that because it’s such a bonding time for them, for some reason. I can’t understand that, I don’t know why. I’m an aggressive person to but I don’t need that to bond with girls.

Sarah couldn’t understand why her male friends needed to integrate aggression into their
friendly pickup games. She attributed their insistence on the need to bond through physicality. She also notes that while she is an aggressive person, she feels that it is not the way she connects with other women.

While Sarah reflected on the men’s desire for male only participants, other individuals commented on the relationship men have with sports. Individuals noted that men are connected to sport more intimately than the association women have with athletics, often alienating women from engaging in sports chat. Shannon commented on the need for men’s to talk about sports and the expectation that men are interested in athletics:

Guys are supposed to know the most about sports. It’s supposed to be their thing. They don’t really like it when girls try, that’s how they bond with each other. You could tell they won’t always know what they’re talking about when they’re watching the football game, but they’ll talk about it anyway to bond with each other.

Shannon, a sports nut, admitted that she sometimes struggles to get respect from her male friends when they talk about sports. “The males will be, like, trying to prove me wrong. They’ll say, ‘You don’t know anything about sports,” she said. Claire related a similar story when discussing how her boyfriend discusses sports:

Normally, it’s my boyfriend and one of his friends and they are talking and I feel like chiming in a little bit, but they are like, ‘We’re guys and we’re gonna talk about it and you have no idea.’ They don’t really include me.

Claire related the importance of men talking about sport and their assumption that she doesn’t know what she is talking about. Shannon discussed how sports factor into men’s lives different, particularly illuminated through how they discuss sports:
If a girl tries to hop in there and say something they look at you like ‘Can’t you see we’re having a conversation.’ They don’t really want your input that much. When I talk to my female friends about sport it’s more about certain plays during a game. It’s just a conversation, not a real important factor of our lives. For guys it is an important factor.

Shannon sees sports as being a more important thing to men. Though she admitted that not all men are obsessed with sports, she continued by articulating how the pressure for men to understand sport factors into how they discuss sports. “I don’t think guys have to explain sports. If a guy doesn’t know what’s going on, he’ll act like he does. There’s too much pressure on you to already know what’s going on.”

While Claire noted difficulties in discussing sports with her boyfriend and his pals, Sarah was eager to discuss the way that sport often factors into her conversations with her boyfriend. Sarah, however, felt that this behavior was rather strange:

Yeah, I talk a lot about sports with my boyfriend (laughs). He goes to a different school, so we will talk on the phone and analyze back and forth about games, like we know something about it. You kind of have to remove yourself from it and be like, ‘This is sad. A boyfriend and girlfriend and this is what we’re talking about.’ It’s so random and so abnormal. For a girl, that’s not normal.

Though Sarah liked talking about sports, she used the term “abnormal” to describe the situation of a boyfriend and girlfriend talking about sport. When questioned about who decided it’s abnormal, she responded;

Um, society. How things have progressed. I talk about sports with my roommates, they are twin sisters. They are really into sports. Other than that, there’s not many girls I hang out with that really care. A group of girls wouldn’t get excited about getting tickets. It’s gonna be more the guy.

Sarah indicated it is society that maintains that a boyfriend and girlfriend discussing sports is strange. She also noted that most of her female friends aren’t interested in sports.
While individuals have suggested that sport has a different significance to men, Diane reflected that her husband often complains that she talks too much during games. She discussed how she often does various tasks while watching games, while her husband needs to zone into the event:

Yeah, he’ll say ‘Diane that’s enough I’m trying to watch the game’ and I’m like, okay. I appreciate and understand, I can be a little chatty. I still know what’s going on but I can multi-task during a game. I mean my husband, he’s kind of zoned into the game. Maybe that’s a woman thing. I do think women can do three things at once. And be great at all three and I don’t think men think that way or can do that. When men watch sports they act intense and they get mad. I mean they get mad, if there’s a bad call, my son gets so emotional it upsets him for the whole weekend if the team loses.

Diane attributed the way her husband watches sport to a difference between men and women, namely, women’s ability to successfully multi-task. However, connected to the way men view sport, she discussed their reactions to losing or a bad call, articulating that the men in her life have often been upset for an entire weekend after a loss.

While many participants reflected on a perceived difference between men and women and sports, Sophia felt that there wasn’t a division between the sexes. A sport studies major, she is constantly surrounded by both men and women, and articulated, “I know a lot of the guys in my program and I would say they probably have the same passion about sport that I do; it just so happens that I’m a female it’s no difference.”

How do men and women develop a different relationship with sports? Study participants had a variety of opinions, many centering on the process of socialization. One thought that was shared by numerous individuals involved men’s experience of being a sport participant. Most of the women sharing this view grew up prior to the
massive expansion of women’s sport ushered in with Title IX. Study participants
believed that men can relate to sport better since they have broader experiences with
sport participation, particularly in their favorite sports.

In a previous section Diane spoke at length concerning her husband’s sport
participation. She connects his experience playing sports to a greater understanding of the
events he watches.

It depends, I mean I think it just depends upon if you participated and have the
love of and understanding of sports. I think I would probably feel different had I
competed. I wish I would have because I think it would’ve been a great thing to
be an athlete, I just didn’t have those kinds of opportunities so I never had those
kind of feelings myself because I didn’t get those experiences.

Diane notes that due to her lack of participation opportunities she never acquired the
feeling of being an athlete which aids in the experience of a fan and spectator. Hannah
elaborates on this point, connecting men’s experience with sport related injuries with
their relationship as a fan:

Yeah, men are more into (sport), because maybe they play it. The guy I go to
football with will talk about injuries he has had, like stingers and certain plays,
‘Oh you know they got a stinger’ he says. I think they get more into it because
they played it and know what that hit must have felt like. As a rule sports are
more a men’s thing. I think women get into it because of who they are dating or
something like that. They go along because he is into it.

Hannah conveys a number of important points in the previous sentiment. She believes
that men are more passionate about sport because they can relate to the experience more
intimately of being an athlete. She also notes that sport is simply more a male “thing” and
women are simply drawn to sport through their relationships. Jackie agrees that men’s
participation in sport can have a profound effect on their experience as spectators:
There are a lot men who don’t care about sports and a lot of women too, but I think there are more men who have participated in the sport they are observing than women, so in that way sports probably mean something different to men. I think there may be a lot of guys who pretend to be interested in sports when they are not. I think if a woman is interested in sports, well she might be pretending to, but probably less so.

The concept of men pretending to be interested in sport echoed a previous sentiment articulated by Shannon. Jackie believes that because men observe sports they previously participated in, their sport spectatorship has a different meaning.

While men’s influence and relationship to sports was discussed heavily by participants, it became apparent that while individuals felt knowledgeable concerning university men’s basketball, they viewed women’s basketball to be an unknown. Study participants attributed this to a lack of visibility of university women’s basketball.

A quick glance at ESPN or other cable sports programs reveals a virtual mosaic of the boundless sport consumption opportunities available. From billiards to ultimate fighting, television, print media, radio and Internet bring potential fans closer to sports than ever before. Yet the same glance would reveal that the sports most easily accessible are men’s sports. Even though women’s sports, like tennis, figure skating and basketball have increasingly become easier to access, consumers still have to search out those opportunities to watch females engaging in athletic endeavors. This deficiency in access and coverage can have profound effects on potential fans, as witnessed in the thoughts and insights of study participants. Women’s basketball suffers from a lack of visibility in media outlets, including television, radio and print. The deficiency of coverage creates a lack of knowledge and awareness by potential consumers. The following
section chronicles participant thoughts regarding their lack awareness of women’s basketball and their observations concerning media portrayals. This theme was robust, as nearly all study participants cited lack of visibility and knowledge as a hurdle to their consumption.

To put it frankly, Shannon is a sports nut. She lives and breathes basketball, scheduling her entire day around the daily viewing of Sportscenter. Ever since she can remember she had a basketball in her hand, influenced by her father’s background in the sport. She feels most comfortable wearing an NBA jersey, usually Paul Pierce, her favorite player. For her sports are more than just a hobby, they are a central passion in her life, something that often frustrates her close friends:

*Sportcenter* is probably my favorite show. I am pretty much addicted to it. I don’t know, it runs my life. Every night, if somebody calls me, and you know *Sportcenter* comes on right on the hour, then after hour after hour. So if someone calls I have to start *Sportcenter* right on the hour. I have to watch it straight through, I can’t start over until it repeats itself. So if someone calls me when I’m in the full on thing I tell them I’m gonna have to call you back I’m watching *Sportcenter* and they get mad at me, but that’s just how it goes.

Shannon spends a considerable amount of time talking to her male friends about basketball, but admits the subject of women’s basketball rarely comes up. “Women’s basketball is a whole lot less popular,” she says. “People don’t find it as interesting, it’s not widely known about.” Ironically, the year prior Shannon was roommates with three of the university’s women’s basketball players, yet had never attended any games.

Since she watches sports on television, follows it on the Internet and reads sport magazine and newspapers daily, she can speak to the lack of women’s sport in the media.
Lately there is one particularly place where the absence of women’s sports has begun to upset her:

If you watch men’s college sport scores on the ticker, it will come up and have the game score and the top scorer, but when you watch women’s scores it just flashes the team scores, no extra info. It kinda makes me mad, I don’t think that it’s fair. The guys get all this extra, even though they do make more money. I mean, these guys get put on there for scoring double digits, but a women’s player has like 31 points and where is her name on the ticker?

Shannon points to the general anonymity of women’s basketball players included in media programming. The sports ticker, a running bar across the bottom of the screen, has become a central place sport consumers turn to in order to quickly get the latest scores and news. In a media environment where quick and easily accessible information has become expected by consumers, the ticker itself serves and important function. While Shannon doesn’t watch women’s basketball, she still feels the lack of individual athlete names is unfair.

Shannon points to her perception that people don’t find women’s basketball interesting and that it isn’t widely distributed or known about. When the subject of women in the mass media came up, Shannon was quick to point out why certain women are portrayed in the media:

When Sheryl Swoops came out (as a lesbian) she was featured on ESPN. I think she was featured because she was a WNBA athlete and was supposed to be one of the girlie girls and then she came out and all of suddenly she’s on the ticker on the bottom of ESPN. No female athletes ever did that. They pick the prettiest women they can find and put her in a swimsuit and make her look not even like an athlete. Just because sex sells and they put it out there to get more people to come to the games. It’s a female sport, female sports just aren’t supported as much. They just don’t have a good image. They aren’t portrayed as being competitive.
For Shannon, the women she sees in the media are there not because of athletic ability, but an unrelated story about their life or their beauty. She connected this to the fact that female athletes don’t have a good image or aren’t portrayed as being competitive.

The experience of seeing female athletes in non-athletic apparel was echoed by Hannah. While looking through her racing magazines and Sports Illustrated she reflected:

*Sports Illustrated* had pictures of (Danica Patrick) in regular clothing as opposed to her racing gear. I think racing is considered more a men’s sport, so she wanted to show everyone she could still be a nice looking lady. She’s not manly or anything like that. It’s all sex appeal and there are some racy pictures of her out there. In my *National Inquirer* they had a layout of her. She was in a skimpy bikini, barely nothing to it, laying across a car. She was showing she was still a sexy lady even in a man’s sport.

Placing women as sex symbols instead of athletes, may devalue their athletic skill and excellence by prioritizing their appearance and femininity. Claire offered her insight as well into the type of female athletes portrayed:

The media definitely ignores women’s sports. They focus on men’s sports and put them out there a lot. You always see the NBA, never the WNBA. I flip through channels and never see any female athletes, unless it’s more entertainment type news about somebody, maybe Anna Kournikova.

The lack of visibility of female athletes and women’s sports was a consistent topic of conversation among participants. Sophia, a college student, reflected on the general ease of watching men’s basketball on television, compared to the challenges of finding women’s basketball:

On TV I always see men’s basketball and I don’t think I’ve ever seen a women’s basketball game on TV. I can’t just catch it and say ‘Oh, women’s basketball,’ you can just catch a men’s basketball game. We’re not exposed to (women’s basketball) as much. It’s so easy to turn on the TV and watch a men’s basketball game.
Since Sophia can easily turn on men’s basketball, she has the ability to consume it more. That access to consumption can have a profound impact on becoming a fan. Grace remarked that the lack of visibility leads her to make assumptions about the level of women’s basketball when compared with men’s. “It’s covered much less in the media, so I associate that with being less dramatic and interesting, she says.”

Sophia also sees a different attitude when it comes to the purpose of the men’s team versus the one purported for the women’s squad. Sophia sees the school place a greater emphasis on the men’s squad, positioning the women as a side show. She remarks:

I don’t know. I hate that most schools make the men’s team like ‘the’ team and the women’s team is just like a side team, just to accommodate women, but the men’s basketball team is like ‘the’ basketball team and that needs to change. I’ve heard so much about our men’s basketball team this year and our success, but we rarely talk about our women’s success. Only a few people know that we even got like the conference championship a couple years ago.

As the “side team,” women’s basketball will attract less interest by both media outlets and potential spectators. Claire positions women’s sports in a more historical context, suggesting that since men’s sports developed early, they were granted a head start to become popular. The sentiment that people aren’t as interested and invested in women’s sport is again reflected:

Women’s sports definitely get overshadowed by the men’s sports. People just don’t really care as much. I know certain people do, but as a population, they don’t. I don’t want to say they’re not as athletic, but men’s sports just shine more. Men’s sports developed before women’s sport and have always been popular. Women’s sports just never got to that level.
Claire indicated that there are people who frequent women’s basketball games, but as a whole, people aren’t as interested. The subject of being overshadowed came up several times throughout the interview process. Theresa was quick to point to men’s football and basketball, two large “revenue-generating” sports on college campuses:

The men’s sport, football and basketball, they make all this money and get all this money, I sometimes feel like it overshadows everything. I think we as consumers kinda have to struggle to get past that for the other things. These two men’s sports have gotten so much money they just overshadow everything. But I am a part of it, so what can I say.

Theresa, a season ticket holder for football and men’s basketball, noted that she contributes to this mentality by her specific attendance patterns. Another fan of men’s basketball and football, Jackie, listens to sports on the radio and television, saw women’s basketball as a giant unknown. While she is an avid consumer of men’s college basketball and the university team, she noted that she doesn’t see the women’s team featured in the media:

I don’t hear about it that much. I don’t know when they play. I don’t hear about it until after the fact. If I hear about it at all, it’s after the game is over. You don’t hear a build up about it. I don’t see it on the front page of the sports section or any newspaper if something big happened. They don’t talk about it on my sports radio station when I am driving home.

In each of the media outlets Jackie turns to, women’s basketball is absent, creating a hurdle for her potential consumption. The lack of build-up can have a profound impact, particularly concerning individual motivations to attend women’s basketball games. Others expressed “build up” as a sense of hype that is missing from women’s basketball.

This hype is particularly important on university campuses, where students often desire to
attend games in large groups. “They don’t get the hype like football and men’s basketball. You just don’t hear about it, it’s not like people talk about women’s basketball. People don’t even know about it,” Claire remarked. When asked who does the hyping, Claire indicated that it was the media or marketing departments. This hype contributes to people wanting to attend games, as Claire continues:

I think of hype when people are talking about it and just around campus. When I am with my boyfriend he’s always like, oh a men’s basketball game is on, they are really good this year – I’ve heard a lot about it. I haven’t heard anything about women’s basketball.

Even though the women’s basketball team was pre-ranked in the Top 5 nationally, and won its major conference championships the year prior, Claire hadn’t heard anything about the program. Sarah echoed this sentiment, noting that with more coverage comes more people talking about the game.

There’s more coverage of guy’s sports. Even around campus, especially with football, people are always talking about the game, especially if we lose. I think there is more publicity and advertising of guy’s sports. I don’t really see anything of the girl’s team. I don’t hear much about it.

The lack of visibility and hype can also impact perceptions of success. As stated previously, the women’s basketball program was ranked in the Top 5 prior to the season, spending the bulk of the regular season ranked in the Top 10. Their roster included the conference’s player of the year and a national player of the year candidate and All-American. While the men’s team had suffered the previous year, they had begun a steady
climb to contending for a conference championship. However, while the women’s team truly was in the race for a National Championship, the perceptions of several participants conflicted with this reality.

Karen connected the men’s team with winning championships, but was unable to see the women at that level. She reflects:

You don’t have memories or visions of National Championships. The men’s teams are at a level it is always possible they might be a contender, some years more than others, but it’s always discussed early on. I think if the women were National Champions or in contention that might spark interest and following. My perception is the women aren’t contending, though I know they are ranked, like 7th or something. So I guess they would be, but you don’t hear about it, so you don’t feel that vested interest. You’re not on that journey with them.

Even though Karen knew that the women’s team was ranked, her perception — due to a lack of coverage — was that they weren’t competing at that high level. Diane added a similar sentiment. “If they were at that level where they were going for a championship they would get more fans, but I don’t think they get the consistent numbers as many as men’s do,” she says. Since mass media outlets would always cover the men as potential champions, it reinforced the images and visions of their squad as National Champions. Sarah shared Karen’s perception:

I don’t know. Maybe it’s a cycle. Not that many people go, so it doesn’t get covered, so not many people become interested and it doesn’t become popular. It’s an unending cycle. I think to get out of that the women’s team needs to be the best. You hear about Tennessee, about them being No. 1. I think if our team was good it would create a different spin on things.

Sarah linked the lack of coverage to lack of attendance in a cyclical fashion. Since women’s sports are not covered, people cannot form attachments, hence it does not
become widely popular like men’s sport. She uses Tennessee as an example because she
does hear about them, then compares her university team to Tennessee. Even though the
university women’s team finished the season ranked above Tennessee, Sarah’s perception
was that they were not good. Sophia noticed the lack of attention for even good women’s
basketball teams as early as high school. She reflected:

I think one thing that I’ve noticed with women’s sports, no matter how good you
are, especially if you’re really good and you’re always winning, it is seems like
people don’t pay attention to it and then if you’re losing then they really don’t pay
attention. I just remember playing high school basketball and we were like city
champions and no one cared, it wasn’t a big deal. And our men, they sucked, but
people still went to their games.

Sophia’s experience with people’s differing levels of interest in men’s and women’s
sports goes back to her participation as an athlete. Even though the girl’s basketball team
was successful, it did not receive as much attention as its male counterparts.

An awareness of big time women’s basketball, particularly the University of
Tennessee squad, was mentioned by Marisa as well:

We don’t go to (women’s basketball) sporting events. We don’t have it on the TV.
That’s not my husband’s interest so he won’t draw my attention to it. When I
worked at Tennessee I knew about Pat Summit, I wonder if she still is there.
Where am I going? Oh, so we have been at places where there were well known
women’s teams. I know who the women’s teams are in NCAA ball, who they
have been over time, like Tennessee. I know that OSU is good, but I don’t know
enough about the players.

Marisa knew that the women’s team was good, she had worked at Tennessee which had a
more visible women’s program, but she didn’t have any knowledge of the individual
players. Numerous participants articulated the need to “know” individual players in order
to feel connected to a team. Knowledge of players can take on different meanings,
sometimes simply having a basic understanding of player’s lives to creating personalities of the players in their mind. **Lack of visibility by media outlets creates a lack of knowledge about female basketball players and teams.** This study reveals that women who are fans desire knowledge of players to create a more personal connection to teams, therefore potential spectators find it difficult to gain affiliation with women’s basketball teams.

Jackie discussed her lack of knowledge of individual players and how it impacts her decision not to attend women’s games:

> I’ve seen the OSU women’s team. I know their coach is male. I know they are really good, not a chance I could actually name them. I think it impacts my decision to not attend women’s basketball because I don’t know them.

Since Jackie doesn’t feel like she knows the players, she is less likely to attend games. Jackie places a strong emphasis on the personal attachment to players and since she doesn’t know that much about the women’s team, she doesn’t attend women’s basketball games.

Marisa feels like she knows the men’s basketball team. She seeks out human interest stories to learn more about the players. Even simply watching the men’s team has offered her insights into the type of people she believes the men’s players are. This experience has been central to her connection as a fan. She reflects on the impact of developing connections to players and her lack of association with the women’s team:

> I don’t know the women’s players. I mean, that’s why you like one team rather than another’. You get to know your players. You don’t develop affection toward
people you don’t see. You see them interviewed. Learn about family life, you feel like you know them. I don’t know the women’s basketball. Maybe someone isn’t getting those stories out there.

Marisa, connects her affection for certain teams to her knowledge of players. This knowledge goes deeper than simply their position or school year, encompassing family life and background. Shirley also wanted to know more intimate details of player’s lives. While her knowledge of women’s basketball players was limited, she spoke to her fascination with human interest stories of athletes, particularly of tennis players she follows:

It’s interesting to find out why people have become what they are. You get to know what has made them so focused on their sport or to become a perfectionist in their sport. You see why they are so good at what they do, what adversities or what opportunities did the individual experience to get there and there’s a variety of scenarios of how that athlete got wired as a youngster or kid. You read about the opportunities given to that individual for them to become what they are and it’s fun to sit back and see what that equation is. For tennis players a lot of times it’s a little more affluence, they went to a private tennis camp down in Florida and then they progressed to those ranks. Another sport it might have been a child that worked on the farm and had an interest in wrestling and had some opportunities and maybe a parent that helped that individual strive or mentally coached that individual and provided the positive feedback. It’s interesting to look at what is that combination of factors that provided this outcome and superb athlete.

These stories help develop personal associations with players that can blossom into a deep affiliation with a sport or team. Participants cited human interest stories in media outlets as important to their connection to players and teams.

For Theresa, the human interest element of sport is compelling reason behind her attraction to sports. She stated:

Turmoil, rebuilding, fun, coaches working with kids – you have to admire what they do. I am a human interest person, I love the gossip. That one young man
when his mother died. I am more into the human interest pieces, not the gossip. I always love that side of things. Oh yeah, human interest stories make sport good.

Theresa’s sentiment was echoed by Marisa. She remarked that when she discusses sport, often the conversation will center on players’ lives.

When we are out talking about the team, we talk a lot about the football and basketball lives. Where they come from, their families. One was highlighted in the paper with his mother. They talked about what she did to shape his life. It’s a topic of conversation. Along with their on-field accomplishments. Their personal life is of interest.

Jackie often searches out human interest stories to learn more about players, but also infers aspects of player’s personalities from their on-court behavior. During our conversation she mentioned several players who she has created personality profiles in her head about. She explains:

It’s not that I actually know them, it’s what I have made up about them in my mind. If I know them because I have heard them being interviewed that’s one thing. But I also make up little personalities in my head about how they are from their behavior on the court, things like humility, endurance or sense of humor. If I see them express that, I like them and am sure they are a good guy. That’s one reason I prefer basketball because you can see their faces, they’re closer up – with football the football masks who they might really be.

Because proximity to the court allows her to have a closer view of the players, she can draw on her observations during the games to aid in creating a sense of feeling of personal relationships. While Jackie could make up personalities for women’s basketball players to attain that sense of connection, the barriers to attending games have proven too great for her to attend and potentially create that player connection.

The culmination of lack of media attention and visibility, coupled with a lack of knowledge of players, creates many uncertainties in the minds of potential
consumers. These uncertainties make attending women’s basketball less feasible and accessible. Since people have limited knowledge of women’s basketball, together with limited time to consume sports, they choose to attend men’s sport.

Even for the most loyal sports fan, the time and money required to attend sporting events can sometimes represent a hurdle to attending games, emphasized by Theresa’s declaration that, “There just isn’t enough time or money to do it all.” With money and available time posing limitations, the unknown elements of women’s basketball make it a risky proposition.

For Shirley, her desire to accomplish as much as possible in a 24-hour period often gets in the way of her enjoyment at games:

I’m the type that I judge my day by how much I accomplished. It’s kind of an unhealthy mindset that when I allow myself the time to just go and observe and enjoy something, sometimes I feel guilty because I should be home doing this or at home doing that. I should be productive and when I’m at a sporting event I really don’t feel productive, but overall, yeah, I enjoy it. If I’m not stressed by something else that needs to be completed, like if I’m in the midst of writing a grant, it’s sometimes hard for me to relax and watch that event when I know there are other things that must be done.

Shirley juggles her interest in watching sporting events with her desire to feel productive. Oftentimes the two clash and Shirley must purposefully carve out time to consume sport.

Diane, a long-time season ticket holder, noted the ease of simply watching games at home instead of making the trip to the arena:

Sometimes (the games) are very time consuming. I love Ohio State basketball and I had tickets for a lot of years but by the time I’d get off work and then run home and come back it was just a long day and it was easier just to watch it on TV than to come back and actually go to the event.
While Diane would sometimes prefer to watch the game at home, Marisa couldn’t imagine not being at the game. However, her loyalty and avid consumption of men’s basketball may serve as a hurdle to developing an interest in the women’s program. She reflects:

There’s not a whole lot more time, I couldn’t go to the men’s and women’s basketball games. I have a hard time, it interferes with the things I have to get done to go to the men’s basketball games and watch them on TV. If I were to add the women’s team, there would just be no way.

Like Shirley, Marisa and Diane, time and other life demands posed a burden on an individual’s consumption of sporting events. Grace shared the sentiment, “It’s a matter of not having the endless amounts of time, energy and money. I don’t know if it even costs anything to go to women’s basketball. I am assuming it does.”

Jackie knows very little about women’s basketball at the university. While she can easily identify men’s basketball players by name, she admitted that she couldn’t identify members of the women’s program. Yet, for Jackie, the questions concerning women’s basketball are larger than naming individual athletes. Her questions span the spectator experience and pose a significant hurdle to her consumption:

With the sports I attend I know the rules, I know where to park, I know how to get my tickets, I know where my seat is. For women’s basketball I am not sure exactly where to park. I don’t know if I can just buy a ticket at the door. I don’t know if I am buying a seat or is it general seating. I don’t know how much it costs. All of these things together, I don’t decide to go. There are just too many unanswered questions for me.

All the unanswered questions and unknown elements of women’s basketball combine to create a formidable barrier for Jackie’s consumption. Others noted that their perception of
what the experience at women’s game would be like, lessens their interest in attending. While it is quite possible that individuals could attend both men’s and women’s games, due to participant resource limitations, they saw it as an either — or. Since Claire has been to numerous men’s games, she has a clear picture of what that experience looks like. While she enjoys men’s basketball, she is unsure of whether women’s basketball would be worth the money and effort:

I would go to the men’s game because I know I will have a good time. I kinda expect if I am going to a women’s game that I probably won’t have a good time, I will be bored sitting there. Since I already have the experience going to men’s games, I probably would simply keep going to them. If you don’t think you’re going to have any good of a time and get into the game, you’re not going to want to go to it.

Claire assumes that she will not have a good time at women’s basketball games. The perceptions participants have concerning women’s basketball often reflect a negative attitude toward women’s sports as compared to men’s sports. The next section will examine participant perceptions of women’s basketball and how these ideas impact their lack of interest to attend women’s sports.

What makes an athletic event fun and exciting? Sport is just one of a myriad of entertainment options people can choose for leisure activities. Consider big-time university football. When study participants were asked what they love about attending football games many answered that they love the band, the roaring fans, the beautiful stadium, the tailgating and even the aesthetics of the scoreboard. What’s missing? Well, football for one thing. Understanding why people attend sporting events is a complex question that has been explored throughout multiple academic disciplines. The following
section is an account of individual perceptions and thoughts concerning not only women’s basketball, but how it compares to men’s basketball. While these individuals have not attended a women’s game in recent years, they were eager to express their perceptions of the game and how these feelings may impact their decision not to attend.

Can you imagine a game with absolutely no fans? It would be hard to separate the game and the thousands of cheering fans that fill stadiums. From The Wave to booing bad calls, spectators are a crucial part of the American sports landscape. While study participants discussed athletes and teams at great length, there was also much discussion concerning the role fellow fans play in their spectating experience. Some, like Jackie, noted that they are turned off by those around them who boo and make a ruckus. However, most participants cited crowds and fellow fans as being a central part of their experience as a spectator. From the ability to people watch to high-fiving strangers, individuals were attracted to events, in part, for the camaraderie with other fans.

**Individuals articulated that central to their enjoyment at athletic events is crowd factors, such as size and enthusiasm of spectators. Participants perceive women’s basketball to be far less attended than men’s basketball and believe this would negatively impact their experience.**

For Karen, part of being at an athletic event is being around likeminded fans. A big crowd is a big draw for Karen, creating a buzz in an arena:

I think the crowd impacts your enjoyment of the total event. All the aspects of being there, the cumulative effect. I would say because the crowd (women’s basketball is less), I mean the bigger the crowd the more fun it is for me.
Karen connected a bigger crowd with being more fun and also noted her perception that women’s basketball draws fewer spectators. Hannah shared a similar sentiment reflecting on her experience at a women’s game over a decade ago.

I just wasn’t impressed the one time I went, there just wasn’t anyone there. It was boring that time I went. They weren’t into it and I really like the fan involvement. Cheering your team on, there just wasn’t that much there. I should probably go to the game and not judge it from an experience 15 years ago. Ever since I started going to men’s basketball and football, it’s always been jammed packed. No one seems to be into the women. I think a lot of people see sports as a guy thing.

Hannah added the comment that sport was a “guy thing,” addressing a potential reason why people aren’t interested in women’s sport. She finds particular interest in fan participation and therefore she found her experience at a women’s game less enjoyable because there was less fan investment.

The perception of a lack of fan involvement during women’s games was reflected in Claire’s comments concerning her disinterest in attending women’s games. She stated:

I know the men’s are totally sold out and I am assuming that the women never sell out games. I can’t imagine as many fans getting pissed and yelling as they do at the men’s game. People are more passionate about men’s basketball.

Claire cannot envision the women’s games being sold out, but her perceptions of fan involvement are deeper than simply purchasing a ticket. The example of fans yelling and getting upset represented a deeper enthusiasm and zeal than she could imagine being displayed at women’s games.

While many participants weren’t sure why people, including themselves, weren’t interested in women’s basketball, Shannon had quite a bit to say regarding why women’s basketball may lag behind in the attendance column:
I would go to the guys’ game, it’s more exciting. When you’re at women’s games and there’s nobody there. Nobody is as excited as men’s. It’s just less atmosphere. People don’t want to go to games if it’s not gonna be fun. (Women’s basketball) is less exciting because it isn’t as fast, it’s just a slow pace. It’s more based around plays.

Shannon, who is an avid fan of men’s basketball, views the women’s game as slower, adding to the sense that women’s basketball is less exciting. For Shannon, this is epitomized by a more systematic approach through plays rather than less formalized basketball that she perceives the men play.

Two important subthemes have emerged from participant perceptions of women’s basketball. The first, as stated by Claire, relates to the idea that less people attend women’s basketball games. Shannon, agreeing with Claire’s beliefs about lack of attendance, also voices another perception: a lack of passion among fans. This view of passion can be connected to the attitude that women’s basketball is less exciting, hence draws more limited passion from spectators. The view that women’s basketball is less exciting was shared by many participants, including Sophia.

Sophia feels like the University team is “her team” and loves the thrill of watching thousands of people stand and cheer them. When it comes to women’s basketball, however, Sophia believes the environment lacks excitement:

I want to be in an environment where there’s a lot of excitement and men’s basketball does bring that. I think if women’s basketball brought a little bit more excitement I would definitely go.
If more excitement is what Sophia found lacking in women’s basketball, each participant found women’s basketball to be missing an essential piece of what draws them to men’s basketball. **Study participants enjoy fast-paced, aggressive action during sporting events. Individuals expressed their perception that women’s basketball is less exciting, aggressive and physical than men’s basketball, making attendance less desirable.**

For Shannon the excitement of basketball can be boiled down to one element: dunking. While Candace Parker may have recently shown that dunking in the women’s game is on its way, Shannon isn’t particularly patient waiting for it:

> I think the lack of dunking hurts women’s basketball a lot. There is just an excitement about someone getting that high up and over someone and dunking. There’s something girls basketball lacks because dunking is a big part of the excitement of the game. When somebody dunks the crowd just goes nuts.

Shannon saw dunking as a display of athleticism for the fans that had no equal in the women’s game. Shannon elaborated more generally on the lack of excitement in women’s basketball:

> (Men’s games) are just a lot faster paced. There are usually a lot more people there. Women’s sports are not as fast, I picture them more with a slow movement of the ball. When it gets down to near overtime, those last couple of seconds – I just don’t feel like women would make the big play.

The perception of women’s basketball being slower also influenced Shannon’s assessment of whether women’s basketball could also be dramatic. She asserts that when the game is on the line, she can’t imagine women making the game-winning shot that has come to represent so many of our historical memories of men’s basketball.
While Shannon was the only participant to mention dunking, there was considerable agreement regarding the perception that women’s basketball was considerably less exciting. Sarah’s attitude of women’s basketball being less exciting began in high school where everyone attended boy’s basketball:

Even in high school I always wanted to go to the guy’s basketball games. I had friends on the girl’s team that always wanted me to come (laughs). All my friends would go see the guys play, so they kind of understood. I just much rather watch the guys because it was more high scoring. It was more physical and entertaining, I guess. I am entertained by things that are fast and strong and quick. That’s what I look for.

Even though Sarah had friends on the girls’ team, she was more interested in watching the boys’ games because her friends would attend those and they were more entertaining. She searches out events that are fast-moving and exciting, experiences she does not connect with women’s basketball.

Individuals had a tough time believing in the aggressive potential of women’s sport. While participants loved the roughness of sport, they perceived women’s sports to be far less aggressive, particularly involving contact between women or the incidents of fighting.

Though Hannah’s experience with women’s sports is limited, she had a hard time seeing women fit into the aggressive models of sport embodied by their male peers:

I’ve been to some men’s hockey. I have never been to women’s hockey. I just can’t imagine the women being as rough as the men. I guess I am into the roughness or pain, I don’t know (laughs).
Being unable to see women’s potential for aggression clearly was a barrier for Hannah’s potential consumption of women’s sport. She expounded on her views concerning gender and roughness:

Men are just more out to kill. They are out for pain and all. I’ve never heard of women’s football, but there is a woman who comes into the office and talks about it and it sounds tough. But I can’t imagine women would hit as hard as the men or tackle hard and stuff. She looked like she could take someone down in a heartbeat, but I just think men enjoy that bashing and He-Man thing.

For Hannah, aggressive tendencies were more a male preserve. While she has heard of women playing aggressive sports, there still was a disconnect regarding how hard-hitting women can be. The idea of women as more gentle was articulated by Shirley:

I’d say there’s less brawls, less fighting. Women are much kinder athletes than men are. Just by my observation that you don’t see women out there, at least I don’t think so, fighting and you know a comparison would be men’s and women’s hockey. At the women’s hockey game I never saw anything close to a fight. You go to men’s hockey and, yeah, you’re gonna see probably four or five start up fights.

While Shirley’s experience at women’s hockey is much more limited than her background watching men’s hockey, she does not believe that women will engage in the same type of fighting that has come to represent the sport. Karen echoed similar comments adding that there may be a strategic reason for aggression:

I don’t watch much (women’s basketball), but there aren’t many people who get slammed to the floor. I think that might be a more common strategy in the boy’s game, more aggression.

Two students, both lifelong athletes, felt that women’s sport was less aggressive. While Claire stated this without any hesitation, Sarah clearly was torn about her statement concerning the pace and aggression of women’s sport:
I guess it's just because men’s sport is more aggressive and fast-paced. I don’t know’ cause I don’t want to say it’s more competitive and athletic. I know that I am aggressive and I’m a girl. I was really athletic when I played sports.

Sarah felt that she was aggressive and competitive, but her general conception was that men’s sport was more so. Sarah’s struggle with this may showcase the struggle for some women, who grew up in the aftermath of Title IX with many sporting opportunities, with societal notions of sport being a male preserve of aggression and competition.

While Sarah outwardly struggled with her perception of men’s sport being more aggressive, words for Claire to discuss women’s lack of excitement came easily. The topic turned to high school, when Claire attended a girl’s basketball game:

In high school I went to one girl’s game and it’s just slower paced, the men are more exciting, fast paced and always going. As a woman’s thing, we’re not as aggressive. Guys, I generally think, if he does something bad or fouls you, he’s gonna get more pissed than a girl would. The pace, men’s (basketball) is always going. Whenever I see women’s basketball it’s just boring.

Claire touched on two important points in her statement, reflecting that women’s sport is boring and that women, in general, are less aggressive. She thought men would react aggressively in the face of being fouled, more so than a “girl” would. This lack of aggression and fast pace contributed to her assessment that women’s basketball is boring.

However, some individuals did not find women’s basketball to be less exciting, less aggressive or less entertaining. Some touched on the fact that basketball has generally the same rules, while another appreciated the potential differences between men’s and women’s hoops.
Marisa took issue with the idea of why women’s sport could be perceived to be anything different than the men’s games. She stated:

I don’t know why it would be any different, same game, same rules. They run and jump and do all the same physical things. I don’t know why it would be less physical.

While Marisa had a hard time differentiating between men and women’s basketball, Grace shared her view that both are the same, “Basketball is basketball is basketball in my mind,” she said. Diane took a slightly different approach, reflecting that women’s and men’s basketball are different, yet the women’s game should be appreciated for its uniqueness and diversity:

I think it’s different when I watch women’s basketball. I think their techniques are so different than men’s. It’s a different type of thing that you appreciate. I appreciate the way they move the ball and the plays instead of the guys that just run and gun and that type of thing. I find it to be completely different.

While Shannon was critical of the emphasis on plays in women’s basketball, Diane found it to be something of unique value. She sometimes will find a women’s basketball game on television, often on ESPN2, and will watch a couple of minutes. Instead of viewing the potential differences of the game negatively, she has learned to view the games through a different lens.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Studying social worlds is not always a straightforward, neat process, yet it is precisely these messes that make humans so interesting. Exploring how people act and make sense of their world showcases that people’s actions are often wrought with contradictions and illogicalities. Chapter 4 detailed participant experiences and attitudes concerning their sport consumption and fan experiences. These stories often exposed the mess in social words, setting up various paradoxes, conflicting personal sentiments and tangled themes, while also detailing the rigorous social and gendered order in society. The goal of the following chapter is to work through some of the clutter to explore in greater depth the commonalities among participants’ stories, exposing the factors that lead to their disinterest in consuming women’s sports.

Central to a goal of scientific inquiry, I intend to link emergent themes from participant interviews to established theory. This practice will place my research in a broader context upon which future inquiry can be built. Furthermore, a great promise of
qualitative research is the ability to produce concepts to inform our quest for knowledge. While many of the themes are interwoven with others, I will attempt to draw them out independently without losing the essential context from which they come.

Summary of Findings

Male Influence in the Spectator Lives of Women

Grace was clear when she reflected on why she doesn’t attend women sports. “It’s all my husband’s fault,” she said. While it may be a bit more complicated than that, Grace’s simplicity struck at the heart of the most robust theme drawn from the data: the significant influence of men in the lives of female spectators. This theme spanned participant ages, ethnicities, educational background and sport participation background.

Study participants viewed sporting events as opportunities to spend time with the important males in their lives. They believed sport was important to the men around them, thus their interest in sport piggybacked on that of the men. While the foundations of men’s and women’s relationships with sports will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, study participants shared that their experience watching sport has been facilitated by men. Since the males in their lives watch men’s sport nearly exclusively, women watch men’s athletics predominately. While some participants discussed learning sport as vehicle to meet and interact with men, others saw sport as an opportunity to view their mate in a different way. Furthermore, the significance of male influence is not specific to one relationship, but forms a pattern through women’s lives. As children, women are influenced by grandfathers, fathers and brothers. As they age, they carry with
them the influence of men when forming new relationships with boyfriends and male peers. Husbands, sons and nephews later orchestrate women’s spectating experiences, maintaining this powerful influence as women grow older. This aspect of male influence serves to reinforce male dominance in the spectator lives of women throughout their lives. Women adopt a male perspective on sports since men provide females access to sporting experiences. They learn about sports to talk with men when they are single, and consume sports to be with their husbands when they are married.

Are all these women stuck in marriages lacking relationship equity? Have women fallen into patterns of blindly following men around, catering to their needs? These statements may oversimplify a complex issue that has its roots in a number of psychological and sociological patterns of gendered behavior. Some of these gendered norms and experiences were drawn from participant stories of observing how men use sport to relate to each other. While men often excluded women from discussing sport, they further alienated women from a sporting experience by using sport as space for male bonding, distinct from any female influence. The aggregate of these experiences is men systematically keeping women outside a sporting culture, often making them feel weird for their interest in sports. Women’s experiences suggested that men don’t offer women credibility to discuss sport, particularly because they see sport as an experience reserved for men. While participants didn’t articulate a sense of anger regarding their exclusion, they did justify this behavior—specifically women who came of age in a pre-Title IX society—believing that men have a more intimate relationship with sport because they
had greater participation opportunities. Post-Title IX women did suggest a feeling of exclusion, but justified it more by men’s perception of expertise in sport or desire for bonding, rather than a component of their past participation. The data suggests participants did not see sport as a place for bonding among female friends.

Women’s Sports as an Unknown: Lack of Visibility

Women are socialized into sport by men who primarily view men’s sport, often making viewing men’s sport a family event. Individuals noted that they see men’s sports all around them, hear them discussed at work, access them easily on television and see them presented in newspapers and magazines. While men’s sports are readily available, they found women’s sport to be harder to access. Women sports are not discussed at work or talked about on the sports radio stations they tune into. Stories on women’s sports are buried on the eighth page of the newspaper and absent in sports-related magazines. This lack of visibility creates a lack of awareness by consumers, which is essential to consumer decisions. Because the university women’s basketball team is not visible, potential consumers do not learn about players, cannot gain information about upcoming games and have a difficult time creating connections with programs. While instant media attention may not instantly increase spectator attendance, improved media visibility would allow programs to better leverage their events against other entertainment options.

Though study participants had difficulty naming university basketball players or female athletes, they did provide insight on why certain female athletes are covered. Participants named two categories for women who are presented in the media.
Individuals cited the sexualization of female athletes as one reason certain athletes are profiled. They brought up Anna Kournikova and Danica Patrick as two female athletes they have seen featured in mass media outlets. The believed these women were featured due to their sexual appeal to men, rather than for their athletic accomplishments.

While the sexualization of female athletes was discussed, participants also believed some athletes are portrayed because of non-sports related entertainment type news. The Sheryl Swoops coming out story and Nancy Kerrigan’s saga were both mentioned as females depicted in the media.

While sports coverage often includes non-sport content, the examples presented above were cited by study participants as female athletes they see in news media. Purely focusing on non-sports related content can strip female athletes of their athleticism. Individuals observed that they often do not see women’s sports and athletes portrayed in the media, and when they do it can be for non-sport related reasons.

Women Sports as an Unknown: Lack of Knowledge

The overwhelming sense I obtained from study participants was that university women’s sports was a mystery. Though programs like the University of Tennessee were mentioned, overall vested consumers of men’s basketball had very little knowledge of the university’s women’s team. This lack of knowledge is quite expansive, including game logistics like where to buy tickets, cost of attendance, where to find schedule information, game location and rules of the game.
In addition, while study participants could name current men’s basketball players they found it difficult to find the name of a university women’s basketball player, with the exception of the women’s superstar athlete who is nationally known. Individuals could rattle off the background of the men’s coach, while only noting that the women’s coach was a male and wore glasses.

Participants expressed that the knowledge of players was important to their enjoyment and understanding of athletic events. Human interest stories were articulated as being extremely valuable to developing an understanding of players and supported in their view of sport as drama. Women in the study discussed sport in similar terms to how people would describe a desire to watch soap operas, seeing sport as a place of human turmoil, rebuilding, cliffhangers and spectacle. Participants relayed that they do not see women profiled in human interest pieces as often as they do male athletes.

Women’s Sports as an Unknown: Perceived Risks of Attendance

Women saw attending men’s basketball as an experience in consistency. They know where their seats are, they are aware of where to park, they know the players and coaches and are knowledgeable of where to find information on purchasing tickets. Individuals articulated that buying tickets has become a ritual because they expect to get the season ticket order the same time of year and the purchase is simply a given.

The lack of knowledge concerning women’s basketball makes attending games more of a risk since there are numerous unknown elements of attending. These unknowns
present a hurdle to attending, compounded by factors previously discussed. Moreover, participants noted limitations imposed on their spectatorship by money and time constraints, which could restrict their ability to attend women’s games.

Perceptions of Women’s Sport

While individuals were not consumers of women’s basketball they had numerous opinions about the sport and spectator experience. Participants said they wanted a fast-paced, exciting and physical game when they attend sporting events. They also noted that a large, animated crowd greatly enhances the sport spectator experience. Participants perceived women’s basketball to be less popular, less physical, less dramatic and less entertaining compared to men’s basketball. Additionally, they believed that women’s basketball was more family-friendly and more accessible than collegiate men’s basketball. Older participants were less likely to view women’s basketball as less physical, dramatic or entertaining, while college participants viewed women’s basketball more negatively. Of particular interest is their perception that women’s basketball is characterized by an empty arena and less passionate fans.

Participants viewed the university women’s basketball team as being good, but not of the caliber to compete for a national championship. Ironically, while these interviews were being conducted, the women’s team was ranked in the Top 10, ending the season as a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament. A disconnect clearly exists between spectators of men’s basketball and their perception of women’s basketball as not nationally competitive.
While perceptions are not always rooted in reality, individuals felt that their perceptions of the game made them less likely to attend women’s basketball. While some participants based their attitudes on games attended decades ago, many individuals formed these ideas without ever attending a women’s basketball game. The question then becomes, where and how do individuals develop such perceptions of women’s basketball? While lack of media exposure and opportunities to view women’s sports clearly impact consumer awareness, women’s attitudes toward women’s sports can also be linked back to cultural socialization and attitudes about female athletes.

Implications and Theoretical Considerations

Sports, Men and Women: The Relationship of Relationships

Sporting events are produced and consumed in the presence of others. The results of this study suggest women’s sports consumption is strongly socialized by the men in their lives. That sport is an institution created and maintained by men, for men, is not a new idea. Coakley (1998) defines socialization as “an active process of learning and social development that occurs as people interact with one another and become acquainted with the social world in which they live (p. 88)” He continues to discuss the impact of socialization, noting that through socialization people “form ideas about who they are, and make decisions about their goals and behaviors” (p. 88).

The results of this study suggest the process of socialization favoring men’s sports begins by watching sport with fathers and grandfathers, continuing with the glorification of their male siblings’, and is later reaffirmed by boyfriends, husbands and sons. The
current study underscores the importance of socialization in the lives of women as sport
consumers. Socialization is a term used to describe a vast array of social forces. One
manifestation of the process of socialization is the creation and maintenance of gender
roles.

The idea that men influence the lives of women is not revolutionary. Scholars
within the fields of women’s studies, gender studies and sociology grapple with male
influence, included in concepts such as patriarchy, male hegemony and gender roles.
However, the extension of male influence into sport spectator behavior represents a new
twist on the previous literature. While I was not shocked that women attend sporting
events to be with significant men in their lives, I was surprised by the intensity of this
motivation.

Connell, Ashenden, Kessler and Dowsett (1982) presented an aspect of gender
relations that is reflected in this study’s participant experiences. First, that interaction
between men and women is “constituted cumulatively in a system of mutually reinforcing
structures” (Connell, et. al., 1982 as cited in Whitson, 1990, p. 20). This is similar to how
Creedon (1998) conceptualizes hegemonic powers within sport as “an infrasystem of
values that overshadows our awareness and helps dominant groups maintain their power”
(p. 93).

Study participants spoke at great length concerning how men have shaped their
experiences in sport. Individuals believed that sport means something different to men
than women. This was conceptualized by participants to be a reflection that men had/have
greater participation opportunities in the sports they watch as spectators. However, individuals cited greater societal forces—a feeling, a belief that sport is a “man’s thing,” it has a different significance in male lives. Whether the manifestation of this was talking about it more with friends or using it as a place for male bonding, individuals touched upon these larger social structures and forces that overshadow awareness. These structures and systems create and enforce male privilege over women in sport. Even with greater participation opportunities for women in sport, we still see that men are gatekeepers of the sporting world. They lead women into sport spectatorship through their interests and utilize a male—controlled media to further socialize women into their sports world.

Results of the study suggest gender roles within the social structure of marriage or serious relationships contribute to this gendered system of male influence. Women articulated that part of being in a relationship with the males in their lives was supporting their interest in sport through attending sporting events. While some participants perceived themselves as fans of university men’s basketball, others stated that if they were not dating or married to the men in their life, they would likely not attend games. College-aged participants discussed how sport is used to meet men. Older participants exchanged similar stories of how they felt understanding sport was important to meet men.

The roles women fill as wives, mothers and girlfriends are manifestations of the gender roles women adopt within society. Numerous scholars throughout the fields of
women studies, psychology and sociology have examined how gender roles serve to promote men’s interests over the desires of women, particularly in the context of marriage. Psychologist, Katherine Torres, viewed the subject of gender roles within couples from the vantagepoint of co-dependent socialization. She argued that women were trained to live and accept the “uneven scale of men being more important than women (1996, p. 7). Torres discusses teaching her clients the careful balance between dependence and interdependence and presents a situation all too familiar to her and patients:

Many of the women I counsel relate that in years past they have dealt with their husband’s various addictions to television sports, alcohol, spending, drugs and other women. Back then their lives revolved around their husband’s compulsions. Their lives as a couple and a family revolved around the needs of the man in the house (1996, p. 10).

While Torres wrote these reflections a decade ago, the patterns of behavior still echo in study participant experiences today. As children, participants discussed how family life centered around Dad’s golf game. When they were older, they spoke of how men’s interest in attending sporting events dictated the family’s need to prioritize attending games. If sport can be classified as an addiction, clearly many of these women are living with an addict.

Torres ties this experience elevating male interests over women’s to the roles women fill within society. Speaking to this experience she writes:

What is the Karma of this situation that I’m dealing with? It seems to be outside my particular relationship; it seems more general and pervasive, such as a life lesson. It seems tied into the role of being female in this lifetime (p. 10).
The experience of Torres and the women she counsels suggests that being a female in society is tied to placing the interests of men foremost in a relationship. While the influence of men was not a surprising theme drawn from the data, the intensity of its impact was somewhat startling. It leads me to wonder about the amount of reciprocity in these relationships. Would men have the same sense of obligation to attend events that interested their wives/girlfriends that the participants had when attending basketball games and football bowl trips?

The sacrifice of women for men’s interest in sport reflects the way they view their relationship to men in their lives. Since women are socialized into sport by men, the data suggests that women adopt a male perspective in watching sport.

The data suggests the potential for relationship inequity. However, since the roles of husbands and boyfriends within these relationships were not investigated more fully, further inquiries could provide additional support for this contention.

Gendered power imbalance has been a central component of many theories, particularly significant for this study is a theory utilized with gender and film studies, the concept of “male gaze.” While first conceptualized by French philosopher Foucault, it was later adopted by film and feminist theorists to describe gender relations. In its most basic form, male gaze explores how humans view each other and themselves, particularly how men portray images of women for the enjoyment of men, accentuating the voyeuristic and feminine aspects of females, it’s essentially the objectification of women (Mulvey, 1975)
Berger (1972) conceived that the gaze is not unidirectional, which was affirmed by Belsey (1980) and has been adopted by the growing discipline of men’s studies to form an extension of the gaze as “female gaze.” Goddard (2000) explores how the gaze, both manifested and accepted by women and men, is not unidirectional. Since humans derive their sense of reality from society, Goddard explains how both sexes help constitute gender roles:

The ‘gaze’ may be seen as casual in the sense that masculine identity is never created in isolation. In other words, masculine identity is inextricably linked, not only to the social image of femaleness, but also to the image of men that femaleness (in all its variety) projects. Men (and women) do not assume roles in gendered isolation, but often play the role they believe women (and men) would like them to play. If, in many cases, their impressions of women’s images of men may be unfounded or skewed, the belief in such an image nevertheless becomes determinative of identity formation (p. 24).

Study participants constantly reflected on the gaze in their lives, even if they weren’t aware of it. Since, as the saying goes, fish are the last to discover the water, we often don’t recognize the social forces that deeply influence our actions. Individuals explained that going to sporting events was a part of their relationships with the men in their lives. For wives, they felt that they need to support their husbands’ interests in spectating sports. This attitude grew from a lifelong experience that being a female means having an interest in sport solely for the benefit of men. This is in essence participants doing the gaze. Through watching sports with men, women were able to fulfill the role men have lead them to believe they need to. What it means to be a wife, girlfriend, daughter or
sister is connected to the consumption of sports with men. The men in women’s lives dictate on what terms those sports are consumed, how close women can get to sport and what types of sport are observed.

The gaze is a social construct, just as gender and sport have been deemed social constructs. Goddard argues that our deeply held feelings of what men expect from women and vice versa begin with our experiences in early childhood, particularly stemming from children’s perceptions of their parents’ relationships. Goddard writes that “the ‘gazes’ between mother and father are themselves the product of social role-playing and so affirm certain stereotypes in the eyes of the child” (p. 27). Even women who came of age with all the benefits of Title IX still saw their experience as a spectator deeply connected with that of men. This perception of gender roles seems to have been manifested by the gaze, as they watched their mothers performing particular gender roles by consuming sport with their fathers. So too, they learned these patterns.

Claiming Authority: Sport as a Male Space

Sport is a place where boys become men and where masculinity is created, affirmed and validated (Cahn, 1998; Messner, 2002). Messner and Sabo referenced how sport has been intertwined with their experiences as men, reflecting that, “both of us were initiated into the world of sports by men and into the world of men through sports” (Messner and Sabo, 1990, p. 14). As Schell and Rodriguez (2000) argued:

Sport represents the cultural production of male supremacy and hypermasculinity, and this negative influence reconstitutes an ideology of male power and domination that is pervasive in American society (p. 15).
Part of the continued dominance of sport by men is the systematic exclusion of women. This manipulation can be seen through participant experiences, particularly in their stories of being restricted from discussing sports with men and being made to feel strange for their interest in sport.

Since women are made to feel strange for taking an interest in sport independently from their relationships with men, any connection to sport is, subsequently, directly fixed to their association with men. Even within their relationships, women feel like sport is a “male thing.” Sarah said she believed a girlfriend and boyfriend talking about sport was, in her words, “random and so abnormal.” She felt that society labeled women who have an active interest in discussing sport as abnormal, uncharacteristic of what women should do. Many participants stated that their spectator behavior is based on their husbands’ and fathers’ athletic interests. Their direct and indirect sport consumption is a reflection of the men’s sport consumption. Furthermore, participants believed that the exclusion of women from male sporting rituals was a reflection of men’s need to use sport as a place for masculine bonding.

Sport as a place for male bonding is intimately connected to sport as a male institution. Male hegemony is reaffirmed since sport has been situated in society as a male-only institution throughout much of history. While sport was one aspect of patriarchal dominance over women, it had a profound effect in creating and maintaining
gender roles (Dunning, 1986). Two outgrowths of using sport as a place for male bonding are particularly significant: the need for the exclusion of women and how men ultimately learn to relate to each other.

Study participants noted that the men in their lives often did not include them in conversations about sport. Shannon reflected that “guys are supposed to know the most about sports. It’s supposed to be their thing. They don’t really like it when girls try, that’s how they bond with each other.” Men simply disqualified women as potential contributors to conversations about athletics. Though they would invite women to come along to sporting events, this invitation didn’t necessarily connote acceptance into the sporting world. Furthermore, Diane reflected on her husband’s insistence that she remains silent while watching games, thus dictating the environment in which his sport is consumed.

The exclusion of women to allow a space for men a space is manifested by how boys are introduced to sport. Boys are welcomed into sport through their fathers and success in the sporting realm represents not only a place to gain attention and approval from their fathers, but an opportunity to differentiate themselves from being feminine (Messner 1992). Fischer and Gainer (1994) place gender segregation in sport as a reinforcement of societal oppression:

Social bonding occurs among men in such settings (sport) is exclusively male bonding. The presence of women is problematic because the communities formed by men through sports exclude or at least marginalize women. Some men use sports consumption to reinforce the social hierarchy of all men over women. That is, the worldview shaped by sports categories women as the lowest of the low. (Fischer and Gainer, 1994, p. 96-97)
While, Fischer and Grainer link male-only sport spaces to larger societal oppression, Fields (2005) extended the need for female exclusion within male bonding to the need for men to find personal identities distinct from women:

By creating female-free spaces in which to learn to be men, American men are also free to create and perpetuate myths about those missing females. Even though a boy cannot be a man in the presence of women, he needs to define himself against the stereotype of a woman. All-male sporting venues provide the opportunity to bond and learn to be American men in opposition to missing American females (p. 159).

The omission of women from male sporting circles translates into men deriving a larger sense of their social identity through sport. For men, sports become a form of social currency that women do not develop from athletics. Men connect with other men through sport and sport becomes a language in which men can connect psychologically and emotionally. Sarah spoke of a frustration she has concerning when men participate in sport together. While she perceives herself to be aggressive, she does not understand why men require contact during friendly pickup games:

Dealing with my guy friends, whenever they wanna play sports together, even a pickup game, anything, they want it to be just guys. They want no rules, tackling in football. If I would want to play, I just don’t understand why they can’t just play a friendly game of two-hand tap. They can’t do that because it’s such a bonding time for them, for some reason. I can’t understand that, I don’t know why. I’m an aggressive person to but I don’t need that to bond with girls.

Since men are socialized into sport through competition, they see their male peers as rivals. Messner (1992) wrote “given the fact that one’s own success is the flipside of
another’s failure, organized sports encourages boys to view other boys not as intimates, but as rivals” (p. 34). What Sarah struggles to understand is that the hitting and aggression are strongly tied to men’s experience of simply participating in sport.

Mass Media and Women’s Sport

Participants in the study described how men are chief architects in their sport consumption through attending games with the males in their lives. Yet, men also bring sport to women through another avenue: media outlets. Men not only facilitate what women watch in the sporting arena, but also the coverage they watch on television. Men overwhelmingly control media outlets. And as study participants indicated, there is far less coverage of women’s sport than men’s. Not coincidentally, men serve primarily as newspaper owners, editors and sports reporters. As Pedersen, Whisenant and Schneider (2003) stated, men make up 91 percent of reporters, nearly 79 percent of photographers and a whopping 100 percent of sports editors in the newspapers examined. The authors translated how the makeup of the newsroom has a profound impact on the presentation of men’s interests and control of sports, often at the expense of women’s sport:

In keeping with the symbiotic relationship between sports and the newspaper media, the results of this study revealed that the newspapers reaffirmed the hegemonic masculinity found in sport by focusing their coverage on boys’ athletics. Not only was there an affirmation of a male bias in the amount of coverage, all of the components of the newspaper personnel were found to be the generic preserve of men (p. 387).

While women stated they had to seek out women’s sports in the media, they also articulated that people didn’t discuss women’s sport. Individuals related this to a lack of hype surrounding events. This lack of hype can be directly connected to the media
concept of audience building. This illustrates the compounding effect of lack of media attention on consumer awareness. Duncan and Messner (1996), while examining media framing within sport, presented the concept of audience building. They characterized audience building as priming and hyping an audience through promotions, advertising, game production and athlete marketing to build anticipation for watching the sporting event. While the evidence of audience building was not surprising, Duncan and Messner found that media outlets utilize methods of audience building far more in men’s sport than in their coverage of women’s sport. This includes a greater production quality of men’s sport, portraying the drama and significance of upcoming men’s basketball games and the transformation of male athletes into heroic figures and media personalities. Men’s sports were treated to extensive pre- and post-game shows, including interviews and historical footage, building anticipation for future events. The culmination of this audience building provided greater expectation for men’s sport. Messner and Duncan (1996) explain:

While producers systematically created an audience for the men’s 1993 NCAA games by employing all the above strategies, they failed to use any one of them to build an audience for the women’s 1993 NCAA games. This failure, coupled with their inferior production values, guaranteed less audience interest in the women’s competitions. These types of media ‘neglect’ are probably not conscious strategies used by producers to discriminate against women. Rather, they are simply part of the routine, day-to-day workings of the institutions of sports media (p. 174).

While Duncan and Messner wrote their piece more than a decade ago, audience building was mentioned several times throughout the interview process. Individuals said they did not hear about women’s basketball events from media outlets. While men’s
basketball was profiled in newspapers and available on television, women’s sport was virtually absent. Furthermore, participants confessed that they rarely heard people discussing women’s basketball. The outcome of audience building is to create “hype,” to make an event or sport a thing on everyone’s mind. Women’s basketball media coverage, dictated by the predominance of men in control of powerful positions in mass media outlets, did not receive the benefit of audience building and hence potential consumers could not create awareness and excitement about events. Sophia represented this outcome by articulating that “most schools make the men’s team like ‘the’ team and the women’s team is just like a side team, just to accommodate women, but the men’s basketball team is like ‘the’ basketball team.”

The lack of coverage is particularly problematic when mass media outlets do not provide human interest stories to allow potential spectators to learn about players. Study participants cited human interest stories as an important factor in their interest in sport and their ability to make connections to teams and athletes. Festle (1996) noted how the lack of human interest stories impact consumers:

> Viewers and readers intermittently receive scores and updates, but they do not become devoted followers of women’s sports since the media do not report its day-to-day drama. Potential fans do not discover the personalities of the main characters—the super-talented stars, the hustling overachievers, the dependable role players—nor the plot lines of winning streaks, altered strategies, and upsets (Festle, xxiv).

The results of this study also suggest that without the personalities of athletes and the plot lines of sport often occupying coverage of men’s sport, women find it more difficult to create connections with players. Moreover, the drama and human struggle in human
interest pieces appeals to many consumers and make sport seem like a soap opera.

Olympics coverage, famous for its saturation of human interest stories, use these media pieces to tell multiple stories surrounding the Olympics. Marvin Kitman, a CNN correspondent, wrote concerning the 2000 Olympics coverage on NBC:

> NBC will be giving us whole hours with almost no coverage of actual sporting events, instead filling the hours with Oprah-esque human-interest stories about this or that, a pabulum mix of fluff, hype and travelogues. NBC coverage is a soap opera, followed by a soap opera, with a winning American high jump in between.

While Kitman utilized a satirical approach to discuss the use of human interest stories, there has been some limited research within the sociology community regarding the importance of human interest stories (Darnton 1975; Bird 1992). Fine and White (2002) wrote concerning the powerful role of these stories:

> Human interest stories create collective attention, essential for the establishment of a public or demos, and the limitations of that process. Although human interest stories are not unique in this regard, such stories encourage shared identification, important for social cohesion and the maintenance of a public sphere… The human interest story is but one example of the creation of collective focus. Public attention can be generated through numerous genres and can have different outcomes. The fact that the human interest story does not matter allows it to matter greatly. Our civil religion depends on generating concern for those within the polity, but what policies flow from this concern? That human interest stories generate communal involvement suggests that these shards of narrative are not only of human interest but of sociological interest as well.

The creation of a collective interest and focus is particularly important for the world of sports because sport is a collective product. Participants spoke of the importance of people talking about sport and the social outlets sport provides. The lack of human interest stories chronicling womens sport seems to limit female sports from entering a
collective focus. Psychologist Steven Danish suggests that human interest stories are more important to women than men. He notes:

Men tend to value clear-cut measurements of ability and achievement—which is almost all the draft is—more than female sports fans, who take greater interest in athletes’ personality and character. Men want data and statistics. They don’t care if athletes are nice people. But women are much more interested in the back story, whether they helped people out when they were growing up (Danish as cited in Williams, 2006).

Perceptions of Women’s Sport

Individuals are not born with values and perceptions, they construct them through experiences in a social world. While study participants had limited experiences with women’s basketball, they offered up many perceptions of women’s sports, participants, spectators and the game itself. An important question that the current study presents is this: Where do these perceptions originate? Subjects in this study constantly set up gendered extremes with men’s basketball as exciting, fast-paced and aggressive and women’s basketball as boring, slow and not popular. While we have discussed how socialization and gender roles factor into attitudes toward women’s sport, perhaps participants’ past experiences and mass media influences all factor into negative perception building.

Past Experiences and Perceptions:

Several study participants attributed their attitudes concerning women’s sport to previous experience attending women’s basketball. Sarah reflected on her high school days stating:
I just much rather watch the guys because it was more high scoring. It was more physical and entertaining, I guess. I am entertained by things that are fast and strong and quick. That’s what I look for.

Claire echoed similar sentiments adding that, “In high school I went to one girl’s game and it’s just slower paced, the men are more exciting, fast paced and always going.”

Participants based women’s collegiate basketball and its pace and excitement on their experience with high school basketball. While this may be unfair to judge elite Division I women’s basketball by the experiences at high school girl’s basketball, it apparently has had a profound impact on several participants.

Moreover, numerous participants who had attended a women’s basketball game over a decade ago were greatly influenced by the experience. They remembered an empty arena, quiet fans and limited excitement generated by arena promotions, hoopla or sporting rituals. They based their perceptions of the current state of women’s basketball on their experiences at university games, some 15 years ago. The world of collegiate women’s basketball in 1991 was greatly different than its current state. This influence on participant perceptions underscores the need for athletic marketers to create easy access for women to attend current games.

In order to achieve this, sport marketers and event managers must work in tandem to provide an experience that rivals the spectator familiarity of men’s basketball. This begins with the initial marketing push for women’s basketball. Marketers must carefully consider which basketball games to hype, taking into consideration factors such as opponent, event date, historical rivals and potential promotions. Furthermore, event
management must strive to create the kind of excitement and thrill of attending a men’s
game at women’s basketball events. As media outlets frame sports through commentary
and quality of production, game managers must frame the women’s basketball experience
for fans.

Media Influences and Perceptions:

While media studies literature is vast, two theories, framing and social
construction of reality, represent two substantial ways in which media outlets craft
messages to consumers. Numerous studies have explored media manipulation of
women’s sport (Duncan, 1990; Halbert and Latimer, 1994; Messner, Duncan and Jensen,
2001; Eastman and Billings, 1999; Tuggle and Owen, 1999). Social construction of
reality describes how media can craft our perspectives of reality through media portrayal
of life. By viewing mass media outlets individuals develop attitudes and perspectives
concerning the world around them. Media offer an ability to understand people, places,
cultures and values of different individuals and groups, thus painting a portrait of the
social reality of our lives. This reality guides our perspectives. Concerning sport, mass
media outlets present the social world of sport as dominated by male attitudes, athletes
and opportunities. The sports media frame events to highlight male aggressiveness and
success, while undermining women’s athletic contributions.

How commentators frame events also can add to individual perceptions of aspects
like aggression, athleticism and success. McCombs defined framing as “the selection of a
restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media agenda
when a particular object is discussed” (McCombs, 1997, p. 6). Numerous studies have shown that sport commentators often frame women’s sporting events to undermine female achievement in sport (Messner, 1998; Messner, et al., 2001; VandeBerg and Projansky, 2003).

As previously cited, three ways media address women in sport is through the sexualization of athletes, the use of ambivalent language and by not providing coverage. When study participants were asked to name a female athlete, individuals commented on the media’s fascination with Anna Kournikova and Danica Patrick. For example, Shannon said “the media pick the prettiest women they can find and put her in a swimsuit and make her look not even like an athlete. Just because sex sells and they put it out there to get more people to come to the games.”

Ambivalent language can have a profound impact on perceptions of women athletes, particularly when they minimize female athletes’ aggression. Since media act as a window into our world, the portrayal of women’s sport help shape thoughts and opinions concerning sports. Participants’ perceptions are a reflection of the type of negative framing that scholars contend mass media outlets employ to dismiss and degrade women’s sport. Individuals believed that women’s sports are less exciting, less aggressive, less physical and less entertaining. Participant attitudes can be summed up by Shannon’s statement:

(Men’s games) are just a lot faster paced. There are usually a lot more people there. Women’s sports are not as fast, I picture them more with a slow movement of the ball. When it gets down to near overtime, those last couple of seconds – I just don’t feel like women would make the big play.
How did Shannon adopt this picture of women’s basketball, one in which women are slow and unable to make the clutch play? Where do individuals who have never attended women’s collegiate basketball obtain these beliefs? Mass media outlets and the framing and language employed to discuss men’s and women’s sports could be a source of these perceptions.

Women’s Sport as an Unknown: Consumer Risk

Risk and sport spectatorship has been conceptualized by a number of authors (Funk, Ridinger and Moorman, 2004; Havitz & Howard, 1995; Wann, 1995). Since sport is consumed socially in the presence of others, the perception of risk can play a profound role in potential consumers’ decisions concerning attendance.

Funk, Ridinger and Moorman (2004) presented risk as a multidimensional, including both facet and temporal risk. Facet risk corresponds to the psychological risk of becoming connected to sporting teams, particularly those related to vicarious achievement and escape. Spectators whose self-concept and esteem become intertwined with a team’s success can suffer psychological distress when team or player does not succeed. Temporal risk represents the challenges that time and logistics present that may restrict an individual’s ability to consume sports. Funk, Ridinger and Moorman (2004) noted that “Individuals may also experience a form of risk when precious time, attention, and effort are being diverted from endeavors of greater perceived importance (e.g., work, family, religion, social issues, politics, etc.) to engage in sport-related behavior (Wann, 1995, cited in Funk, Ridinger and Moorman, 2004, p. 41). Two other important aspects of
risk and spectatorship discussed in Funk et. al. (2004) were the concepts of risk importance and probability. Risk importance is the potential and importance for a harmful outcome, both psychological and related to time expended, due to decision-making. Risk probability is a measure of the likelihood of making a bad decision.

It was clear that for study participants women’s basketball represents an unknown. The lack of knowledge and its impact on consumption can be summed up by Jackie:

With the sports I attend I know the rules, I know where to park, I know how to get my tickets, I know where my seat is. For women’s basketball I am not sure exactly where to park. I don’t know if I can just buy a ticket at the door. I don’t know if I am buying a seat or is it general seating. I don’t know how much it costs. All of these things together, I don’t decide to go. There are just too many unanswered questions for me.

These “unanswered questions” make the consumption of women’s basketball a risky proposition. Separate from any potential social stigmas labeled to women’s basketball, the temporal risks of women’s sport can be greater than in men’s sport, since many people are first-time attendees at women’s basketball. Moreover, study participants articulated that they don’t go to women’s basketball because they do not have the time needed to attend games. When they were asked they often responded with similar sentiments to this one mentioned by Marisa:

I couldn’t go to the men’s and women’s basketball games. I have a hard time, it interferes with the things I have to get done to go to the men’s basketball games and watch them on TV. If I were to add the women’s team, there would just be no way.
Individuals viewed attending women’s basketball as an addition to their men’s basketball attendance. The temporal risk of attending women’s basketball was perceived to be too great for potential consumption.

While the psychological risk may be limited due to lack of knowledge or following for the team, individuals did reflect on a heightened sense of risk probability connected with attending women’s basketball. Claire discussed her perception of the likelihood of enjoying a women’s game:

I kinda expect if I am going to a women’s game that I probably won’t have a good time, I will be bored sitting there. Since I already have the experience going to men’s games, I probably would simply keep going to them. If you don’t think you’re going to have any good of a time and get into the game, you’re not going to want to go to it.

The perceptions that study participants held concerning women’s basketball made the risk probability of attendance formidable. The sum of these factors creates a heightened sense of risk among female spectators of men’s basketball. The result, in combination with the previous hurdles to attendance, result in female fans of men’s basketball not attending women’s basketball.

Methodological Contributions

While several fields in the social sciences have been dominated by qualitative studies for decades, their emergence in the sport management realm is a more recent development. Lately, more scholars have utilized alternative paradigms to examine human behavior.
In employing qualitative methodology, I sought to gain rich, detailed accounts of individuals sport consumption behavior and attitudes. In terms of gaining maximum variation in my sample, I partnered with the Department of Athletics to reach out to vested consumers of men’s basketball. While the use of large-scale mailing is commonly associated with random sampling in quantitative studies, I felt this process to be incredibly valuable to accessing a diverse audience for my study. Without this step I am unsure that I would have been able to reach the very specific sample I was eager to gather.

Furthermore, while there are numerous studies examining sport spectator behavior, this study is unique in its approach, notably, by examining the subject from the vantage point of non-spectators. Traditionally, scholars in the field have studied spectator motivations by attending sporting events and asking attendees to comment on why they were there. While this approach has yielded significant findings, it is limited since those being studied are already at the event. Asking why people attend a sporting event is different than asking them why they choose not to attend. By looking at the latter, this study is a departure from previous ones in the field.

Conclusions

In a *New York Times* piece on viewership of the NFL draft, Williams (2006), discusses how women lose their husbands for a weekend while men become entranced with draft coverage. Or, as one distressed girlfriend remarked, she is stuck watching it:

I just wanted to lose consciousness, so I wouldn’t have to watch, she said. Being
trapped in that space, it was terrible. But I couldn’t go out and do anything, because if I left, she said, her boyfriend would pout, as if she didn’t appreciate history in the making.

The article highlighted the fascinating way sports can factor into relationships, whether between a girlfriend and boyfriend or the friendships of men who gather around a television to consume 48 hours of draft coverage. Moreover, the article was another example of the interest in discussing sports’ cultural impact in relationships. A quick glance at the self-help section of a large bookstore showcases numerous self-help books advising women on how to save their marriage from sport.

While this study began with a simple premise of exploring female spectator disinterest in women’s sport, it has morphed into a greater examination of gender roles and female perceptions of women’s sports. This journey, facilitated by the experiences, attitudes and insights of 13 study participants, provides many important observations about how individuals make consumer decisions concerning sports. Yet, I am left with an overwhelming sense that perhaps those who seek to advance women’s sport as a legitimate spectator destination may have further to go to gain social acceptance than previously thought. While the voices of participants were brutally honest about their perceptions and experiences, the attitudes exposed in their stories paint a challenging picture for advocates of women’s sport. This study represents both a starting place for future research, as well as an assessment of the current mind-set of female spectators of men’s sport. There is much room for the advancement of both.
Recommendations for Future Research

This study sought to fill a void in the current research regarding female spectator motivations and attitudes regarding their lack of consumption of women’s sport. While this study has shed light on a number of important and intriguing aspects of consumer behavior, gender relations and media effect, it represents only the beginning of potential inquires into the subject. While I utilized qualitative methodology as an approach to my research questions, our understanding of the subject could be greatly enhanced by employing alternative methodologies such as quantitative and social network analysis to explore female disinterest in women’s sport. As a result of this study, several suggestions for future research have been developed. These questions would provide further clarity concerning:

1. The negative case analysis, while simply used as a check on trustworthiness, brought up some interesting questions concerning sexual orientation and spectator decisions. Would similar results be found if study participants reflected a greater variance of sexual orientation? Given that the majority of women in this study watched men’s sport because their husband’s or boyfriends did, it would be interesting to see if a parallel pattern exists between gay or lesbian couples. Scholars have previously examined the connection between sexual orientation and consumption of women’s sport. How would sexual orientation factor into attitudes and consumption patterns of sport?
2. Gender was a central focus on this study, both that of the spectator and the athletes being observed. Similar questions could be explored of men who watch men’s basketball exclusively. Why are they not interested in women’s basketball? Would men cite similar perceptions of women’s basketball? Are men influenced similarly by males in their life?

3. Further exploration to sort out influences of past experience in sport and attitudes concerning women’s sport are needed. Why did post-Title IX women perceive women’s sport more negatively than pre-Title IX participants?

4. How can athletic marketers attract potential fans to women’s basketball games? What methods can be employed to combat negative perceptions of women’s sport that represent a hurdle to consumption?
LIST OF REFERENCES

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160


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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT LETTER
Dear Buckeye Basketball Fan,

We need your help!

You are invited to participate in a study on spectator behavior of Ohio State Basketball fans. Dr. Janet Fink and doctoral candidate Annemarie Farrell are studying female consumer behavior of sport, utilizing personal interviews to gain an understanding of why women attend Ohio State men’s—but not women’s—basketball games. We hope that this information will help us in developing better support for women’s sports events.

To qualify for this opportunity you must meet the following criteria:

1. Study participants must be female and over the age of 18.
2. Individuals must have attended an Ohio State men’s basketball game within the past two years.
3. Individuals must have not attended an Ohio State women’s basketball game within the past two years.

Participation would involve a personal interview conducted at The Ohio State University, lasting approximately 90 minutes. The interview will be scheduled at a time convenient for both the researcher and participant. People who qualify and participate in an interview session will receive a $50 gift certificate to the Ohio State Athletic Team Shop for their time. The study will also pay for parking during the interview.

**Your participation is voluntary.** You may refuse to participate in this study in which case you do not need to respond to this letter. If you choose to participate, you may leave the study at any time and you will still receive the $50 gift certificate. Participation or nonparticipation in no way affects your relationship with The Ohio State University. All interviews will be audio taped for use only by the researcher. Please be assured that anything you say during the interview will be kept strictly confidential, and at no time will participant names or identifiers be used.

If you are interested in participating in this unique opportunity, please contact Annemarie Farrell at 614.746.6933 or farrell.90@osu.edu or Dr. Janet Fink at fink.26@osu.edu. **The deadline to respond to this letter is February 10, 2006.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Janet Fink, PhD
Associate Professor
The Ohio State University
Sport and Exercise Management
614-292-0867

Annemarie Farrell
Doctoral Candidate
The Ohio State University
Sport and Exercise Management
614.746.6933
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE
Interview Question Guide
Annemarie Farrell

Note: Since qualitative research is an emergent experience, this guide will inevitably grow and adapt. I am utilizing semi-structured methods, hence this is only a basic framework.

Intent of the Study: The purpose of this study is to investigate female consumption of women’s sport through the voices and perspectives of female fans of men’s basketball who do not attend women’s events. I also intend to seek an understanding of how their attitudes and disinterest may be related to gendered media portrayals, socialization and distinct spectator motives.

Guiding Research Questions:

4. Why do women fan’s of men’s sport choose not to attend female sport?

5. What attitudes do female sport spectators hold of women’s sport?
   a. Where do these attitudes originate from?

Basic Information and social currency:

What/how have you been involved with sport (playing, coaching, etc.)

Would you consider yourself a sports fan?

Would you consider yourself an athlete?

What do you consider to be your favorite sport?

Are there particular individuals in your life who helped foster your interest in sports?

Do you enjoy attending sporting events?

What don’t you enjoy about attending sporting events?

Do you talk about sports with others? Who?

   Where do you discuss sports?
With spouse
- With children
- At work
- With friends socially
- Other

Do you wear athletic team apparel? What teams?

**Sport Consumption Habits:**

Do you attend other sporting events? If so, what is your reason for attending?

a. Ohio State events (How often):

b. Blue Jackets (How often):

c. Cleveland teams (How often):

d. Cincinnati teams (How often):

e. Other…

Do you watch live sporting events on TV? What are they? How often? If so, what is your reason for watching?

Do you watch sport news programming? How often? What do you look for in sports news programming?

a. ESPN:

b. Local sport news:

Do you read sport related magazine? What are they? How often? What do you look for/like in sport related magazines?

Do you read the sports section of newspapers? How often? What do you look for/like in newspaper sport coverage?
Do you regularly visit sport related websites? What do you look for/like in websites?

Do you listen to sport radio broadcasts? What do you look for/like in radio broadcasts?

Have you attended any sporting events featuring female athletes?

**Women and Media:**

Can you name any female athletes or sports you have seen featured in the media?

Why do you believe that athlete or sport was featured?

What phrases or images come to mind when you think about men’s/women’s sport? Why?

Do you find that popular images of women’s sports/athletes to be accurate? Why?

How do you think these phrases or images impact your consumer decisions? Why?

**Ohio State Spectator Habits:**

How many Ohio State men’s basketball games do you attend on average during the season?

How long have you been attending games?

Who do you attend games with?

Who initiates the idea of attending games?

What aspects of attending men’s basketball games do you enjoy? Why?

When you think of Ohio State men’s basketball, what images come to mind? Why?

When you think of Ohio State football, what images come to mind? Why?

When you think of Ohio State women’s basketball, what images come to mind? Why?
When you think of women’s basketball, what kinds of fans do you perceive attend?

**Women’s Sport and Spectating:**

How did you first begin establishing an interest in men’s bb? Why do you think that interest hasn't manifested itself to interest in the women's bb. team?

How would you position women’s basketball in comparison to men’s basketball?
(there are no wrong or right answers, just your perceptions)

- More or less exciting? Why?
- More or less accessible? Why?
- More or less popular? Why?
- More or less physical? Why?
- More or less family friendly? Why?
- More or less dramatic? Why?
- More or less entertaining? Why?

Have you ever been to a women's game? If so, how would you describe the experience?

How could athletic marketers make women’s sports (particularly basketball) more appealing for you?

You have the ability to attend a men’s or women’s game, how would you go about making the decision?

How have you come to understand why you attend men’s games and not women’s events?

Is there anything not brought up that you would like to discuss?