GETTING THE GIRL:
FEMALE ATHLETES’ NARRATIVES OF THE RECRUITING PROCESS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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By

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ABSTRACT

Current mainstream literature on the recruitment of high school athletes typically falls into two categories: exaggerated accounts of the recruiting process or practical guides to help one get recruited. Existing research on the topic tends to investigate the status of recruiting within particular institutions or the reasons why prospective student-athletes choose the college or university they do. In nearly all instances, little analysis of the gendered nature of recruiting takes place and stories from women’s sports are rare. This void leaves us with little understanding of what it means for females to be recruited, what methods are used to recruit female athletes, and how female athletes make sense of their recruiting experiences. This project aims to fill this void by interviewing current and former NCAA Division I women’s basketball players who have navigated the recruiting process en route to an NCAA Division I athletic scholarship. An analysis of their narratives provides a better understanding of the feelings that female student-athletes experience while being courted as prospective student-athletes, documents changes and trends in recruiting, and enables a richer comprehension of how NCAA rules and regulations impact the recruiting process and the lives of female athletes. Additionally, this project presents a way in which recruiting research can attend to both participants’ experiences and larger socio-cultural, historical, and philosophical contexts by using a framework of feminist legal theory.
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“The world is made of stories, not of atoms.”

-Poet Muriel Rukeyser
“Do you have a boyfriend?” the young woman asked me as we sat in my modest, yet comfortable, office. I leaned back in my chair, attempted to look unfazed, and thought quickly about how I should answer this question. I felt her dad, sitting in a chair to my left, look at me. I was a young basketball coach at a small college, attempting to hold together a program that had been sorely neglected. The young woman that asked the question was an impressive junior college player who could come in and offer two years of experience and leadership for my budding team. Through emails and weekly phone calls over the past several months, I had established a comfortable rapport with this young woman. I was proud that my work had finally brought her to campus to hopefully “seal the deal” and convince her that we were a good fit. Yet, at this particular moment, all I felt was panic; in my mind, this question could make it or break it. Months of work - of evening phone calls and emails - would perhaps all come down to this answer. “No,” I said, and I smiled apologetically. I hoped my blasé response covered the mixture of fear and sadness I felt on the inside. “Do you?” I asked quickly and attempted to return the focus of the conversation back to her.
I do not remember what she said, and honestly, I cannot even recollect this particular athlete’s name. What I do recall is that this young woman taught me an important lesson about the sexual politics of intercollegiate recruiting. She did not end up coming to my school, and I will never know if my response to this question mattered to her or not. To her, the question could have been mere chit chat, a question she would have felt comfortable asking any woman close to her age. To me, the question spoke to the idiosyncratic and highly complex world of women’s basketball recruiting, where identities such as gender and sexual orientation matter when a young woman attempts to make her college choice.

At the very least, I can attest to the fact that these things mattered to me. When I was a high school athlete and was recruited to play National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I basketball, these identities mattered a great deal, though I am a bit embarrassed to admit this now. As a feminist sport sociologist, it pains me to review my high school scrapbook and find articles where I readily admit that my college choice hinged on my desire to be coached by a male simply because I felt that I responded better to male coaches. Despite the fact that I was coached and led to a high school state championship by a female coach, I easily fell prey to the stories which suggested (and continue to suggest) that men were better and tougher coaches, and further, that male coaches were the ones who would challenge me the most. I also succumbed to the homophobic comments that made me wary of college programs with female head coaches. “They [female coaches] will ‘sleep’ with their players,” well-meaning folks warned me, “and you don’t want to deal with that on your team.” As a dedicated and serious athlete, I knew that this type of player-coach interaction could spell
disaster. However, I did not yet have the knowledge base to know that this well-meaning advice reflected a history of sexism and homophobia within women’s sports. Therefore, I did not question these assumptions as I navigated recruiting. Rather, I took in all these narratives and planned unofficial visits to schools that solicited my basketball talents. I traveled to three schools, and not surprisingly, each one had a white, male head coach at the helm.

On one level, then, this research project is about me understanding and coming to terms with my own experiences as a recruit and a recruiter. I often wondered: how did my recruiting experience compare to what other women experienced? Did other female athletes remember recruiting as I did? Did we experience significant differences along axes of age, race, class, ethnicity and sexuality? While certain researcher paradigms would find the personal interest I have with this project problematic and a potential site of bias, Rinehart (2006) notes that the move towards “more overtly personal” scholarship reflects a “paradigmatic shift” that “privileges the personal as necessary and fundamental to ‘deep research’” (pp. 181-2). I feel that my proximity to the project and my evolution from recruit to recruiter to researcher adds a degree of credibility. Furthermore, while my own personal experiences were an impetus for this study, it evolved into an investigation of the recruiting process and female athletes. How are women’s personal recruiting experiences couched in larger socio-cultural, historical, philosophical, and political contexts? How should researchers study female athletes’ experiences with recruitment?

With these questions in place, I turn to the voices of current and former collegiate female basketball players to better understand female athletes’ experiences as recruited/prospective student athletes. More specifically, this project examines the
experiences of females from different generations to provide a better understanding of the experiences and feelings of recruits operating within different contexts. While I could have constructed a research project that isolated a number of different variables and divided women along the axes of race, sexuality, region, etc., I chose to separate my participants by age in order to create a quasi-historical account of recruitment within women’s basketball. Additionally, to separate participants by age also resonates with much of the discussion within women’s sports which likes to neatly divide experiences and athletes as “pre Title IX” and “post Title IX.” Finally, though I divide my participants by age, this does not forego the need to attend to other areas of diversity, and I recognize these intersections throughout, but especially in Chapter five, which examines intersections of gender, race, and sexuality.

This project is indebted to the time and energy given to me by seven women who agreed to be interviewed for this project. Tina and Jasmine took time from their busy lives as college athletes to talk to me in the winter of 2007. Though I knew each of their faces and part of their recruiting “stories” from looking them up on their team’s website, our interview was our first face-to-face meeting. Tina and Jasmine differed in many noticeable ways. Tina is a stocky, white guard who talks fast and was prone to finishing her sentences with “likes” and “whatevers” whereas Jasmine is a tall, Black post player, who is apt to laugh mid-sentence and occasionally (and accidentally) included French words when she answered the questions I posed. Though Jasmine completed her high school years at an all-girls boarding school in the United States, she hails from, and considers home, outside of the United States. She graduated in 2004 with a class of 17 students, and her status as an international student athlete proved burdensome during her
high school year. Her high school basketball team, comprised mostly of international students, contained a wealth of talent; they were well-respected and all the seniors on the team received athletic scholarship offers. The size of the school coupled with the team’s success and international flavor forced Jasmine to battle the “dumb jock” stereotype. Therefore, she “enjoyed getting A’s in all my [her] classes just to show people that athletes can perform as well as other students.” In another attempt to challenge stereotypes, Jasmine ran, and earned the title of, student body president.

In contrast to Jasmine’s high school scenario, Tina attended a large suburban high school in the western United States known for its successful football and sports program. She graduated in 2005. When asked to described herself in high school, Tina said that she was “very boring” and spent most of her downtime at home, relaxing because she was “sore and tired” from her sporting endeavors. Tina also said she was known for being a “jock” and “not being very into school.” Her reputation as a jock earned her the respect of some of the more established male athletes at her high school, and Tina found it interesting when they would “come up and talk to me about a big, important women’s NCAA basketball game they had seen.” Tina said that “it was cool to see them interested” and in this capacity she feels that her presence “helped get a little respect for women’s sports.” Tina’s recruiting narrative proves a bit more complicated than most. She verbally committed to a university during her junior year of high school and eventually matriculated at the institution. However, after a short time at the school, she decided to transfer and essentially went through the recruiting process again.

Tina met Jasmine on her recruiting visit to the university they both currently attend. Their university considers itself one of the leaders in the realm of intercollegiate
athletics and fields nationally competitive teams in nearly all of the sports they offer. Jasmine and Tina are currently teammates and friends, and the rapport between them was apparent immediately. They spoke easily and unabashedly about their recruiting experiences with me, regularly interrupting each other to add a point or share a story and frequently dissolved into laughter as they recounted some of their recent experiences with recruiting.

**Introducing Tasha, Rebecca, and Elizabeth**

I first met Tasha and Rebecca through a women’s basketball league in which we all participated. Though I vaguely knew of both Tasha and Rebecca because of competing against them in the league, this meeting would be the first time we spoke at length about anything. Tasha arrived first, and we chatted easily as we waited for Rebecca to arrive. Rebecca arrived a few minutes later with another woman, Elizabeth. “I thought it would be okay to bring her,” Rebecca said. She continued, “We played together in college, and she was recruited, too.” I assured Rebecca that having Elizabeth there was not a problem, and briefly introduced myself and the project to her. Then the four of us began to talk.

Rebecca soon distinguished herself as a direct communicator, possibly accessing skills she utilizes in her current work as a businesswoman. She graduated in 1993 from a large, predominately white, suburban high school known for its perennially powerful girls’ basketball program. When she graduated from high school, her team was ranked fifth in the nation. In addition to basketball, Rebecca played two other varsity sports in high school and said that “in terms of athletic ability, you can classify me as a tomboy.” She said that the same discipline that led to her success in athletics parlayed into the
classroom, and she worked very hard to maintain “a B+/A- average.” Though Rebecca entertained early scholarship offers, she decided to sign during the late signing period. Rebecca recalled: “More than anything, you know, when you’re 17 years old, it’s a pretty big decision…so I think I was a little bit not sure of exactly what I wanted to do so I was able to postpone it until the end.”

Rebecca’s college teammate, Elizabeth, also graduated from high school in 1993, though her high school experience was quite different due to the school’s size and location. Elizabeth attended a small school, graduating with 85 other students, in what she described as a “farm community.” Girls’ basketball was gaining popularity in her town due to the success of her high school team, but it certainly did not have the sustained history of support that Rebecca’s high school team had. When asked to describe herself in high school, Elizabeth said that she found time to be involved with “everything in high school, on every committee, voted most likely to succeed, best dressed, on every dance court, all that silly stuff” and identified the small size of her school as the main reason she was able to be so active. Elizabeth, a white woman, also said that “there was really only one race in my high school: white. So, my experiences in basketball were my first with other races, and then in college, with other ethnicities.”

Having spent time as a women’s basketball coach at both the high school and college level, Tasha appeared the most pensive about her time as both a prospective student athlete and as a coach involved in recruiting. Her high school “profile” involves elements of Rebecca and Elizabeth’s experiences, though she graduated in 1994, one year later than both of them. Like Rebecca, Tasha self-identified as “very much a tomboy” in high school. She participated in three sports during the school year and played AAU
basketball during the summer. At her fairly large (about 1,000 students) rural high school, Tasha was both a “class clown” and a “goody two-shoes” who took a college preparatory curriculum. Within her community, girls’ basketball made its mark in the early 1990’s, and her high school enjoyed a reputation for fielding solid sports teams across the board. Tasha’s high school was predominately white, and she commented that her own racial identity took a little while to develop: “I am very proud of the fact that I am bi-racial, and I think it took me a little while to really embrace that. I never thought about it in high school, but when I got to college and met others with similar backgrounds, I realized how unique I was and that it wasn’t a bad thing.”

*Introducing Vivian and Teresa*

I met with Vivian and Teresa, two women from the 1979-1984 generation, on a morning in early November when the days were just beginning to turn cold.\(^1\) Deciding upon a time and place to meet proved easier than I expected, and the three of us met for a morning interview in Teresa’s office. She owns a sports-related business in town and is fairly well-known within the local women’s basketball community because of her current work, her time spent as a coach, and her collegiate playing career. Teresa graduated from high school in 1982, and she made the decision to attend the local university in part because she grew up watching the women’s games at the university. Watching these college stars play high level basketball shaped her desired to do the same; she knew early on where she wanted to attend college. Teresa said she was also attracted to its affiliation with a top-notch conference and wonders why more current female athletes do not share

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\(^1\) Vivian and Teresa did not respond to my request for “demographic” information. (See Appendix E.) Therefore, their biographical sketches are shorter and contain information either from the interview transcripts or other sources. These other sources are not cited to protect the promised anonymity of the subjects.
the same sentiment. She said, “I still believe this. How you could pass up a Top Conference school in your hometown to go somewhere else?”

Vivian also had a “hometown” component to her recruiting decision; she decided to attend her university because her brother attended the university. While this led Vivian to believe and to tell me that she did not have much of a recruiting narrative, I still pursued the interview with her because of her extensive basketball accomplishments, which includes professional playing experience both in the United States and overseas. She grew up with several older brothers and graduated from high school in 1979. Though she saw her brothers excel in athletics at the college level, interestingly, and in contrast to many young women of today, Vivian didn’t grow up anticipating a scholarship or even with aspirations of attending college.

In contrast to the narrative structure that frequently elicited synchronicity in the responses provided by the other two groups, Vivian and Teresa responded to my questions differently, regularly comparing their experiences to “today’s athletes” and speaking of when recruiting “started to change” in both positive and negative ways. As Gerdy (1997) suggests, and as Vivian and Teresa’s recollections attest, recruiting practices during this period were “happenstance” and less institutionalized. Therefore, recruiting during this time period was varied perhaps in large part because of the lack of institutional resources and also because of the uncertainty regarding the place of recruiting within women’s intercollegiate basketball. This led Vivian, who typically responded first to my questions, to regularly end her responses with some variation of the statement, “This was my experience, and I don’t know if this was yours.” This response pattern created a means of contrasting as opposed to connecting the recruiting
experiences of Vivian and Teresa. Additionally, it also allowed for Vivian and Teresa to compare their experiences with recruitment to those of the young women of today. As such, this conversational choice produced the story of a localized and hassle-free recruiting process for them as high school athletes. It naturally also elicited a desire for women’s basketball to return to these more innocent days.

While the female athletes mentioned above allowed me to address some of the research questions I presented earlier, they also allowed me to demonstrate how I think female athletes’ experiences and narratives of recruiting ought to be studied, researched, and recorded. My quest to produce a more intimate and engaging text speaks to feminist thinking that understands the personal to be political and also a basis for theory building. In contrast to the conception of theory that speaks of “shaky foundations” or unstable “frameworks,” feminists of the 1970s turned to their own stories (and standpoints) as the basis for theory, and I return to that idea in this project (Richardson, 2000, p. 927). Feminists recognized that “women talking about their experiences, narrativizing their lives, telling individual and collective stories became…women theorizing their lives” (Ibid, p. 927). This understanding provided a new model from which feminists could theorize about gender and the material consequences of inequality. It is my hope that the varied stories of women’s experiences with athletic recruitment afford all readers the opportunity to enjoy re-visiting and perhaps re-considering what they previously held true.

My desire to collect and present these stories took on new urgency as I read through the latest book on recruiting, Feldman’s (2007) *Meat Market: Inside the Smash-Mouth World of College Football Recruiting*. As I made my way through this text, I
witnessed some of the same tired stories at play when it comes to discussions of recruiting within men’s sports. Feldman (2007) tells a tale of crazed coaches working insane hours to secure recruits, of recruits’ questionable academic transcripts, and of attractive women tempting recruits. The text resembles others written on recruiting (see Appendix A) with its emphasis on the spectacular and unusual as well as its focus on women only as tools to be used in the recruiting game. The text’s redeeming quality is its pronouncement that despite all the hard work put in by the coaches and all the resources devoted to recruiting by the university, “recruiting’s an art, not a science” (Feldman, 2007, p. 64). Therefore any attempt to quantify or predict various elements of recruiting, as many studies have attempted, would prove futile. My project, which allows space for contradictions, for athletes to supply idiosyncratic and inconsistent responses, and for hunches and suppositions about recruiting rather than absolute answers, embraces the art of recruiting.

While I remain steadfast in my commitment to female athletes’ narratives of recruitment and feel certain that a study of men’s experiences with recruiting would not necessarily address women’s sport in any capacity, I could not escape the inevitable questions or the implicit comparison to men’s sports while conceptualizing this project. Whenever I spoke about my research, people would largely ask me a variation of these two questions: “Are you going to interview men about their experiences?” and “How do you think men’s experiences would compare to those that you get from the women?” I realized that my decision to focus on women’s experiences with recruitment did implicitly suggest that there was a difference worth studying. Therefore, I entertain these questions herein and draw upon feminist legal theory as a point of departure since it
offers a body of knowledge that had dealt with similar questions and themes within its own institution. The framework of feminist legal theory helped me organize my project and connect the recruiting narratives I collected. I explain more about this choice and attend to other methodological decisions I made in the next chapter. Also, for those readers unfamiliar with the recruiting process, the next chapter provides an overview of athletic recruiting.
CHAPTER 2

TERMINOLOGY AND METHODOLOGIES

In this chapter, I make explicit the choices and decisions I made in conducting and framing my inquiry into recruiting within women’s basketball. The following sections will serve as the backdrop for the rest of this project as they define important terminology, discuss methodological choices, and perhaps most importantly, explain how feminist legal theory and feminist thought can offer a lens through which one can consider women’s narratives of recruiting. This lens proves especially useful for this project in the way that it offers a chance to examine questions of gender sameness, difference, and diversity. Additionally, feminist legal theory provides the means through which to establish historical, socio-cultural, and philosophical contexts for the stories and narratives on recruiting offered to me by the women I interviewed. Before moving on to a discussion of these contexts, it is imperative to establish a common language, and I do this in the next section.

Terminology

Language is not neutral; therefore, in what follows I elaborate on several key concepts and terms relevant to my project and my understanding of how each is utilized. Additionally, this section aims to provide a very general picture of recruitment for those
who are not familiar with the process. Broadly defined, athletic recruitment refers to time when a high school athlete is being sought by colleges, universities, or junior colleges based on her or his athletic ability. While the manner in which athletic recruitment proceeds might vary across sport and NCAA or NAIA (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics) divisions, it typically involves an observation (or “evaluation” per the NCAA) by a coach or by coaches. A coach can observe an athlete at an athletic contest (i.e., a high school game), a summer camp, or on a videotape or DVD. After a coach evaluates and identifies an athlete as possessing desirable athletic skills, a coach will communicate her/his interest in some manner. This articulation of interest usually comes in the form of a letter or a phone call and the NCAA regulates closely how and when this communication may occur. Instant and text messages and emails – relatively new additions to the recruiting game – do occur and are monitored differently by the NCAA than are phone calls or letters. Later on in the recruiting process, face-to-face visits may include campus or home visits. A campus visit involves a recruit visiting an interested college or university whereas a home visit entails a coach visiting the home of a prospective student athlete. The NCAA regulates the number of official campus visits (those that are paid for by the host university) a recruit may take and also designates the time period wherein these visits may take place.

Thus far, I have used the terms prospective student-athlete and recruit interchangeably, though that is not technically correct. The NCAA uses the term “prospective student-athlete” to refer to those students who possess the potential to be recruited for their athletic abilities. Per the NCAA, a student becomes a prospective student-athlete when they “start their ninth-grade classes” or if “before your ninth-grade
year, a college or university gives you, your relatives, or your friends any financial aid or other benefits it does not provide to students generally” (NCAA, 2007, p. 28). A prospective student-athlete becomes a recruited prospective student-athlete when “a college coach contacts her directly about the possibility of becoming a member of that collegiate institution’s team” (Becker, 2002, p. 4). Therefore, all students who enter their ninth-grade year may be considered prospective student-athletes but not all will be recruited for their athletic potential.

Additionally, there are political consequences for using the term student-athlete, regardless of its antecedent. Staurowsky & Sack’s (2005) work on the history and etymology of the term “student-athlete” implores scholars to avoid using this term because it can obscure the employment relationship between athletes receiving scholarships and the universities providing the scholarships. They argue that using the term student-athlete makes it appears as if athletes who are paid to play are students just like everyone else when in actuality the parameters of the relationship make it one that is ripe for exploitation. I concur with Staurowsky & Sack’s (2005) position and therefore, by and large I utilize the more straightforward descriptors, recruit or athlete, when referring to the experiences of those with whom I spoke.

Athletes who are recruited can earn “full-ride” scholarships to NCAA Division I institutions. Typically, these full ride scholarships, or grants-in-aid, cover tuition and fees as well as room and board costs. They tend to be to universities or colleges that will also cover the costs of being on a team. This includes travel to away games and contests, hotel costs, meal costs, and the cost of athletic gear. In essence, there will be little or no cost to

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2 See also Byers (1995) for an explanation on the NCAA’s initial use of the term student-athlete (p. 69).
an athlete on a full ride. When athletes commit to a college or university they do so by signing a National Letter of Intent which signifies their plan to matriculate at that particular institution for at least one year. This essentially ends the recruiting process and an unofficial recruiting ban goes into effect; no colleges or universities are to attempt to recruit an athlete after she/he has signed this document. While certain situations may permit one to break this commitment without consequence, the NCAA maintains strict rules regarding the fulfillment of the National Letter of Intent agreement.

Further, the NCAA upholds strict guidelines for almost all facets of the recruiting process. Some of these rules detail how much and when a coach may telephone a recruit, when coaches can observe games and prospects, and what test scores a recruit must secure in order to compete at the college level. In order to ensure that students have completed the necessary coursework and achieved the requisite test scores, the NCAA Clearinghouse and/or the NCAA Eligibility Center exists. The NCAA requires all recruits to register with the NCAA’s Clearinghouse and document that they are eligible to compete as first-year students according to NCAA standards. No recruit may take official visits or be contacted by coaches unless she/he is registered with the Clearinghouse.

Finally, I should make clear that though I take for granted that recruiting and scholarships occur concurrently, I am aware that one does not necessarily need the other to occur. Occasionally, college athletes may “walk on” and earn a spot on a team and a scholarship despite the fact that they were not recruited by any member of the coaching staff. Additionally, during my stint in the college coaching ranks, I regularly recruited high school athletes but never with the promise of a full athletic scholarship. Instead, I would work with our financial aid office to consider what type of “package” we could
offer students, wherein this package would include a combination of scholarship money, grants, loans, and work-study positions. With those caveats in mind, it is the case that most Division I athletes who receive full scholarships were recruited, and therefore I proceed with this correlation through the remainder of this project.

Finally, a brief note on the choice I made to use the word narratives in my title and throughout this project is in order. As Richardson (1990) says, “Narrative is everywhere…and is both a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation” (p. 20-1).

As a mode of reasoning, it provides the opportunity to make meaning out of disparate circumstances or experiences, usually via a temporal framework. At the very least, in other words, people can connect their varied and vast experiences in a chronological fashion. As a mode of representation, narration is the means through which people tell stories of their lives. My title primarily refers to the recruiting stories my participants share with me, though I also mean to refer to the legal narratives that circulate about gender and recruiting as well as the stories that current NCAA recruiting rules help to create about gender and recruiting. Narratives about recruiting and gender also emerge from mainstream movies and documentaries. All of these narratives and stories converge and collide in my project so that I might create another narrative of recruiting. Like Tsang (2000) I “make explicit [my] own background and the recognition that [I] tell a story from a particular vantage point (e.g., temporally, spatially, culturally, historically)” to be clear that I see this project as one narrative of recruiting and not “the” narrative of recruiting (p. 45).
As established in the previous section, athletic scholarships cover room, board and tuition costs in exchange for an athlete’s commitment to participate on a university team. Compared to forty or fifty years ago, financial support (in the form of scholarships) has improved significantly, and today female athletes are provided with 45% of all scholarship dollars awarded at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) level (DeHass, 2006). The prevailing assumption is that women athletes, with athletic scholarship opportunities in tow, have progressed and are better off today than ever before. However, some scholars, such as Sack & Staurowsky (1998) and Shulman & Bowen (2001), focus on the potential downside of awarding women athletes with athletically-based financial aid. These concerns include the exploitation of athletes’ bodies and labor, and the pressure to play while injured. Certainly though, these potential problems are not exclusive to women’s sports.

My project attempts to acknowledge the “good,” “bad,” and everything else that scholarship opportunities have brought to women’s sports. Further, it is most interested in collecting stories of how female athletes who earn scholarships navigate through the confines of sport as recruited student athletes. In other words, how do female athletes manage and understand their time as athletic recruits? An additional goal of this research is to situate the narratives of these women within larger historical, philosophical, and socio-cultural contexts. To do this, I utilize a multidisciplinary perspective and a variety of qualitative methodologies. I collapse these all under the heading of feminist research and describe them in the following paragraphs.
While the ways in which one conducts feminist research vary, they usually build upon the premise that most cultures and subcultures privilege men’s experiences and power over women’s. Therefore, this project ultimately rests upon the premise that women and girls have been underserved within the institution of sport, and it makes a commitment to an “explicit…interpretation of sport as a gendered activity” (Birrell, 2000, p. 61). It also seeks to create a space for women’s stories of recruiting within the existing literature base and to establish a framework for studying the experiences of female recruits. Since the notion that stories and experience matters is “a widely shared insight of feminism” and of researchers who identify as feminist, a large part of this work involves documenting and bringing together the personal narratives and experiences of women who have been recruited (Bredemeier, 2001, p. 412).

I include women’s voices throughout this research to make the larger political contexts more personal. I also conjoin the stories of elite Olympic and professional athletes with those who played at the intercollegiate level. For instance, I access the autobiographies of female basketball stars, Nancy Lieberman-Cline and Chamique Holdsclaw and also include insights provided by Nicole Louden from the biography written about her by Zagoria (2001). Finally, I make reference to the experiences and stories of seven current and former NCAA Division I basketball players —Vivian, Jasmine, Tasha, Elizabeth, Teresa, Tina, and Rebecca — who shared their recruiting stories with me. (See Appendices A, B, C, D, and E for more information on the interview process.)

However, this project is not only about chronicling women’s stories of and experiences with recruiting. Rather, per the writings of sport historians Parratt (1998) and
Vertinsky (2006), I remain mindful of attending to both women and to gender. Parratt (1998) explains the difference:

Where historians of women focus on the lived experiences and social circumstances of human agents, the historians of gender speak of subject identities and discursive positions; where the former try to disclose women’s oppression and work towards resisting and altering the conditions that underpin it, the latter see language as the mechanism of oppression and are equivocal about the possibility and means of resista

Researchers who study women’s experiences and those who study the construct of gender often ask different questions and impart different methodologies. For example, I use standard interview coding methods to analyze the stories told to me by the women I interviewed, and yet I impart a discursive analysis to explore how the rhetoric of recruiting can position women and men differently. My attempt to address both women and gender within recruiting requires the use of a multidisciplinary framework and a flexible epistemological foundation, which is typical of most research that is identified as feminist.

For instance, Krane (2001) describes her notion of a “lesbian feminist epistemology” by saying that it involves “integrating feminist standpoint, queer theory and feminist cultural studies,” and this articulation proves to be a useful model for the aims of this project (p. 401). Though her theoretical orientations diverge in some significant areas, taken together these three positions allow Krane (2001) to better understand the experiences of lesbians in sport, the focus of much of her research.

Similarly, though my project does not embrace any approach exclusively, it relies on a few epistemological foundations. First is the belief that social locations and identities (or the standpoint from which one operates) can offer marginalized groups a unique view of
the world. The location of female athletes on the periphery of sport affords them unique insights into the world of recruiting, and this is why I chose to incorporate the narratives of seven women into this project. Turning to their voices provides the opportunity to weave together varied experiences, voices, theory, and analysis.

Krane (2001) accesses queer theory when delineating her epistemological foundations, and her theoretical positioning proves useful to my project as well. Queer theory foregrounds the study of sexuality, and more specifically, queer theorists consider “the construction of heterosexuality” and “heteronormativity” (Sykes, 2006, p. 16). In this project, queer theory provides a means for analyzing negative recruiting and the way that heteronormativity (the expectation and demand that all are and/or should be heterosexual) frames male coaches of women’s basketball as safe because of their presumed heterosexuality. Female coaches, on the other hand, are risky and potentially threatening to the social order of sport if their heterosexuality cannot be confirmed.

Finally, Krane (2001) cites cultural studies as a force that grounds most of her work. In this project, cultural studies, with its interest in exploring the interplay between larger social forces and individual actors, provides the framework for understanding how media, films, and internet websites provide recruiting narratives ripe for interpretation. It also allows a space for investigating how these cultural artifacts shape one’s own understanding of women’s experiences with recruiting. When I access cultural artifacts of recruiting, I bring in “evidence” including autobiographies, the popular film *Love and Basketball* (2000), the documentary *The Heart of the Game* (2005), and the recruiting website, hoopgurlz.com, which guarantees “All Girls. All Ball. All the Time.” Taken
together, these cultural representations shed light on how social and cultural forces impact women’s experiences with recruiting.

Like Krane (2001), Halberstam (1998), in her study of female masculinity, establishes her own “scavenger methodology” which imparts “different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies or human behavior” (p. 13). In many ways, I see this project following suit in light of its loose network of methods and that fact that it is likely to warrant “criticism from historians for not providing a proper history, from literary critics for not focusing on literary texts, and from social scientists for not deploying the traditional tools of social science research” (Ibid., p. 10). Yet this is one of the challenges of engaging in multidisciplinary research: it demands the ability to straddle methods, writing conventions, and approaches. While this brings challenges and difficulties, my greatest challenge is to remain mindful that the multidisciplinary nature of this project invites in readers from the academic fields of sport studies, women’s studies, and sociology as well as those from outside academia. I desire to create a text that can reach all these constituencies. I concur with Richardson’s (1997) two underlying sentiments: writing in a manner that engages and perhaps even entertains proves not only possible, but essential for reaching diverse audiences, and writing in innovative ways provides a forum for understanding our projects in unique ways. Therefore, I seek to tell stories that are accessible to a variety of people. I envision this project being useful to not only my peers in academia, but also to high school and college coaches, high school athletes and their parents/guardians, and fans of women’s basketball and of women’s sports.
Feminist Legal Theory Framework: Outlining the Chapters

This section delineates how ideologies about gender shape women’s experiences with athletic scholarships and begins by unpacking a vignette about tennis star and activist, Billie Jean King, which recently appeared in The New York Times. As I break down this story, I lay out the framework that allows an analysis of beliefs about sameness, difference, and diversity to occur. I also provide an overview for each of the remaining four chapters that investigate various aspects of recruiting within women’s basketball.

On August 19, 2007, a special advertising supplement appeared in Play: The New York Times Sports Magazine. It used a story about Billie Jean King to remind readers of how far women athletes have come and also to remind them to remain vigilant about protecting women’s rights in sports. It read:

Back in 1964, when tennis legend Billie Jean King was a student at California State University, Los Angeles, she had already won two Wimbledon doubles titles and could whip every guy on the men’s tennis team. Yet, even though some of those men had tennis scholarships, she worked two jobs because women weren’t eligible for athletic scholarships. “People didn’t think much about it,” says King...“Nobody seemed to care that girls didn’t have opportunities.” (my italics, Kahn, 2007).

King’s story reminds readers that the ability to strive for and obtain a college athletic scholarship is a relatively new phenomenon for women, and that it did not exist for King and most of her contemporaries. Contrary to current practices where women regularly get recruited and obtain college scholarships to participate in sports such as tennis, basketball, volleyball, and soccer, male and female athletes from King’s generation were understood to be quite different in their athletic needs and wants.
The narrative’s retrospective acknowledgement that this practice (to view and treat men and women differently in terms of scholarships) was unfair and should be changed marks a shift in consciousness for it focuses on the similarities between men and women in terms of athletic expectations. Further, it implicitly relies on a liberal feminist framework which seeks to improve the lives of women by matching their opportunities to those afforded to men. To suggest that Billie Jean King’s situation was unfair requires one to argue for “sameness” or equal treatment: women’s scholarship opportunities should be increased to meet the standards afforded to men. While not explicitly stating it, this argument resonated with ideas that featured prominently in feminist legal theory at the point in time dubbed the “Equality Stage.”

Legal feminist theorists refer to the ideas of sameness, difference, and diversity in terms of the equality, difference, and diversity stages of feminist legal theory. This conceptualization proves especially useful in terms of understanding gender, feminism, and athletic recruiting for women because of the implicit, and perhaps inevitable, comparisons both between men and women and among women. According to Chamallas (1999), feminist thought within the realm of legal theory, can be divided into three stages: “the Equality Stage of the 1970s, the Difference Stage of the 1980s, and the Diversity Stage of the 1990s” (p. 23). Though potentially problematic because of its overly simplistic categorization, organizing feminist legal theory into these three stages allows for a better understanding of the epistemological underpinning of each stage. In this case, epistemology refers to the question of, “How do we know what we know?” By using it in

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3 Some might find it problematic to rely solely on Chamallas (1999) to detail the parameters of feminist legal theory, however Scales’ (2006) more recent book on legal feminism affirms that “Chamallas [has] provided a reliable history” from which to operate (p. 1).
this section, I mean to highlight the fact that advocates for women’s sporting endeavors used different arguments and understandings of relations between men and women to stake their claims. For example, one perspective felt that women should have certain rights because women are the same as men whereas others felt that decisions and laws should attend to the differences between women and men. These divergent perspectives reflect various epochs in feminism and feminist legal theory.

The feminist legal theory framework creates an opportunity to illustrate the material consequences and accomplishments of feminists who advocated for the rights of women within these various paradigms. Using this framework to examine the experiences of female athletes in terms of scholarships and recruiting allows for a better understanding of some of the tensions that remain for women around recruiting and scholarship access, policies, representations, and narratives. Finally, it provides a means to contextualize some of the stories I was told by the women I interviewed.

The stages also resonate with conceptions of feminist theory and activism. For example, the legal discourses operating during the Equality Stage mirrored the work done by early liberal feminists, who were committed to ideals such as individual rights and worked to convince all that women deserved “the same natural rights as men” (Donovan, 1997, p. 1). Liberal feminists sought to work within the existing context of the law (and other institutions) and did not request protection for women from the legal system. Rather, they sought to challenge and undermine the existing laws that treated women differently from men in an attempt to protect them. Equality feminists saw this emphasis on difference (as in, women are different from men) as something that limited women and potentially confined women to a life focused primarily on the family and the home.
This liberal feminist framework continues to hold weight and female athletes and their supporters have relied on this commonsense argument to carve out opportunities for women in sport. Instead of understanding men’s and women’s experiences in sport and elsewhere as fundamentally different, liberal feminists measure success in terms of achieving rights or opportunities that are equal to or in line with those that men receive. In the context of women’s sports, Title IX legislation mandated that women should be treated like men in terms of access and opportunities, and therefore “men’s sport programs are used as the norm by which equal opportunity in women’s sport is judged” (Blinde, 1989, p. 33). The approach served certain women well and came to the fore within the context of women’s recruiting in a 1973 lawsuit, *Kellmeyer, et al. v. NEA, et al.* The plaintiffs sought to secure women’s rights by arguing that women and men should be treated the same. Similar arguments occurred in a lawsuit filed by Michigan’s Communities for Equality, and these lawsuits will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Three.4

However, establishing men’s experiences in sport as the norm to be achieved is an area of contention for those who do not subscribe to the liberal feminist approach. In the 1980s, feminist legal theories began to identify the ways in which men and women were different from one another, and the idea that they ought to be treated according to these differences began to circulate. The Difference Stage embraced the idea that on some level men and women were significantly different, and that these differences ought to be acknowledged in the fairest way possible in the eyes of the law. Those who identified as

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4 Though I do not discuss them here, lawsuits by basketball players Victoria Cape, Cheryl Lynn Jones, and Diana Dodson access themes related to recruiting rights as they sued for the right to play full court (as opposed to six-on-six) basketball. See Chapter four of Fields’ (2005) *Female Gladiators* for a detailed exploration of these cases.

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cultural feminists were integral to the functioning of the Difference Stage within feminist legal theory. The most essential underpinning of cultural feminism was the appreciation and celebration of women’s differences from men. This included celebrating ideas around women’s ways of knowing, governing, leading, and playing sport and typically appreciated the “non-rational, the intuitive, and often the collective side of life” (Donovan, 1997, p. 31). Instead of erasing traditions associated with femininity or women’s so-called roles, cultural feminists sought to create a space for these roles to be re-conceptualized and understood differently. In so many words, the dominant feminism of the Difference Stage wanted to reclaim women’s spaces and places in order to make them powerful sites.

In the legal arena, the era of difference created a framework for tackling some issues that those working in the Equality Stage could not adequately address. For example, a woman’s experience with pregnancy clearly distinguished her from her male equal, and therefore made a “traditional equality principle” impossible to impart (Chamallas, 1999, p. 26). The concept and understanding of (biological) difference within the lives of men and women that emerged during the Difference Stage provided the opportunity to re-fashion the notion of equality (Ibid.). Instead of pushing for a notion of equality or the same treatment even when operating from different starting points, difference feminists instead allowed for unique circumstances to dictate fair, yet potentially unequal, solutions.

In sport, these ideas circulated freely within the rhetoric of the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), the organization that oversaw women’s athletics from 1972-83. Instead of attempting to replicate the system established by men’s
sports, most AIAW handbooks clearly indicate that their desire was to not follow the male model of sport. The AIAW “adopted a student-centered, education-oriented model with built-in safeguards designed to avoid abuses observed in the male athletic model” and was in line with the athletic programming for women that preceded it (Hult, 1994, p. 97). Part of these safeguards included the rule that athletes receiving athletically-based financial aid (scholarships) were ineligible to compete in AIAW-sponsored competitions. The rules, championships, philosophy, and policies differed so that women’s experiences in sport would resonate with the prevailing understanding of women at the time. This commitment to creating a separate space for women, wherein differences are permitted still influences current NCAA women’s basketball recruiting regulations. This topic will be explored in greater depth in Chapter four.

The Difference Stage of the 1980s was supplanted by the Diversity Stage of the 1990s wherein critiques on the monolithic category of woman demanded that feminist theories grow and evolve. In sum, the feminists of the Diversity Stage argued that laws and feminist theories that intended to “speak for ‘women’ in general” had “little relevance for women who were not white, middle-class, and heterosexual” (Chamallas, 1999, p. 27). Those feminists who operated within the Diversity Stage argued that differences among women, including race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation ought to be considered when advocating for legal reforms. An acknowledgement of the impact of diverse identities that women possess required a re-examination of the legal reforms based on the unquestioned category of “woman.”

The newfound awareness of multiple identity categories and oppressions required theories to account for not only many different types of oppressions but also intersections
and overlaps of identities (Crenshaw, 1997, p. 179). Dichotomous thinking – the belief that women are either like men or are not like men – was pushed aside by considerations of how women could be oppressed by other women in light of their race, class, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. The Diversity Stage included Black feminist thought, Womanism, Chicana feminism, Latina feminism, and First Nations feminism. This Stage raised consciousness through discussions of concepts such as white privilege and unconscious racism.

The expanded vision of the category of woman enabled feminist scholars to consider how race, ethnicity, and sexuality shaped and intersected with gender to contour experiences in sport. An appreciation for the lessons of the Diversity Stage requires one to consider how women’s experiences with recruiting or time as recruits reflects the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. More specifically, I contend that the recruiting process creates opportunities for raced and sexual stereotyping. I demonstrate how this happens in Chapter five via an analysis of the film *Love and Basketball* (2000) and the documentary *The Heart of the Game* (2005).

Though Chamallas’ (1999) text and historical look at feminist legal theory ends with the Diversity Stage, certainly the presence of feminist thought within the legal realm continues in the twenty first century. Therefore, I include one final stage for this project: the Postmodern Stage. Levit and Verchick (2006) explain that “postmodern feminists use the tools of deconstruction to challenge the modernist idea of an unchangeable rule of law. Laws are not objective or impartial – they are crafted from political biases…[and] postmodern practices critique many subtle hierarchies of power” (p. 37). Deconstruction asks one to dig beneath legal rhetoric and of all texts to reveal the ways in which power
operates at the level of language. In her book on postmodern legal feminism Frug (1992) completed a postmodern legal feminist analysis of contract law texts by “analyzing the ways in which male and female characters…are deployed,” by exploring the “particular discourse and cultural stereotypes of women and men,” and by “show[ing] the way meaning can acquire gendered overtones” within a text (p. 113). I follow this example and provide brief commentary on the place of technology in recruiting via an examination of the girls’ basketball recruiting website, hoopgurlz.com. I chose to explore hoopgurlz.com in light of the increased presence of technology and the internet within recruiting. In this last chapter, I also offer my thoughts on the implications of my research and provide suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER 3

EQUALITY STAGE:

THE KELLMEYER AND COMMUNITES FOR EQUITY LAWSUITS

To begin this chapter, I return to the narrative about Billie Jean King that appeared in Chapter 2. I referenced this particular story to help set an historical marker for the study of recruiting and scholarships within women’s sports. Now, I use it to illuminate how notions of sameness made the quest for women’s recruiting and scholarships more palatable to the American public. King’s narrative requires readers to consider how a vision of “sameness” or equal treatment could have made a difference in her situation. Rather than working two jobs, she could have been able to put her time into perfecting her game and excelling in the classroom. Readers are nudged to consider what else King might have accomplished if only she had been given what the men of her generation took for granted.

This passage argues that women’s and men’s sports should receive equal treatment, and this belief fueled much of the activism within the second wave of feminism, the era that birthed Title IX. Title IX – often cited as the most important piece of legislation for U.S. female athletes – relies on a liberal feminist ideology, the belief that men and women should be treated the same within the confines of sport and in all
areas of life. In this chapter, I will examine the theme of sameness as it connects to the *Fern Kellmeyer* lawsuit and the more recent case involving Michigan’s Communities for Equity (CFE), which was brought before a Federal district court in 1998. The *Kellmeyer* (1973) lawsuit and the *Communities for Equity* (2007) lawsuit both rely on arguments of sameness and serve as examples of liberal feminist activism within women’s sport. Additionally they both shaped and continue to contour women’s experiences with athletic recruiting and therefore represent important points of reference for this examination of women’s narratives of recruiting. This becomes clear in the second half of this chapter when the voices and narratives of the women who participated in this project are presented.

The social changes and accomplishments that occurred during the Equality Stage relied on liberal feminist thought which supports ideals such as “individual autonomy and choice” for women and seeks rights for women that align with rights for men (Chamallas, 1999, p. 25). Liberal feminist activism seeks change within existing institutions and does not aim to radically transform social institutions or structures. Liberal feminists measure success in terms of achieving rights or opportunities that are equal to or in line with those that men receive. Further, they seek to challenge and undermine existing laws and policies which attempt to protect women by treating them differently from men. Within the realm of feminist legal theory, Equality Stage feminists viewed laws that emphasized women’s differences from men as potentially stifling and limiting, fearful that an acknowledgement of gender difference would limit women in their varied pursuits. Essentially, they felt that if women and men were the same then they ought to receive the same...
same privileges and be subject to the same laws. They challenge the belief that men’s and women’s experiences in sport and elsewhere are fundamentally different.

Though these ideas come and go within present-day activism, the quest for sameness provided the impetus for the plaintiffs in the two aforementioned lawsuits involving scholarships and recruiting within women’s sports. In this chapter, I examine the lawsuits more closely to identify the ways in which arguments of sameness were utilized to create opportunities for women in sport that align with those offered to and for men. Though this chapter focuses on the lawsuits, I am less interested in the outcomes or in breaking down the nuances of each particular case and more interested in pulling out the central themes as they speak to ideas of sameness. Again, I am primarily interested in using these lawsuits and feminist legal theory to provide a larger historical, philosophical, and socio-cultural framework of recruiting in order to better situate the personal narratives of the female athletes I interviewed.6 The feminist legal framework provides a means for identifying how various conceptualizations of sameness, difference, and diversity manifest within women’s basketball recruiting and not necessarily to make a case for one particular ideology over the other.

_Kellmeyer Lawsuit_

Though women have participated in the sport of basketball since the turn of the 20th century, a new era of women’s intercollegiate basketball began when the AIAW established itself as the governing body for women’s intercollegiate athletics in 1971. Once in power, the AIAW leadership codified a number of rules in an effort to protect

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6 For more information on the Kellmeyer lawsuit, see Wushanley (2004) or contact the University of Maryland archives. Several articles on the Communities for Equity case exist. See Schafer (2003) for one example.
and differentiate women’s sports from men’s sports. Part of these safeguards included the rule that athletes receiving athletically-based financial aid (scholarships) were ineligible to compete in AIAW-sponsored competitions. In tandem with the AIAW position against scholarships, recruiting by coaches was discouraged. The 1972-73 AIAW handbook reasons that, “recruiting practices and financial aid programs in women’s athletics are often contrary to educational objectives; they impose undesirable pressures and are means of athletic control by those who offer the greatest financial inducements” (Weiland, 1988, p. 75). The AIAW leadership felt that the attention of coaches and administrators should be directed to overall programmatic concerns as opposed to just one sport or to recruiting a few talented athletes.

Though the debate over athletic-based financial aid existed in private for many years within the AIAW, a very visible and public critique of the AIAW’s stance on scholarships took the form of a lawsuit in 1973. Fern Kellmeyer, et al. v. NEA, et al. (1973) involved 11 tennis players and their coaches from two Florida colleges and endeavored to “invalidate the DGWS [Division for Girls’ and Women’s Sports]/AIAW rules that prevented women recipients of athletic scholarships from participating in AIAW-sponsored intercollegiate competitions” (Wushanley, 2004, p. 63). At the time of the lawsuit, a female athlete who received an athletic scholarship from a college or university could not compete within the AIAW (Hult, 1991, p. 285). Since a number of colleges and universities that offered women’s sports were affiliated with the AIAW, this policy severely limited the opportunities a woman had to compete. The plaintiffs asked the courts to explore the merit of the AIAW’s policy on scholarships, particularly as it
related to emerging concerns over gender equity within higher education (Wushanley, 2004, p. 63).

To make their case, the plaintiffs contended that the rules governing women’s sports and scholarships should change because “there is no such prohibition in any association or organization or college or university governing intercollegiate athletics for men. Virtually all males participating in intercollegiate athletics receive scholarships from their colleges or universities based upon their athletic abilities” (Fern Kellmeyer, 1973, p. 9-10). In sum, the plaintiffs sought to secure women’s rights by arguing that women and men were the same and should be treated as such. The lawsuit never made it to the courtroom because after strategizing with legal counsel, the AIAW avoided the lawsuit by agreeing to revise their position on athletic scholarships (Hult, 1994, p. 98).7 Less than 20 lines appeared in The New York Times “Sports News Briefs” section to report the important news that female athletes who received scholarships were now eligible to participate in AIAW championships (“Women Win Right,” 1973).

While the AIAW officially revised its scholarship policy in 1973, the decision was fraught with tension both within and outside of the Association. As a result of this policy revision, AIAW membership increased dramatically, and in 1978, just five years after the policy was changed, over 500 colleges and universities awarded athletic scholarships to women (Forman, 2001, p. 134; Wushanley, 2004, p. 70). Also by 1978, the AIAW had adopted athletic scholarship policies that were almost identical to those in effect by NCAA member institutions (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998, p. 118). Recruiting policies were evolving as well and coaches could now leave campus to assess the talent.

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of recruits and would also receive release time and be reimbursed for any expenses incurred during this travel. By 1981, 64% of AIAW institutions awarded scholarship money to women (Weiland, 1988, p. 75). When the AIAW modified its scholarship policies, it created a different way to conceptualize the potential benefits of sport for women. Sports no longer merely provided a way for women to develop physically and mentally. They could now help women finance their way through higher education just as they had for men. With one instrumental lawsuit, women’s sports and women’s recruiting would never be the same.

Communities for Equity Lawsuit

The scholarship rights secured via the Kellmeyer (1973) lawsuit paved the way for “recruiting rights” to be debated within the Communities for Equity (2007) lawsuit against the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA). Though 25 years separate the two lawsuits, the arguments for sameness and treatment that is in line with boys’ and men’s sports persist as my summary of the Communities for Equity (2007) lawsuit will indicate. In this section, I provide a broad sketch of the major issues at stake within the lawsuit and focus on one central argument leveled by Communities for Equity (CFE): when girls are forced to play sports in “non-traditional” seasons, their right to be recruited for intercollegiate athletics is compromised.

In Michigan, a group of parents formed the advocacy organization, CFE, in 1997, in order to agitate for the rights of middle and high school female athletes within the state (“About CFE,” n.d.). The parents who founded this organization noticed that their daughters’ teams lacked some of the support afforded to the boys’ teams (i.e., cheerleaders and bands), and they came together as a group in order to see that “their
daughters [were] treated as well as their sons” (“Women’s Sports Foundation,” n.d.). After educating themselves on the specifics of Title IX and gender equity within sport, the group filed a lawsuit against the MHSAA in June of 1998. There were seven complaints listed and six were successfully mediated. The one unresolved issue dealt with sport season scheduling, and the case went to trial in September of 2001 (“Top 10 Things,” n.d.). The last complaint leveled by CFE contended that Michigan high school girls were not afforded the same benefits as their male counterparts because for certain sports, the girls competed during non-traditional and therefore less advantageous seasons (“Sixth Circuit Court,” 2006).

CFE argued that the MHSAA hurt girls in Michigan by having six different girls’ sports (volleyball, basketball, golf, tennis, soccer, and swimming) scheduled during “harmful” (i.e. non-traditional) seasons but having no boys’ sports scheduled in harmful seasons. The two sports that raised the most ire for CFE were the sports of volleyball and basketball. Prior to the 2007-8 school year (when the court-mandated changes occurred), high school girls in Michigan played volleyball in the winter and basketball in the fall, the reverse of what happens in most other states and at the intercollegiate level. Thus the plaintiffs claimed that “girls are harmed in ways boys are not,” and that girls suffer “limited opportunities to be seen by college recruiters and to compete for athletic scholarships” by virtue of the arrangement put forth by the MHSAA (“National Women’s Law Center,” n.d.).

Though CFE used straightforward arguments of gender equity in their case, the issue of recruitment entitlement is of obvious relevance to this project for it bespeaks a new era of rights that extend beyond the right to take the field or even to receive financial
aid while on the field. Now, CFE argued, girls deserve to not only play, but to play
during a time that would optimize their chances to be recruited. More specifically, their
argument claimed that high school girls in Michigan have:

Limited opportunities for college athletic scholarships and opportunities to
play college sports (whether on scholarship or not); Less [sic] recruitment
opportunities as a result of NCAA recruiting restrictions that limit the ability
of women's college basketball coaches to recruit during the fall, but not the
winter...Less [sic] scholarship opportunities, due to the fact that the National
Letter of Intent dates for high school athletes to sign for their college
scholarships, occur before Michigan girls even start their senior seasons in
volleyball and soccer (“Background,” n.d.)

The MHSAA refused to bend and meet all of the demands put forth by the CFE and the
CFE’s commitment to their daughters’ recruiting rights kept this case in the courts for
almost 10 years. The case was finally decided in favor of CFE in April 2007, though the
agreed-upon plan of action ultimately accepted by the Courts was not the one put forth by
the CFE (“Long Overdue,” n.d.).

Part of the success of CFE’s “right to be recruited” argument came via expert
testimony from former Women’s Sports Foundation CEO, Dr. Donna Lopiano. In a 2007
press release that applauded the Supreme Court’s decision to not review the case,
Lopiano summarized the significance of the case and relied on the notion of sameness to
make her claim:

This case was filed by parents in 1998, parents who wanted their daughters treated
as well as their sons. It’s amazing it has taken this long, but right has prevailed.
Female athletes deserve the same chance as male athletes to be seen during
regular seasons of play so that college coaches are making scholarship offers and
decisions based [on] senior year performances. This wasn’t happening in non-traditional
seasons that occurred after deadlines for offering scholarships (“Women’s Sports Foundation,” n.d.)
In 30 years of fighting for the rights of women and girls in sport, Lopiano transitioned from a president of the AIAW who was concerned with the ways in which women’s sports were following the path blazed by men to an expert witness in a case that involved complex questions about gender equity, women’s sports, scholarships, and recruiting (Lichtenstein, 1981, p. 30). In many ways, she represents the changing world of women’s sports. Though the debates have become more nuanced, both lawsuits come down to themes of sameness and equal treatment in sport.

In both instances a liberal feminist ideology and the quest to be treated just like males became the measuring stick for what was to occur within women’s sports. These legal narratives frame the experiences and stories of women who have been recruited, though the women I interviewed never cited them directly. Instead, they spoke of their expectation of being recruited, of their first impressions of recruiting, and of the stresses and pressures they faced as recruited athletes. The lawsuits explored in the first section provide important contextual information through which women’s recruiting narratives and voices can be better understood.

Female Athletes Speak about Recruiting

I had heard about illegal recruiting of guys. It made me feel kind of special that I was receiving the same treatment for my basketball talents (Lieberman-Cline, 1992, p. 52).

Lady Magic: The Autobiography of Nancy Lieberman-Cline (1992) provides one of the first personal narratives of a highly coveted female basketball star.8 Lieberman grew up in Queens, New York, played college basketball at Old Dominion University (ODU) from 1976-1980, and went on to play professionally in various leagues. In the

8 Since this book was completed, Nancy Lieberman-Cline has divorced and now is known as Nancy Lieberman. I shall refer to her as such throughout the remainder of the chapter.
chapter of her autobiography that addresses scholarships and recruiting, entitled, “Recruiting Wars—for a Girl,” Lieberman (1992) expresses little surprise that she was offered paid visits to various campuses despite the fact that, “under AIAW rules there were no paid recruiting visits” permitted via the organization’s guidelines (p. 51). In addition to these instances of rule-bending, Lieberman (1992) briefly mentions other illegal activities that took place, but in the end places no judgment on the athletic personnel who worked outside the rules of the AIAW. Ultimately, being seen as “one of the guys” in terms of recruiting and scholarships allowed Lieberman to feel validated as an athlete. The liberal feminist ideology that underscored the Kellmeyer (1973) and Communities for Equity (2007) lawsuits returns in Lieberman’s assessment of her recruitment.

The two women closest to Lieberman’s generation with whom I spoke, Vivian and Teresa, detailed their recruitment in different terms, at times espousing liberal feminist thought and at times challenging the established “male model” of sport as the one to which women should aspire. Vivian, who graduated from high school in 1979, grew up with several older brothers and witnessed them excel in athletics at the collegiate level. Though she saw some of them go through the recruiting process, Vivian didn’t grow up anticipating a scholarship or even with aspirations of attending college. She recalled:

From where I came, college wasn’t really an option for most people. And if you did go to college, it was usually because you played sports. But for women, for girls, I mean, my mom was totally against me playing. I mean, everyday I would go out I had to hear it from her. So, there was no way that I was thinking that I was gonna go to college first. And then that I would be playing basketball, second, and third, [that] I would get somebody to pay me or give me a scholarship.
I understand this to mean that Vivian did not expect equal treatment when it came time for her to imagine her future as an athlete or as a college student. The concept of sameness or a liberal feminist ideology had not yet entered her mind and would not until several years into her collegiate basketball experience.

Teresa graduated from high school in 1982, just a few years after Vivian, but had the advantage of growing up near a university with an established women’s basketball program. This helped her to establish a vision of playing collegiate basketball. The program featured many female athletes on scholarships and according to Teresa, the university was on the “progressive end of things at the time,” meaning they offered a number of sports for women and demonstrated support for their female athletes in a way that many other colleges and universities did not. Fortunately for Teresa, she had the means to access this team as a spectator and would regularly watch these women play. When she told me about this program, she could still easily reel off the names of the female athletes she watched and who became her role models. After watching these women play, she was able to say to herself: “I want to play there.” Therefore, Teresa did not necessarily have to aspire to be the same as or on par with male players because she had access to a successful scholarship-granting women’s basketball program. In this way, the quest to create the same opportunities for women as men had facilitated a moment where women no longer had to look directly to men to help establish their expectations. As Teresa’s story attests, the presence and visibility of established scholarship athletes who are female can provide young girls and women with a vision of what is possible.
When these expectations become commonplace and women’s sports become institutionalized, the need to articulate this sense of beginning seems to wane. For the younger athletes with whom I spoke, there was a discernable silence around this topic as if the moment wherein women had to wonder or think about whether or not they were worthy of scholarship offers had passed. Since I started off all three interviews with a general question (What was recruiting like for you?) I somewhat expected to receive responses that indicated each woman knew exactly when she became a potential college basketball player. While my initial query led to the discussion above for Teresa and Vivian, no one else discussed the moment when they realized that they could be recruited or earn a scholarship. Instead, their responses focused on the excitement, yet stressful nature of the process. Further, several women mentioned “just wanting to get it [recruiting] over with” which proves noteworthy in light of the “recruiting rights” and opportunities that the CFE parents sought for their daughters in Michigan.

For Tasha and Elizabeth, two women who graduated from high school in 1994 and 1993 respectively, getting past the recruiting process so that they might “enjoy their senior year” was how they responded to my question of, “What was recruiting like for you?” Tasha, who played four years at a mid-major university, recalled that she was “so stressed out by the time it came around to do it [be recruited]” that she committed and signed during the early signing period just so she could be done. She noted that the seemingly endless phone calls, the rude coaches, and the unsolicited advice dispensed from well-meaning folks all contributed to her desire to end her recruitment as promptly as she could. Similarly Elizabeth signed early and desired to get the process over as quickly as she could. She was the only player on her high school team to continue her
basketball career in college, and since her high school coach offered very little guidance, she relied mostly on her parents for direction and support and on her Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) team to provide her with exposure to college coaches.

Rebecca, who graduated in 1993 from a high school with a reputable girls’ basketball program, described the period of time when she was recruited as both stressful and exciting. In contrast to Tasha and Elizabeth, she did not sign a Letter of Intent during the early signing period, choosing “to wait until the end to kind of see how things played out and see what I wanted to do.” Though the process was stressful, she was able to rely on her father and her high school coach for assistance while being recruited. Throughout the course of our conversation, she repeatedly noted the importance of her high school coach. According to Rebecca, he “did all of the legwork to reach out to the schools,” and also “had a lot of good relationships with [college] coaches.” He informed her of who was or was not interested in her and communicated with schools when she was not interested in them. As her coach “filtered” calls from interested schools, Rebecca was able to concentrate on other elements of the recruiting process.

The increased involvement of her high school coach allowed Rebecca to move through recruitment with a bit more control and ease. However, it typically was someone connected with the player (a coach or parent) and not the player herself who took control of the situation. Both Tasha and Elizabeth mentioned their parents as being helpful as they navigated the phone calls and campus visits. Rebecca noted the help of her father and her high school coach. The biggest change from this “middle generation” to the youngest generation I interviewed was the recruiting aplomb demonstrated by Tina and Jasmine, two women currently playing in college. Again, when opportunities become
institutionalized, so do the expectations of recruitment. These women were not surprised or just excited to be recruited: they expected it and had parents, club coaches, and high schools who expected it as well.

Tina and Jasmine, who graduated in 2005 and 2004, respectively, demonstrated a savvy unseen in the stories told by Vivian and Teresa and marked a shift from debates about scholarship rights and recruiting rights to the right to a level of control over the process. Tina had an especially interesting vantage point since she seemingly went through the process twice; she transferred from one NCAA Division I school to another after only a quarter at her first school. For assistance, Tina utilized the insights of her mother (who had been through recruiting on a smaller scale when she was an athlete) as well as her club coaches. More importantly, during her second round of recruiting, Tina said that she learned from her initial mistake and

Everything I hated about there [the school she originally signed with], I wanted to make sure I didn’t find in the place I went eventually. So the way the coach ran the team, and stuff. And the type of discipline. And the type of person that the head coach was and the way that the assistants interacted. And just different stuff like that. So, [I was] just trying to find the opposite of what I came from.

Tina’s second round of recruiting would allow her to sift through the different programs interested in her and select one that not only would offer her an athletic scholarship but also allow her to work within a system that she felt would work best for her. Instead of being just excited or stressed about the prospect and the opportunity to be “re-recruited,” Tina demonstrated an attention to detail that can only come from personal experience, and yet also indirectly benefited from the experiences of other women who were recruited before her.
Tina’s contemporary, Jasmine, also told a story that demonstrates the recruiting aplomb of today’s generation of athletes and high school programs. Jasmine’s high school frequently sent athletes onto institutions of higher learning for athletic pursuits. Therefore her high school had an organized evaluation system in place and after visiting a college or university students returned to the high school and assessed how well the school fit their needs by completing a standardized evaluation form. Students ranked the schools they visited in various categories and then tallied their scores. The formalized evaluation process allowed Jasmine to figure out what was really important to her and why and reflects the structures and procedures that schools are imparting to assist recruited student athletes.

Since her school was a boarding school, and she had parents less familiar with the recruiting process, Jasmine relied on her high school coach and the high school president to help her make her decision. Further, Jasmine was advised by her school personnel to “stay in good relations” with schools, even those she did not like, because there could be another member of her team interested in that particular program. In other words, Jasmine’s school prided itself on the fact that their students earned athletic scholarships and maintained good rapport with colleges and universities which would contribute to their ability to place athletes in the future. This mentality and these services and structures have emerged as female athletes have become more aware of the athletic scholarships awaiting them as opposed to being happy just to have the opportunity to earn one.

Both Vivian and Teresa noted that their happiness in “just being there [at college]” made them less aware of the differences in treatment between the male athletes
and the female athletes on their campuses. Teresa retrospectively recalled the differential treatment: “It took me two years up at [her university] to figure out why all the football players were driving these brand new cars, and I’m driving around in a little Chevy with three cylinders.” This statement suggests that the money that “changed hands” within men’s sports and men’s recruiting did not within women’s sports at her university. Similarly, Vivian recalled that she did not mind that the male athletes lived in newly built, luxurious housing while she and her teammates lived in “a nasty old dormitory.” She explained that the disparate living conditions failed to elicit any complaints because, “We [her teammates] were clueless…I was happy to be in college…you know, going on road trips and getting money for a food stop.” The sheer happiness with just being able to play coupled with the understanding that men and women would not be treated the same allowed for these women to accept treatment that was different and substandard.

While Vivian and Teresa did not recognize differences during the time of their recruitment, both Tina and Jasmine quickly responded to my question of how recruiting was different for their male counterparts. Tina noted that she was surprised to realize that a recruiting trip for a male athlete sometimes replicates what the mainstream media present in films such as Spike Lee’s *He Got Game* (1998). She said that for male athletes who are recruits “people [women] are just lined up…they [current players who are hosting] just take you to parties, get you drunk, and then throw you some girls.” Jasmine corroborated Tina’s comments with small details of her own. Further, Jasmine added an interesting twist on the notion of sameness by noting that she has joked with Tina about wishing that a similar thing would have happened on her visit. On her ‘ideal visit’ her
hosts would have had a number of men lined up, and Jasmine could have “just point[ed]”
to the one she wanted.

When Jasmine and Tina told me about the male athletes they knew who had
women waiting for them on their visits, they insinuated that perhaps the stories from the
football “recruiting parties” at the University of Colorado - Boulder are more common
than one might think.\footnote{As the recent media attention garnered by the sexual assault and rape allegations at so-called football “recruiting parties” at the University of Colorado - Boulder demonstrates, the popular narrative of what recruiting looks like includes women only when they are used as a means to lure recruits. Some might argue that the use of women as “recruiting tools” has been done for many years and has support from films such as \textit{He Got Game} (1998) or \textit{The Program} (1993). See also Feldman (2007) p. 193.} My response to their answer was to reaffirm my reason for the study. “That’s all we hear about in terms of women in recruiting,” I said, proud that their answer had validated my conception of and work on this project. “Obviously we don’t have that situation [where men are lined up for female recruits] occurring in most places,” I continued. Jasmine agreed but then said laughingly, “That’s what we [she and Tina] joked about. One day we wish that we will.” Tina agreed and asked: “Where were \textit{our} guys at [when they came to campus visits]?” The jovial tone that this exchange between Jasmine and Tina took indicated that this particular quest for treatment that is equal to their male counterparts is not necessarily one for which they would fight. However, it does beg the question: what will women fight for next in order to feel as if they are treated equally within the context of scholarships and recruiting? What will be next on the agenda for the courts, and how might it shape and contour the next generation of female athletes and their narratives of recruiting?

When the \textit{Kellmeyer} (1973) lawsuit secured the right for women to obtain scholarships and compete in the AIAW, it helped usher in a new era for women in sport.
Their participation in sport could now be acknowledged financially and athletes and their parents increasingly saw sport as a way for their daughters to pay for their college educations. This mentality invariably led to the lawsuit filed by CFE who fought to have their daughters offered the same opportunities in high school sports so that their right to be recruited would be maximized and/or the same as their sons. Their success in forcing the MHSAA to change sport seasons so that girls were able to be recruited perhaps created another dilemma—more stress on their daughters when they actually were recruited. Fortunately, high schools and coaches seem attuned to the pressures facing young women who are recruited and appear to be instituting changes to help manage the stress.

In both Kellmeyer (1973) and Communities for Equity (2007), the claim to fairness and equality relied on ideas of sameness and equality with men’s sports the benchmark to which women aspired. While a liberal feminist agenda permeated these arguments, not all feminists were (or are) content to watch women’s sports follow the lead of men’s sports. Those feminists in search of a visible and discernable difference between men’s and women’s sports are discussed in the next chapter which builds on the ideas of the Difference Stage of feminist legal theory.
CHAPTER 4

DIFFERENCE STAGE:
NCAA RULES AND BYLAWS

Women’s sports are following the well-worn path to collegiate professionalism. Many young women no longer play for the thrill of victory but rather for the dollar...Administrators in women’s athletics have chose the wrong role model. Many aspire to equality with men’s college sports. I, for one, have higher aspirations (Park, 1982, p. 73).

Missy Park’s letter to the editor appeared in a 1982 issue of Sports Illustrated and responded to a piece the magazine produced on the troubled women’s basketball program at the University of South Carolina (USC). Park – a member of the Yale Women’s Basketball Team at the time of her letter – identified the problems at USC as being directly related to the increased money and resources directed at the women’s game and embraced the view held by many of this era. She was disgusted that the quest for equality and sameness required that women’s sports subscribe to the model provided by men’s sports. Instead, women should espouse a different way of approaching sporting endeavors and stop adhering to “the male model” of sport. In this chapter, I will examine current instances within NCAA recruiting rules and bylaws that continue to embrace this particular stance by allowing room for differences between women’s and men’s sports. A closer look at the NCAA recruiting policy-making process will reveal that arguments that
acknowledge and appreciate men’s and women’s differences within the context of basketball recruiting resonate with the stance taken by Park in her impassioned letter from 1982. In part II of this chapter, I explore themes of gender difference within NCAA policies and establish a larger context for female athletes to talk about the manner in which ideas of gender difference and NCAA recruiting bylaws impacted their recruiting experiences.

While Park’s letters speaks to the time when the AIAW endeavored to run women’s sports by and for women, it also serves as an exemplar of the ideology circulating within the 1980s “Difference Stage” of feminist legal theory. The Difference Stage recoiled at the Equality Stage’s ideas of sameness and instead embraced the idea that on some level men and women had some significant differences – both biological and cultural – between them. Even after many legal victories during the Equality Stage, difference feminists were responding to one of the central tensions that persisted: “If women ask to be treated the same as men on the grounds that we are the same as men, then we concede[d] that we have no claim to equality in contexts where we are not the same as men, whether as matters of biology or as matters of social fact” (Scales, 2006, p. 84). In sum, feminists felt that these differences could not be ignored and instead ought to be addressed in the fairest way possible within the law. Difference Stage feminists argued that the reality of gender difference could not be dealt with effectively under the model presented by liberal feminists of the Equality Stage.

However there is more to this particular stage than just an acknowledgment of difference. While liberal feminist thought buoyed the Equality Stage, those who identified as cultural feminists were integral to the accomplishments of the Difference
Stage. Tired of the way in which “‘male’ functions as a code word for superior, while ‘female’ still carries associations of inferiority,” cultural feminists desired to reclaim femininity (Chamallas, 1999, p. 307). They sought to promote the idea that “feminine qualities may be a source of personal strength and pride” and aspired to “broader cultural transformation” (Donovan, 1997, p. 31). Cultural feminists embraced essentialist notions of gender, especially when they positioned women favorably. Further, while liberal feminists often faced critiques because their changes occurred within established institutions without actually changing the structures, cultural feminists endeavored to enact change both within and to institutions. In the context of sport, this meant that they aspired not only to alter women’s opportunities in sport but also to change how sport itself was conceptualized. In terms of affirming the feminine, cultural feminists sought to identify and promote women’s “naturally” collaborative and nurturing ways of knowing, governing, leading, and playing sport. Instead of erasing traditions associated with femininity or women’s so-called roles, cultural feminists sought to create a space for these roles to be re-conceptualized and appreciated as opposed to denigrated.

The era of difference created a framework for tackling some issues (most notably, pregnancy) that those working in the Equality Stage could not adequately address. Additionally, the Difference Stage feminists provided the opportunity to question gender norms, re-frame the picture, and place women at the center. Instead of pushing for a notion of equality or the same treatment even when operating from different starting points, difference feminists instead allowed for unique circumstances to dictate fair, yet potentially unequal, solutions. In sport, the ideas of cultural feminists freely circulated within the rhetoric of the AIAW, the organization that oversaw women’s intercollegiate
athletics and existed from 1972-83. The rules, championships, philosophy, and policies differed from men’s so that women’s experiences in sport would resonate with existing ideas about women and women as athletes. For example, within the AIAW the rules allowed athletes to transfer from one college or university to another and play immediately. While athletes who transferred could not receive an athletic scholarship immediately, the rule intended to “discourage wholesale transferring while at the same time enabling a player who wishes to change school for purely academic reasons to do so without interrupting her playing career” (Green, 1979, p. 40). The rule suggested that women, perhaps unlike men, would always privilege their academic pursuits over their athletic pursuits and never transfer purely for athletic purposes.

The commitment to creating a separate space for women, wherein differences between men and women often place women in an esteemed position, still resonates with fans of women’s sports just as it did with Park in 1982. In particular, women’s basketball and its “under the rim play” often garners praise as the purest, most fundamentally sound version of basketball. In the media and elsewhere female athletes are celebrated as representations of the epitome of the NCAA student athlete, playing for the love of the game and nothing more. Not surprisingly then, these ideas manifest in debates around current NCAA women’s basketball recruiting regulations wherein differences between men and women position women as pure and the more rational and reasonable arbiters of recruiting rules.

*Introduction to NCAA Division I Recruiting Rules and Bylaws*

Most college sports fans understand that recruiting rules (and violations) shape the day-to-day activities and interactions of coaches and recruits. In some instances, rules
can deliberately or inadvertently affect a group of athletes based on gender or race. In this section I will examine and unpack NCAA Division I recruiting rules and bylaws to demonstrate how tensions between gender sameness and difference shape the recruiting polices in place for women’s basketball. The slight variation in rules position women’s and men’s basketball differently, making women’s basketball appear more sensible and reasonable (more pure) when it comes to recruiting. To make these claims I first access a fairly well-known discussion of how NCAA Division I recruiting rules interface with identities (i.e. race and gender) to demonstrate that an analysis of this manner can and has occurred. By briefly analyzing Proposition 48, I provide an example of how NCAA Division I recruiting rules can be read through the lens of race and gender.

In 1984, the NCAA passed Proposition 48 which prohibited high school athletes from securing an athletic scholarship unless they received a 2.0 grade point average in eleven academic courses and obtained at least a combined score of 700 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or a 15 on the American College Test (ACT). Proposition 48 was an NCAA policy initiative created to ensure that all college athletes met a certain academic minimum before they could receive an athletic scholarship and compete within the NCAA. Further, it was seen as a way to bolster the credibility of the NCAA. Several coaches, most notably former NCAA Division I men’s basketball coaches, John Thompson and John Cheney, recoiled at the new rule and shared the sentiment that this policy disproportionately affected black male athletes and endeavored “to stem the flow of black athletes into predominantly white universities” (qtd. in London, 1989, p. 18). Thompson followed up his comments by protesting and walking out during one of his team’s games.
Though the ire and public protests of Thompson and Cheney received attention, they did not impact eligibility rules in any significant ways; the NCAA moved on to other, more stringent requirements for NCAA athletes who receive scholarships.

Meanwhile, female athletes of all races and ethnicities were largely outside the frame of the Proposition 48 discussions. A brief half-page article on the topic in *Women’s Sports and Fitness* magazine contends that women were not impacted by Proposition 48 as much as men, perhaps providing one of the reasons why women were largely left out of this discussion. The magazine cited a *USA Today* survey indicating that “only 44 of the 938 recruits in Division I women’s basketball will sit out [in 1986]…that’s 4.7 percent compared to 13 percent of the men’s basketball recruits” (Gaines, 1986, p. 20). The ways in which Proposition 48 impacted women’s basketball recruits differently than men’s and the response to the way the policy disproportionately impacted black male athletes is instructive when one considers how current NCAA rules and bylaws implicitly position athletes differently. These different positions then assist in the perpetuation of essentialist ideas about race and gender. For example, the black male athletes who were sidelined due to Proposition 48 helped to perpetuate the stereotype about their superior athleticism, but limited academic ability when compared to white athletes. In the next section, I explore this phenomenon in another context by examining how rules and bylaws help to position women’s basketball recruiting as more reasonable than men’s basketball.

In order to demonstrate how this occurs, I must detour slightly and discuss how an NCAA proposal becomes an official bylaw. For those readers unfamiliar with the *NCAA Manual*, the language can be verbose and the bylaws confusing. As Fleisher, Goff and Tollison (1992) write in their book that examines the NCAA, “the rules cover the most
minute details of the relationship between schools and athletes...[and] the Manual is much more akin to a legal, statutory code than to a loose collection of club rules” (p. 94). Therefore, in this section I sparingly utilize the language of NCAA proposals and bylaws; I only cite directly when absolutely necessary. Further, this section does not claim to examine all current recruiting bylaws nor delve deeply into how proposals become bylaws.10 Instead, I aspire for clarity as I make my claims about the gendered nature of NCAA rules and bylaws.

The 2007-8 NCAA Manual, the organization’s official rulebook, and NCAA.org, the official website, direct those interested in understanding the most recent rule changes to visit their Legislative Services Database for the internet (LSDBi) site. Though most of the rules and bylaws found on the LSDBi are the same as they are in the NCAA Manual, according to this website, the

LSDBi system’s manual bylaws are updated after legislation is adopted, amended or revised. As such, the LSDBi manual cites and text may differ from those in the hardcopy of the bylaw manual that is issued once a year...the LSDBi system has the most up-to-date version of bylaw cites and text. (“LSDBi,” n.d.)

The need to re-direct interested parties to another source reveals how quickly and regularly the rules of the NCAA change. Though this tool aims to make accessing and following recruiting rules easier, it does not reduce the number of recruiting rules. A bylaw search for “recruiting” within this system yields 495 matches. In other words, there are 495 bylaws that deal specifically with some element of recruiting within NCAA Division I sports. Some of these are general recruiting rules that serve all sports whereas others speak only to specific sports. In this section I will only review two that contain

10 For more information on this topic, please visit the NCAA’s website (www.ncaa.org) and search under the topic “Legislation and Governance” to find explanations on how legislation is introduced and passed within the organization.
telling differences between women’s and men’s basketball recruiting to demonstrate how ideas of gender manifest in official recruiting policy.

To be more precise, I examine two proposals to change existing bylaws within women’s basketball recruiting, and I delve into the rationales behind these particular proposals as well as the subsequent repeal of the proposals. To do this via the LBDSi website, I first examine the bylaw and then the links that contain information on associated proposals. The associated proposals link connects viewers to a website that shows related proposals to existing bylaws and includes information on the origin of a proposal, the status, the intent, and the proposed amendments. It also contains the proposal’s estimated budget impact, its impact on student athletes’ time, a rationale for why the proposal was either accepted or denied, which committee accepted or denied the proposal, and the position statement of whichever cabinet/committee was charged with reviewing the recommendation. This behind-the-scenes information is important to the commentary included in this chapter on the rules regarding recruiting-person days (bylaws 13.02.7 & 13.02.8) and total recruiting opportunities (bylaws 13.1.6.3 & 13.1.6.4).

Before moving on, a word on how proposals are initiated is in order. According to the NCAA website, each year NCAA member conferences are eligible to submit legislative proposals for “changes in NCAA bylaws to be considered by the division’s governance structure or legislative process” (“Submitting Legislative Proposals,” n.d.). Those who represent member conferences are instructed to visit the LSDBi website to detail their proposed changes or amendments. For those visiting this site, the following expectations are in place: the proposals for legislations changes or additions must be
received by July 15, a clear statement of intent as well as a well-articulated rationale should accompany the proposal, and the proposed legislation ought to note what current policy (in this case, based on the 2006-7 manual) is to be amended (“Submission of New Legislative Amendments,” n.d.). Again, proposals that move through this process will be examined here.

While some standard policies are in place regarding recruiting for all NCAA Division I member institutions, a number of differences exist in the recruiting rules across NCAA sports. For instance, a search for “football” within the 495 recruiting bylaws currently in place for NCAA Division I sports turns up 50 hits and suggests that football largely operates in its own realm when it comes to recruiting.¹¹ Men’s and women’s basketball, the only sports other than football to have their own “Issues Committees” (committees that, among other things, oversee and advocate for recruiting rule changes or additions on behalf of their constituencies) also have a number of different bylaws despite playing the same sport within roughly the same time period. For example, rule 13.02.8 reads:

In women's basketball, a recruiting-person day is defined as one coach engaged in an off-campus recruiting activity of a women's basketball prospective student-athlete, including a prospective student-athlete who has signed a National Letter of Intent (or the institution's written offer of admission and/or financial aid), on one day (12:01 a.m. to midnight); two coaches engaged in recruiting activities on the same day shall use two recruiting-person days. Women's basketball staff members shall not exceed 100 recruiting-person days. (“NCAA Division I Manual (13.02.8),” n.d.)

In men’s basketball, the bylaw reads exactly the same save for one important detail:

men’s basketball staff members shall not exceed 130 days. In 2006, the Atlantic 10

¹¹ For example, see NCAA recruiting rules: 13.02.3.1, 13.1.8.4, and 13.1.6.2. See also Feldman (2007) for an in-depth exploration into football recruiting.
Conference proposed to change the bylaw (Proposal 2006-28) and allow women’s basketball to have 130 days as well. In their rationale for making the change, the Atlantic 10 Conference argued that

a change in the legislation would create parity between the men's and women's basketball recruiting processes. Currently, men's basketball has 130 recruiting-person days. This moderate increase in the number of recruiting-person days will provide coaches with additional evaluation opportunities, which should enable institutions to make more sound recruiting judgments regarding prospects who will be successful both academically and athletically at the institution, and who are likely to fit into the program and the student body. (“DI Proposal: 2006-28-A,” 2006)

The Atlantic 10 conference also felt that the budget implications would be minimal and that there would be no impact on student athletes’ time. Ultimately, both the Academics/Eligibility/Compliance (AEC) Cabinet as well as the Women’s Basketball Issues Committee were willing to compromise and engage with the proposal on some level. However, they both rejected the request and rationale to move to 130 days to be just like men’s basketball. The AEC Cabinet put it simply and said that “a change to increase the number of recruiting-person days in order to provide consistency with men's basketball is unnecessary” (Ibid). Implicit in this decision is the belief that women’s basketball would be better served in charting its own course when it comes to recruiting rules.

While the AEC Cabinet’s response does not provide any explicit reasoning as to why they feel the rule change is unnecessary, it does provide enough of a response to suggest that women’s basketball is secure enough in its own position to have a marked difference from men’s basketball. Further, I argue that this difference between the genders allows women’s basketball to be cast in a favorable light. That is, with many
feeling that recruiting has spun out of control, any attempt to rein it in or decrease its intensity is seen as a move in the right direction. Finally, I should note that this difference in rules also reflects the larger reality of men’s and women’s sports at the intercollegiate level: women’s sports simply do not have the resources to recruit like men’s sports, and as current University of Texas Assistant Coach Mickie DeMoss has said, NCAA rules typically are passed for “cost saving purposes” or to counter an abuse of an existing rule (qtd. in Becker, 2002, p. 2). In this way, the difference reflects the financial reality of women’s basketball.

The NCAA recruiting bylaws 13.1.6.3 and 13.1.6.4 and the associated proposals reflect a similar situation to that which is seen in 13.02.7 and 13.02.8. Bylaw 13.1.6.4 concerns the total times a member institution may be in touch or observe a recruit and reads as follows:

In women's basketball, during the academic year, each institution shall be limited to five recruiting opportunities (contacts and evaluations combined) per prospective student-athlete but may not include more than three in-person, off-campus contacts during the prospective student-athlete's senior year and shall include contacts with the prospective student-athlete's relatives or legal guardian(s), but shall not include contacts made during an official visit per Bylaw 13.6. Women's basketball staff members shall not exceed 100 recruiting-person days. (“NCAA Division I Manual (13.1.6.4),” n.d.)

In men’s basketball, the rule is nearly identical except for the numbers. As mentioned in the last example, staff members in men’s basketball are allotted 130 recruiting-person days. Further, they are limited to seven recruiting opportunities per recruit as opposed to the five afforded to coaching staffs within women’s basketball.

In 2006, the Big East Conference delivered proposal 2006-34 to the appropriate committees and argued for an increase in the number of recruiting opportunities in
women’s basketball from five to seven in order to “promote[s] parity between sports by allowing women's basketball the same number of recruiting opportunities afforded to coaches in all other sports (except football)” (“DI Proposal: 2006-34,” 2006). The AEC Cabinet as well as the Women’s Basketball Issues Committee rejected this proposal, and the AEC Cabinet responded that “an increase in recruiting opportunities in order to provide consistency with other sports does not warrant a change to the current rule” (Ibid.). Without issuing any substantial comment, NCAA Division I Women's Basketball Issues Committee expressed opposition to the proposal.

Undeterred, the Big East and Mid-American Conferences issued a nearly identical proposal in 2007, amendment 2007-38. Again, arguing for seven instead of five recruiting opportunities for women’s basketball, the AEC Cabinet and the Women’s Basketball Issues Committee recommended defeat, with the Women’s Basketball Issues Committee noting that they “questioned the value of the two additional recruiting opportunities relative to the impact on coaches' life/work balance” (“DI Proposal: 2007-38,” 2007). The proposal would eventually be withdrawn. Yet, this documented concern over how changes in recruiting rules would impact the personal and professional lives of the coaches of women’s basketball is noteworthy for two reasons. One, it again establishes room for differences between women’s and men’s basketball without an implicit indication that the men’s policy is the best one. It also positions women’s basketball to be the more rational and controlled side of the coin. By choosing not to follow suit and the lead of men’s basketball in all matters of recruiting, the committees that steer women’s basketball recruiting create a space for coaches of women’s basketball to be slightly different in how often and in what manner they will pursue their recruits.
The NCAA puts many new rules in place each year to guide coaches and athletes as they proceed with the recruiting process. Most of these rules and regulations deal with what a player needs to be academically eligible for intercollegiate competition and what coaches can and cannot do as they attempt to recruit athletes to attend their institutions. As the section above indicated some of the rules and the proposals to change them reflect ideas about gender and perhaps the financial realities of men’s and women’s basketball recruiting budgets. Additionally, the debate around whether or not to change women’s basketball to meet the standards of men’s and how this argument is deployed and countered indicates that there is space for the leaders of women’s sports to detour from the approach that the leaders of men’s sports are pursuing. In essence, this situation speaks to the point made by Park (1982) which began this chapter. Instead of opting for the same recruiting rules to which men’s basketball subscribes, this slight deviation creates a space for women’s agency. This theme will prove important in the next section as women talk about both gender difference and how recruiting rules and bylaws impacted their experiences.

Female Athletes Speak about NCAA Rules and Bylaws and Gender Differences

In the last chapter, both Jasmine and Tina briefly discussed the difference between the tactics used to gain the attention of male recruits and those used to reach female recruits. In the example they provided (luring recruits with the opposite gender), women’s recruiting emerges as the more reasonable model of recruiting. In this instance, women’s sports do things the “right way” when it comes to recruiting and do not follow the path blazed by men’s sports. However, ever since the NCAA’s first public condemnation of a women’s basketball program (Alcorn State University) for recruiting
improprieties, the prevailing sentiment was that rule violations would increase dramatically because “the growing popularity of women’s basketball is putting more pressure on coaches to win – the kind of pressure that has led to cheating in men’s basketball” (Farrell, 1985, p. 31). Yet, when the women I interviewed did talk about coaches violating recruiting rules, most of the stories were of fairly mild violations.

Jasmine and Tina both recounted instances wherein coaches did deliberately violate the spirit of and intentions behind NCAA rules. For example, Jasmine recalled that a college coach came to visit her high school and engaged in a “Third Party Non-Conversation” with her and her coach (Feldman, 2007, p. 6). That is, a coach came to visit and talk to her at a time when a direct conversation with her was not permitted. To get around this rule, the college coach could talk to her high school coach who would then talk to her. Therefore what technically happened was that the college coach “would talk to my [high school] coach and my [high school] coach was talking to me.” That act did not technically break NCAA policy, but it did likely put undue pressure on Jasmine, which is one of the reasons the NCAA puts policies and guidelines against this practice in place.

Similarly, Tina recalled a moment that seems commonplace in a time when cellular phones are practically everywhere. At certain points on the recruiting calendar, face-to-face conversations are not permitted but phone calls are allowed. Tina recalled instances at tournaments when a coach would be on one side of the bleachers and a recruit on the other side. She said, “They’re like 20 feet away [from one another], talking on the phone and that’s legal, but you can’t just go sit next to them [and talk].” Again, the spirit of the rule, which endeavors to protect recruits from unnecessary interference at
games and tournaments, was broken, yet the technical point of the rule was not violated with this practice.

Though Tasha, Rebecca, and Elizabeth (the “middle generation”) did not speak explicitly about coaches violating rules, they did indirectly articulate the ways in which their basketball-playing experiences reflected existing recruiting rules. For example, when coaches were able to evaluate them during summer AAU games, they strategically communicated their presence even though they were not permitted to engage in conversation with recruits. All three women shared the memory of being watched by coaches and the means by which coaches communicated their interest in them. In a moment of convergence during our interview, the women collaborated in telling this story; Elizabeth started the story by saying that during summer AAU games coaches came to evaluate “with their [college logo] shirts on.” Tasha added that the coaches’ attire and strategies would tempt the young players, imploring them to “pretend like you don’t see us, but we’re going to be there decked out in everything, sitting right in the front row so you know we’re there.” Rebecca chimed in, noting that coaches often positioned themselves “right underneath the basket” so that their presence could not be ignored. Coaches needed their presence acknowledged to communicate interest not only to recruits, but to AAU coaches, parents, and perhaps even their coaching peers.

While this nonverbal display and communication does not violate any current NCAA policies, it does demonstrate another way in which some coaches circumvent the intents of policies and rules in place. It also indicates how NCAA recruiting rules and policies have become normalized so that this courting process or the way it potentially changes the game experience for young women is not even discussed. While rules
typically do not warrant extensive conversation, rule violations are often items that receive extensive coverage in newspapers and on the internet.

One of the more interesting moments for me came when Tina almost seemed disappointed that she could not provide any scandalous stories of rule breaking. As I concluded my interview with her and Jasmine, I asked if they had anything else to add. Tina replied: “I’m trying to think of some really illegal stuff…But off the top of my head…I can’t think of [any] illegal recruiting stuff.” She spoke a bit more about the major violations that happened in men’s sports in the past, when athletes received cars, houses, and money from boosters. She shared that the most “illegal thing” that occurred during her recruiting was that coaches would write a brief note in pen on the form letters they sent to her. “That’s not legal,” she said, “But it’s no big deal.” Tina and Jasmine, the youngest athletes I interviewed, were the only two to comment at length on the violation of recruiting rules. I suspect that this reflects the recruiting savvy that athletes of their generation possess and perhaps also the extent to which their current lives as college athletes are still governed and impacted by NCAA rules.

Another factor may also be their proximity to the recruiting experience and their limited time to reflect on their recruiting experiences in light of other life experiences. For though the other women with whom I spoke did not discuss rule violations in any great length, notions of gender differences came out in a variety of stories they told me, especially in terms of their current identities as employees. Some stories emerged from questions I posed while others manifested in light of their insights and life experiences. The responses yielded interesting results. Though I did not intend to use my interviews to explicitly compare men’s and women’s recruiting experiences, this theme invariably
came up. In certain stories, notions of women’s superiority came through and reified stereotypes and expectations. Yet, in other cases, a perception of gender differences regarded men as the fairer sex. This was especially the case when the women I interviewed talked about how gender mattered in their choice of head coaches. I conclude this section by discussing this preference in greater depth.

For the Vivian and Teresa, the two eldest women I interviewed, explicit comparisons of women’s and men’s experiences came early and often in our conversation and reflected their athletic and career experiences. Their comments also included a hint of nostalgia and a bit of disdain for the present-day state of female recruits and women’s sports. For example, Vivian, an athlete who played through the AIAW-NCAA transition, noted that women’s sports quickly picked up the “bad habits” of men’s sports: “I’ve heard some [high school] girls talk…they think they can just jump right straight into the WNBA…When we [women] got the opportunities, we just hop right onto the bandwagon, and it’s scary how fast we get swept into something.” Instead of celebrating the increased intercollegiate and professional opportunities afforded to women, Vivian noted the misguided efforts of athletes of today. In discussing the NCAA-AIAW transfer of power and the increased competitiveness and money that the NCAA brought to the women’s game, she succinctly stated, “I thought the AIAW was fine,” and offered little reflection on any positive results of the NCAA takeover.

Teresa picked up on this theme later in our conversation, lamenting some of the young, recruited athletes of today who will not accept recruiting correspondence if it does not come from the head coach, or is not “handwritten or Fedex-ed.” She followed up this statement by revealing that “money’s starting to get exchanged in the women’s game
right now, which is scary.” Her use of the word “now” suggested that a dramatic turn of events has happened in women’s college basketball recruiting, reflecting not just women embracing the habits of men, but also women’s coaches adopting the same illegal recruiting strategies as men’s coaches have done. Despite the reporting done by sportswriters such as Green (1979), Lieber & Kirshenbaum (1982), Vance (1984) and Farrell (1985) which documents that women’s sports did encounter explicit rule violations and unethical inducements to athletes, most of the stories shared with me from Vivian and Teresa included phrases that clearly delineated their generation from other generations. “Now it’s different,” said Vivian. It’s a “whole different era,” and “It’s changed,” they told me. Vivian even closed our conversation by saying, “You know us old school players, we thought we were cool when we got sweats and shoes,” highlighting again the differences she sees between her generation and younger ones.

For the two other groups, discussion of gender differences did not always rely on essentialist notions of gender or a comparison with other generations. Instead, as Rebecca reflected on her recruiting experiences, she noted the subtlety of sexism as she recounted two instances where gender became salient for her. First, she found it odd that on her recruiting visits the coaching staff “always took you to a male sport” as part of the visit despite the fact that there were “plenty of women’s sports that we could have attended.” This decision on the part of a coaching staff was likely strategic. Recruits who visit campuses in the fall are more likely to get caught up in the excitement of an athletic department while attending a crowded football game as opposed to watching a women’s sporting event which may or may not be able to secure fans. Later in our conversation, Rebecca mentioned that the university she attended “lived and breathed” men’s sports
and that it was difficult at times to accept this and take the backseat because she and her teammates worked hard, “always had the higher GPAs and were never in trouble.” With this comment, Rebecca provides an answer as to why she was taken to a men’s sporting event during her recruiting visits. Sexism still pervades athletic departments, and athletic resources and excitement tend to surround men’s sporting events more so than women’s despite the many positives that women’s teams bring to athletic departments.

Despite displaying an awareness of how ideas about gender difference and the subtleties of sexism impacted their college athletic experience, Rebecca, Elizabeth, Jasmine, and Tina all shared one thing in common: a strong belief that the gender of their head coach made a difference to them. All four expressed a clear preference for a male head coach, though for Rebecca and Elizabeth, this was a retrospective recognition since they had played basketball in college for a female head coach. In the case of my interview with Rebecca, Elizabeth, and Tasha, the detour to this discussion took me by surprise for it came in response to a question on any perceived differences between the male and female coaches who recruited them. Elizabeth could not recall any, but said she wished that she had paid more attention to this. She then confessed her preference to me and the rest of the group: “I’m probably a terrible person for saying this, but I would have totally picked a male coach rather than a female coach because I think…they don’t do any of those little head games.” Rebecca immediately agreed: “They don’t take the shit.” She further affirmed Elizabeth’s preference by admitting her own preference for a male leader and used her work experiences to make her case, “I don’t bond as well with female bosses as I do with male bosses. I’m pretty good at removing the emotion from things.”
Both Elizabeth and Rebecca rely on essentialist ideas of women as understanding and emotional to justify their preferences for male head coaches.

Tina and Jasmine also accessed some familiar stereotypes when explaining to me why they preferred to play for male coaches. For Tina, the athlete who transferred shortly into her college career, the first time she played for a female head coach was at her first university. After growing up and being coached only by men, Tina found she had a hard time adjusting to a female head coach and felt some shame in admitting it: “Even though this is totally backwards and like 1900s, you look at a female coach more as like a [my] mom. Like someone who’s just bitchy.” When describing how she responds to a male head coach, she said, “You look at him like a military leader, like a father…a more authority figure. And you’re like, okay, I’ve got to listen to that and [you] don’t take it personal.” Jasmine shared Tina’s sentiments, even using the same adjectives to express her preference for male head coaches. She felt that female coaches often felt it necessary to over-emphasize their leadership and control over their teams, which made them seem just “bitchy all the time.”

In light of my own relationship to the topic at hand and my admitted preference for male coaches as a high school athlete (see Chapter one), I did not feel as much frustration with the sexist and essentialist comments rendered by Rebecca, Elizabeth, Tina, and Jasmine as I might have if they had been told to me in a different context. What their comments suggest to me is what sport scholars have already established: sport remains a masculine site where characteristics of femininity are still met with scorn (O’Reilly & Cahn, 2007). The one comfort I located in the above comments is that both Tina and Elizabeth realized that their ideas were perhaps not in line with what should be
expected of them as strong athletic women. Further, Tina, Jasmine, and I were able to
have an insightful conversation about their stated preferences for a male head coach in
light of their deep appreciation for and connection with their female assistant coaches.
While we could come to no consensus as to why they felt the way they did, they did see
the contradictions in their belief systems. Jasmine even suggested to me that this topic
would be worthy of a study. While of interest to me, I found it more noteworthy that no
other elements of identity were mentioned by the women. For example, no one
articulated a preference for a young coach, a Black coach, a lesbian, or straight coach,
though a stated preference for a male coach also perhaps suggests a preference for a
straight coach. Instead, gender stood out as the most important identity marker for the
women with whom I spoke. Alas, race and sexuality do matter when it comes to
recruiting and the next chapter discusses precisely where and how these things matter.
CHAPTER 5

DIVERSITY STAGE:
INTERSECTIONS OF GENDER, RACE, AND SEXUALITY

Deborah Thurston and Jackie Joyner look and talk like street-smart, wisecracking kids from a black ghetto, which is exactly what they are. They were the two players scouted by Billie Moore in East St. Louis last year...they walk around campus as if they still can’t believe their athletic talent has brought them to this strange landscape of hazy sun, manicured lawns and handsome pink buildings (Lichtenstein, 1981, p. 50-1).

Lichtenstein’s 1981 article on the burgeoning recruiting scene within women’s sports unintentionally helps to illuminate an important understudied subtext of recruiting: diversity matters to the writers, coaches, and athletes within women’s sports. Within Lichtenstein’s (1981) article the “tall and a bit gangly” Thurston and Joyner are juxtaposed with the blond haired, “California beach bunny” athlete who was recruited to play badminton for UCLA (p. 50). The two recruits, who were brought in by legendary UCLA Women’s Basketball Coach Billie Moore, are “othered” further as they walk through the (white) campus and also as they operate within the narratives and world of recruiting. To “other” means to set apart as different or unique from some supposed norm, and in this chapter, I contend that the norm of women’s basketball recruiting is the unnamed white, middle-class, heterosexual recruit. I use the concept of othering to demonstrate how certain recruits become suspect and deemed more risky when held up
against the white, middle-class, heterosexual norm. More specifically, this chapter will build on the work done in Chapters three and four by exploring how race, sexuality, and gender intersect to position women differently within the confines of the recruiting game. In the first part of this chapter, I touch on how themes of diversity and otherness manifest in recruiting primarily in terms of race and gender, and I use a variety of texts to support these claims. Section two explores how the women with whom I spoke remembered and understood how sexuality and negative recruiting shaped their recruiting experiences.

By including a chapter that deals with diverse identities I am attending to critiques leveled at the Equality and Difference Stage feminists raised by those operating within the Diversity Stage of feminist legal theory. In sum, arguments based on comparisons with men rested upon the notion that women shared a common experience with other women which superseded or erased other elements of identity. The shared identity of “woman” was thought to eclipse other significant elements of self such as race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality. Feminists of the 1990s Diversity Stage challenged laws and policies that emerged from the Equality and Difference Stages that claimed to serve women. To Diversity Stage feminists, these laws and policies embraced a highly problematic false universalism and seemed to suggest that one’s gender oppression mattered more than any other oppression and/or that gender oppression could be isolated from other forms of oppression.

Diversity Stage feminists contended that regardless of whether the argument was that women were the same as men or that men and women were different, these two stances relied upon a monolithic conception of woman. Critiques of the monolithic

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12 These critiques took place outside the legal realm as well. For examples see Lorde (1984), Smith (1977), and Moraga & Anzaldúa (1981).
category of woman demanded that feminist theories grow and attend to the fact that
diversity among women could position some women as oppressed in certain instances but
as oppressors of others in different contexts. Put plainly, the Diversity Stage feminists
demanded that a change occur because the feminist theories that intended to “speak for
‘women’ in general” had “little relevance for women who were not white, middle-class,
and heterosexual” (Chamallas, 1999, p. 27).

The theoretical underpinnings of the Diversity Stage included Black feminist
thought (sometimes called Critical Race Feminism), Womanism, Chicana feminism,
Latina feminism, lesbian feminism, and First Nations feminism. These feminisms raised
awareness of how multiple identity categories complicated existing legal feminist
frameworks. In other words, feminists of the Diversity Stage shed light on a different
type of gender essentialism. While those operating within the Diversity Stage recognized
that differences between men and women were significant, they also noted that diversity
among women needed to be acknowledged. Liberal and cultural feminists were forced to
recognize that their work within the legal realm and elsewhere tended to rely on a
feminist agenda that reflected the needs of a white, middle-class, heterosexual woman.

Instead of viewing categories such as race, sexuality, and gender in isolation,
feminists from the Diversity Stage implored the legal community to consider how racial,
sexualized, and gendered stereotypes intersected in the lives of women to render some
women’s experiences invisible. To counter their invisibility, marginalized women began
to tell their stories, often using personal narrative to draw attention to the nuances of their
experiences of multiple oppressions (Levit & Verchick, 2006, p. 27). The personal
narratives told by women of color and lesbian women spoke to the ways in which
stereotypical expectations (based on a combination of gender, race, and sexuality) shaped their everyday experiences. This storytelling helped feminists from the Equality and Difference Stages acknowledge that gendered stereotypes often have raced and sexualized components (even if they were not easily recognized) and that these stereotypes impact expectations, laws, and public policy. For example, the supposedly universal feminine traits of “passivity, dependence, and fragility” corresponded with white women and not Black women who were seen to be “too domineering rather than too weak” (Chamallas, 1999, p. 88). These same types of stereotypes manifest as coaches watch athletes and decide which ones to recruit and which to avoid. The expanded vision of the category of woman enabled feminist scholars to consider how race and sexuality intersected with gender to shape women’s experiences in sport. In the next section, I explain how female bodies are assessed within recruiting and how stereotypes based on physical attributes (in this case, race and gender performance) impact the process.13

Coaches of women’s college basketball assess the bodies of recruits on a regular basis. It happens in the first stage of the recruiting process when talking and relationship building takes a back seat to the “meat market,” a term frequently used to describe an early stage of the recruiting process.14 Since coaches and athletes cannot communicate

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13 Here I move from talking about sexuality to talking about gender performance. I mean to highlight that sexuality cannot be assessed via an observation. Instead, it is typically the case that “masculine” gender performances in women leads to anxieties about sexual orientation. In other words, if a female athlete performs masculinity, then the assumption is that the woman is a lesbian. Therefore, I argue that when coaches identify overt displays of masculinity in female athletes, this may lead them to not consider this athlete as a potential recruit. While I would argue that attempting to understand anyone’s gender, race, ethnicity, or sexuality simply by looking is problematic, none of these demand the clarification but the sexuality-gender performance distinction.

14 This idea is best captured within the film Hoop Dreams (1994) when film director Spike Lee addresses a group of high school basketball players at a Nike camp. Lee tells them that, “these coaches don’t care about you” and reminds recruits that coaches are there primarily to see/imagine what each athlete can bring to his program in terms of fame, success, and money. It is also the title of Feldman’s (2007) recent work on recruiting.
directly at the very early stages of recruiting, they must rely on their bodies and body language to do the talking. In the last chapter, Tasha, Rebecca, and Elizabeth shared how this occurred at AAU games during their high school careers wherein coaches would saunter into the various gymnasia clamoring to be seen and heard but unable to utter a word because of NCAA rules. Similarly, former WNBA star, Chamique Holdsclaw, wrote about this experience in her autobiography as she recalled a visit from Pat Summit, the woman who would eventually become her coach at the University of Tennessee (UT). Summit came to visit Holdsclaw’s pre-season high school practice, and both used their bodies to communicate nonverbally:

By NCAA rules, she [Summitt] wasn’t allowed to talk to me at that point, so she sat in her car, and I could feel her eyes on me…I never was much into running…I always hung in the middle of the pack, sometimes even dropped to the back, though I gave it an effort the day Coach Summitt was there (Holdsclaw, 2000, pg. 66).

In the instance noted above, Summitt’s presence and eyes communicated that UT was serious about recruiting Holdsclaw (Ibid., p. 67). Holdsclaw’s extra effort that day endeavored to convey to Summitt that she was not only a talented basketball player, but also an athlete who would work hard and be worth the investment.

Like Holdsclaw, recruited athletes regularly perform in front of college coaches at practices, shoot-outs, camps, and games, and they tend to run, dive, and hustle a bit more when college coaches are in the stands to evaluate their potential. The athletes know that this extra effort will likely make a difference in the eyes of many coaches. Further, they know that virtually every aspect of their bodies and abilities are on display and subject to commentary. Muscle tone, body shape, weight gain, hairstyles, and clothing choices
frequently become fodder for discussion among coaches. With such an emphasis on observing, examining, and evaluating bodies, coaches also take note of the race, ethnicity, and gender performances of the athletes they recruit. Furthermore, whether they acknowledge it or not, most access the stereotypes that go with these identities.

While in some cases certain stereotypes might help athletes earn a scholarship, in other instances, it clearly does not. In the case of Holdsclaw, a Black female athlete and the top-ranked player coming out of the class of 1995, stereotypes based on her race and class status almost prevented Summitt from recruiting her to UT. According to Holdsclaw (2000) Summitt felt that getting her to commit would be “a long shot” and that there was not a chance that “she’d be able to convince a girl from the projects [Holdsclaw] to come live in Tennessee, forget about play ball there” (italics included, p. 67). It was former UT assistant coach, Mickie DeMoss, who convinced Summitt to pursue Holdsclaw, and once they developed a relationship, things quickly fell in place. Alas, Holdsclaw herself had her reservations, and they resonated with Summitt’s own concerns about Holdsclaw’s relocation to Tennessee. Holdsclaw (2000) had her own stereotypes about the south to overcome: “I had this image of the South, that it was Beverly Hillbillies or something—no shoes, a bunch of cornfields. Too country for me” (p. 69). While it is not known if Holdsclaw’s experience in the south challenged or affirmed her stereotypes, she did end up successfully completing four years of basketball at UT.

Both Summitt and Holdsclaw faced their stereotypes in some way, and they escaped relatively unscathed, but their story indicates the ways in which assumptions and

15 For example, see Zagoria, 2001, p. 132.
expectations based on race, class, and region can affect the recruiting process. Holdseclaw had the skill and reputation to attend any of the hundreds of schools that recruited her, and most coaches did not fear that investing time, resources, and energy to recruit her would be in vain. Yet other athletes do not fare as well due to racial and ethnic stereotypes and assumptions. For example, Native American female athletes must navigate stereotypes about their inability to “leave the reservation” in order to be seen as viable recruits and those worthy of a coach’s investment. In an article on the obstacles facing Native American athletes, Sky Smeltzer, a baseball coach at Yavapai Junior College describes Native American athletes as “very timid, shy and not real comfortable out of their element…the hardest thing for them is being away from the reservation and comfort zone they have there” (Boeck, 2007). There is evidence that these stereotypes and assumptions impact how and if Native American female athletes are recruited.

In her essay on basketball legend SuAnne Big Crow, Staurowsky (2005) revisits a segment on Native American sporting experiences which aired on ESPN in 1999. The specific moment she cites speaks directly to how stereotypes and expectations for Native American athletes impact their recruiting and scholarship opportunities. Staurowsky (2005) recounted the story of LeAnn Montes, who was recruited to play college basketball by many schools and ultimately decided to play for the University of Montana, to demonstrate the way Native American athletes are seen as risky investments by coaches. In her essay Staurowsky (2005) described the particular moment that appeared on ESPN:
LeAnn was told by the coaching staff, according to assistant coach Shannon Schweyen, that she would not be given an athletic scholarship until she had completed her first year at the university because “It was a high risk situation. We told LeAnn ‘we want you to come here and prove to us that you can make it.’” When the interviewer asked, “Is LeAnn a high risk because she is a Native American woman?” Schweyen initially agreed and then qualified the remark by noting that “it is difficult for them to leave their surroundings.” (p. 194-5)

These stereotypes still persist and manifested in the recruitment of current high school senior Angel Goodrich, a player at Sequoyah High School in northeast Oklahoma.

John Nobles, Goodrich’s high school coach, said that while she was being recruited, “many coaches expressed concern that [she] Goodrich might not stay for four years” (Crouse, 2007). He made Goodrich aware that some coaches expect that she will be unable to “stick with it” because she is a Native American athlete. Nobles expanded on Staurowsky’s (2005) writing by saying, “They’re these belief structures that are slow to break down, that they’re [Native American athletes] going to get homesick, get pregnant, get involved with alcohol or drugs” (Crouse, 2007). Though Goodrich signed with the University of Kansas, her recruiting experiences indicate that narratives about ethnicity still play a role in the recruitment of female athletes.

The stereotypes associated with female athletes who are identified as Native American can oftentimes cast them as questionable recruits and risky investments. To

16 Colton’s (2000) ethnography allows for a more thorough examination of these themes as he follows Sharon LaForge through her senior year of high school as a basketball player living on the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana. In addition to the established stereotypes of Native American athletes, Colton is able to highlight the ways in which the family and community’s expectations for LaForge reflect a lack of familiarity with the norms and protocol of recruiting. In one instance, Colton notes that Danetta (LaForge’s grandmother) “still believes that Sharon will get a scholarship to Montana State or the University of Montana” despite the fact that neither of these two schools (nor any other school) has been in touch with her (p. 323). Throughout the season, this expectation will continue to weigh on LaForge, marking her inability to secure a college scholarship a failure on not only a personal level, but also a familial and community level as well.
acknowledge the ways in which these stereotypes manifest in recruiting shatters the myth of the level playing field and the illusion that high-quality players will be recruited based on their abilities alone. It demonstrates the racial politics of sport and of the recruiting game, and the privilege afforded to white athletes who may face stereotypes about athletic inferiority (i.e., “white men/women can’t jump”) but not stereotypes of character. To provide further evidence of how the stereotypes of race and gender intersect in the lives of female recruits, the next section examines two important filmic moments. By closely examining two scenes, one is able to consider how the intersections of race and gender shape the recruitment of Black female athletes.

Race, Gender, and Recruiting

Two recently released visual representations - the film, Love and Basketball (2000), and the documentary, The Heart of the Game (2005) - foreground the experiences of Black female athletes and provide an opportunity to examine recruiting, race, and gender. Neither representation exclusively focuses on recruiting, but both contain important moments to examine in light of the insights of Diversity Stage feminists who implore us to consider the nuances of gender and race within one’s theorizing. While The Heart of the Game (2005) chronicles the real-life experiences of a young athlete and her teammates, Love and Basketball (2000) is a work of fiction. Though not necessarily based on “a” true story, its plot and message rings true for many girls and women who grow up loving and playing the game of basketball. Further, though released in 2000, the film persists as an important one for female athletes; current basketball player Candace

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17 My analysis seems to contrast the insights found in Baker (2003) where he claims that “these two films [Love and Basketball and Girlfight] were directed by non-white women, yet emphasize gender and class issues more than race” (p. 145). I would contend that separating out these various identities proves nearly impossible and therefore I try to attend to multiple identities and social locations in my analysis.
Parker, UT’s top player, lists the film as one of her favorites (Wojciechowski, 2007). For these reasons, this mainstream Hollywood film is truly a one-of-a-kind, and both its popularity and verisimilitude make it an important text to be analyzed. For the purposes of this section, I provide only brief plot summaries to help set the two scenes. I then explore one specific moment from each representation to illuminates the ways in which stereotypes of gender and race shape the recruiting opportunities of each representation’s main character.

*Love and Basketball* (2000) tells the story of Monica Wright (played by Sanaa Lathan) and her counterpart, Quincy “Q” McCall (played by Omar Epps), their love of basketball, and ultimately, their love for each other. Monica and Q are neighbors in a wealthy section of Los Angeles, and their upper-class status provides them with ample career and educational opportunities. A career in basketball is just one of the many possibilities available to both Monica and Q. Both come from stable homes with fathers who work and mothers who choose to stay at home, and Monica and Q both receive similar advice from their parents: do not be swayed by your love of basketball when making your college decision. For Q, this means selecting a school with a solid academic program from among the many who seek his athletic talents. For Monica, the decision at hand is whether to give up her dream or keep fighting for her chance to play college basketball in light of the fact that she has not been heavily recruited. By closely examining a moment in the film wherein Monica and Q discuss her status as a recruit, the manner in which stereotypes of gender and race shape the recruiting opportunities becomes clear. I set up this scene in the next few paragraphs.

Monica’s journey through the recruiting process is a focal point in the second
section of the film. When viewers first see her on the court, she is shown as a passionate and focused player. However, she is eventually shown as one whose emotions can get the best of her, and this “lack of control” serves as her fatal flaw as a basketball recruit. For example, during one important high school game, Monica’s lax defense allows her opponent to drive past her to the basket. As her opponent goes up for a layup, Monica comes out of nowhere to block the shot out of bounds. She stares down her opponent in an attempt to display her dominance and authority on the court. For this action the referee gives Monica a technical foul for taunting her opponent, and as he walks to the scorer’s table to report his call, she follows him, shouting, “For what?!” “Man, you suck!” she tells him.

Upset with her antics, Monica’s coach pulls her out for the rest of the game, and Monica sits dejectedly on the bench. She sulks and puts a towel on her head, forced to watch as her team plays on without her. As this happens, the camera occasionally flashes to a member of the UCLA women’s basketball staff who had come to the game to watch Monica play. Though she does not respond outwardly to Monica’s technical foul, one thing is clear: she’s watching a game and searching for talented recruits, and Monica is not on the court.

After that game, Monica pleads with her father to talk to her coach about playing her in the next game. Monica’s father defends the actions of the coach, “You lost your head,” he replies calmly. He feels that the coach was warranted in his decision to make Monica sit out. He adds, “Maybe it’s time to start thinking of things other than basketball,” repeating an earlier sentiment expressed by Monica’s mother. Monica does not like this suggestion. “The coach from USC is going to be there [at the next game]!”
she reminds her father, implying that this could be her last chance to get recruited. She reiterates that she is not willing to give up her dream of earning a basketball scholarship.

In the next scene, Monica is in the front row at Q’s game, watching him play and “showboat” to the delight of the crowd. Since they are next door neighbors, she catches a ride home with him after the game, and as they drive the two banter about the radio, the girls who have crushes on him, and on the upcoming school dance. Q teases Monica about being dateless for the dance, and she responds by punching him solidly in the arm. “See, that’s why you ain’t getting recruited,” Q says in a loud voice. “Who says I’m not getting recruited?” Monica responds. Q continues, “Your hot-ass temper, that’s who. I’m warning you…if you don’t stop with your bad attitude, no one’s going to recruit you.” Monica responds by forcing him to consider the double standard imposed on female athletes: “Please! You jump in some guy’s face. You, you talk smack, and you get a pat on your ass. But because I’m a female I get told to calm down and act like a lady. I’m a ball player, okay?” She says, pleading her case and temporarily silencing him. “With a jacked-up attitude,” quips Q, and the two continue their ride in silence.

Q’s insights here bespeak not only the reality of recruiting for all genders (that coaches will likely not spend their time on players deemed unmanageable) but especially so for those female athletes othered within the game of basketball. Though she plays for a predominately Black school (Crenshaw High School) and a Black head coach, the film presents her family’s middle class gender ideology as that which she must transcend. Similarly, Monica uses a fairly straightforward gender analysis to make her case to Q, but her commentary would be enhanced by recalling the insights of Diversity Stage feminists: her gender and race intersect to complicate her gendered analysis. As a Black
female athlete, her identity brings with it a host of stereotypes and assumptions, some which can work to her advantage while being recruited, but others that will be used against her. While Monica’s race may usher in expectations about her superior athleticism and toughness (as compared to non-Black basketball players), it also accesses stereotypes about the aggressive and domineering Black woman. Again, while this personality can be useful on the court, it is more often read as a distraction and potentially risky character trait to recruit. Everything that conjures up stereotypical representations of aggressive and domineering Black women may make her a risky recruit. This is especially true in Monica’s case because she is not presented as a highly sought recruit.

In spite of the fact that she is not being heavily recruited, Monica’s love for the game propels her forward. In the next game – her high school’s championship game – she plays well under the watchful eye of the two college coaches in the stands (the head and assistant coach from the USC) and eventually receives a scholarship offer from USC. She is elated that she will be able to continue her basketball pursuits at the college level and feels as if she has made it based on her skill and potential. However, one day after practice, the truth of her recruitment is revealed to her. The starting point guard (with whom Monica is competing for playing time) tells Monica: “Girl, don’t you know you just sloppy seconds? The only reason you’re here is cuz Tonya Randall got pregnant and decided not to come. They [the coaching staff] were done recruiting.” In other words, the pregnancy of another recruit created an unexpected vacancy at USC, and the coaching staff became (more) interested in Monica only after their first choice unexpectedly became pregnant. This knowledge provides further support for the assertion that
Monica’s on-court antics and the ways in which they help to reify stereotypes of Black females as overly angry and aggressive served to make her a risky recruit.

Conveniently, *Love and Basketball*’s (2000) brief discussion of a pregnant female athlete who has missed out on a recruiting opportunity provides a perfect segue to discuss another representation that explores themes of gender, race, and recruiting. *The Heart of the Game* (2005), tells the story of Darnellia Russell and her teammates at Seattle’s Roosevelt High School. The documentary follows the program’s seven-year journey to the Washington State girls’ basketball championship. Early in the documentary, viewers hear stories of Russell’s background. Her father is serving time in prison, and Russell lives with several siblings, her step-father, and her mother, April Swafford, who gave birth to Russell when she was only 14 years old.

Swafford hopes that Russell will do better than she did and wants her to be the first in the family to attend and finish college. With this in mind, Russell’s mother decides to send her to Roosevelt High School instead of the neighborhood high school, Garfield High School, to help keep her from friends and relatives who might lead her astray. Russell’s junior high physical education teacher also suggested Roosevelt to Swafford because of the up-and-coming basketball program. Russell herself is ambivalent about attending the predominantly white, upper-class high school; she feels unsure about “being around so many white people.” Additionally, she finds herself fielding questions from her grade school peers about “why she’s got to play basketball with all those white girls?” The documentary’s early mention of race allows for consistent opportunities to consider how racial and gendered stereotypes manifest in Russell’s basketball career.
Despite Russell’s indifference about attending Roosevelt, it appears as if it was a good decision in terms of positioning her for a college scholarship and getting recruited. Early on in the documentary, her mother proudly shows the camera the letters from college basketball programs that Russell has received. Swafford goes through the stack one by one, reading each college’s name, and noting that “practically every school in California” has sent a recruiting letter to Russell. While this early attention from colleges appears promising, a slight detour occurs on the path leading from Roosevelt High School to the college of Russell’s choice: she becomes pregnant after her junior year of high school. Russell quits the team and drops out of school for a short time as she works through this tough period in her life.

Russell temporarily moves in with her boyfriend’s family, and she decides to have and to keep the baby. Though she eventually returns to school, she sits out her fourth year of high school, pregnant and unable to play. Since her hiatus from school left her behind academically, she returns for a fifth year of high school, and re-joins the team to participate in her fourth year of basketball. At this point, the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association (WIAA) declares her ineligible to compete during her fifth year, and she must petition the WIAA to be eligible to participate. The WIAA denies Russell’s request to play a fourth year of high school basketball, saying that the hardship she suffered (her pregnancy) was of her own choice. Russell continues her quest to rejoin the team, and takes the case to court, claiming that the law unfairly discriminates against females. With the help of a lawyer who donated his services, the judge decides in her favor.
However, Russell’s senior-year success story is short-lived as the reality of her life after high school becomes clearer. Despite the many schools that sent her letters early in her career and the numerous accolades she has received, it appears as if her college prospects have disappeared. At this point, the documentary is silent on the topic of recruiting, and the implications of this silence are realized when two play-by-play analysts (who provide commentary for the Roosevelt High School’s state championship game) express astonishment that no college has signed the talented, young star. As Russell scores and dazzles during the championship game, one commentator says, “There’s got to be a school out there that needs her [Russell]. What about Washington State? What about Oregon State? There’s got to be a Division I school that can use Darnellia Russell.” However, the reality is that no college or university does want her at that point because she not seen as athletically talented and academically eligible, but instead as a young, Black, unwed mother. Though Russell has trumped the stereotypical narrative of the young, black, and pregnant teenager by succeeding in basketball, in school, and in raising her daughter, she remains a risky recruit. As Chamallas (1999) reminds us, scholars have demonstrated that “the narrow image of the ideal mother…tacitly excludes unmarried, lesbian, or minority mothers” (p. 312). The image of the ideal recruit follows suit: mothers, especially unmarried or minority mothers, need not apply.

Since college coaches are not able to comment on their interest in particular recruits before they sign with their universities, we are left with only speculation on what caused coaches to leave Russell behind. While college coaches cannot comment, Bill Resler, Russell’s high school coach, said that the lack of scholarship offers was “pure
sexism” and that “boys can make mistakes that girls can’t” (qtd. in Brown, 2006). Similar to Monica’s assertion in *Love and Basketball* (2000), Resler would like to highlight the ways in which only gender ideology thwarted Russell’s attempts at continuing her basketball career at a Division I university. Once again, I consider the insights of the Diversity Stage feminists who reminded us that though gender matters, so also do race and ethnicity, especially when it comes to stereotypes and expectations. Russell’s experience provides an opportunity to explore the ways in which gender, race, and sexuality intersect and impact one’s ability to earn a scholarship and be recruited. The next section continues to look at the realm of diversity in recruiting and shifts the focus to sexuality.

*Female Athletes Speak about Sexuality, Gender, and Recruiting*

Because of the ever-present discussions of homophobia in women’s basketball, I made sure to ask my participants how ideas about sexuality impacted their recruiting experiences. In particular, I asked about negative recruiting and the prevalence of it. While negative recruiting can mean imparting a variety of unethical tactics, in the case of women’s sports it typically refers to the decisions made by coaches to use homophobia to deter prospective student athletes from attending a certain institution. When the recruitment of female athletes is discussed in the mainstream media, most of the coverage explores how negative recruiting shapes the process. Therefore, I went into my interviews feeling certain that most of the women would have stories to share about this topic. I soon realized that this assumption was incorrect, and their experiences presented a more complicated story of how gender, sexuality, and recruiting come together.
In terms of the women with whom I spoke, some experienced negative recruiting firsthand but others had little or no knowledge of the practice. While Vivian and Teresa - the most senior athletes I interviewed – both knew of its existence, neither had firsthand experiences with coaches imparting this strategy during recruiting. In fact, both seemed to surmise that the strategy would be less effective today than it was in the past, with Vivian noting that, “homosexuality in women’s basketball, it’s more accepted now…it’s no big deal.” Teresa shared this sentiment only in part noting that “society is changing” but for some people “it [having a lesbian coach or team member] is still an issue.” Vivian wondered aloud how negative recruiting could be an effective tool, noting that the presence and visibility of lesbians within women’s sports has always been there. Alas, she did concede that “for parents it might be different,” and that a subgroup of parents exists that “would think that their kids could be affected by that kind of environment.” While Vivian seemed to answer her own question by noting the manner in which homophobia could be used as a tool to sway parents of recruits, she still remained incredulous that this tactic could be effective in today’s climate.

Vivian’s assertion that parents might be the ones most swayed by the presence of lesbians or perhaps more concerned with the presence of lesbians on a coaching staff or within a team resonated with a story told by Jasmine. While hosting a recruit, she engaged in small talk with the parents as they walked to a football game. The recruit’s father asked Jasmine, “So, how’s everybody on the team with the boyfriend situation?” Jasmine told me that she instantly recognized this query as an attempt to discern the sexuality of team members and decided to “play dumb” by saying, “Well, some people are dating and some people are not. Coach says you have to have a balanced life…not
just basketball.” Jasmine knew she had teammates who identified as lesbian, and she also knew that parents of prospective recruits frequently tried to ascertain “if the school has gay people on the team or if the coach is gay.” She made the decision to not allow homophobia to proceed on her watch. These important moments where negative recruiting is challenged by athletes have not yet been cited or explored by those who study the topic, but they represent an important piece of the puzzle. While Jasmine does not directly confront the father in this case, she does circumvent the question and perhaps subtly remind him that this question reflects distorted perceptions about what it means to have teammates or coaches who are lesbian.

Tina shared a story that suggests that once parents do find out that a school has a lesbian coach or a team with lesbian players, things can get complicated. When I asked her and Jasmine about the presence of negative recruiting during their experiences, Tina excitedly told me she had a “huge story” about this topic. Tina knew of a fellow basketball player who was on a visit to the school she wanted to attend when the athlete’s mother found out that the head coach was a lesbian. According to Tina, she called up the university’s basketball office and said, “My daughter needs to get out of there right away. I did not know that the head coach was gay.” The player eventually ended up playing at another Division I institution for (unbeknownst to her mother) another head coach who is a lesbian. A few months ago, Tina’s club coach called her up to tell her big news: the player whose mother had her avoiding any association with lesbian coaches had just “come out of the closet” as a lesbian.

I include Tina’s story of her peer in this discussion for a few reasons. First, it demonstrates the strength of homophobia within women’s basketball and recruiting, and
it also indicates the power that some parents have over their daughters’ decisions. However, more than that, this story reveals the presence of open secrets within women’s college basketball; though no NCAA Division I coaches are openly lesbian, Tina shared this information in our discussion as if it were common knowledge, saying of the first coach: “It was not like it was this huge news bulletin…Everyone knows that Coach has been gay for however long.” Tina also indicated that the sexual orientation of the second coach was not new knowledge either. Tina’s blasé disclosure of this knowledge suggests to me that information about the sexual orientations of coaches is shared but it is still unclear when, how, why, and to what end. Finally, Tina’s story about her club coach calling her with this information raises an important question: why? If, as Vivian contends, the sexuality of players and coaches is really a non-factor and non-issue, why is this news worthy of being shared? The narratives from above indicate that sexuality does matter a great deal to coaches, players, and fans of women’s basketball.

Yet, as mentioned above, the existing research provides little sense of how exactly sexuality matters. Additionally, both the frequency and effectiveness of negative recruiting is still not clear. For instance, though both Jasmine and Tina had knowledge of lesbians within women’s basketball and also how homophobia impacts young women’s choices and opportunities, they could not recall any major moments of influential negative recruiting during their time as recruits. In the one instance that Tina spoke of dealing directly with negative recruiting, she recalled that the conversations and homophobic concerns emerged from outside of and not within her interactions with college coaches. She told me that outside people (i.e. fans or acquaintances) advised her to “check and make sure that people [team members and coaches] have boyfriends.”
Jasmine did not recall any firsthand experiences of negative recruiting but instead recognized, perhaps from her experiences as a host, that parents will often find ways to check to see if the school has gay people or players.

Tasha’s experiences with negative recruiting reflect the most typical way that homophobia is used in the recruiting process. In an attempt to sway her decision towards his school, Tasha said that one college coach questioned her decision to look at another university and used negative recruiting. He warned her that at the other school she was considering, “the entire team was a bunch of lesbians” and that the “coach recruits lesbians.” Tasha told me that as a young high school student, she didn’t quite understand the implications or purpose of the comments from this coach. Ultimately she did not end up at either school but it was not because of the potential presence of lesbians or the negative recruiting. According to her recollection, neither the questionable tactic nor the potential presence of lesbians seemed to affect her decision.

Interestingly, after this experience, Tasha caught on quickly as to how and why negative recruiting was used when she faced it as a college player who interacted with recruits. When she was asked to host recruits for her university as a college athlete she parlayed her high school recruiting experience from one of indifference into one of advocacy. The athletic conference with which her school was affiliated possessed a reputation for being particularly adept at using negative recruiting as a tool. Therefore, she had ample opportunity to dialogue with prospective student athletes who were often considering her university and other conference schools. Tasha explained:
When I got to college the kids that I was hosting would say, “I’ve heard about this school. You know, this coach said this about that school.” There were kids I had to sit down and be like, “Look, don’t listen to what these coaches are going to tell you.” You almost are like a counselor for the kids…because they hear so many things, and they’ve got their coaches at [high] school telling them one thing. You know, you’ve got coaches that are telling them that you shouldn’t go to this school because there is a lesbian coach. So you just have to tell them, look, you’ve got to go where you feel comfortable.

Tasha’s story is an important one for it documents that negative recruiting is not just proceeding unchallenged within women’s basketball programs. Similar to Jasmine’s indirect challenge of homophobia, Tasha understood that her role was not to merely host recruits but to educate them on the realities of college sports and how homophobia might deter them from considering colleges and universities that could offer opportunities for academic, athletic, and personal growth.

In terms of sexuality and recruiting, it is more difficult to ascertain how heteronormativity is shaping the process, and both Tina and Jasmine demonstrated this inability during our interview. While aware of homophobia and negative recruiting, they did not identify the way in which their current coach exercised his heterosexual privilege by inviting recruits and the team to his house for social gatherings. Heterosexual coaches, who do not feel the same pressure to cover their sexuality, can involve their opposite gender partners or family members to take an active role in the recruiting process. These coaches may have recruits over to their homes for team meals or events during their campus visits and may also invite their partners to engage in recruiting events such as campus tours or sporting events. Coaches with partners of the same gender may be less inclined to include their partners because of uncertainty about the consequences. These practices serve to normalize and privilege certain types of relationships that coaches have
with their partners and serve to cultivate a “family” atmosphere that often appeals to many recruits and their families. The narrow notion of family allows heteronormativity to impact and shape recruiting, though it is rarely named or interrogated.

For example, in light of alleged coaching improprieties by Pokey Chatman within Louisiana State University’s (LSU) women’s basketball program, new head coach Van Chancellor had to establish a way to limit concerns that same-gender sexuality was a hallmark of his program. When Chancellor, the coach who replaced Chatman at LSU, was asked how the allegations that Chatman had improper sexual relations with former players impacted his recruiting strategy for the 2008-9 class he said, “We [the LSU coaching staff] didn’t dwell on the past. We told them what my wife and I stood for, that we believe in equal opportunity and a great education and that you could come here [to LSU] and feel comfortable” (Longman, 2007). By inserting his wife into the recruiting equation and conversation, Chancellor effectively eliminates any concerns that his program at LSU will be forever tarnished by the alleged actions of Chatman. Chancellor and his wife, their marriage, children, and grandchildren present a unified front and protective shield against the allegations and secrecy associated with Chatman’s resignation. Further, Chancellor also squashed any possibility of “lesbian impropriety” by employing a staff of three married assistant coaches (“LSU Women’s Basketball,” n.d.).

While heteronormativity and its presence within recruiting is an area worthy of future study, the nuances of negative recruiting revealed via the conversations I had also warrant further consideration by researchers. The varied responses I received from my query of how and where sexuality was impacting the recruiting process suggests that

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while the media may be correct in documenting this problem that is perhaps unique to women’s sports, an over-emphasis on the topic distorts the experiences of women who are recruited. More often than not, the women who shared their recruiting experiences with me had not directly experienced negative recruiting, though most were aware of its presence and viability as a strategy within recruiting. Perhaps, as Vivian and Teresa seem to suggest, a more accepting society will allow negative recruiting to relinquish its potency. Yet within the same interview, Vivian and Teresa also told me that from their vantage point, more negative and cutthroat recruiting happened after recruiting battles moved from regional to national scales and also after the demand for top players began to get more intense. If their version of recruiting history is accurate then negative recruiting may continue to flourish as long as coaches continue to vie for talented young athletes and the trust of their parents/guardians.

The difficult but necessary task of exploring how race, sexuality, and gender intersect to shape recruiting practices buoys this chapter. As Diversity Stage feminists suggested, an analysis that explores gender differences at the expense of how other elements of diversity and difference matter fails to attend to the real life experiences of most women. This chapter merely begins the analysis of how race, sexuality, and gender play out within recruiting, and more work ought to be done to consider how social class, region, nationality, and ethnicity further shape women’s experiences with athletic recruiting. The next chapter will move on to another increasingly important of recruiting: technology.
CHAPTER 6

POSTMODERN LEGAL FEMINISM:
GENERATION TEXT/GENERATION NEXT

Nicole isn’t great by NJ’s [New Jersey’s] standards?...She’s good by the country’s standards...She works hard and can run with the best of them...Have you seen her play? Her team has a couple of good players on their team besides her, but she puts that team on her back every game and plays her heart out...D-1 ball isn’t all about physicality, it’s about heart and what you believe you can do, and then going out there and working hard for it (Zagoria, 2001, p. 163).

When Zagoria (2001) made the decision to chronicle Nicole Louden’s life as a New Jersey high school basketball star, he suspected that he would have to deal with the ways in which technology had changed recruiting because “with the evolution of specialized chat rooms devoted exclusively to women’s basketball, anyone can post an opinion of a player” (p. 160). The selection that begins this chapter offers a unique twist on the idea that anyone can post an opinion of a player for it is Nicole Louden (as an anonymous basketball fan) who posts this complimentary evaluation of herself. Louden posted this response on a New Jersey girls’ basketball forum to respond to others’ critiques of her abilities and potential and also to bolster her own confidence as she meandered through the low points of recruiting. A few days after posting this the ways in which technology is changing athletic recruitment again became evident. A coach from the University of Georgia emailed Louden to tell her that “it would be in your best
interests to consider schools other than Georgia” (p. 164) as she was no longer a recruit that they were watching. Louden’s story makes salient that a new generation of recruits and a new season of recruiting is upon us. Yet the most effective manner in which to study the impact of these innovations is less clear. Authors such as Maher (2007), who explored the use of technology in recruiting by examining the impact of text-messaging, are beginning to emerge and attend to the influx of technology in the recruiting game. I envision this brief chapter as an effort to lay the groundwork for future studies on how and where technology impacts recruiting. To set the scene, I begin with a brief discussion of postmodern legal feminist theory.

Though Chamallas’ (1999) text and historical look at feminist legal theory ends with the Diversity Stage, certainly the presence of feminist thought within the legal realm continues in the 2000s, and there is no doubt that this epoch offers a number of evolutions within recruiting that must be examined. Chamallas (1999) ends her section of the Diversity Stage in feminist legal theory with a discussion of the ways that attentiveness to diversity helped lead to postmodern feminist theories within the legal realm. Broadly defined, postmodern feminist theories deal with “themes of anti-essentialism and multiple perspectives” and postmodern analyses have “questioned the existence of a universal truth…and developed a new understanding of the individual” (Ibid., p.98). As with the last chapter, the postmodern turn in feminist legal theory brings with it a number of different “groups” of feminists under the umbrella of postmodernism including postmodern feminists, poststructuralist feminists, global feminists, and third wave feminists. While all of these groups provide unique perspectives and ideas, some common themes emerge, and these themes will supply the backdrop for this chapter.
In her chapter entitled, “A Postmodern Feminist Analysis of Contract Law,” Frug (1992) highlights a number of ways to utilize postmodern feminist thought within legal theory, and I access a few of these elements for my analysis as they prove useful to this chapter. First, Frug (1992) says that unearthing the “gendered character of discourse” allows one to consider how language and discourse shape (as opposed to reflect) behaviors and reality (p. 112). This type of deconstruction asks one to dig beneath the rhetoric and discourse of the law (and of all texts) to reveal the ways in which power operates at the level of language. Levit and Verchick (2006) explain that “Laws are not objective or impartial – they are crafted from political biases…and postmodern practices critique many subtle hierarchies of power” (p. 37). I briefly examine the discourse of the girls recruiting website, hoopgurlz.com, to demonstrate the ways in which ideas about gender and power are accessed on this site.

In line with the previous point, Frug (1992) contends that “analyzing the ways in which male and female characters…are deployed,” and “show[ing] the way meaning can acquire gendered overtones” within a text can be a useful exercise for postmodern legal feminists (p. 113). I again use the girls’ basketball recruiting website, hoopgurlz.com to explore this theme. Finally, Frug’s (1992) work highlights the historicity and the fluidity of identities. As Louden’s opening post reveals, female athletes can be recruits in one instance and anonymous bloggers in the next within the context of modern recruiting. The ways in which this changes recruiting are yet to be determined, and I engage this theme more carefully later in this chapter. In light of the cursory examinations I provide, I conclude this chapter with my suggestions for a research agenda or roadmap for those
interested in future analyses of women, gender, and athletic recruiting. Additionally, I
discuss the implications of my work.

In this chapter, I chose to focus exclusively on hoopgurlz.com for a number of
reasons. First, the website is an important location for information about recruits as well
as the nationwide high school girls’ basketball scene. The site’s creator and main writer,
Glenn Nelson, frequently contributes to ESPN.com and is seen as an objective voice on
girls’ and women’s basketball recruiting because of his background in journalism and not
just fandom. Finally, the site was just recently acquired by ESPN, and this change of
ownership, according to James Brown, senior vice president of New Program
Development at ESPN, “represents our [ESPN’s] continued commitment to providing our
core fans with compelling high school content” (qtd. in ESPN PR, 2008). The support of
ESPN will likely allow this site to flourish and expand its content and core audience.

At present, the site offers a means for anyone, but mostly high school girls’
basketball players and fans, to monitor the recruiting scene. Visitors to the site can read
articles posted on the site’s front page, can view multimedia presentations that feature
high school athletes, can dispute the site’s ranking of high school players, or can draft a
note and send it to the site’s “Dear Hoop Mom” forum. The emphasis on female
empowerment is visible on the site’s main page. The website address appears at the top of
the main page, written in graffiti-styled font and is next to a “woman” symbol which has
a basketball coming through it. The pictures of high school athletes on the site are
primarily action shots or mug shots that would appear in a high school media guide. All
of these components help to set the tone that visitors to this site are serious about high
school girls’ basketball.
The site’s tagline, “All Girls. All Ball. All the Time.” appears only at the top of the page, but it sends an interesting message. On the one hand, the nod towards the availability of girls references a dated notion that girls and women should be available for sexual and other types of services (usually for men) at any time. Yet the inclusion of the words “All Ball” toys with this notion of girls and women’s subservience and availability to others. The tagline on this site gives girls permission to think, care, dream, and read about basketball as much as they want. They can even dialogue with others “all the time” on the site’s forum section. For fans of girls’ basketball, this tagline suggests that they will not need to turn elsewhere to find news on their favorite high school players. Girls’ basketball is the priority here, and it will not take the backseat to boys’ or men’s basketball.

The articles that appear on the site’s front page change frequently, but they typically reveal some sort of consciousness about the gender politics at play in the sport of basketball. A recent headline, “Girls Can’t Dunk?” tells the story of two 2008 female McDonald All-American players who say they were asked to try out and prove their dunking abilities in order to participate in the annual dunk contest, a prerequisite that male athletes did not have to fulfill (Nelson, 2008b). Alongside this article is a poll asking readers to weigh in on the question, “Can girls dunk well enough to compete against boys?” Additionally, readers can respond to this article through the site’s message boards.

Another recent article, entitled “Pistol with a Ponytail,” focuses on Oregon high school athlete, Shoni Schimmel. Only a sophomore, she is featured because of her exquisite passing skills and court vision. Though a number of talented female players
have come since his time, Schimmel’s on-court performances are compared to Pistol Pete Maravich, indicating the ways in which women’s basketball heroines still exist outside the popular culture’s lexicon (Nelson, 2008a). Nelson’s (2008a) story on Schimmel is fairly comprehensive and discusses the ways in which her identity as a Native American female athlete has shaped her style of play and approach to the game. According to Nelson (2008a), “’Rez ball’ style is free spirited and encourages creativity,” and reveals itself in the play of Schimmel. As the two aforementioned articles suggest, the site attempts to attend to the ways in which both gender and ethnicity shape the girls’ basketball scene. Additionally, the site also provides a forum where difficult decisions about recruiting are handled with sensitivity and compassion, as is evidenced by the article on Elena Delle Donne which appeared in the summer of 2007.

Hoopgurlz.com covered the surprising announcement from Elena Delle Donne, one of the most coveted basketball prospects of the class of 2008, that she would take the months of July and August “off” from basketball. While taking a respite may seem reasonable to those familiar with the demands placed on today’s young athletes, Delle Donne’s move was unprecedented in the world of big-time girls’ and women’s basketball because July and August are arguably the two most important months for recruiting in the United States. Not surprisingly, Delle Donne cited the pressures of recruiting as a major reason for her hiatus and requested that college coaches not contact her during her time away from basketball (Nelson, 2007a). Delle Donne said that those who do attempt to contact her would adversely impact their standing with her, stating, “If they call, I probably won’t answer or call back. If they text, I might ignore them” (qtd. in Nelson, 2007a). Delle Donne, who eventually signed with the University of Connecticut,
appeared to suffer no ill consequences in light of her decision. Additionally, several readers posted responses to the article on Delle Donne’s decision and applauded her choice, one writing as if she were speaking directly to her. These responses to the Delle Donne article raise interesting questions about who reads, posts, and responds to the content on this site and to what end.

These questions are just a few of the many that my brief analysis of hoopgurlz.com brings to light. Again, while an extensive analysis of the site’s offerings and content is beyond the scope of this project, I feel strongly that further research ought to proceed on this front. More specifically, I would suggest that future research should explore who uses these sites and how these sites are being used. As the blurb that opened this chapter indicates, players are reading their own online press and engaging with it on some level. Are many high school athletes like Nicole Louden and using hoopgurlz.com (and other sites) to leverage their options in the recruiting game? Are college coaches visiting hoopgurlz.com to see where they stand with recruits? Does the site engage fans of other sports in any meaningful way? These are just some of the questions that this chapter raises in light of technology, gender, and recruiting.

In addition to spurring questions about technology, gender, and recruiting, it is my hope that this project inspires continued research on female athletes’ experiences and narratives of recruiting. In sum, this project not only documented the lack of research interest in women’s narratives and experiences of recruiting, but it did something about it. The stories I collected and analyzed mark an important beginning step towards understanding recruiting, an increasingly important part of female athletes’ experiences with sport and athletics. In its entirety, this project aimed to not only collect and analyze
first-person recruiting narratives but also provide a model of how recruiting research could incorporate larger historical, socio-cultural, and philosophical contexts. The feminist legal framework I imparted allowed me to touch on the larger contexts of female athletes’ narratives of recruiting, and the strength of this project is its breadth. In total, this work documents how the legal, NCAA rule-based, mass-media produced, and technology-oriented world of recruiting shapes and contours women’s narratives of recruiting. It is my hope that future researchers will build on this foundation.
When I was in high school and being recruited, I did not have the clout nor the courage to remove myself from the process as Delle Donne did. Instead, I muddled through the calls, moving from annoyance one day to a panic the next day as coaches suddenly dropped me as my fellow basketball players made their choices. Pennington (2006b) describes this part of the recruiting process as “a nationwide game of musical chairs,” and this analogy seems quite fitting: when one recruit sits down and commits another one is left standing (p. 1). Recruits want to be sure that the chair on which they sit fits them well and feels comfortable, but what makes one comfortable can feel stifling to another.

After having one chair pulled from beneath me (Penn State dropped me from their list) early on in my recruitment, I quickly sprang into action. I narrowed my choices, took three unofficial visits, and ultimately committed early to Northwestern University. Making the commitment was the easy part for I was ready to be finished with recruiting. However, canceling my other scheduled visits and telling coaches I would not be attending their universities proved more difficult for me. As I summoned all my courage and dialed one coach’s number, I braced myself for the unexpected. I breathed a sigh of relief when I got his voicemail. I left a quick message, informing this coach of my decision and thanking him for his interest. One down, one to go, I thought to myself. As I readied myself to make the next call, the phone rang, and I answered it. It was the coach
I just called, and he was not happy. His negative response upset me a great deal, and I convinced my younger sister to make the next call for me. She dialed. “Hello, this is Megan Chawansky,” she began. I stood beside her, tearful and grateful.

I did not remember this part of my recruiting story until my sister reminded me of it one day as I talked to her about this project. “You don’t remember that?” she asked. I did not, and perhaps I could not because it did not fit into the recruiting narrative I had created for myself. My sister’s important recollection inspired me to talk to my mom about my recruiting experiences. I asked her what she remembered, and she went on about the mean coaches who pressured me, her young, shy daughter. She recalled how upset I would get. “They weren’t fair,” she said repeatedly, and seemed to be incredulous even today about some of the games the coaches had played. In the role of a protector and caretaker, my mother’s insights on my recruitment speak to the partial and contested nature of truth and reality.

I share these personal memories at this point to indicate I am quite aware of the fact that this project is “a” story of women’s experiences with recruitment and not “the” story of recruitment. Though I involved other women’s voices in this project, their experiences have been re-told to me based on their limited recollection of the process and have been shaped by my questions, my interpretation, and my organization of their responses. I take full responsibility for the recruiting narrative I have created via the amalgamation of our collective voices.

At the same time that this project is unique because of its inclusion of seven women’s narratives of recruiting, it is also limited by their contributions. My decision to focus on the first-hand accounts of female athletes leaves out a number of other important
narratives of recruitment. As my story above and the narratives within this project suggest, parents, guardians, siblings, high school coaches, and club coaches all play an important role in women’s experiences with recruitment. Additionally, this project leaves out the narratives of the college coaches that recruit these talented athletes, and at times seems to be overly critical of the recruiting tactics they employ. Alas, the narrative I share to begin this project indicates that I understand the complex and unpredictable world of recruiting for both coaches and athletes. It is my hope that this project has allowed readers to come to a similar understanding.
A search for “recruiting” on the SPORTDiscus database yielded over 500 articles many of which dealt with highly specific recruiting moments concerning individual athletes, particular coaches, or certain recruiting violations. (For examples see DeCourcy (2004), Dienhart (2003) or Johnson (2005).) Most of these articles examined instances in men’s sports and because of their highly specific nature, did not contribute substantively to the existing literature and/or knowledge base. The texts that do offer insights that relate to my project are annotated below. I divided the literature into three categories: academic literature, popular accounts of recruiting, and homophobia and recruiting. Texts that deal specifically with women’s experiences in recruitment are reviewed and included within the main body of this project.

Review of Academic Literature

The academic literature on recruiting typically focuses on one area: the college choices made by high school athletes. In general, researchers conducted studies to better understand the reasons recruits select a college or university, and these types of studies traditionally involve the use of surveys or a quantitative research methodology. The concentration on this particular area reflects the idea that recruiting choices are quantifiable and rational enough to be studied, a stance that I would contest. The studies completed by scholars such as Ulferts (1992), Speer (1992), Elliot (1995), Cooper (1996),
Slabik (1995), Baumgartner (1999), Bouldin, Stahura & Greenwood (2004) and Teeples (2005) endeavor to offer coaches, athletic departments, and universities insights into how to more effectively position their schools and programs to interact with recruits. Bouldin, Stahura & Greenwood (2004) succinctly summarize how institutions of higher learning can utilize these studies when they write about their work: “The results of this study should provide universities and their athletic departments with a broader understanding of the various factors involved in a student-athlete’s choice of schools. Recruiting efforts can be developed around these findings…” (p. 156-7). While important, the aims of these types of studies tend to reflect a sport management-oriented approach as opposed to one that endeavors to unearth the nuances of social or cultural forces interfacing with recruiting.

The findings from the studies above elicited multiple answers as to why athletes choose the schools they do. Most of the authors attribute the differences among the participants to the various divisions, governing bodies (NCAA, National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) or junior colleges), genders, or sports that their studies examine. Taken together, the studies indicate that what drives a student to choose one institution over another varies considerably. For example, in Speer’s (1992) work, both the female junior college basketball players and the Division I basketball players he surveyed said that the availability of a scholarship was the most important factor in their decision. In his survey of men’s basketball players (who competed at various levels of competition), Cooper (1996) reported that scholarship money was fourth on the list. Instead, the “coaches’ commitment to the program” was cited as the most important factor (p. 26). Bouldin, Stahura & Greenwood (2004) surveyed NAIA men’s baseball
players and found that while the “impression made by [the] head coach” was important to athletes, it fell second to the “opportunity to play as a newcomer” that the university or college provided (p. 149). In Baumgartner’s (1999) study of NCAA Division II female soccer players, this group identified the academic reputation of the college as the most important factor.

The variability in response may relate to the factors deemed important by each study’s author(s), and therefore may correspond with the choices available on each survey’s design. For instance, one facet of Baumgartner’s (1999) study used both short answer and Likert scale questions to assess how much various characteristics of the head coach mattered to athletes. Bouldin, Stahura & Greenwood (2004) asked athletes to respond to 22 questions regarding how much the “advice of parents,” “the appearance of the college campus,” and the “past record of the team” influenced their decision (p. 152). In an effort to solicit more thorough answers, Klenosky, Templin & Troutman (2001) applied the interview technique known as laddering in their study of 27 NCAA Division I football players. In order to “link the salient attributes of the chosen school to the consequences and personal values important to the athlete” Klenosky, Templin & Troutman (2001) ask a series of follow up questions to their subjects (p. 95). In essence, laddering involves repeating the question of why. For example, if a recruit said that the coach’s personality was a factor in one’s decision, the subject would be asked, “Why?” until the interviewer could identify a personal value or the participant can no longer continue (p. 98). In this way, Klenosky, Templin & Troutman (2001) built upon some of the aforementioned studies. Their research allows one to better understand that a school’s location might matter in a recruit’s decision because he values the ability of family and
friends to watch his contests or because he desires a feeling of belonging and felt that in a particular school’s geographical location. In the end, though, their study still attempts to connect these responses to larger recruiting tactics that a college or university may impart.

Howat’s (1999) study on factors influencing student-athletes’ choices to attend East Tennessee State University (ETSU) resembles the work done by Klenosky, Templin & Troutman (2001). Howat (1999) interviewed 36 first-year student-athletes at ETSU and found that they identified the school’s coaching staff, ETSU personnel, and current team members as the most important factors in terms of making their college decisions (p. iii). The “nice, helpful people” and the “friendliness of the South” were cited by several athletes but it was the importance of the coaching staff that garnered a mention from 27 of the 36 athletes interviewed. To sum, these studies all make important contributions to the limited research completed on athletic recruiting, yet in spite of the slight variations in methodological approaches they did not necessarily speak to the questions I sought to answer. Again, these questions revolved around how female athletes made sense of the entirety of the recruiting process and not just how they came to make their ultimate decision. Additionally, I wanted to explore larger social, historical, and philosophical contexts, and these studies tend to ignore these dimensions.

Review of Popular Literature

The topic of athletic recruitment garners considerable attention within what might be considered “popular” or mainstream literature.¹⁹ This body of recruiting literature

primarily falls into two categories. These categories are 1) guides to help one get recruited and obtain an athletic scholarship or 2) dramatic accounts of the recruiting process. In the first category, Becker (2002), Caryer (1996), Koehler (1996), McKissic (1998), and Isenberg & Rhoads (1999) are among the many authors that offer suggestions to high school athletes who aspire to attain athletic scholarships and continue to participate in sports at the intercollegiate level. These texts intend to provide the reader with an insider’s perspective to the recruiting process and are based upon the notion that the recruiting “game,” as it currently exists, provides coaches an unfair advantage. Frequently these books dispense tips and advice on how to navigate recruiting, and their target audience is recruits, coaches, guidance counselors, and parents/guardians of recruits. Though somewhat dated, Mauro’s (1988) guidebook provides useful information to the research project at hand. Chapter ten (“A Survey of Former Athletes”) surveys 133 former college athletes and found that the criteria these athletes used as high school students to select their institutions would change significantly if they were to go through the experience again (p. 101). This research suggests that a reflective, longitudinal analysis could offer a much needed service to the present-day recruits who are embarking on their own decisions.

The second category of mainstream recruiting texts provide more sensationalized, behind-the-scene accounts of the recruiting process and range from an exposé that details the shady characters and big money of men’s basketball recruiting (Raw Recruits (1990)), to Recruiting Confidential, which chronicles one high school football player’s recruiting journey, as told by his step-father, the author (Claerbaut, 2003). The recently released

Beckham (2003). I do not discuss these works here, but do focus on Love and Basketball (2000) and The Heart of the Game (2005) in Chapter five as they deal with women’s experiences in basketball recruitment.
book by Feldman (2007), *Meat Market: Inside the smash-mouth world of college football recruiting* perhaps offers the best title to capture what I am designating as the “dramatic, behind-the-scenes accounts” available to readers. Claerbaut (2003) endeavors to tell a fairly straightforward story about his stepson, a talented high school star who elicited interest from mid-major football programs. Readers do see a bit of the dramatic ups and downs of the process as Claerbaut’s stepson commits, and then changes his mind and rescinds his commitment, to one of the schools that heavily recruited him. Alas, the downfall of this work in light of this research project is that Claerbaut (2003) writes in the first person, so the perspective is his and not that of his stepson, leaving readers unsure of how this level of parental involvement aids or complicates the recruiting experience.

In *Raw Recruits* (1990) the focus is on the “characters” who represent the growing influence of companies like Nike and Adidas in high school basketball. The people who work for these companies are typically involved with “grassroots” programming. In other words, they set up and run recruiting camps and leagues in order to make a brand connection with impressionable youth. In their text, then, Wolff and Keteyian (1990) show that the recruiting game can occur long before a prospect has even entered high school. Wetzel and Yaeger’s (2000) *Sole Influence*, takes *Raw Recruits* (1990) to the next level by following some of the same types of characters, albeit ten years later. As they assess the recruiting landscape, they find that with the sustained commitment and financial help of athletic shoe companies, the basketball and recruiting “consultants” that readers first met in *Raw Recruits* (1990) continue to scour the prep basketball scene in search of potential clients. Again, their aim is to connect with rising
stars by sponsoring club teams, tournaments and events to make the important early brand connection with young athletes. Wetzel and Yaeger (2000) devote one chapter to the increasing presence of these personas within women’s basketball, a topic not addressed in Raw Recruits (1990) by using one of its more recent stars, Chamique Holdsclaw, as a case study. However, they suggest that though women’s basketball is increasing in popularity, it is thankfully almost completely devoid of the consultants who are changing the men’s game.20

Similar to the works mentioned above in terms of its focus on the exceptional story, Rooney’s (1987) The Recruiting Game: Toward a New System of Intercollegiate Sport, looked at college football and men’s basketball with an eye toward solving the recruiting scandals that cloud college sports. Rather than celebrating or documenting the recruiting scene, he sees recruiting as a problem for colleges and universities and attempts to present a solution that will keep collegiate sports competitive while avoiding unnecessary recruiting scandals. The most intriguing part of this book is Rooney’s (1987) use of his academic training in physical geography to craft a solution; he provides extensive geographical modeling to suggest that recruiting based on regional boundaries would “redistribute athletic talent far more efficiently” than current recruiting practices do (p. 166). He feels that this would solve the problems created by the money and pressure underlying recruiting controversies.


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20 There is some evidence that this might be changing. A blog posted on Hoopgurlz.com, by Nelson (2007b) indicated that there are several major shoe companies (Adidas, Nike, and Reebok) now involved in girls “grassroots” basketball.
story as it documents the intricacies of recruiting within the academically competitive Ivy League conference, a league that does not award athletic scholarships. Lincoln’s (2004) focus lies on the Academic Index (AI), a calculation of a prospective student athlete’s standardized test scores and class rank or grade point average (GPA), the tool used within the Ivy League to assess a prospective student-athlete (p. 6). Schools within the Ivy League use the AI to ensure that the academic abilities of prospective student-athletes fall in line with applicants to these same Ivy League schools who will not participate in intercollegiate sport. Lincoln (2004) collects perspectives on the AI from coaches, administrators, admission counselors, and student athletes working within the Ivy League to better understand the pressures and structures of recruiting even when the promise of an athletic scholarship does not exist.

*The New York Times*’s Pennington provided a similar service with his recent eight-part series on the realities of recruiting at the NCAA Division III level. From October of 2005, to January of 2006, Pennington’s series, entitled “The Athlete’s Edge,” interviewed coaches, parents, and recruits affiliated with Division III Haverford College (Pa.), to demonstrate the demands and stresses of the recruiting process even in instances when athletic scholarships are not on the line, which is the case at NCAA Division III institutions. Pennington’s series reveals that the trickle-down effect occurs; NCAA Division I norms of recruiting play out on the NCAA Division III level. This tends to create some of the same problems associated with NCAA Division I recruiting as well as some unique ones. For example, some Division III athletes actively pursue the possibility

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21 For more on recruitment in the Ivy League and in NCAA Division III athletics, see chapter 2 in Bowen & Levin (2003).
of sports participation and of being recruited, but only as a means to an end. They will quit the team once they have been accepted into the highly-selective DIII colleges they want.

Surprisingly, Pennington’s (2005-6) series did not include much information on the growing role of technology in the recruiting process, though this topic has garnered recent attention in short articles that appear elsewhere. An article on “e-recruiting” within college football appeared in *The Columbus (OH) Dispatch* and described the impact of text messaging and emailing on the recruiting process (Gordon, 2006). Though the NCAA initially grouped text messaging along with what they considered a contact, the NCAA changed its stance in August of 2004 and now considers them general correspondence, akin to letters or emails (Gordon, 2006). Since Gordon’s (2006) article, the NCAA has since banned the use of text messaging as a means of communication within recruiting, but it is likely that this regulation will be revisited. Curtis (2006) also sheds light on technological advances in recruiting by examining the advent of web networks such as Rivals.com and the role they play in monitoring and communicating with recruits. Networks such as Rivals.com allow college football fans access to breaking news not only about their current team and potential recruits, but they also allow fans to serve as reporters or correspondents. These reporters are free to check in regularly with sought-after recruits without any limitations by the NCAA. Curtis (2006) aptly sums the implications of this situation:

If the old fear was that players were being besieged by coaches offering favors, the new fear might be that they are besieged by Internet “reporters,” each of whom is selling his or her school…there are dead periods when coaches are prohibited from calling recruits, but a Rivals writer can call anytime. In effect, he becomes the school’s intermediary (p. 39).
For fans of women’s basketball, comparable situations and websites (www.hoopgurlz.com) exist, but to date no literature grapples with this topic in any meaningful way.

_Homophobia and Recruiting_

While negative recruiting comprises a variety of unethical tactics, in the case of women’s sports it often refers to the decisions made by coaches to use homophobia to deter recruits from attending a certain institution. When female athletes and athletic recruiting have been featured in the media the articles almost always involve an exploration into how negative recruiting shapes the process. While some coaches are as deliberate as recently-resigned Penn State Coach, Rene Portland, Griffin (2006) describes some other examples of negative recruiting tactics used by coaches:

Coaches sometimes tell a recruit and her family that a rival coach is a lesbian or that there are lesbian players on her team. Coaches use this tactic even if they do not know the sexual orientation of the coaches and athletes at the other school. Other coaches...might allude to rumors or make innuendos about problems on another school’s team caused by “lifestyle” or “moral” issues that the coach believes the recruit and her family might find offensive or threatening. Though college coaches are more likely to engage in negative recruiting, high school coaches do also. High school coaches are often influential in helping their athletes make decisions about what college to attend and can use negative recruiting to steer an athlete and her family away from a particular college program (n.p.).

A leader in the study of homophobia in women’s sports, Griffin (2006), succinctly states that negative recruiting relies “on the fears and concerns a high school athlete and her family might have about playing on a team with lesbian or bisexual coaches or teammates.” While these fears do circulate formally and informally within the world of
women’s athletics, it is within the context of athletic recruiting that these fears become institutionalized.

Coaches can be forthright in their negative recruiting or choose to be more subtle in their approach. The comments rendered by Portland are frequently cited as being reflective of the explicit homophobia in women’s basketball recruiting. Within the women’s basketball community, Portland was well-known for her program’s “no-lesbians” policy, and this policy revealed itself when she recruited players. Figel’s (1986) article in the Chicago Sun-Times, quotes Portland as saying that lesbian activity is one of the first things she “bring up during a recruiting visit” and that when she broaches the topic, “kids are so relieved and the parents are so relieved…they would probably go without asking the question [Are their lesbians on the team?] otherwise, which is really dumb” (p. 119). While Portland’s use of homophobia has been well documented, several additional newspaper accounts verify the existence and the impact of this practice outside of Penn State. (See, for example, Harrop, 2005; Sandoval, 2003; Fish, 1998; Lipsyte, 1991). The effectiveness of negative recruiting relies on the seemingly timeless concern over the gender and sexuality performances of female athletes, yet it also relies on “real life” events (Cahn, 1994). For instance, an incident that occurred at the University of South Carolina (USC) provided a major impetus for negative recruiting to persist.

The incident involved USC Coach Pam Parsons. Parsons built a reputation as a demanding but successful coach by establishing a solid core of players at Old Dominion University (ODU). After she had departed ODU for USC, her highly-touted recruits led ODU to national titles in 1979 and in 1980. She moved to USC and continued her successful ways, but also ran into trouble when allegations of recruiting (and other)}
improprieties surfaced. Parsons resigned from USC in January of 1982 amid allegations that she violated AIAW recruiting rules and policies regarding transfers. In a *Sports Illustrated* article, she was also accused of engaging in a sexual/intimate relationship with one of her players and with a player that she was recruiting.

According to the article in *Sports Illustrated*, Karen Brown, a former assistant coach under Parsons at USC, hired a private detective to trail Parsons and to uncover improprieties she witnessed and suspected (Lieber & Kirshenbaum, 1982, p. 32). The detective reported that Tina Buck, then a high school player and USC recruit, emerged from Parsons’ house at 9:58 am on Sunday November 2, 1980. The detective began surveillance at 6:50 a.m. and concluded that Buck had spent the night at Parsons’ house, which was a recruiting violation and a potential indication that the relationship between Buck and Parsons extended beyond recruiting. This suspicion was further supported by Brown who said that, “Parsons recruited with sex in mind” (Lieber & Kirshenbaum, 1982, p. 33-4). In light of these alleged improprieties, a mother of one of Parsons’ players summarized the sentiment of the parents of recruits then (and perhaps now) when she said:

> What would you say if Pam Parsons came into your home, all dressed up, with pretty clothes and makeup and nice hairdo and said, “In a year from now you won’t even know your daughter?” You’d think, “My little tomboy is finally going to learn how to be a lady.” Instead… (Lieber & Kirshenbaum, 1982, p. 37).

The bulk of the information about the Pam Parsons case from above emerged from the *Sports Illustrated* article that appeared in February of 1982, after Parsons had resigned from USC. After the article came out, Parsons and Buck sued *Sports Illustrated* for libel for “publishing a story saying they were lesbians” (Smith, 2007). Parsons and Buck lost
and were found guilty of lying about their relationship; both served time in jail for perjury. Other coaches felt the ramifications of this case on their own programs. Lieber & Kirshenbaum (1982) cite (then) Kansas State Coach Lynn Hickey as trying to “allay fears on the subject [of lesbianism] by publishing photos of herself with her husband in media guides” (p. 33). This tactic continues to be utilized within women’s sports as does the decision to include references to one’s children.

Some schools have taken the lead in terms of how heterosexual privilege can be used in the university’s promotional/recruiting materials. Oftentimes, recruits turn to a college’s media guide or website to get a better sense of the school, and frequently, these sources will include biographical information on a coach’s past experiences and educational background. This section can also contain information on or pictures of partners and children. While many find this personal touch appealing, others find it confining and silencing, and many coaches, especially female coaches who have same-gender partners, decide to not include this information in their biographies. Laurie Priest, the Athletic Director at Mount Holyoke College, recognized the two-tier system that this process created and decided to eliminate any information on a coach’s family from the college’s athletic materials (Rochman, 2002). Priest explains that her decision not to include information on the families of any of Mount Holyoke’s coaches makes it fair for everyone: “It's not that we are trying to hide it, but we're not saying one thing about one person and then omitting it on another. That to me is an inclusive act” (Rochman, 2002). This act demonstrates an awareness of heterosexual privilege and how challenges to heteronormativity can improve the recruiting experience for all.

While changes such as those initiated by Priest can help address the issue of
negative recruiting, attention at the national level has been slow. In 2006, the NCAA
coupled with the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) to sponsor a think tank
which addressed the issue of negative recruiting. The 30 attendees were especially
concerned with the topic as it pertains to another element of recruiting: the recruitment
and retention of female coaches. This concern resonates with a study on negative
recruiting conducted by Wellman & Blinde (1997) where 10 head women’s basketball
coaches were interviewed to discuss how homophobia impacted both their recruiting and
their coaching careers. Nine of the ten coaches agreed that negative recruiting is a tool
used within women’s college basketball and all ten coaches said that they had been
involved in “situations where prospective student-athletes inquired about the lesbian
topic” (p. 74-5). Additionally, Wellman & Blinde (1997) report that all ten of the women
interviewed “believed that the lesbian label affected career choices of women and
discouraged many young women from entering the coaching profession” (p.69).

Helen Carroll, Director of the NCLR Sports Project and think tank participant,
echoes this belief and explains that negative recruiting “affects all women, regardless of
their sexual orientation” and that failure to address this issue will stymie any attempt to
move women’s sports forward because “as long as any woman athlete or coach can be
harmed by being tagged with the label ‘lesbian,’ the goal of achieving true equality for
women in sport will remain elusive” (McKindra, 2006). The think tank generated ideas
on educational initiatives and noted that negative recruiting likely persists because of its
“effectiveness and the lack of serious repercussions” (McKindra, 2006). Increasing
education and establishing consequences for coaches who engage in negative recruiting
may help to address the problem, but research and work needs to continue to establish a
clearer sense of the frequency and effectiveness of the practice.
In the section that follows, I detail the steps I took while interviewing seven women for this project, and I provide this analytical trail to establish credibility and dependability. To begin, I discuss how a pilot study I conducted in the winter of 2006 offered an opportunity to test out research questions and research designs. I then explain the rationale behind my selection and recruitment of participants, the interviews I conducted, and the triangulation and analysis of data.

*Pilot Study*

During the winter of 2006, I conducted a pilot study by interviewing three women who were former college athletes and who had navigated the recruiting process during their high school athletic careers. Each competed in a different sport at the college level; one had been a NCAA Division I swimmer, another a NCAA DII volleyball player, and one was a basketball player who signed with a NCAA DI institution and then transferred to a NCAA DII institution to complete her eligibility. The women ranged in age from 25-35, and each attended a high school in a different geographic region of the United States. Attempting to navigate the most salient difference among the women who participated in my pilot study (their various sports) confirmed my suspicion that though consistent themes emerged across the women’s recruiting experiences, each sport tended to have its own traditions and protocol when it came to recruiting.
In addition to providing me the opportunity to tease out the confines of the present project, my pilot study provided an opportunity to re-work my research questions, test out the group interview format, and hone my skills as a researcher. My pilot study also afforded me the chance to “listen to the voices” of my participants and to make necessary changes to my interview questions and my interview aim. For instance, as a direct result of the responses I received during this pilot experience, I opted to tweak the focus of this project to women’s narratives of the recruiting process as opposed to my initial desire to exclusively examine how notions of gender and sexuality manifest within recruiting. When asked, my respondents had much to say about their recruiting experiences, but most of it did not exclusively deal with themes of gender and sexuality. Therefore, I decided to make this line of questioning a portion, but not the exclusive focus of, my interviews.

I chose to narrow my focus to women’s basketball because of the sport’s rich history, my own familiarity with the sport, and the existing literature on the topic. Though sparse, the literature on recruiting within women’s basketball far exceeds the literature on recruiting for any other women’s sport, and this research project endeavored to add to this literature base. Also, because it attracts more female participants at the high school level than any other sport, it allowed me to utilize convenience sampling methods and still access a diverse group of women. According to the National Federation of State High School Associations’ website, 452,929 females played on 17,275 high school teams in 2005-6 (“National Federation of State,” 2006). From this large group of high school athletes, many are recruited to compete within the intercollegiate realm, and the number of participants in NCAA Division I women’s basketball increases almost every year. For
instance, at the NCAA Division I level for the 2004-5 season, 4,747 women participated as members of 323 teams, a marked increase from the 273 teams and 3,659 participants during the 1981-82 season, the first year the NCAA sponsored the sport (Vicente, 2006). These numbers indicate the popularity of the sport as well as its potential to supply a diverse sample for this research. I chose to focus on Division I athletes and recruiting because though recruiting occurs at all NCAA levels, NCAA Division I basketball is considered to be the highest level at which one can compete and thus the site where the most intense recruiting usually takes place.

Because the interactions and sharing that emerged during my pilot study elicited rich and thick narratives about each athlete’s experience, my pilot study reaffirmed my belief in the group interview format. I also felt that the group or “team” interview setting provided an atmosphere that was more conducive to storytelling. Fontana and Frey (2000) agree and add that “group interviews can also be used successfully to aid respondents’ recall of specific events…or experiences shared by members of a group” (p. 651). Since this project depended on the ability of participants to remember their recruiting experiences, I wanted to assist them in this process by surrounding them with others who might assist them in their recall. The validation I received and the changes I made based on my pilot study enhanced my current research project.

Identification and Selection of Respondents

Since current and former Division I female basketball players are a unique group, this research project used a combination of snowball and maximum variation sampling methods to establish the list of potential participants. I began by brainstorming and compiling a list of former NCAA Division I athletes based on my knowledge of the
women’s basketball community in the large, midwestern town where my interviews took place. To add to the list of potential participants, I made contact with two women within the local women’s recreational basketball community - one who organizes and runs a recreational women’s basketball league and another who is a player in two recreational leagues. Snowball sampling, which asks others to help identify “cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich” allowed me to add to the list of potential participants and to secure necessary contact information (Patton, 1990, p. 182).

With the assistance of my contacts, I added to the master list and then began to divide the athletes into the following categories: those who graduated from high school between the years of 1979-84, those who graduated between the years of 1993-98, and those who graduated between the years of 2000-05. These five-year periods were delineated because they resonate with important moments in the history of women’s basketball and in women’s recruiting; they also represent an example of women-centered periodization (Parratt, 1994, p.7). Additionally, they provided a realistic range for acquiring participants within the specific geographic region to which my current project was limited. Though these timeframes are meaningful, they are not meant to be read as fixed dates but rather as providing a useful framework to organize the interview participants I recruited.

In another effort to build the subject pool, I arranged to send an email to members of one of the recreation leagues via my contact who runs the league. (See Appendix C.) This league contains many former NCAA Division I basketball players, and it is also one in which I have participated in as a player. Further, it was my hope that this email would
unearth additional participants who had yet to be identified and who could allow me to maximize the variation within my sample. This email briefly described the research project and requested women to self-identify if they were interested in participating. It also requested that recipients forward the email to other eligible participants.

The email elicited five responses from women who agreed to be interviewed. Of the five, two women fell within the 1993-8 period that I wished to study, and I contacted them to set up an interview date and location. The email did not garner any responses from women who fell in either of the other two time periods. Therefore, to secure participation from women in the 1979-84 timeframe, I returned to my master list and to my contacts and asked for more suggestions. Upon receiving their suggestions and considering my list, I contacted two women directly who agreed to participate in my study. Obtaining access to current basketball players from the graduating class of 2000-5 proved to be a bit more difficult.

In order to obtain access to current NCAA Division I basketball players, I contacted a colleague who serves in an athletic-academic support capacity at the institution wherein I sought participants. Because this person has direct access to the women’s basketball team, we spoke about the backgrounds of potential research participants and also about the procedures for obtaining access to these individuals. After our discussion, I sought permission to speak with one or two current Division I basketball players at this institution by emailing the Associate Athletic Director my request and a bit about my project. This individual responded after a few days, informing me that she had passed my request on to the head coach of the team. She also requested more information, inquiring about the probable length of the interview and the questions I
would be asking. I responded with the requested information and awaited her response. Approximately two months and several emails later, I received permission to proceed with the interviews but was told that I would need to contact another person to actually arrange the interviews. I contacted this representative to set up a convenient time and location for the interview. This person never responded to my request, so I emailed my initial contact and set the interview up through her.

Though all of my respondents participated or currently participate in NCAA Division I women’s basketball, I took careful attention to identify and select participants whose diversity in terms of age, race, class, regional background, playing experience, and other life experience would provide insightful narratives. I sought to maximize the diversity of my participants and “document unique or diverse variations” while also unearthing “important common patterns that cut across variations” (Patton, 1990, p. 182). The respondents who participated included women from small high schools, women from suburban high schools, women who signed early with their respective college programs as well as one who signed her National Letter of Intent in the late signing period. One participant transferred early in her college career and another had extensive professional playing experience. Several women served as coaches either at the high school or college level and all remain connected to women’s basketball in some fashion. The most significant difference among my participants proved to be their respective ages, and I explain the intention of this difference in greater detail below.

*Periodization*

The late seventies were a time of transition for women’s intercollegiate athletics, and the years of 1979-1984 aimed to access the experiences of women who weathered
this change. 1978 produced the first women’s “Final Four” and the first modern women’s professional basketball league, and the growth and expansion of women’s basketball continued in 1979. That year witnessed the first AIAW championship to be held at a neutral site and when Old Dominion University, led by coach Marianne Stanley, won the title, women’s basketball entered the “player-now-coach era” (Hutchison, 1991, p. 320). Some of these former “players-now-coaches” sought to create a coaches association so that they might weigh in on policies and formally voice “concern about the recruiting edge gained by coaches involved in the ABAUSA [Amateur Basketball Federation of the USA] international program” (Ibid, p. 321). Though supported by oversight committees, the vision for a coaches association remained dormant for several years.

The NCAA takeover of women’s sports and tournaments and the way in which this impacted women’s experiences and perspectives can not be understated. After the AIAW conducted a highly successful national championship affair in 1981 (a 32 team, single-elimination tournament), the 1982 national championship would be its last. With the NCAA hosting its own separate women’s basketball championship in 1982, the two tournament options divided women’s basketball and the “strength and depth of the 1981 teams were now split between the AIAW and NCAA [tournaments] as schools declared their alliance” (Ibid., p. 324-5). In 1982, the NCAA orchestrated the sole national basketball championship for women with a 32-team bracket. This year also saw the inaugural convention of the Women’s Basketball Coaches Association (WBCA), an organization that continues to serve as a watchdog for women’s intercollegiate basketball.

In 1983, ESPN televised early-round tournament games, and CBS televised the championship game, which allowed fans to witness the high quality of women’s
basketball. Legendary player Cheryl Miller made her national debut during the championship game, leading the University of Southern California (USC) to the title. On the international women’s basketball front, the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics provided a forum for the US women to display their skills, and they won the gold medal for the first time in history (Ibid., p. 328). These select highlights demonstrate the immense time of growth and change for athletes who graduated from high school between the years of 1979-1984.

While the 1980’s proved to be a time of great growth for U.S. women’s basketball players both at home and internationally, the period from 1993-98 witnessed a marked increase in terms of public reception and structural changes and is therefore the second period from which my project secured participants. According to Wetzel and Yaeger (2000), “National interest in the (women’s) game soared during the mid-1990s as grassroots participation grew and fans became turned off by what they perceived to be greedy, misbehaved NBA players” (p. 145). It was during this period that highly publicized collegiate women’s basketball players began to emerge as “household names” and drew more attention to the game. In a 1993 nationally televised game, Texas Tech’s Sheryl Swoopes scored a remarkable 47 points to lead her team to the NCAA Division I championship over Ohio State, 84-82. Lannin (2000) highlights the cultural significance of this game by noting that:

The Ohio State-Texas Tech game was the highest rated women’s final since the TV networks began televising games. Fourteen percent of Americans watching television that afternoon had the game on. The excitement generated by the game led to an almost instant sellout of tickets for the 1994 Final Four months before the season even started (p. 114).
1993 was also significant in terms of streamlining girls’ high school basketball nationwide. During this period, both Iowa and Oklahoma stopped holding a six-player championship tournament. Iowa held their last six-player state championship in March of 1993 while Oklahoma made the switch in 1995.

The excitement generated from the 1993 championship game remained long after the game ended, and in 1994, the NCAA Women’s Basketball tournament grew to 64 teams. The 1994 Final Four created almost the same amount of enthusiasm as the previous year produced. A sellout crowd witnessed a title game between Louisiana Tech and the University of North Carolina (UNC) that ended on a last-second three pointer that gave UNC the championship. One year later, Rebecca Lobo steered the University of Connecticut to a perfect 35-0 record and the 1995 National Title in front of a record TV audience of 5.4 million (Lannin, 2000, p. 117). National media attention ensued and after the victory, *Sports Illustrated* featured University of Connecticut player, Jen Rizzotti, on their cover.

Fans of the women’s college game during the mid-1990s could continue to follow the athletic endeavors of their favorite athletes via two new professional leagues. In late 1995, founders of the American Basketball Leauge (ABL) announced that their league would begin in 1996. Another professional league, the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA), began in 1996 as well and provided more opportunities to spread the game of women’s basketball beyond the college arena. On an international front the 1996 Olympic Games, held in the United States for the first time since 1984, provided an opportunity for fans of women’s basketball to watch and support their favorite female basketball players as they competed for (and won) the gold medal in Atlanta, Georgia.
These events coalesced to alter the landscape of women’s basketball considerably, and by interviewing athletes who were recruited during this epoch, I endeavor to capture the narratives of young women who were recruited during a time of increased media attention, respect, and professional opportunities for female basketball players.

Though the significant women’s basketball events of the 2000-2005 era remain to be decided, it can be stated with certainty that athletes of this period participate at a time when more money and resources than ever before exist in the women’s game and in women’s sport in general. One professional league (the WNBA) persists and offers opportunities for women to compete after completing their college eligibility. Further, the student-athletes from 2000-05 allow for a closer examination of the ways in which electronic communication and technological innovations have affected the recruiting process. Text messages, emails, recruiting websites, and instant messages are regulated to various degrees under NCAA guidelines. This type of communication differs from the telephone contacts and written correspondence that occurred during the first two time periods and inevitably alters the process. Interviewing women from this time period will allow for an examination of these practices and will shed insight into how these new innovations shape the recruiting experiences of female basketball players.

The Interviews

Once I identified those participants who would be most useful in terms of providing a conversation that maximized diversity in terms of age, race, class, regional background, playing experience and other life experience, I contacted the women via email or in person to describe my project and secure participation. During these initial conversations, we established a convenient place wherein the group interview could take
place. Three semi-structured interviews took place, and I chose to interview six women in total, two from each time period. (Though I intended to interview two women from the 1993-1998 time period, one of my respondents arrived to the interview with a former college teammate, and she participated in the interview.) I chose to interview the women in pairs because of the success of this type of arrangement during my pilot study and also because much like the work done by Cox and Thompson (2000), I hoped that conversing with two women at once would allow them to build off of one another, perhaps about a recruiting memory or event that had long been forgotten (p. 9). The questions I posed were all open-ended, and participants were told to feel free to expand on them as necessary. (The interview guide is Appendix D.) This allowed for gathering participants’ thoughts, feelings, perceptions and experiences about the recruiting process.

Before the actual interview began, I obtained verbal consent from the participants, and all were told that involvement in the interview was optional and that they could choose not to participate, could refuse to answer questions that made them feel uncomfortable, and could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequence. After completing the formalities, I began by asking questions from my interview guide, but I did not adhere to a strict order across all three interviews. When attempting to elicit narratives during the interview process, McInnes (1995) suggests paying careful attention to the environment to make sure it is one that is conducive to storytelling and to have the researcher become “actively, fully, appropriately, and reciprocally involved in the storytelling process” (McInnes, 1995, p. 133). I attempted to adhere to both of these suggestions, and the order of my questions followed the conversation instead of a rigid order.
I took notes occasionally during the interviews but dedicated most of my attention to my participants and to maintaining the flow of the interview. I interjected my own thoughts and experiences when I deemed it necessary or to keep the conversation flowing. I recorded the interviews and transcribed them at a later date. In the interview transcription, I immediately provided each participant with a pseudonym so that their responses would be kept confidential. Additionally, college and university names as well as names of college and high school coaches were coded in a manner so that readers cannot discern the location or recruiting tactics of a specific coach. After the transcription was complete, a copy was sent to each participant in order to correct, clarify or expand upon any information provided during the interview.

When I sent out the first two sets of transcripts, I also sent out a “Demographic Sheet” (Appendix E) to gather more information about my participants. At this point in time, I had interviewed five women and three women completed and returned the demographic sheet. One woman replied with a few questions about the transcription, but she did not complete the demographic sheet. Further, she never responded to my email reply which spoke to her concerns. I never heard from the other participant, despite several follow-up emails. Since I was unable to meet with my two youngest women until January, I learned from this experience to bring my demographic sheet with me to the interview. They both completed it after we finished our interview.

Analysis of Data

One way to establish credibility and dependability within a qualitative research project is to surround oneself with peers who are familiar with the subject matter at hand and who can serve as discussants and colleagues. These peers enable you to consider new
ideas and provide a different way to read and understand the data. While I met on several occasions with one established peer, I also talked with two former Division I coaches of women’s basketball. Additionally, I processed the data with a sports psychologist to get another perspective on my data. As one who works with a variety of athletes, some of whom are struggling with the recruiting experience, I found his insights most helpful.

While relying on the interview transcription as an important data source, I triangulated by engaging with another relevant data source: the texts that establish recruiting protocol and help to create subjectivities within recruiting. By examining NCAA recruiting manuals, I was able to better understand how these governing institutions conceptualize, comprehend, and construct the subjectivities and experiences my interview participants discuss. Ultimately, I alleviate many concerns about credibility by heeding Erickson’s (1986) call for researchers to take responsibility and be in search of disconfirming data which can show readers both “typicality and atypicality” of the data (p. 140). This empowers and allows the reader to work through the data on her/his own and draw her/his own conclusions.
Research Participants needed

I am trying to locate basketball players to interview for a research project I am doing at OSU. My research will look at the recruiting experiences of female athletes and will require a 1 ½ to 2 hour interview. If you are a former NCAA Division I basketball player who would like to be considered for this project, please email me back with the following information:

Name:
College Attended/Years:
HS Attended/Years:
Best way to reach you (phone/email):

Feel free to forward this email to others who may be interested.

Thank you,
Megan Chawansky
Chawansky.1@osu.edu
614-xxx-xxxx
APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following questions served as an interview guide. Not all questions were posed in all interviews.

Did you enjoy being recruited? Why or why not?

What were you like in high school? How did you look? Were you outgoing/shy?

Do you remember making a conscious decision to play in college or was it expected?

Did you take recruiting visits? Where? What did you do?

Were your parents/coaches involved in your recruitment? In what way?

Were you recruited by male coaches or female coaches? Do you recall any differences in the two groups (male or female)?

Can you recall any instances of negative recruiting? How did it make you feel?

Were there any references made to your sexuality, the sexuality of your coaches, or of the team?

If you could change something about your recruiting experiences, what would it be?

How were the recruiting letters you received significant (or not significant) to you?

When coaches would call you on the phone, what would you talk about?

**How often would you receive emails/text messages? Did you prefer this method of communication? (For 2000-5 participants.)

How did your experiences with recruiting impact/affect the way you treated recruits when they would come and visit campus?

Is there anything else you would like to add?
APPENDIX E
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Getting the Girl: Female Athletes’ Narratives of the Recruiting Process
Demographic Information of Participants

High School Attended:

Years Attended:

Location of High School (City, State and Country)

Please write a few sentences about your high school in terms of its sporting program, location and size. For example, was it considered a suburban or inner-city high school? Did it have a well-respected sports program? Was it known for other reasons?

Please write a few sentence about who “you were” and/or what you were like in high school.

Please write a few sentences about how your identities around race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and social class were or were not importance to you in high school and how they are or are not important to your self-identity now.
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Women’s Sports Foundation Responds today’s Supreme Court’s decision regarding Michigan High School Athletic Association’s scheduling of girls sports.
