FEMALE ATHLETES AND WOMEN'S SPORTS: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF NIKE'S WOMEN-DIRECTED ADVERTISEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

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Girls and women have made great strides in U.S. sport since the passage of Title IX. Despite their progress, the literature suggests that women's sports do not receive media coverage that is commensurate with those advances, while representations of female athletes are often perceived as problematic. In 1999, Nike's sponsorship of the U.S. Women's World Cup soccer team helped to launch female athletes into the popular imaginary. Additionally, Nike advertising directed towards women began to include feminist values in commodity form to establish Nike as a "celebrity feminist." As Nike expanded its marketing to the female consumer, I ask whether the brand's advertisements suggest that Nike has become an advocate for women's sports. This study uses textual analysis to analyze four women-directed Nike advertisements that aired between 1995 and 2010. Nike's portrayal of women in sport has evolved from the "if you let me play" advertisement to the "I'm making myself" campaign. In those advertisements, representations of girls and women transitioned from renderings of young girls asking permission to "play sport" to displaying more mature female athletes who exercised their agency in sport. The understandings gleaned from this study provide a foundation for those who wish to further explore meanings of Nike advertisements directed toward women.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

"If you let me play," a young white girl asks pleadingly as her hands firmly grasp the chain of a swing. While she gazes at the camera, the close-up shot exposes her vulnerability.

The backdrop is a playground with the distant sound of children playing. The lighting is dim, black and white; another girl swings in the background, looking down at the ground.

"If you let me play…"

"If you let me play sports…"

A second girl with bronze-blonde hair, centered in the camera's view reaches out with her glove to catch a softball. Her movement is graceful and the radiant white "N" on her cherry red t-shirt stands out against the dark night sky. She pulls her glove into her chest and speaks to the camera.

"…I will like myself more…"

She throws the ball back as the camera returns to the playground.

"I will have more self-confidence…" says a young Asian girl with short jet black hair that matches the iconic black Nike swoosh on her white t-shirt.

"If you let me play sports…"

Various young girls echo the refrain, *"if you let me play…"*

"I will be 60% less likely to get breast cancer…"

A girl wearing a floral print top raises her eyes to the camera, and says in a soft, but serious tone, "I will suffer less depression…"

Simultaneously, a girl wearing shorts and a sports' bra stands in the distance, her face obscured. The scene then returns to the girls at the playground.

"if you let me play sports…"

The first girl on the swing reappears, her tone is more emphatic now; "I will be more likely to leave a man who beats me…," her volume rises with the word "beats."

"If you let me play…"

"I will be less likely to get pregnant before I want to . . ."

A new image appears as the camera zooms in on a girl gripping rings as she hangs from a swing set.

The camera cuts to two adolescent girls in bathing suits standing together, the older one rests her hands on the shoulders of the younger girl who stands in front of her.

"I will learn…"

"*I will learn* what it means to be strong…"

"…*to be strong*"

A girl in a leotard crosses her arms, her facial expression hardened…"*play sports*." Coming full circle, the camera returns to the original girl on the swing.

"If you let me play sports."

The screen goes dark and the Nike brand signature identifiers are displayed at the conclusion of the advertisement. The white Nike swoosh and the "Just Do it" mantra are juxtaposed against the black backdrop.

In a montage of scenes, the young girls in the Nike advertisement make their case for the opportunity to play sports. The reiteration of the phrase, "if you let me play sports," throughout the advertisement, seems ironic since it contradicts the concept of Nike's admonition to "Just do it." It suggests that they are asking permission to play sports. But why do they have to ask permission to play sports and who exactly are the young girls addressing? Is it Nike? Is it males? Or is it society as a whole?

This 1995 Nike advertisement aired 23 years after the passage of Title IX, which was meant to prohibit sex discrimination in educational programs receiving federal funding (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005). While this law was purportedly about ensuring equitable access to educational programs, it turned out to have its greatest impact on athletics. The application of Title IX implies that no person on the basis of sex is to be denied the benefits of educational activities (Rader, 2009). Since this important piece of legislation provided an avenue for girls and women to access sporting opportunities, why would girls *still* need to ask permission to play?

As a seven year old avid fan and participant in sport, I was able to identify with the advertisement's young girls citing compelling facts and figures describing the benefits of playing sports. However, the premise, which suggests that females needed to ask permission, did not seem applicable to my experiences in sports at the time. I had never knowingly faced adversity as a female and the idea that women had to request equality in areas such as politics, organized religion, corporate offices, and sports did not resonate with me. I enjoyed the luxury of having multiple options for participating in recreational and organized sport without resistance; thus, I failed to recognize the significance of the advertisement at the time.

In retrospect, I realize that my exposure to the trials and tribulations of female athletes was negated by my seeming freedom to access sports. Additionally, my appreciation of professional sports was limited by my impression that women's sports paled in comparison to men's. I spent countless summers watching baseball and devoutly following the Detroit Tigers; I came to idolize athletes such as Ivan "Pudge" Rodriguez. I grew up an Ohio State football and basketball fanatic and identified as a Buckeye long before I attended and graduated from The Ohio State University. As a result of my affiliation with men's sport, I was generally

disinterested in women's sports beyond the Olympics. However, during the 1999 Women's World Cup, when women's soccer reached its peak, my perception of women's sports began to change.

The success of the U.S. women's soccer team in the 1999 World Cup positioned them in the national spotlight. The broadcasts attracted approximately 40 million U.S. viewers and the final game in Pasadena had one of the largest crowds ever seen at any women's sporting event (Longman, 2000). There was substantial media coverage and the headlines emphasized the team's competence and fame. Prior to the 1999 World Cup, women's team sports were not particularly visible, but there seemed to be endless potential for women in soccer. Their victories were uplifting and special, which also ignited a "bandwagon" following; even young boys began wearing the U.S. players' jerseys especially that of the well-liked team captain, Mia Hamm.

The most memorable characteristic of the team was their special bond, which was captured by the humorous Nike advertisement "We will take on the world as a team." It demonstrated the team's closeness; when Brandi Chastain needed to have two cavities filled, four of her fellow teammates, including Mia Hamm and Brianna Scurry, volunteered to endure the same dental procedure. The aforementioned advertisement is described in more detail later in this study. The frenzy surrounding their journey had many unique aspects, one being that Nike was a sponsor of the team. At the time, soccer was predominantly associated with Adidas, but the players' uniforms bore the Nike swoosh. The logo became an iconic symbol of the World Cup when Brandi Chastain clinched the finals' win over China and took off her jersey, falling to her knees in celebration and exposing her Nike sports bra. Elite female athletes were outwardly at the center of the sports world during this notable time. After the summer of 1999, I

began to get the impression that sports *might* be a setting for women to develop strong and healthy bodies, defy stereotypes, become accomplished athletes, and gain recognition.

While reflecting on the "if you let me play" advertisement in my years at Bowling Green State University, it appeared that Nike was in the vanguard of acknowledging that women played sports. As mentioned in the "if you let me play" advertisement, the advantages of participating in sport included positive influences on self-confidence and health, such as reducing the likelihood of depression or becoming pregnant in high school (Pfohl, 2012). Nike's interpretation of young girls' possibilities in athletics focused on encouraging the development of confidence through sport experiences. The later reign of the 1999 U.S. Women's World Cup sparked a growth for women's team sports and provided female role models. The "if you let me play" Nike advertisement offered reasons for 'allowing' young girls to play sports and the 1999 team embodied what it meant to be victorious in sport.

The health benefits and the new inspiration from thriving women athletes are a few examples of how Nike emerged as a constant in illustrations that suggested women should participate in sport. Although Nike courts both genders to develop an affinity for their products, the sporting-brand giant appears to offer a platform for the progress of female athletes. A distinctive impression is formed by advertisements that celebrate women and discredit common stigmas associated with women in sport. Thus, exploring select Nike advertisements provides a unique opportunity for analyzing messages directed toward women.

The purpose of this study is to explore meanings expressed in Nike's women-directed advertisements. Chapter II begins with a synopsis of three significant moments in the history of U.S. women's sport that furthered the participation and acceptance of women in sport. Driving the momentum from the increase of women's participation in sport, Nike started to expand its

position within the women's market by generating women-directed advertisements. Chapter III demonstrates how textual analysis has been utilized within the purview of sport studies and outlines the steps taken to perform textual analysis on four women-directed Nike advertisements. While the "if you let me play" advertisement is included in the introduction, Chapter IV contains transcriptions of the three remaining Nike advertisements examined in this study . Chapter V analyzes the Nike advertisements in relationship to the literature while implications of these analyses are included in the conclusions (Chapter VI).

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature includes a brief history of girls and women in U.S. sport, which summarizes the three waves of feminism in the U.S. that reveal parallels between the aims of the feminist movement and advancements of women in sport. The select events portray important examples of challenges to the prevailing notion that sports belong exclusively to men. The increased presence of women in sports propelled Nike's consideration of women as athletes.

The second section focuses on literature pertinent to Nike's advertising with a focus on the appearance of women-directed advertisements. As Nike became acclimated to the female market, commodity feminism can be employed to understand how key aspects of feminist ideals were attached to the brand's advertisements. There is also an exploration of the issues regarding the representations of females. Despite women's progress in sport, there is scant attention given to women's sports and the images that are available portray female athletes in traditionally idealized forms of femininity. Additionally, the meaning transfer model is employed to illustrate how advertisements are constructed around preferred meanings.

Three key moments have contributed to advancements of women in the history of U.S. sport. These three moments include: (a) the passage of Title IX (in 1972); (b) the tennis "Battle of the Sexes" between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs (in 1973); and (c) the 1999 Women's World Cup in soccer. By increasing opportunities for U.S. girls and women to participate in sport, Title IX has had a substantial impact on leveling the playing field (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005; Festle, 1996; Lopiano, 2000; Tucker, 2008). Billie Jean King's defeat of Bobby Riggs in the "Battle of the Sexes" proved that women could handle pressure and were not inferior to men (Ware, 2011). More recently, the 1999 Women's World Cup was a turning point that altered the culture of sport by proving the potential popularity of female team sports (Christopherson,

Janning, & McConnell, 2002; Longman, 2000; Lopiano, 2000). Taken together, these events provide a basis for understanding the status of girls and women in sport in late 20th and early 21st century U.S. culture.

Brief History of Girls and Women in U.S. Sport

Between 1970 and 2000, visible signs of the progression of U.S. girls and women in athletic arenas reflected social change and a growing appreciation of women's team sports (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005; Festle, 1996; Howard, 2011; Longman, 2000; Spencer, 2000). A prominent shift in sports followed World War II; a significant rise in the participation of women occurred as result of Title IX (Lopiano, 2000). One of the greatest achievements during the Women's movement in the 1970's, Title IX came at a time when women's liberation was already pushing for women to seek more opportunities, discredit stereotypes, and combat sexualization (Festle, 1996). Still pertinent today, Title IX is meant to create and conserve gender equity.

Title IX (1972)

Bernice Sandler and Edith Green were instrumental in what became Title IX through their coordination of a Congressional hearing to address issues regarding sex discrimination in education (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005). Their efforts were followed by Senator Birch Bayh who authored the bill and gave assurance that the language of the Omnibus Education Act prevented sex discrimination (Festle, 1996). On June 23, 1972, Title IX was passed, legally "[prohibiting] discrimination based on sex in education programs that receive federal money" to foster greater participation from a more comprehensive representation of society (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014, p. iii). The enforced provisions for compliance and various lawsuits that implemented Title IX insured non-discriminatory treatment for both sexes. Originally, it was unclear how Title IX applied to athletics; however, policy interpretations added in 1975 further enforced Title IX and

created the opportunities for women to participate in sports at the national level (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005). This powerful piece of legislation "changed the face of American sport forever" (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005, p. 3). Its role in transforming the opportunities for women in sport radically increased the number of girls and women participating in sport.

In 1970, prior to Title IX's inception, there were approximately 16,000 female intercollegiate athletes and, in 2014 there were about 200,000, "more than ever before" (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014, p.1). The participation summary from Acosta and Carpenter (2014) conclusively suggests that the number of females playing sports continues to grow; meanwhile, there has been no indication of a decline in the number of males, meaning that the benefits available from sport participation have been to "[enrich] the lives" of both genders (p. 2). Sports have historically been a sex-segregated domain; thus, enactment of Title IX changed the landscape for women in sport by giving them a chance for equal opportunities (Carpenter & Acosta, 2005). Additionally, in 1972, the first year of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) participation survey, 294,015 girls were partakers of high school sports nation-wide. More recently, girls' participation in high school sports reached a total of 3,267,664 female student-athletes in high school sports during the 2013-14 school year (National Federation of State High School Associations). It is important to recognize that the implications of Title IX have been measurable and it is credited with changing the dynamic of high school and college athletics.

Title IX's protection against discrimination extends to both genders and strives to balance the ratio of participation. Exceptional women throughout history were competing at the highest levels in sport before Title IX, for example: Babe Didrikson Zaharias (Olympics; golf), Althea Gibson (tennis; golf), Gertrude Ederle (Olympics; swimming), Wilma Rudolph (Track and field),

and Helen Wills (tennis) (Bohn, 2009; Pfohl, 2012). Nevertheless, through the influence of Title IX, the opportunities for women's participation in sport were more prominent as years passed. Title IX opened doors in sport and provided a liberating impact on girls and women. In the earliest years of Title IX, Billie Jean King excelled in the world of tennis and had become an influential and successful figure in the struggle for equality for women in sport. King exemplified physical and social liberation; she "put a human face on a federal law with her match against Riggs a year later," which furthered society's ability to embrace females as athletes (Tucker, 2008, para. 3). The famous "Battle of the Sexes" was instrumental in making it acceptable for women to exert themselves in athletic pursuits.

The "Battle of the Sexes" (1973)

Billie Jean King is a name well-known beyond tennis enthusiasts; she was a pioneer in women's struggles for equality. She was a "spokesperson for women's liberation" and a trailblazer in women's tennis (Spencer, 2000, p. 389). With nearly 50 million people watching on television and an audience of 30,472 at the Houston Astrodome, her legendary defeat of Bobby Riggs in the 1973 "Battle of the Sexes" both legitimized female athletes and improved their status in North American sport (Spencer, 2000; Ware, 2011). The match was indeed about social change; its success reinforced the increased participation rates initiated by Title IX. King demonstrated that female athletes could overcome sexism and showed that a woman could beat a man in a male-dominated arena (Roberts, 2005; Spencer, 2000). Her victory is also considered to have had "profound effects within American culture at large" and had historical implications regarding the discussion of feminism (Spencer, 2000, p.387).

Both Title IX and the "Battle of the Sexes" occurred during what is known as the second wave of feminism. In order to understand the impact of the second and third waves, it is

important to outline what these three waves of feminism entailed. The first wave of feminism in the U.S. focused on the liberal women's rights movement, women's suffrage, and the abolition of slavery (Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004). In 1848, the first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York (Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004). The first wave is distinct for passage of the 19th Amendment of the Constitution, which granted women the right to vote, and was passed and ratified in 1920 (Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004). Suffragists were also advocates of the abolition movement that paralleled the women's rights movement; it occurred in the 1800's and early 1900's (Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004). Key proponents of the first wave of feminism were Susan B. Anthony and abolitionist Harriet Tubman. The women of the first wave confronted stereotypes and tried to "change the perception of women from voiceless dependents to independent thinkers with a valid voice in shaping the country" (Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004, p. 23). First-wave feminists were concerned with equal opportunities; even though women of the first wave made great strides for women, they were still seeking gains in the work force, which continued to be addressed in the second wave.

The contributions of the second wave of feminism, which arose in the 1960's continued to focus on women's independence or liberation from men (Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004). The women of the second wave worked to change the existing systems and "perceptions of what women were capable of" began to change (Tucker, 2008, para. 21). Advocates included activists such as Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem; the celebrated women of the second wave undertook a range of issues considered barriers to equality, including legal inequalities, the family, reproductive rights, sexuality and the work place. The second wave sought to unite the women's movement by seeking anti-discrimination policies that grew out of rights-based movements (Siegel, 1997). A concentration on procuring equal pay for equal work was timely for Billie Jean

King's push for more equitable pay, as she aspired to close the earnings gap between men and women professional tennis players.

The women tennis professionals in the early 1970's "were struggling to fashion a way to get comparable treatment even if their situation was not identical to men;" thus, they addressed the imbalanced ratio of prize money (Festle, 1996, p. 151). King and eight other brave women, Valerie Ziegenfuss, Judy Dalton Tegart, Nancy Richey, Julie Heldman, Peaches Bartkowicz, Patti Hogan, Rosie Casals, and Kerry Melville, sought to secure an opportunity for themselves and future female generations to have a viable chance for profiting from playing tennis (Spencer & McClung, 2001). The separation of the "original 9," from the United States Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA) was an essential part of the history of women's sports (Ware, 2011). The Virginia Slims Tobacco Company was the original supporter of the newly founded women's tennis tour. This occurrence promoted the growth of women's professional tennis because the earning potential of female tennis players increased as the Virginia Slims tournaments created a competitive market (Favorito, 2007; Spencer, 1997). As the transition to the third wave of feminism commenced, women were making institutional gains. However, more visibility and acknowledgement added to the need for further changes in stereotypes, media portrayals, and language that defined women.

The third wave of feminism is often distinguished from the second in terms of its focus on sexuality, race and third world women, but its concepts made appearances before the 1980s (Festle, 1996). It can be argued that sign-values related to Virginia Slims' actions as a sponsor reflect notions of third-wave feminism, even though many suggest that the third wave of feminism began in the 1980s (Spencer, 2000). Key issues included the continued focus on removing the "glass ceiling" and addressing wage gaps between men and women. Third-wave

feminism must be considered when exploring popular culture and representations of women (Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004). The stigma of being a supporter of feminist beliefs regarding political, social, and economic equality were rearticulated by "converting feminism into sign values associated with certain products in the context of so-called positive images of women" (Cole & Hribar, 1995, p. 356). Third-wave feminists consider signifiers of "commodity," "popular," or "celebrity" feminism in culture to be relevant to gender issues (Heywood & Drake, 1997). Spencer (2000) suggests that expressions of third-wave culture existed when marketers, such as Virginia Slims connected their brands to meanings of women in commodity form. The idea that Virginia Slims was capitalizing on this type of practice was described as "commodity feminism" and Virginia Slims was one of the original sponsors to tap into consumer-driven feminism drawing upon feminist ideologies and capitalizing on them (Spencer, 2000). As appropriation of feminism to sell products and the patronage of female athletes emerged, the prominence of feminist consciousness in popular culture increased. Also, more visibility for female athletes and the introduction of sponsors for women's sports leads to the discussion of the 1999 women's soccer World Cup which occurred during the third wave of feminism.

Women's World Cup (1999)

The 1999 Women's World Cup hosted in the U.S was the third key moment in history that contributed to advancements of female athletes in U.S. sport. Relative to Virginia Slims' sponsorship of the "original 9" in tennis, Nike's corporate sponsorship of the 1999 U.S. women's World Cup team positioned the brand as a visible promoter of women's sport. Virginia Slims' sponsorship centered on tennis, which is an individual sport; thus, Nike's backing of the U.S. women's soccer team was rather groundbreaking. Additionally, the players on the 1999 U.S. team were amongst the beneficiaries of proliferating opportunities to participate in sport at a

higher level. After the passage of Title IX, the growth in the women's game fostered the establishment of a national team that created an opportunity for female collegiate players to continue their soccer careers (Lopiano, 2000). Title IX gave females the opportunity to excel and improve their talents in sport by enhancing opportunities to participate. More girls and women participating in sport after Title IX can also be attributed to the larger female audiences that had a growing interest in sport as result of their own experiences participating (Favorito, 2007). The success of the U.S. women's soccer team was culturally significant since "America had other great individual female athletes before, but there had never been a women's *team* like this. And there might never be again" (Howard, 2011, para. 5). Comparable to the "Battle of the Sexes," the victory of 1999 Women's World Cup team was a watershed moment, as reflected by the number of spectators and the interest generated by these events (Christopherson, et al., 2002). Longman (2000) suggests that the victories of the U.S. team in the 1999 Women's World Cup transformed the world. The increased media coverage and the attention viewers paid to the team's journey were reported in extensive accounts of how the popularity of women's soccer skyrocketed during and after the tournament (Longman, 2000).

The reign of the 1999 U.S. World Cup generated an enlightened redefinition of females in sports; they were portrayed as strong, muscular athletic heroes (Scraton & Flintoff, 2002). The emotional buildup surrounding the 1999 Women's World Cup attracted an untapped audience to the game and the team performed beyond expectations. The team became role models across the gender divide and "people were watching not just because the team was successful, but also the team was made up of women who represented what the media heralded as a new kind of woman" (Christopherson et al., 2002, p. 183). However, the connection to the general public still demonstrated controversial concepts because sexuality was emphasized rather

than athletic talent. The female players became household names due to their success, but they were role models "due to the fact that they maintained elements of femininity" (Christopherson, et al., 2002, p. 184). Longman (2000) agrees that portrayals of female athletes remain consistent with gender ideals that place femininity over athletic performance. Regardless of the reason, the marketing and exposure were present; the market for women's sport encouraged sponsorship from Nike, Gatorade, and Reebok. Multinational corporations, such as Nike, began taking notice of girls and women in sport by financially supporting women's leagues (Cole, 2000; Pelak, 2006). The 1999 U.S. team's visibility and the positive stories circulating about their success compelled more consideration from sponsors.

Corporations discovered that women's sports can actually be very profitable when they are celebrated and actively promoted (Giardina & Metz, 2005). Nike became a centerpiece in the mass media surrounding the 1999 Women's World Cup team; their support of a women's team positioned them in the right place at the right time. They received mass media attention when the Nike swoosh became the "unofficial symbol of the Cup," and the brand's visibility among women athletes grew (Cole, 2000, p. 3). Nike received even more recognition as the iconic photo of Brandi Chastain's celebration, featuring her in a Nike sports bra, was on the cover of major publications such as *Newsweek* and *Sports Illustrated* (Grow & Wolburg, 2006). Adidas, Reebok, and Gatorade were additional sporting goods/apparel companies and brands that sponsored women's soccer, but Nike was the most valuable ever-present sports brand in the world (Ozanian, 2012). Their sponsorship of the U.S. women's team was noteworthy; the relationship exemplified growing support for women's teams and possibly the capacity of a brand to act as an enthusiast for female athletes.

This new corporate sponsorship of women's team sports followed the paradigm set by Virginia Slims' in 1970. The exponential growth in the number of women who participated in sport after Title IX generated a larger female sport consumer market that deserved considerable attention (Bradish, Lathrop, & Sedgwick, 2001). An ideal "case study for exploring how gender influences branding" arose as women began their athletic pursuits (Grow, 2008, p. 312). What grew in the 1980s and continued from then on was contemporary and innovative advertising that featured female athletes as a part of advertising to women.

Nike Advertisements and Branding

Reebok first took control of the women's market in 1982 with the innovative Freestyle shoe designed specifically for women (Cole & Hribar, 1995; Krentzman, 1997). Nike originally failed to recognize female interests when the aerobic fad was in full effect in the early 1980s (Grow & Wolburg, 2006). Relatively exclusive to elite male athletes, the brand's very masculine image presented challenges to female consumers who found it difficult to identify with Nike (Grow, 2008; Grow & Wolburg, 2006). Nike's first advertisements geared toward women were deemed too aggressive, featuring very muscular females, and they failed to gain a positive response. The appeal to women shifted to targeting emotions and generating a sense of community. Nike hired a marketing agency called Wieden and Kennedy (W+K) to act as consultants for their marketing department on their campaigns geared toward fostering a women's sub-brand (Grow, 2008). Nike had to differentiate their communication to craft advertisements aimed at women (Cole & Hribar, 1995; Grow & Wolburg, 2006). As Nike's focus on attracting the female market became more prominent in the late 1990s, advertisements focused on inoffensive and inspiring dialogue to project itself as an avenue through which young girls and women in sports could grow.

Nike positioned its brand within the discussion of girls playing sports to help them lead both healthier and happier lives and emphasizing fun (Lucas, 2000). Social changes normalized women's participation in sport and Nike started to recognize the importance of women in the market. Nike's original "hero worship" tactics that were effective in advertising to men were less effective with women, who responded to more genuine strategic marketing (Goldman & Papson, 1998). Empathy was a primary focus; Nike began to actively address women by generating advertisements that drew upon the "heart of the female experiences of fitness and sports in a personal way" (Grow, 2008, p. 10). The concepts in Nike advertisements, such as "If you let me play," allowed for "the swoosh [or Nike] to stand for promoting girls' and women's participation in sport and fitness" (Lucas, 2000, p. 150). There were also concepts of possible transformation as a result of using Nike products in all their sport and fitness endeavors and Nike could aid them in reaching their potential (Lucas, 2000). Addressing female consumers in this way produced campaigns that continuously encouraged participation of girls and women in sport and increased the size of the market and profits.

Advertisements contained subjective expression and storylines based on empowerment and freedom of women through sports (Goldman & Papson, 1998). This idea was translated into the 1990's film *What Women Want*, which featured a male chauvinist (played by Mel Gibson) who has been given the power to read women's minds and begins to empathize with their perspectives. The main character goes on to create an advertisement with a female co-worker (played by Helen Hunt) for Nike running shoes for women. The advertisement features a woman's internal monologue while she runs, suggesting that they have tapped into the female psyche, which will motivate women to associate with Nike and purchase their products. The

effectiveness of the Nike commercials is dependent upon whether female consumers follow the prescription of the discourse and use Nike products (Lucas, 2000).

The literature provides a backdrop for an analysis of Nike women-directed advertisements (as texts) (Cole, 2000; Cole & Hribar, 1995; Goldman, 1992; Grow & Wolberg; 2006; Hilliard & Hendley, 2005). Scholars have used a range of multidisciplinary approaches that include discussion points for a critical examination of the commodification of feminism. Grow and Wolberg (2006) examined Nike's advertisements produced from 1999 to 2000 that focused on empowerment and product emphasis, including their "Just do it" stories. The "Just Do It" mantra was not gender specific. Thus, Nike was able to create "a sense of womanhood [in sport] that was cultivated and signified;" the swoosh and "Just do it" directive were the corporation's symbols for empowerment and were adapted to embrace the emergence of women's sport (Cole & Hribar, 1995, p. 348). The feminist movement was translated into a commodity with interconnections to Nike demonstrating 'commodity feminism.' Nike advertisements were capable of functioning as reflections of the public's consumption of women's sports and a source of liberating ideas (Cole & Hribar, 1995). The already popular corporation was intertwined with cultural discussions of feminism at a time when capitalism was starting to incorporate feminist ideals of gender equality in sport. Within the realm of commodity feminism, the "Just Do It" phrase is meant to ignite a sense of emancipation from contemporary ideals and expectations while also suggesting that participating in sport can improve the lives of females (Cole & Hribar, 1995; Hilliard & Hendley, 2005). Nike's women-directed advertisements included a "wide range of superficial ideological grafts that spliced together signifiers of feminism with the consumer narrative of femininity as envy, desire, and power" (Goldman, 1992, p.130). Thus, Nike privileged attitudes of independence and self-

acceptance for females in their advertisements, which became part of the feminist identities consumed by women (Cole, 2000).

Nike's acceptance and empowerment of women perpetuated their alliance with the female population in sport. Their commentary on the issues helped the brand reach greater visibility among a new demographic. Nike appeared to be sympathetic to the struggles of women and seduced "new consumers by championing a romantic vision of modern, liberated femininity and liberal feminism" in their advertisements that encouraged them to shape their bodies as a form of empowerment (Cooky & McDonald, 2005, p. 159). The brand emerged as a celebrity feminist "through its ability to capitalize on postfeminist values and identities" (Cole & Hribar, 1995, p. 355). There was a sense of individualism that applied to women seeking personal gains, moving away from the second-wave of feminism, which concentrated on the progression of women as a collective unit. The adoption of postfeminism, implying that "feminism was over," that a women's movement is no longer needed, positioned women to seek out individual achievements (Cole & Hribar, 1995). Nike had formulated a stable identity and their inclusion of a "feminist point of view [that] emphasizes the assertion of women's rights" is not an improbable concept because of sport's "significance in society" (Felshin, 1974, p. 433). As Nike functioned as a "celebrity feminist" they capitalized on making the consumption of women's sport an acceptable practice (Cole, 2000). Their success is a testament to how they were able to use pro-women advertisements and convert feminism into a means to achieve financial success (Cole & Hribar, 1995).

Advertising is a way to connect with customers, and this occurs with Nike; 'commodity feminism' is an appropriate concept to consider in the discussion of the brand's pursuit of making connections with female consumers. Additionally, Grow and Wolburg (2006) mention

the difficulties faced by Nike's creative team to address constraints on developing a proper advertising strategy for the female market. Nike informants and the agency involved in forming the creative team that produced the advertisements had to take into account the norms and roles of women in sports. This generates more cause for exploring the messages in advertisements and understanding concepts such as gender and power in sport. Nike advertisements that include content tailored to the experiences of the female consumer provide a fertile ground for exploration. Advertising to women meant that more images of females were put on display, but some of these representations were problematic.

Representations of Female Athletes

Despite the strides made by girls' and women's' participation in sport, the media continues to provide limited attention to women athletes. Even after Title IX and the broadening audience for both individual and women's team sports, the dramatic gains by girls and women in sport are not accurately exhibited in the coverage given to women's sports. The amount of media coverage women receive, which is estimated at less than 1.5%, is not reflective of the percentage of women participating in sport (Cooky, Messner, & Hextrum, 2013). Most importantly this percentage has declined from 1989 to 2009; even at its peak it was significantly less than the coverage given to men. The lack of media coverage of women contributes to how women's sports are perceived. If women are featured in the media, the images are not always positive because they are limited to traditional sexualized representations that emphasize preferred forms of femininity rather than athleticism (Connell, 1987; Hargreaves 1994). Markula (2005) suggests that the media accepts "sportswomen" as long as they are confined to the stereotypical feminine sports. The limiting depictions of women are then perpetuated in advertisements.

Improved popularity and visibility for female athletes is considered advantageous for advancing women's sports. Unfortunately, the mechanisms used to increase attention include sexual exploitation as part of advertising (Bishop, 2003; Kane & Maxwell, 2011; Scraton & Flintof, 2002). Sex appeal and an emphasis on heterosexuality are considered valuable assets when promoting women's sports and a reason for its "success and popularity with the general public" (Christopherson, et al., 2002, p.179). Yet, Kane (2011) ultimately suggests that this does not effectively generate interest in women's sport, but rather sells a hyper-sexualized version that is lacking appeal for legitimate sport's fans. The "sex sells" approach appears to only "[offend] the core fan base of women's sport," which is women and older men (Kane, 2011, para. 10); thus, it fails to increase real interest in women's sports. Feminist critiques suggest that this destabilizes the self-esteem of women and puts female athletes on display for male spectatorship and their heterosexual desires (Cole & Hribar, 1995). The rhetoric surrounding women's sports and the representation of female athletes provide "an insightful point of reference for analyzing Nike's advertising" (Grow & Wolburg, 2006, p. 5). Media exposure is problematic when women are "marginalized, made invisible, and trivialized" negating the positive effects of the publicity (Koivula, 1999, p. 591). If women are neglected in sport coverage or portrayed in stereotypical ways, then it further reinforces the idea that sports are a male-dominated terrain (Messner, Duncan, & Jensen, 1993; Scraton & Flintof, 2002). In addition to the stereotypes and cultural norms that favor men's sports, media advertising can also mediate messages that are conveyed to consumers.

Meaning Transfer Model

An exploration of particular "messages" formulated within an advertisement is a common component of examining cultural meanings diffused through mass media (McCracken, 1989;

Turner, 1992; Wren-Lewis, 1983). "Preferred [readings are] inscribed within the message" and specific interpretations of advertisements based on specific determinations are important to analyze (Wren-Lewis, 1983, p. 183). Furthermore, McCracken's (1989) meaning transfer model aids in determining how advertisements often times do more than just promote the merchandiser's goal of selling products; certain "depictions of people, products, and events [are selected] for their ability to signify a preferred meaning" (Grow & Wolburg, 2006, p. 2). The McCracken (1989) model then extends to suggest that advertising is a means of meaning transfer. McCracken (1989) further explains the circumstantial factors at play in how meaning operates within advertisements.

Theories of consumer culture, which include promotional culture, include accounts of individual and collective meanings that circulate in advertisements (Wernick, 1991). Although McCracken's (1989) meaning transfer model focuses on understanding the role an athlete plays in promoting a marketing campaign, it remains concurrent with exploring how successful brands seek to capitalize on promotional relationships with featured athletes and products (Wernick, 1991). Manifest attempts to leverage athletes' images encourage consumers to share in a collective cultural understanding of the created representative meanings, which circulate in the same media as their advertisements (McCracken, 1989). Exposure for a brand enhances its equity and the model implies that sponsoring an athlete helps to build awareness and differentiate the brand from its competitors (Butler, Maguire, Barnard, & Golding, 2008; Wernick, 1991;). Also, "celebrities" add depth and value to the image of the sponsoring brand transfer and the whole process explicitly deals with the meaning acquired by the customer. With an emphasis on an endorser within the model, it is suggested that their lifestyle transfers on to the product and then to the consumer. Although it is hard to deny that Nike uses recognizable female athletes in

the advertisements examined, the degree of their celebrity status is not discussed in this study. Also, it is possible that Nike, itself, is the celebrity within the advertisements.

Under consideration for this study are women-directed Nike advertisements. The meaning transfer model provides a framework and a theoretical understanding of the process through which meanings are produced in the culturally established world and influenced by the prevailing culture (McCracken, 1989). This is translated to the sports platform based on the tendency to transfer meanings to consumers via brands, typically with sponsorship-links for sporting events or athlete endorsers (McCracken, 1989). This model has utility for clarifying how sports' brands are perceived in the mass media and consumer culture. By having messages that resonate with consumers, they later acquire goods that not only serve their needs, but also provide bundles of meanings (McCracken, 1989). Also, the established identities of the consumer influence the situated reading the consumer gives to the advertisement. As a result, a consumer's preference for a brand in conjunction with the intended advertising message (e.g. stereotypical image of a spokesperson) is a crucial determinant for the process of meaning transfer (McCracken, 1989).

McCracken (1989) also emphasizes that the transfer model does not relay a single meaning, but expresses a number and variety of potential meanings based on how it is perceived by the consumer. McCracken (1989) pointed out a process of meaning transfer in which the association with the brand occurs in the consumer's mind during consumption. Such meaning transfer may thus require more rehearsal and personal mediation, perhaps through stories (Katriel & Farrell, 1991; McCracken, 1986). The meaning transfer model embraces the assessment of meanings endowed in products and then transferred to consumers (McCracken, 1986). The research done on the relationships between brands, consumer, and culture supports the idea that

cultural meanings are embedded in advertisements and conveyed by the media (Turner, 1992). In combination with examining readings of texts, the meaning transfer model provides a theoretical foundation from which dynamics of consumer society could be understood and how symbolic meanings in advertisements are contemplated. A complex collection of perceptions based on an individual's gender, profession, age, social class, and/or ethnicity influence their interpretations of meanings (Turner, 1992). Consumers actively construct meanings following a logic based on cultural frames of reference (McCracken, 1986). Likewise latent meanings of advertising claims are perceived from different vantage points and consumers interpret such meanings based on their perception and experience. In the case of the meaning transfer model, the consumers digest meanings embedded in advertisements; in textual analysis, researchers analyze texts (i.e. advertisements) to formulate possible understandings.

This study uses textual analysis to examine Nike advertisements in an attempt "to understand the likely interpretation of [the] texts made by people who consume them" (McKee, 2001, p. 2). An analysis of select Nike advertisements can assist in better understanding the phenomenon that occurs when Nike attempts to situate their brand as part of a cause to empower women through sport participation. The approach incorporates information about Nike's advertisements geared toward women. Textual analysis enables its users to examine how specific texts (in this case, Nike advertisements) produce, perpetuate and carry meanings (Markula & Silk, 2011; McDonald & Birrell, 1999). Nike's commercial interest in the female market is paired with the use of rhetoric that resonates deeply with female consumers, which contributed to the brand's popularity (Giardina & Metz, 2005). This study includes an assessment of how Nike emerged as a sponsor of women and how their advertisements "have exemplified the ways that corporations have made themselves champions of women's athletic

participation" (Dworkin & Messner, 2000, p. 348). Nike's involvement in women's sports requires further investigation.

This study examines how underlying understandings of feminism are present in Nike's advertising campaigns geared towards women (Cole & Hribar, 1995; Dworkin & Messner, 2000; Krentzman, 1997). In particular, I ask the following questions: First, how can we understand Nike advertisements based on historical understandings of women's access to sports? Specifically, what types of messages of 'empowerment' and independence does Nike convey to women? Second, how can we understand Nikes' facilitation of feminist perspectives through 'commodity feminism' as the inclusion of women in sport increased (Cole & Hribar, 1995)? The language co-opted from literature surrounding women's sports, Nike advertisements, meaning transfer, and textual analysis will be used to describe the findings. Ultimately, this study examines how four select Nike advertisements convey multiple meanings.

CHAPTER III: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

This study uses textual analysis to examine meanings in Nike's women-directed advertisements. Sport scholars have employed textual analysis since the late 1990's as a way to understand how power operates in and through sport (Andrews, 2002; Cooky & McDonald, 2005; McDonald & Birrell, 1999; Messner, Dunbar, & Hunt, 2000; Simon-Maeda, 2013; Spencer, 2003; Stern, 1996). Turner (1992) considers textual analysis to be "the most important theoretical strategy cultural studies has developed" because of the increased focus on social and political messages in the media (p. 71). Sport scholars who have drawn upon cultural studies include McDonald and Birrell (1999) who forwarded the idea of "reading sport critically" as a methodology for interrogating power (p. 284). While cultural studies scholars borrowed the notion of analyzing texts from literary studies, they have extended the definition of "texts" to include more than the written form (Turner, 1992). As a result, textual analyses can be conducted on "cultural practices, rituals, dress, and behavior as well as… television programs or advertisements" (Turner, 1992, p. 112).

The definition of "texts" has been further broadened to include advertisements, books, periodicals, personas, television shows, radio broadcasts and commentary, autobiographies, novels, films, web sites, or images (McDonald & Birrell, 1999, McKee, 2001; Stern, 1996; Turner, 1992). In sport studies, McDonald and Birrell (1999) suggest that a "particular sporting event or celebrity" can be understood as a 'text' (p. 283). Reading sport critically also takes into consideration the cultural influences that create multiple meanings that circulate within narratives (Stern, 1996). Sport scholars attempt to analyze and make sense of what narratives convey, or how meanings are revealed.

Sport-media texts can be regarded as cultural artifacts, the critical reading of which allows scholars to understand the articulation of meaning. Culture is present in dialogue and through readings of textual representations; therefore, the way to understand culture is to study texts and their narratives as products in their context (Cole, 1991; McDonald & Birrell, 1999). Textual analysis is a tool within cultural studies that focuses on the function of meaning expressed in texts and how those texts are formulated. McKee (2001) states that context "is what ties down the interpretations of a text" (p.145). The interpretation of a text permits multiple possible meanings, considering the context produces the structure for a preferred reading. The "first and most important thing to remember is context, context, context;" as much about the wider context is examined before interpreting the texts, including the historical conditions in which the advertisement occurs (McKee, 2001, p. 145). The culture that produces the text can contribute to the illumination of the text's meanings.

In sport studies, textual analysis has been used to perform 'readings' of celebrities or media texts. As McDonald and Birrell (1999) have argued, this strategy enables scholars to analyze celebrities through narratives that are written about them; the researcher should act as a cultural critic not by searching "for the facts of their lives," but by searching "for the ways in which those 'facts' are constructed, framed, foregrounded, obscured, and forgotten" (p. 292). For example, Simon-Maeda (2013) performed a textual analysis of the popular Japanese pitcher, Daisuke Matsuzaka, using newspaper articles, online postings, televised sports shows, web and magazine reports. The study focused on the Americanization of Matsuzaka and revealed how the media functions to popularize cultural stereotypes that both depend on and influence constructions of race and national identity (Simon-Maeda, 2013). Wensing and Bruce (2003) used textual analysis to examine media coverage of Cathy Freeman during the Sydney 2000

Olympics to examine how meanings of national reconciliation were constructed through Freeman's dual identities as both Australian and Aboriginal.

A comparative study of Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova was conducted to examine the political conditions of protest and rebellion that characterized the 1960s and 1970s U.S. culture (Spencer, 2003). In ESPN's Sportscentury video segments about Evert and Navratilova, Evert was constructed as "Chrissie," "America's sweetheart," who girls wanted to emulate, while Navratilova was framed as the "Czech defector" whose circumstances were shaped largely by the events of Prague spring (Spencer, 2003). The analysis provided insight into the construction of gendered and national identities in media representations that emphasize accepted differences. These studies drew upon the method of textual analysis which attempts to tease out the dominant or 'preferred' meanings embedded in media texts (McKee, 2001).

Studies have also used textual analysis to explore constructed views of gender and equal opportunity in sport (Carty, 2005; Eskes, Duncan, & Miller, 1998; Messner, et al., 2000; Pirinen, 1997). Specific questions about how women are represented in the media can be addressed when performing textual analysis. Pirinen (1997) suggests hierarchic gender relations expressed in the media can be challenged, resisted, and transformed. The analysis includes how media texts can be used to offer options for empowering women. Sport studies can provide insight into improving practices and contesting stereotypes and misconceptions that surround sport "by having a greater appreciation of issues such as gender" (Bell, 2009, p. 43). Additionally, overlapping analyses of gender, race, sexuality, and nationalism can inspire a feminist reading of sport media representations. Eskes, et al. (1998) applied the method of textual analysis to interpret meanings conveying ideologies regarding health and beauty and the maintenance of the ideal feminine body in fitness magazines. The methodology was based on analyzing elements

such as syntax in both visual images and written language to decode meanings located in the features of the text. Eskes, et al. (1998) sought to discover connections between the texts and patriarchal ideals about femininity; they focused on the narrative structure found in the magazines and as a result of the critical reading, it was discovered that texts portrayed fitness pursuits as empowering. The empowerment ideology suggested that exercising control over one's body translated to control in one's life (Eskes, et al., 1998). The study co-opted feminist ideals because of the pro-women stance that was exhorted based on the location of the texts in a culture of contested gender relations. A textual analysis can be a combination of analysis and a critique of the cultural meanings that convey specific ideologies of gender in media production and text construction.

Carty (2005) also examined societal ideas regarding femininity and feminism in texts. The research explored certain transitions in society that have accompanied the increasing popularity of women in sports. Textual portrayals of female athletes have presented questions regarding women's gains in sport (Carty, 2005). The analysis revealed that magazines have deviated from celebrating women's sports achievements and promote stereotypical images of female athletes. Also, silence about women's athletic accomplishments help preserve the reverence for men's sports. Messages seemed to acknowledge the achievements of the feminist movement, but portrayals focused on sex appeal and traditional feminine stereotypes at the expense of feminist principles. Carty (2005) demonstrated that exploring convoluted messages in media coverage and print advertisements demonstrated that categorizing texts can lead to conjectures about the discourse surrounding women's sports.

Methods

Scholars have suggested that analyzing media messages is necessary for furthering the visibility of females; thus, more qualitative and quantitative studies that include feminist perspectives are needed (Hovden, Bruce, & Markula, 2010). It is important to acknowledge the potential to draw attention to gender concepts, inequalities, and power structures. This study contemplates avenues by which Nike represents women and endows operations of power. Textual analysis attempts to investigate and expose 'hidden' meanings inherent in cultural texts, particularly those of the media (McKee, 2001).

What can be seen from the variety of studies that have been conducted is that there is no standardized methodology for doing textual analysis (Howell, Andrews, & Jackson, 2002; McDonald & Birrell, 1999; McKee, 2001). While McDonald and Birrell's (1999) groundbreaking study outlined the theoretical and philosophical bases for using textual analysis, McKee (2001) focused on how to perform textual analysis. This study draws upon theoretical and philosophical guidelines outlined by McDonald and Birrell (1999) but also adapts McKee's (2001) nine steps for doing textual analysis as outlined in his "Beginner's Guide to Textual Analysis" (see Appendix A). According to McKee (2001), textual analysis enables us to excavate possible meanings or make the best "educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text" (p. 140). McKee (2001) suggests that textual analysis is a way of investigating "texts to try and understand their meaning" and offers a guide for collecting and examining information (p. 147). Also, differing sense-making processes create more than one interpretation of a text and there is no exact or 'correct' understanding of the text, but rather the possible meanings are the result of the questions asked (McKee, 2001). There is less concern for how the text compares to reality and increased focus on the attempt to

understand the messages the text contains. The undertaking of the analysis is "to bring out the whole range of possible meanings" (Larsen, 1991, p. 122).

Following McKee's (2001) steps for performing a textual analysis, this study performs a textual analysis of four Nike women-directed advertisements that aired from 1995-2010. In particular, I ask how advertisements and marketing techniques in Nike's women's directed advertisements relate to women as well as to feminism. In keeping with McDonald and Birrell (1999), Nike commercials are a part of popular culture and can be analyzed as cultural products; thus, they are a good site for examining the production of cultural norms. Cooky and McDonald (2005) confirm the need for critical interrogation of narratives embedded in the advertising rhetoric of corporations such as Nike. .

McKee (2001) furthermore outlines the process of narrowing down the topic. The intent of this study is to examine Nike advertisements that exhibit Nike's relationship with women in sport and how the brand attracts females. Elements that discuss, enact, and articulate concerns for girls and women in sport are specifically addressed. More specifically, this study critically examines the commercials as 'texts,' drawing upon the historical relationship between Nike and women's sport, as well as the representation of female athletes. The selected texts reflect concepts related to Title IX, Nike's marketing to women, and the 1999 Women's World Cup team. The specific commercials are influential Nike advertisements, several of which also feature Nike-sponsored female athletes. Following McKee (2001), a list of relevant texts was compiled and narrowed to four specific advertisements (texts).

The first text in the sample is the "If you let me play" advertisement selected because it is most significant to discussions regarding Title IX and it includes testimonials (i.e., narratives) for allowing young girls to play sports. Academic research from Cooky and McDonald (2005)

suggest that this advertisement helped shape the brand and its focus on female consumers. The second advertisement is ”We will take on the world as a team.” This advertisement focused on the 1999 Women’s World Cup championship team that “stole the limelight and “[captured] the heart of America” (Cole, 2000, p. 4). The advertisement was aired while the U.S. women’s soccer team was competing in the 1999 Women’s World Cup. Third, is the Nike ATHLETE campaign advertisement that was released in 2007 as part of an aspiration to drop the female modifier from the description of ‘female’ athletes. The campaign was aired at the start of that year’s WNBA playoffs and the U.S. Open, as well as the Women’s World Cup in 2007. The fourth and final advertisement is Nike women’s ‘I’m making myself” campaign, which features fit women, as well as professional women athletes.

Following McKee’s steps 7 and 8, it is important to outline how texts (in this case, the commercials) are acquired and described. The commercials are then interpreted in light of the literature and the timing of each advertisement is considered in relationship to literature on the progression of women in sport and Nike’s appearance in the women’s sport market (Christopherson, et al., 2002; Cole & Hribar, 1995; Eskes, et al., 1998; Lucas, 2000), Most importantly, this study addresses “Why this text now?” (McKee, 2001; Markula & Silk, 2011). McKee (2001) says it is important to locate the text historically and connect it to larger political, social, and economic processes.

The final step in completing a textual analysis is to keep the context of the commercials in mind while attempting to interpret the content, including characters, script, and segments (McKee, 2001). The meanings contained in the text are considered and reconsidered with multiple reviews based on previously reviewed literature. The production of the text is important to its interpretation; within a commercial there is often analysis of how elements such as dialog,

multiple images, text, lighting, music, personas, function. Thus, the context is used to determine which elements are most important to the interpretation; not every aspect needs to be discussed (McKee, 2001). When performing textual analysis on Nike's advertisements, I make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of those texts based upon multiple viewings as informed by the literature.

The discussion started with a viewing of each advertisement multiple times in order to produce transcriptions for each ad. Each text was analyzed according to the images and content. In my observations, I sought to discover patterns that revealed meanings instantiated in these texts in light of related literature. The Nike advertisements were studied with the intentions of finding various meanings. In unpacking each advertisement it was important to remember that it is never possible to read meaning directly from the words or images. Drawing interpretation from the text as a whole and including its context was an important part of the analysis. There are multiple conditions for the reception of this text, but the preferred reading is based upon my best guess after analyzing the texts in light of the literature and contexts. In the next chapter, I provide transcriptions of three more Nike advertisements.

CHAPTER IV: ADVERTISEMENTS

The introduction to this study contains a detailed description of the first Nike commercial to be analyzed, "If you let me play." That commercial was introduced in 1995. The remainder of this chapter includes descriptions of three other women-directed Nike commercials that appeared between 1999 and 2010. The date for each commercial is included in parentheses.

We Will Take on the World as a Team (1999)

Four members of the 1999 Women's World Cup team sit alongside one another on a green couch in the waiting room of a dentist's office. The sound of a dental drill hums in the background while the tinny sound of music plays in the distance.

Seated on the couch in the waiting room are U.S. Women's Soccer Team players, forward, Mia Hamm, midfielder, Tisha Venturini, and, defender, Joy Fawcett, all dressed in their red Nike USA game jerseys, blue shorts, and knee-high red socks. Goalie Briana Scurry wears her distinctive all grey jersey and white goalie gloves. All of the uniforms feature the iconic Nike swoosh clearly displayed on their jerseys and socks. The players appear to be game-ready, equipped with shin guards and cleats; yet, they wait patiently.

As the camera spans across the players seated on the couch (from right to left), Venturini nonchalantly dribbles a white soccer ball off her foot and catches it in her hand. Hamm sits calmly and glances over Scurry's shoulder, who flips through a magazine. Fawcett is slightly slouched in her seat, doing neck rolls to stretch out her neck; she has a magazine across her lap.

The scene shifts to defender, Brandi Chastain, also dressed in uniform, appearing in the doorway clutching her jaw and grimacing. Slightly behind Chastain is an older male dentist. The female receptionist is visible, peering through an open sliding glass window separating her desk area from the waiting room.

Venturini asks “how’d it go?”

Chastain replies, “he had to drill. . . . I got two fillings,” she mumbles.

The camera returns to Venturini, Hamm, Fawcett, and Scurry on the couch centered in the frame. Without hesitation, Hamm rises from her seat, arms at her side, as the camera zooms in to provide a close-up of her stoic facial expression. The pleasant music abruptly changes to dramatic and joltingly sharp cords.

Hamm declares, “then I will have two fillings.”

The camera catches a glimpse of the receptionist looking perplexed and immediately shifts to the dentist.

The dentist takes off his glasses and responds, “but Mia, I just examined your teeth…they’re perfect.”

Next, we see Scurry put her magazine aside and reiterate Hamm’s actions, repeating “I will have two fillings.”

The dentist tilts his head in puzzlement.

Venturini then stands and announces, “I will have two fillings.” Her face reveals devotion and she is unwavering in her proclamation.

The camera returns to the receptionist whose expression has transformed to a look of admiration. She places her hand over her chest like a proud mother.

Fawcett stands and follows, “I will have two fillings.”

As all four players stand at attention, firm in their commitment, the words “WE WILL TAKE ON THE WORLD” appear across the screen. Shortly after, “AS A TEAM,” slightly larger, fades in to complete the phrase.

The dentist places his hands on his hips, seemingly baffled by their actions.

The 34 second commercial concludes with the receptionist, dressed in prim white, rising to her feet and saying "I will have two fillings."

A white Nike swoosh appears to the left.

ATHLETE (2007)

The Nike ATHLETE campaign debuted in September, 2007 and featured a commercial with a variety of female athletes and one male high school girls' basketball coach (named Bill Ressler).

The setting of the commercial appears to be a high school gymnasium; at the far end is an enormous half circle window that resembles a setting sun. The blurry screen of a city skyline can be seen through the window. The gymnasium walls are a muted green tint with a white ceiling and luminous wooden gym floor. Set in the center is a white joint step and platform positioned at the base of an approximately 15-foot-long megaphone. Narrow at one end the megaphone widens to 3 feet in diameter. The athletes step up to deliver a continuous message.

The image interchanges between WNBA Phoenix Mercury players Cappie Pondexter and Diana Taurasi, Bill Ressler, Cherie Nelson, former USC All-American women's basketball player, and, professional skier, Picabo Street walking to the mega phone.

"I am…Cappie Pondexter,

…Diana Taurasi,

…Cherie Nelson

…I am Picabo Street…"

"…and I've got something to say…" says Cherie Nelson gesturing with her hands and wearing a red tracksuit.

The high school coach, Bill Ressler, says “female athletes have to overcome the bias that their game isn’t as good as the men’s game.”

The athletes continue stepping up to the megaphone to speak.

“Are boys bigger, stronger, faster? Yes,” says beach volleyball player, Gabrielle Reece, but asking, “Is that all that has to do with being an athlete? No.”

Flash to a shot of Lezleigh Jaworski, USA speedskater.

Gretchen Bleiler, the Olympic snowboarder and gold medalist in skiing at the 1998 Olympics, succeeds Reece, saying, “The halfpipe doesn’t care that I’m a girl.” Her long blonde hair reaches below shoulder length and she wears a pink shirt.

“I want to pitch for the Boston Red Sox,” proclaims an unfamiliar teenage girl wearing a red baseball cap backward, over her ponytail and Boston Red Sox t-shirt.

“And when I look in the mirror, I see an athlete,” Picabo Street continues.

“I am a runner…” says Frances Santin, USA track and field athlete, wearing a sports bra and spandex shorts; she stands with her hands on her hips.

“…snowboarder…” adds …Gretchen Bleiler...

,…“ballplayer…” adds…Alvina Carroll, streetballer

“triathlete” Sarah Reinertsen says, emphatically…,

“softball player,” says Jessica Mendoza,

“I am an athlete,” adds Mia Hamm, who bears the ATHLETE insignia across her shirt.

“And I am proud of that athlete,” Picabo Street adds.

“It’s not a girl thing. It’s not a boy thing. It’s a skills thing,” Alvina Carroll, concludes.

Across the large opening of the megaphone, the word ATHLETE appears punctuated with a smaller Nike swoosh . The phrase is followed by NIKEWOMEN.COM.

I'm Making Myself (2010)

Open on a close up of a woman's calves, the focus is pulled to bright neon green soles of her shoes bouncing up a set of concrete stairs. The rest of the image is an ominous grey as the Nike shoes come into focus. The white Nike swoosh on the side of each shoe, against the black and grey backdrop, glows just as bright as the luminous soles. A clear NIKE emblem can also be seen on the heels.

The woman is revealed; she is later identified as Allyson Felix. She comes up the steps dressed in all grey exercise attire. The hood on her grey wind breaker covers her grey cap; a small white Nike swoosh is emblazoned on her grey top. Her right hand grasps the strap of what appears to be a gym bag slung over her shoulder. Her hair hangs down out the sides of her hood and she gazes at the camera.

Felix's voice can be heard saying "There is no better feeling than knowing that you gave one hundred percent and that there was nothing left to give." A rap song plays in the background; repeated harmony *the fire…the fire*.

The setting moves to the inside of a gym, a male trainer laces boxing gloves onto a second woman's hands. Both are dressed all in black as the sun beams above the woman's head. The focus of the shot draws the viewer to the boxing glove on her right hand and the American flag bandana wrapped around her head.

Cut back to Felix, the camera zooms in on her waistline to her exposed navel. The tight waistband of her shorts displays the word Nike. Also in the frame are her hands; she is wearing black weightlifting gloves and picks up free weights, which from their size appear to be eight or ten pounds, from a weight rack spanning the length of the bottom section of the image. Her wrist

and the motion of picking up the weights is the main focus; a white Nike swoosh is on her black wristband.

Felix addresses the camera in a testimonial style and her name appears to the side with the title AMERICAN TRACK STAR underneath. The weight rack is in the background; she wears a grey jacket and her hair is now in a ponytail. An orange-red sports bra is slightly showing where the jacket is unzipped. She smiles, slightly glowing with sweat.

Next, the image changes and Felix is featured from her bust line up. Her orange-red sport bra is now all she is wearing and a small grey swoosh can be seen across her chest. Her arms raised above her head, she stretches to reveal her very toned triceps . Looking away from the camera her eyes gaze slightly up and to the left where we see the phrase, "I'M MAKING MYSELF" followed with *Proud,* underlined as if to fill-in the blank.

A third woman is in the center of a new image, she is bent over with her arms toward the ground. She is difficult to see from a distance and her stance is wide, her feet are spread wider than her shoulders. She raises her chest out of her stretch; her legs look toned. She wears only black spandex shorts and a black sports bra with a white Nike swoosh. The camera quickly shows a focused profile shot of her face. She looks determined, but her face is expressionless. Now there is just a view of her backside, most importantly the attention is drawn to her butt by the crazy patterned purple shorts she is wearing. Back to her face, her hair is pulled back and her facial expression is calm. She appears to be wearing eye make-up that is unaffected by the barely noticeable sweat. She raises a weighted ball to her chest. Now, she is set in front of the New York City skyline. She appears to be high above the ground, possible on a balcony of a tall building. Her name, Julia Mancuso, appears with the words AMERICAN SKIER beneath. She wears a grey weather coat and a grey cap.

She says, “Rain or shine, I push myself to the limit every day.”

The picture shifts to show Mancuso wearing an orange-red V-neck Nike shirt, with another weight rack in the background. The phrase “I’M MAKING MYSELF” is followed by *Shine,* which is underlined, again as if to fill-in the blank.

Flash to Felix, then to what appears to be Mancuso again, then to a fourth woman whose face is slightly concealed by her bright white jacket’s hood. Her dark hair hangs down, and she is seated with her left leg stretched out as she reaches across for her toes. The image changes to her standing with her trainer as he tapes her hands in preparation for putting on boxing gloves. He wears a NY Yankees t-shirt and the camera angle now reveals both of their faces. It is dancer, Sofia Boutella and the male trainer watches as she makes a boxing motion. He moves closer to her to manually move her arm to demonstrate proper form.

Boutella wears a white sports bra and black Nike wristband with a white swoosh when the camera is focused in on her from the chest up. A quick change shows her standing in a boxing ring: she stretches her left leg up in the air so that her foot extends above her head. She is wearing a black Nike sport bra. As she brings her leg down, we see the phrase “I’M MAKING MYSELF,” followed with *Hot,* which is underlined as if to fill-in the blank. Now she appears, with water and the New York City skyline in the background. Her orange-red sports bra can be seen behind a black jacket and her hood is up. Her name, Sofia Boutella, and ALGERIAN DANCER appear to the side.

Boutella says, “I don’t believe in truncating because you don’t earn anything… I mean you have to earn it.”

The song in the background continues to play; the lyrics become more clear.

In the tradition of these legendary sports pros
As far as I can see, I've made it to the threshold

Lord knows I've waited for this a lifetime
And I'm an icon when I let my light shine
Shine bright as an example of a champion
There's something in your heart
and it's in your eyes
It's the fire, inside you
Let it burn
You don't say good luck
You say don't give up
It's the fire, inside you

Images of more women, including Felix, Mancuso, and Boutella, can be seen exercising. Back to Felix, performing high knee jumps. The muscular back of one woman is shown as she does lat pulldowns;

…the woman in the American flag bandana, sweats as she boxes at full speed; her eyes are closed. We catch a glimpse of her black Nike boxing shoes moving across the floor before returning to a shot of her punching forcefully.

More women are seen exercising; a blonde in a white sports bra with defined abs jumps in the air as she drives her knee to her chest.

Another shot reveals a pair of black and white Nike shoes and the lower backside of a lean muscled woman.

The images proliferate…

A close up of a sports bra with nothing shown above the shoulders. The woman performs a concentrated biceps curl.

Next, a woman dressed in a navy blue Nike shirt, orange Nike shorts, blue, orange, and black patterned tights, black Nike shoes, and white wrist band as the female performs a high intensity abdominal exercise on a blue mat.

Flashes are shown of women doing squats, crunches, pull ups, pushups, presses, boxing, jumping rope, mountain climbers, and lunges.

In the second to last image, white Nike soles on black Nike shoes move across the screen. A woman doing mountain climbers can be seen, with only her legs being shown. We see the words: WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO MAKE YOURSELF?

The final image shows Sofia finishing a crunch, with her hands behind her head as the camera zooms in on her face. Cut to black and white Nike swoosh with the link to FACEBOOK.COM/NIKEWOMEN

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

This chapter provides my reading of the individual advertisements, highlighting possible meanings that are conveyed. Each reading is informed by literature on women in sport that was outlined in Chapter II.

"If You Let Me Play"

The first in the series of four Nike women-directed advertisements, "if you let me play," aired during a change in the female sporting landscape (Yarbrough, 1996). During the 1990s and early 2000s the idea that sports could be a major factor in girls' and women's well-being and enhanced self-esteem was gaining momentum. This era consisted of mainstreaming the reasons for participating in sport and public concerns for young girls' and women's health. Noting the time period in conjuncture with the widespread attention the advertisement received informs the possible responses. Although Title IX lawfully prohibited discrimination based on sex, Festle (1996) suggests that sport primarily remained an overwhelmingly male domain due to the continuous oppressive representations of women. The progressive appearance of this advertisement is the primary focus of its possible interpretations, but even the positive testament for more female participation is negated by the failure to demonstrate this shift in society because the young girls are still asking for permission to play in 1995.

Initial observations of the advertisement include the general innocence of the young girls' request. Specifically, they are pre-adolescent females perhaps ranging from eight to twelve years old, which is noteworthy because youth athletes "either burned out or were forced to drop out of sports by the age of thirteen" (Rader, 2009, p. 364). It is possible that Nike was attempting to reach this particular demographic in order to dissuade them from giving up on their athletic recreations. Additionally, the female representations in this advertisement only include 'girls' or

'young ladies;' thus, the "infantilization" of the speakers perhaps makes them less threatening so as not to disrupt the patriarchal order (Messner, et al., 1993). Portraying the population of female athletes as girls instead of women suggests a childlike vulnerability. It is significant that sports are touted in the advertisement as a way to improve their lives, but this was still contingent on being permitted to participate. Also, the young girls are addressing an invisible authority figure; they do not appear to have the power to enter sports without someone's permission. This demonstrates Foucault's (1979) notion of surveillance whereby no physical structure needs to be present in order to yield power and execute control. Here the power is not locatable, it is possible the request is being directed towards power that circulates diffusely in society (Foucault, 1979).

As Nike extended their brand to women, this advertisement expressed reasons for young girls to yearn for the opportunity to participate in sports (Grow & Wolberg, 2006). The "if you let me play" commercial encouraged conversations about the significance of sport in young girls' lives (Yarbrough, 1996). The messages were laced with a sense of empathy, which drew from a shift to more "heartfelt" campaigns within their advertisements directed toward women (Goldman & Papson, 1998). Research had shown that women responded to sincerity and testimonies straight from the source, females themselves. The young girls personify authenticity; the reason sports need to be made equally available is to improve their lives and future. Having a means to increase one's self-confidence to leave abusive relationships and lower the risk of getting breast cancer, suffering from depression, or becoming pregnant too soon, are valid and factual reasons for why playing sports is valuable to young girls. Thus, the substance of this advertisement makes a compelling case for the inclusion of females.

It is possible that the advertisement is not fixated on sending a message about the product, but instead attempts to explain what the brand can mean and takes into account popular culture (Arvidsson, 2006). The words of the advertisement resonate with the goal of fostering the progression of women in sport. The facts about sport participation in the advertisement are very serious and this is juxtaposed with the laughter of young girls in the distance. The centerpiece of this Nike advertisement is the phrase, "if you let me play." A possible meaning of the emphasis on the slogan's "let" is that the girls lack their own agency and are thus disempowered. Sport is not a right to be claimed by females, but rather something they have to be allowed access.

Although positive benefits can occur from physical activity these young girls are specifically asking to participate in organized sport. It is meaningful that the setting of the advertisement is a playground. In her study of gender-related messages, Thorne (1993) examined American children's interactions on school playgrounds; she states that "friendly" competitive frameworks are often employed to indirectly address certain underlying tensions about sexuality. One interpretation of "the frame of play ('it's all fun')" is that it may be a pretense for saying that girls are meant to simply play because they are less aggressive than boys (Thorne, 1993, p. 5). Suits (1988) also contrasts the distinctions between play and sport, noting that play involves the "exhibition of skill not paramount in importance" verses sports which are competitive and structured (p. 1). The girls in the advertisement are featured in "play clothes;" dresses and bathing suits, and their demeanor suggests that they are playful. By contrast, Rader (2009) explained that team sports presented an unparalleled opportunity for "encouraging the healthy growth of moral and religious reflexes in boys" (p. 109). These were advantages offered

to boys as early as the nineteenth century; it was no wonder that girls wanted the same opportunities as their male counterparts.

Instead of *demanding* access to sports, the advertisement transforms the frustration of being left out into a desire. The young girls want to reap socially acceptable benefits as mentioned above from participating in sport. They want not just to be allowed to "play," but to "play sports," which is the final emphatic statement in the advertisement followed by the Nike swoosh. Based on Cole (2000), arguments can be made that companies such as Nike profit from Title IX by advocating for women in sport to gain their attention, but essentially seek capitalistic gains. This can be displayed most readily by Nike signifiers that appear in both the middle and end of the advertisement; thus, it is clear what brand is taking interest in these girls. Nike's persuasive marketing seems effective because the advertisement promotes women in sport as holistic and pure (young); thus, there is not an immediate connection to a corporate agenda. This does not mean that Nike fails to produce a public service by raising awareness, but they are still attempting to advertise (and profit from) their brand.

"We Will Take on the World as a Team"

In the summer of 1999, amidst massive attention surrounding the successful run of the U.S. women's soccer team to a World Cup victory, corporations finally opted to invest in women's soccer. Longman (2000) suggested that the talented and well trained 1999 team was a direct result of increased opportunities for women in sport as a result of Title IX. Additionally, as more females were participating in sport, there was a larger audience for women's sport, which attracted corporate sponsorship (Giardina & Metz, 2005; Shugart, 2003). Since the advancements of the women's team coincided with an untapped market for soccer, a game that historically fails to retain a large audience in the U.S., companies such as Nike and Adidas hoped

to establish brand loyalty among young players (Johnson, 1999). As more females entered the field of play, they became a desirable target for athletic apparel. There was a promising audience and as the women's game gained undeniable popularity so did Nike's commitment to sponsoring the team.

The rare visibility and extensive coverage of the U.S. women's team attracted the support of the Nike brand, which tended to advertise women's sports by featuring individual rather than team sports. Thus, the inclusion of multiple U.S. Women's Soccer team players in the "We will take on the world as a team" Nike advertisement was an unusual occurrence. Nike had opted to use five of the players; thus, emphasizing teamwork over big egos or star quality. The humorous storyline of the advertisement demonstrated the 1999 U.S. women's team's unique and successful bond. After Brandi Chastain announced that she needed to have two fillings, first Hamm, and then the other players, Tisha Venturini, Joy Fawcett, and Briana Scurry, stood in attention and quickly volunteered to "have two fillings" alongside of their teammate. Their willingness to endure having two fillings was a commentary on their team unity and interdependence, which was considered stereotypically feminine (Christopherson, et al., 2002). The physical sacrifice of one's body contributed to their pursuit of the common goal to "take on the world." This was in conjunction with the tendency to portray the team as positive role models that young girls could aspire to become and placed focused on 'togetherness.'

The reception of the team and this advertisement also reflects the similar ideas about the team being projected as an all-American, family-oriented team, or the 'white-girls-next-door' (Leonard, 2000). They were the counter to selfish and poor behaviors often displayed by male athletes, thus, suggesting they maintained exclusively feminine characteristics that should be emulated by the viewers. The U.S. women's team members have had endorsement deals,

lending their names and faces to everything from athletic shoes to credit cards to energy bars to Barbie dolls. This influences how women's sports are perceived; these sponsorships limit their images to traditionally feminine characteristics, keeping female athletes subjugated (Leonard, 2000). Christopherson et al. (2002) placed an emphasis on the importance of considering examples of both traditionally and nontraditionally feminine portrayals of the team that lead to their popularity. Popularity through femininity was positioned against this particular advertisement's images, "by doing femininity…the players were improving the status of women and women's sports" (Christopherson et al., 2002, p. 179). Yet, the images of the players in the ad featured them fully equipped and in their U.S. jerseys.

The "game ready" appearance of the players produced an atypical framing of female athletes. Although they were shown in a dentist's office waiting room, their attire challenged the conventional understanding that women should adhere to ideal feminine standards when they are in public. They were featured off the field; yet, they brought their identities as athletes with them. It strengthened their uniformity and they appeared exceptionally strong when they stood side-by-side at the conclusion of the advertisement. The U.S. players' uniforms clearly bore the Nike Swoosh and it was evident that they were members of the U.S. team. Thus, it is also important to note the significance of including the easily recognized U.S. jerseys.

It is possible that the wide appeal that captivated the nation was strategically cultivated by Nike to take advantage of patriotism that was also gaining attention from male viewers. The All-American concept also served to rally the nation behind the team. There was not personal glory; everyone was invited to share in the accomplishments of the team. The team effectively captured the hearts of America and they became authentic superstars. Viewership for soccer was lagging; the newly generated domestic appreciation of the game arose from the worldwide

competition that was conveniently taking place in the U.S. The interest in the Women's World Cup was a result of the tremendous athletes deserving of praise who dedicated themselves to promoting the tournament. The team fostered an environment that featured admiration for compatriots who represented their country with distinction. Stadiums were filled with audiences that wanted to witness their team compete and, ultimately, capture victories (Longman, 2000). The team maintained unprecedented visibility; it is a national trend to become emotionally invested in athletes that take precedence in moments when a sport is at its peak value in the national spotlight (Wensing & Bruce, 2003). Nike effectively placed their signifiers all over the U.S. team and this advertisement emphasized national identities, which overrode their gender identities. Nevertheless, this advertisement seemed to be directed mainly toward women.

The impact of this advertisement on female viewers was most visible in the dentist's female office attendant's facial expressions and actions. Essentially, the comical portion of the advertisement occurs when she stands and requests two fillings in the final moments of the clip; the Nike swoosh appears simultaneously. It is conceivable that her response could have been due to national pride, but her actions earlier in the advertisement suggest that she was touched by the player's' actions and was inspired by them as well. When Mia Hamm first volunteered, the dental receptionist had a look of confusion but as the remainder of the players stood, she placed her hand over her heart as if to show a sign of her allegiance; her gesture was like that of a proud mother. She seemed astonished and in admiration of the closeness of the team. In a sense, the advertisement invites its entire viewership to participate in the actions demonstrated by team members. Yet, even though the male dentist also appeared to be astonished by the players' actions, he was not mobilized to volunteer for two fillings himself.

"Athlete"

The Athlete advertisement debuted in 2007 and literally placed women on a pedestal. The campaign was designed to generate a forum for women to overcome stereotypes and ignorance (Kane, 2011). It was a rallying point for bolstering awareness of the differing treatment of female athletes. As evidenced by the production of female athletes announcing their names and clearly stating "I've got something to say…" into an oversized megaphone, the ATHLETES wanted to be heard. Individually, but with a common theme, they delivered a message to disregard the female modifier and acknowledge them as ATHLETES.

After Cherie Nelson's commencement to begin dialog, "I've got something to say," the advertisement proceeds with Bill Ressler, the only male featured in the advertisement. The prevailing chasm between support for men's and women's sports is rooted in a number of issues. As Ressler states, there is a "bias" that the women's game "isn't as good as the men's," which can be due to the lack of coverage, discrepancies in resources, fluctuating fan bases, stereotypical images, unequal pay for coaches and players (Cooky et al., 2013; Kane, 2011). The traditional basic physical differences between men and women might be easy to point out; "Are boys bigger, stronger, faster? Yes." However, Gabrielle Reece quickly adds that is not "all that has to do with being an athlete." Athletes can demonstrate the same dedication and commitment to the sport regardless of gender; as eloquently stated by Gretchen Bleiler "the halfpipe doesn't care that I am a girl." The real problem "is the very notion of dividing the athletic universe" or "segregating organized athletics based on gender;" it creates "male" athletes and "female" athletes (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008, p. x). Even if there is separation as a result of physical differences, the divide in the attitude towards male and female athletes is socially created. There is a power struggle and adding female to the description of an athlete might imply that they are

not necessarily the "real" and most important athletes in American culture. Although it might not seem overtly oppressive to include "gender markers," it does serve to differentiate women and men, and "language reflects and helps maintain the secondary status of women by defining them and their place" (Eitzen & Baca Zinn, 1989, p. 364). The labels are expressions of existing understandings of femininity and masculinity; maintaining the inferiority of women.

The idea that males are inherently better than women remains embedded in the structure of societal views that lead to differential treatment of male and female athletes, even as women have gained greater access to sports (Bishop, 2003). There are still limits, as the advertisement plays out; there is a young girl who wants to pitch for the Boston Red Sox. Her claim strikes the point that girls and women will seek access to existing teams because of their established legal rights. At the same time, certain views and the separate establishment of sports maintain a sexist society. As women in sport test their own potential in sport with a freedom from the female label, they may also dare to play on men's teams. It is relevant to the pursuit of gender equality expressed in the advertisement, but it is an even more controversial topic than how females are addressed. Women who want to play on men's teams are still met with opposition, possibly because of the fallacies surrounding their ability to compete with males (McDonagh & Pappano, 2008). Suggesting that she wants to play for the Boston Red Sox brings focus to the lingering restrictions on women. Women may no longer be excluded from participation, but there are only a limited number of females who have played on male teams. The advertisement also emphasizes that women still only exist in sport as the inferior of male athletes, instead of equals. "It's not a girl thing. It's not a boy thing. It's a skills thing" and that should be the only component that matters.

Ironically, as the advertisement plays out, the ATHLETES are never actually seen demonstrating their skills. Some of the ATHLETES are wearing their uniforms or training attire; yet, they are never shown in action. We assume that they possess these skills by how emphatically they state what type of athlete they are: "runner, snowboarder, ballplayer, triathlete, softball player." Mia Hamm collectively summarizes by saying, "I am an athlete" and it has nothing to do with gender. She presents herself as strictly an ATHLETE, without the female modifier. Self-perception is the key because in a sexist society it could serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy to only think of oneself as female, causing a tendency to display socially acceptable behaviors or aspirations. The stereotypes are responsible for the ways in which women are recognized. Even experimental findings in psychology have been demonstrated to reflect male assumptions of women's lesser abilities and treating them as such only serves to exaggerate the female's belief that they are worthless. Sports should provide opportunities for opportunities for unhindered aspirations for females to reach their athletic potential. It is possible that without petitions for equal treatment the abilities of female athletes might remain lesser known than males'.

The overall grand announcements within the advertisement are powerful, but as each athlete steps up to the megaphone it is difficult not to feel as if their setting is still lacking. The space does not command an audience; it is not in the middle of a highly populated arena, but rather a non-disclosed location. Women do not occupy a lot of space in sport and they have to command the floor to make their claims. Young (2005) discusses ideas about the space that women in sports feel restricted to in comparison to males. She suggests that the phrase "throwing like a girl" is based on the notion that women are afraid to utilize the space around them; thus, creating less forceful movements while participating in sport. Also, women are more

likely to wait in their space, rather than "going forth to meet" a ball they hope to catch or hit (Young, 2005, p. 146). In this case, the concept of space is interesting because in order to command movement they need the arena to do so; in a sense, they are occupying a large space and are finally confronting the issue.

The advertisement is filmed in an empty high school gymnasium and their message is met with silence. There is no visible crowd that would initially require the use of a megaphone in the first place. Typically, megaphones are used when there is no space to put a stage, but the speaker still needs to be heard. Yet, the floor they command is unknown, why don't these women have a grander stage? The advertisement facilitates an understanding that sending a message to a national viewing audience, in any form, might at least draw attention to the changes that still need to occur after the passage of Title IX. Was their announcement meant to reach men, women, society? The Nike swoosh and the Nike ATHLETE "logo" were the lasting images of the advertisement. They were placed in the center of the wide end of the megaphone as if to amplify the ATHLETE. The message and proceeds benefited women, but Nike still stands to gain from its placement in the advertisement.

"I'm Making Myself"

In 2010, Nike featured three female athletes: Allyson Felix (track runner), Julia Mancuso (skier), and Sofia Boutella (dancer) partaking in exercise sessions. The advertisement superimposes a theme throughout the footage with a slogan that starts with a typeface "I'm making myself" followed by "proud, shine, and hot" with each respective athlete. Most evident in this advertisement is Nike's construction of itself as a feminist lifestyle through sport to promote its products to women (Bell, 2009; Cole & Hribar, 1995; Pirinen, 1997). The main focus is on the athletes' "quests [for] sporting excellence, only explicable in terms of their inner

drives [or the] qualities that make them the champions they are" (Cole, 2000, p. 4). Markula and Pringle (2006) consider how women can be enlightened to experiences of freedom through sport. What it is meant to train like the female athlete portrayed in the advertisement, established a possible meaning embedded in the advertisement (Arvidsson, 2006). Central to the content is the concept of female empowerment through fitness; Nike positioned its brand as a supporter of female athletes choosing to "make [themselves]" with their own agency in sport. The brand signifiers are featured in the images and in doing so Nike appropriated itself as a commodity feminist, taking feminist concepts of self-empowerment and selling them back to females (Cole & Hribar, 1995). This advertisement is encouraging women to want to partake in physical activity to enhance their abilities and become successful in personalized ways, similar to the athletes featured. Helstein (2003) discusses the creation of the desire in Nike advertisements for women, both to improve oneself to the level of the Nike women featured in the advertisements and to purchase Nike products.

The idea of self-empowerment is expressed in the statements of Felix, Mancuso, and Boutella, that "there is no better feeling than knowing you gave one hundred percent…rain or shine, I push myself to the limited everyday…you have to earn it." The main focus is on the athletes' "quests [for] sporting excellence, only explicable in terms of their inner drives, qualities that make them the champions they are" (Cole, 2000, p. 4). Personal improvement and perseverance are the primary concepts directed toward the viewer, suggesting that these are values they should embrace in their own lives. The advertisement showcases the athletes performing exercise and demonstrating their fitness, while their bodies are on display. Markula (1995) adds that meeting public ideals and displaying feminine qualities can be oppressive and foster collective pressures. There are hyper-sexualized images with camera angles that capture

their toned legs, stopping at their midriffs, and focusing on their butts. Some of the exercises are provocative as the athletes are wearing spandex and sports bras, thus exposing a lot of skin. When Goldman, Heath, and Smith (1991) wrote about commodity feminism, they also discussed the segmentation of women's bodies. This suggested ways to objectify women as they were sold to the public.

Even with a balance between powerful athleticism and aesthetics, the advertisement does not stray from the paradox of showing traditionally feminine images. Bordo (1990) suggests that there is often fluctuation between the appreciation of the slender body and a more solid muscular look. Thinness might represent soft femininity; and more shapely bodies can symbolize strength and liberation from the connotations that women are meant to be weak. Muscularity is meant to be the result of greater empowerment given to women (Bordo, 1990). There are coexisting images; while the athletes' muscles are featured the images do not take away from their emphasized femininity. Also, the focus on their tight and toned bodies as the main proponent in their careers presents the body as the most valuable possession a female athlete has to offer (Pirinen, 1997). The "I'm making myself" advertisement adds to the regard for talented and very fit athletes and there are moments that suggest that focusing on the women's physiques actually challenges stereotypes because the athletes are shown as strong, powerful and physically capable. Yet, the images in the advertisements still demonstrate the dominance of sexualizing women and celebrating their bodies. Although the female athletes' athleticism is put on display, they are still being represented as stereotypically ideal women.

The visual signifiers of Nike with the juxtaposition of the "I'm making myself" slogan suggests that Nike is in support of their female consumers and encourages them to improve their lives by adopting this slogan as their own, leading to ideas about models for empowerment. This

advertisement challenges women to consider what they need to do to "[make] themselves." As attention is drawn to possibly improving one's physical form, it may suggest that they can increase their attractiveness, which makes them more acceptable to society. This analysis invokes Goldman and Papson's (1998) idea to analyze how messages in advertisements convince women that disciplining their outward appearance to meet societal standards allows them to take control over their bodies. The women in the advertisements are accomplished athletes; however, they are represented in ways that are controlled by the brand that seeks to profit from making consumers feel a certain way (Cole & Hribar, 1995). While beckoning women to participate in exercise using Nike products, they fashion themselves to respond to the question "what are you doing to make yourself?" It is possible that females will buy into Nike's recommendations simply because they think they are being empowered.

The tactics that Nike uses to advertise their products and services to women seems to suggest an explanation for trying to further understand these advertisements. Nike enhances its image by being supportive of women, which is appealing because they seem to combat stereotypes and ignorance. However, sports are an area of society where visions and images of women are circumscribed by existing societal values and sanctions (Scraton & Flintof, 2002). It is difficult to say that one brand can change perceptions of female athletes, especially when restrictive themes are maintained in advertisements; yet, it opens up conversations about female athletes and textual analysis recognizes advertising texts as an opportunity to discuss women's place in sports.

Post Title IX, women have continued to make strides in athletic participation while social attitudes toward the participation of women in sports have become more positive (Scraton & Flintoff, 2002). And yet, despite the dramatic increases in participation of girls and women in

sport, there are few mediated representations of females in sport or in advertisements, such as these that appeared between 1995 and 2010. It is still exceptional to find four Nike advertisements that represent progressive images of female athletes. Females interested in sport could identify with the brand as the advertisements suggested that Nike was in support of a pro-woman image (Hilliard & Hendley, 2005). The advertisements elicit a response from the female audience; they feature Nike cheering on the female spirit, but there also still seems to be restrictions beyond women's control.

Nike's production of commercials such as "if you let me play," "We will take on the world as a team," "ATHLETE," and "I'm making myself" exemplify "the vast and lucrative potential markets" that might grow within women's sports (Dworkin & Messner, 2000, p. 348). Nike's advertisements suggest they are campaigners of women's sport and they acknowledge the achievements of women; but they still exploit the appearance of women in a sexualized and trivial manner. The inequalities in the representation of female athletes serve to sustain male dominance in the sporting world (Kane & Maxwell, 2011). The media fails to represent female athletes in ways that publicize their significant achievements and they have yet to regularly spotlight women's sports within the public's agenda (Bishop, 2003).

The theme of restrictive forces in society is reiterated in the advertisements and the analysis indicates that images of women connected to their experiences still reveal patriarchal influences that exist within Nike's promotion of women. The Nike brand promotes an attractive lifestyle of fitness and sport that incorporates women and appeals to them with advertisements that feature supportive messages. However, as texts, the advertisements express gender bias and inequality, both by overtly discussing bias in the "ATHLETE" and ambivalently in some of the images of the other advertisements of this study. The "I'm making myself" advertisements

convince women to value themselves and their bodies by engaging in exercise regimens that foster important improvements that can only be gained in sports. The way in which female athletes are represented in the advertisements is connected to the public's consumption of women's sports (Cole & Hribar, 1995). Taking note of Nike's good intentions, it is possible that recognizing the problematic depictions allows for more aggressive efforts to overcome them in the future. As this study also considers how increases in the participation of women in sport draws focus to the female market, it is possible to see how Nike has moved alongside the progress of women in sport. "Preferred readings" in this discussion are supported by the literature and observations in this study set a foundation for examining the Nike brand and their capability to capture the female market. It sheds light on Nike's illustrations of women in sport and more implications can be explored in the future.

CHAPTERVI: CONCLUSIONS

The Nike brand's relationship with the promotion of the female athlete demonstrates reasons for continuing to explore advertisements with textual analysis and draw implications from understanding when and how to market to females. For example, in the wake of the American soccer team's victory, Nike picked the perfect moment to align itself with a women's team that remains the most popular in history. The team and the female athletes in the advertisement are significant assets for Nike to persuade their consumers to purchase more of their products. The meaning transfer model suggests that attaching an endorser to a brand can persuade consumers to purchase one brand over another. There are multiple brands competing with each other; Nike has managed to produce social stratification linking itself to prestigious female athletes, allowing consumers to feel that the Nike brand will give them a performance edge. The females in the advertisement continue to be role models for a rising number of girls and women in sport. However, it might have served to emphasize their roles strictly as endorsers because these women were already admired by the sporting public, especially the U.S. team (Krentzman, 1997). Meaning transfer highlights the notion that cultural meanings between products and an endorser relate to the positions they hold in society and are based on how the advertisement presents the relationship between them and the product (McCracken, 1986, 1989). When consumers identify with female athletes that have been successful in sport they are influenced by the idea that they might achieve the same success if they purchase Nike products (Ozanian, 2012). Nike has traditionally been successful in conveying a lifestyle and an exclusive group to be associated with as if it was capable of creating identities. The attraction and retention of women who consume Nike products and Nike's brand message is the premise for examining the advertisements.

Implications

The discussions provided by the textual analysis suggest that Nike has actually moved beyond advertisements into popular expression. There is validation for claiming that the advertisements serve a larger purpose than selling products. They could have other implications beyond the readings discussed in this study. Textual analysis also takes into consideration the concept of "reading sport critically;" as a critical approach, "reading sport" enables scholars to make sense of the implications of "discourses on race, sexuality, age, ability, class, and nationality" (McDonald & Birrell, 1999, p. 284). Conducting a later study that incorporates understanding of race could enhance our understandings of the findings discussed in this study. It would seem that Nike's dedication to creating products that meet the needs of their consumers would indicate that they valued their relationship to the individuals that use their products. Perhaps discovering the implications for the progression of women with regards to different ethnicities, race, sexuality, and so forth, a study could generate a greater understanding of women's status in sport and society.

Overall, this study provides an investigation of how Nike propagates its brand as a means of inspiring female athletes. The growing popularity of women's sports helped compel fitness companies such as Nike to carefully craft advertisement messages aimed at women. Images of women participating in sports could have a positive influence on the audience by either encouraging female viewers to participate in sport or by demonstrating to male viewers that it is acceptable for females to participate. The advertisements broadly continue to create greater awareness of women in sport.

It was a prudent move for Nike to create women-directed advertisements since they became a medium through which females can define themselves (Bastos & Levy, 2012). Nike

has unquestionably created opportunities for challenging societal views of women when they extended the brand to women (Cole, 2000; Grow & Wolberg, 2006). Even if the persuasive tactics of Nike are profit seeking, the advertisements reflect social changes that have accompanied the increasing popularity of women in sports. The focus of this study was on four Nike's women-directed advertisements. A synthesis of all Nike advertisements would lead to an even greater understanding of how Nike advertises to women. For example, Nike's 2006 award winning "I feel pretty commercial" features Maria Sharapova, and demonstrates how her accomplishments were sometimes overshadowed by her attractiveness. The commercial maintains the idea that she will not let anyone define her and will let her skills as a tennis player be her most prominent feature. Thus, an inclusion of more Nike advertisements would be an effective additional study. If not all the Nike advertisements directed toward women, perhaps it would be useful to examine the print ads that accompanied the advertisements in this study. With the exception of the "We will take on the world as a team," these advertisements are part of a larger campaign with print advertisements in addition to the commercials. Examining the widespread women-directed advertisements might give insight into the commonalities in the ways in which Nike tries to attract female consumers. The campaigns in their entirety could offer a grander understanding of what Nike is trying to accomplish.

The advertisements for the Nike brand need to embody the relationship by making contact in more than a superficial way. Examining how the advertisements synched with the time periods also contributes to the analysis. Just as Nike products evolve with the sports and consumers' needs, their seemingly progressive commentary on society in the advertisements takes into account what is occurring in popular culture at that time and that aids in their effectiveness. Incorporating values of feminism into Nike's brand message to women set a

precedent reflected in their subsequent women-directed advertisements. For example, the "I'm making myself" advertisement includes a Nike Women's Facebook profile with a dedicated "I'm Making Myself" wall for women to comment and inspire other women to follow their fitness pursuits. All statements start with the phrase "I'm Making Myself," and are finished by the women with a short description of what helps them develop certain characteristics, such as "strong," "fit," "happy". The 'Nike women's profile on Facebook allows consumers to comment on or like these statements. Real testimonials from women and athletes are part of the larger advertisement. The study indicates that it is challenging to combat media norms for gender, appease the market, and meet sales goals. Ironically, none of the advertisements were product-specific messages; yet, I am not confident that the brand can encompass both a completely altruistic and supportive message without the intention of turning a profit.

Social responsibility should be a part of the process; thus, it would be interesting to find information on the Let Me Play fund named after the 1995 commercial, but created during the ATHLETE campaign to donate money to equipment and uniforms for female youth programs. Nike gave a dollar from each ATHLETE t-shirt and wristband sold to the fund. It might be argued that visibility is the key to generating awareness; thus, it is unavoidable using a brand within a public announcement. It would be interesting to see how much Nike contributes to the fostering of women's sports, numerically. Incorporating an understanding of issues such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) could be an additional avenue for future research.

Nike is not without controversy, but it is their responsibility to make good on the promises they are suggesting to women. There should be some concern regarding ethical components of advertisements. At one level, all that Nike is doing is selling sporting goods, but should athletic shoes and clothes inspire altruism? Thus, as women progress in sport, I ask

whether their Nikes are really getting them anywhere. The purpose of this study was to unravel whether sport brands such as Nike actually serve as advocates for women reflected by the elements they include in their advertisements. More research can be done to continue the examination of advertisements and their meanings within the realm of sport brands.

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APPENDIX A

Steps for Performing a Textual Analysis

Step 1
Choose your topic of interest. Which part of culture and which questions interest you? This can come from academic reading, or from your own experience of culture.
Step 2
If necessary, focus your question to become more specific (for example, 'How are Indigenous Australians represented in Australia soap operas?')
Step 3
List the texts which are relevant to this question from your own experience (for example, 'I know that there was an Indigenous character in Home and Away, and in A Country Practice')
Step 4
Find more texts by doing research both academic and popular (for example, 'Prisoner fan websites mention an Indigenous character; Neighbours also used to have an Indigenous character; Number 96; featured an Indigenous hairdresser'; and so on.)
Step 5
Gather the texts (this is often the hardest bit. Newspapers and magazines are often in University Libraries, although for some popular magazines you may have to go to the National Library in Canberra. For films, television programs and radio programs, you may find video or tape copies for sale.
Step 6
Watch as many examples of each program as you can and notice how particular textual elements work in each one (for example, 'I notice that in Home and Away it is usual for each young cast member to have at least one emotional/sexual relationship going on at any given time. To do so is to be seen as normal; not to do so is strange.)
Step 7
Watch other programs in the same genre to see how they work (for example, 'I notice that in Australia soap operas, it is normal for all of the central characters to be presented in the title sequence. Therefore, the fact that the Indigenous characters in The Flying Doctors and Prisoner are not in the title sequence suggests that they are not the most important characters in these texts')
Step 8
Get as much sense as you can of the wider 'semiosphere' (the 'world of meaning' – Hartley, 1996) as you can (read newspapers, magazines, watch as much television, listen to as much music as you can) to get some sense of how these texts might fit into the wider context (for example, 'I notice that Ernie Dingo keeps cropping up across the media in travel shows, kids shows and variety shows as well as soap operas. This suggests that his star image – of being a 'nice', gentle, culture-straddling man - will be important in understanding his appearances in GP')
Step 9
With this context in mind, return to the texts and attempt to interpret likely interpretations of them.

* The information in this table was taken from McKee (2001).