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Life in the Stands: The Experiences of Female Major League Baseball Fans

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Kelly Lynn Balfour entitled "Life in the Stands: The Experiences of Female Major League Baseball Fans." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Kinesiology and Sport Studies.

Joy T. DeSensi, Major Professor

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Life in the Stands: The Experiences of Female Major League Baseball Fans

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Kinesiology and Sport Studies
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Kelly Balfour
May 2012

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Dedication

First off, this work is dedicated to all my friends and family who supported me through this process. I would also like to dedicate this to my committee, Dr. Joy DeSensi, Dr, Lars Dzikus, Dr. Rob Hardin, and Dr. Allison Anders, for the time and effort you put forth over the past year.

Abstract

Females have long been overlooked as sports fans in our society, especially female fans of men's professional sports leagues (MLB, NFL, NHL, NBA). There is a vast amount of research available as to what motivates females to attend sporting events, but not on their experience of being a sports fan. Professional sport organizations are now beginning to acknowledge the female fans in their marketing and team apparel. The purpose of the proposed research study is to understand the experience of females who self-identify as fans of Major League Baseball (MLB). Ten female fans of MLB were interviewed and asked to discuss their experiences, positive and negative, of being a MLB fan. A thematic analysis of the interview transcripts brought to light four main themes. The four main themes were: (a) gender logic surrounding sport, (b) female views, (c) fan atmosphere, and (d) total experience. Each of these themes is discussed in detail with the use of participant's stories to develop a greater understanding of each theme.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1	1
Statement of Problem	2
Purpose Statement	5
Research Questions	5
Significance	6
Theories employed in research on female fans	7
Delimitations/Limitations	9
Definition of terms	9
Organization	11
Chapter 2	12
Defining Sport	12
Defining Fan	13
Subcultures	15
Gender	19
Fan Motivations	23
Emotional Attachment	29
Social Theories	33
Hegemony	33
Feminist Theory.....	36
Chapter Summary	40
Chapter 3	41
Positionality	41
Constructivism	42
Race.....	42
Gender.....	43
Geographic location	44
Class.....	45
Scholar	46
Sports fan	47
Influence of my positionality on my study, participants, and interpretation of data	47
Research Design	49
Participants.....	49
Institutional Review Board, Confidentiality, Risks and Benefits	50
Design	51
Interviews.....	53
Data Analysis	53
Validity	55
Limitations	57
Chapter Summary	58

Chapter 4	59
Participant Profiles	59
Presentation of Data	63
Theme 1: Gender logic surrounding sport.....	63
Theme 2: Female views.....	70
Theme 3: Fan atmosphere	77
Theme 4: Total experience	84
Conclusion	101
Chapter 5	104
Implications	104
Recommendations	109
Conclusions	110
Closing Thoughts	113
References	114
Appendices	122
Appendix A	123
Appendix B	125
Appendix C	127
Vita	129

Chapter I

Introduction

The world of sport is an integral and exciting part of society in the United States. Beyond participating on the field, people around the country are flocking to fill stadiums on a nightly basis. Sport has commonly been viewed as a male domain where females are the outsiders (Coakley, 2009; Dunning, 1999). Participation opportunities for women have increased over the years, but that has not eliminated the male gendered nature of sport. Female athletes may now finally be receiving acknowledgement on the playing field, but are they also being acknowledged and respected as sports fans

Though women in the United States may now have increased opportunities to participate in sport, norms have been established within society as to what activities are appropriate for men and women to participate in as athletes or fans (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). Social norms based on gender set the standard for the masculine characteristics of men and feminine characteristics of women in a particular society or culture (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). These norms, or traditional gender roles, influence people's ideas as to who should be involved in sports, the attire they wear in a sport setting and their overall behavior in sport. This idea of who should be involved in sports does not just exist in terms of participation, but for spectators as well. If these gender norms dictate what sporting activities are appropriate based on gender then do they also have an influence on a female baseball fans fandom?

Societal gender norms and the continued thought that women are outsiders in the sports world, even as spectators, are a few of the areas that are examined in this dissertation. What is their overall experience of being a fan in a male dominated environment? Do female fans feel as

though they are accepted or seen as outsiders in the stands for the wrong reasons? These are questions that are addressed in this dissertation.

Statement of Problem

Within the sport psychology and sport sociology literature little is published on the experience of women sports fans. According to Melnick and Wann (2004), as well as Rojeck (2006), the term fan is used to describe a person who has a strong emotional attachment to or a steadfast interest in something. For the purpose of the proposed study the term will be used in relation to sports fans. In terms of defining sports fan or identifying as one, Dietz-Uhler (2000) proposed in her work that there is not one set definition as to what is a sports fan. Each individual fan should be able to define fandom in his/her own way (Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End, & Jacquemotte, 2000). To some, being a fan may mean you have to attend live games, while others may see being a fan as having a vast knowledge of the sport in question, but each person will have his/her own definition as to what being a fan means to them. Sports fan is a generic term to describe someone who is dedicated to supporting a team or sport. Those who define themselves as fans may consider themselves to be part of a subculture of society based entirely on being a sports fan.

There are numerous levels of sports fan that are discussed. Among the different types of fan that are discussed in research on sports fans and their motives are true fans, die-hard fans, novice fans, and the champ follower to name a few (Hall & O'Mahony, 2006; Laverie & Arnett, 2000; Stewart & Smith, 1997; Wann & Schrader, 2000). An individual's previous involvement in a sport has been found to have a positive effect on their fandom due to a previously established self-identification within that sport (Fisher & Wakerfield, 1998). This positive

correlation with person's personal identity with that sport has the potential to increase their level of fandom.

Research that has been featured on sports fans, in both sport psychology and sport sociology literature, tends to focus on fan motivations (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; Wann, Schinner & Keenan, 2001; Wann, Waddill, & Dunham, 2004). Potential motives for sports fans found include the following: group affiliations, family, aesthetics, self-esteem, economic, eustress, escape, and entertainment (Wann & Waddill, 2003). Though gender may not be the focus of the studies, numerous gender differences have been found in studies on sports fans motivations (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; Wann, Schinner & Keenan, 2001; Wann & Waddill, 2003; Wann, Waddill, & Dunham, 2004).

Reasons why people chose to be sports fan will obviously vary from person to person, but as was mentioned, they also vary based on gender (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000). It was found that females were motivated to be sports fans based on social motives such as utilizing fandom as a way to spend time with their families and for the cheering aspect of the game (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; Wann, Schinner & Keenan, 2001). While females were found to be fans due to social aspects and the entertainment value of the game, male fans were found to be fans based on their love for the game and enjoyment they gain from learning about the game itself (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; James & Ridinger, 2002). Though their motives for being a sports fan may differ, males and females are equally likely to be sports fans, however males noted a stronger connection to sport in general (James & Ridinger, 2002). Since motives for being sports fans have been found to differ based on gender, it would seem fitting to research fan experiences based on gender.

Since gender differences have been found within the motives of fans, it is essential to understand the concept of gender. Often in society we think of biological sex and gender as interchangeable terms when in fact they carry different sociological meanings. Gender is what provides society with a set of characteristics that are deemed appropriate for males and females (McCabe, 2008). Coakley (2009) states that it is the social construction of gender that generates our ideas behind masculinity and femininity in society. The social constructions of masculinity and femininity develop the gender norms of our society and influence everything from the clothes people wear to the leisure activities in which they take part (Cameron & Lalonde, 2001). For example, the gender norms established based on ideas of masculinity and femininity have an influence on the sports that are deemed appropriate for males and females to participate in as both athlete and spectator. Contact sports such as football are perceived to be appropriate for males while more aesthetically pleasing sports such as figure skating are deemed appropriate for females (McCabe, 2008; Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006).

Beliefs of gender appropriateness are present in all areas of society; therefore being able to analyze these same gendered beliefs in a sport context is no different than analyzing them in the greater society. Prior to the passage of Title IX, the main issue involving women in sport was participation opportunities.¹ Women now have more opportunities to participate in sport, but the playing field is still not level in all areas of sport. The media often trivializes women who now have an opportunity to participate in sport that they did not have at one point in time. Does this trivialization carry over to sports fans?

¹ From Title IX, Education Amendment Act of 1972, Title 20 U.S.C. sections 1681-1688, by the United States Department of Labor, says that no person will be discriminated against based on sex within a federally funded educational program.

Differences in motivations of sports fans have been found to vary between males and females but little has been done focusing on the differences in the overall fan experience. Examining the overall female fan experience and how the women feel they are perceived as sports fans is an area where the literature can be expanded. Research published on the experience of female sports fans tends to focus on European professional leagues (football and rugby) (Ben-Porat, 2009; Jones, 2008) and not the “Big Four” in North America (National Hockey League (NHL), National Football League (NFL), National Basketball Association (NBA), Major League Baseball (MLB)). Women who participated in the research on European soccer and rugby leagues noted that the female fans felt trivialized and often experienced sexual harassment at games by male fans (Jones, 2008). In this study, I want to know if this sentiment is echoed by female sports fans of MLB in the United States. Studying the full fan experience is my goal and an area that the current research does not cover in great depth.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research study was to understand the experiences of females who self-identify as fans of Major League Baseball (MLB).

Research Questions

Through a qualitative research approach and a narrative analysis of the data, the following research questions were examined:

1. What are the shared experiences of a female sports fan of Major League Baseball?
 - a. How do the experiences of female Major League Baseball fans differ from each other?
2. How do female fans of Major League Baseball perceive other female Major League Baseball fans?

3. How do female fans of Major League Baseball believe male fans perceive them?
4. How do female fans of Major League Baseball believe other female fans perceive them?
5. What effect do societal gender norms have on female fans of MLB?

Significance

As was previously mentioned, a majority of the research that covers sports fans focuses on the fans motivations for attending live sporting events or watching sports on television (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; Hall & O'Mahony, 2006; James & Ridinger, 2002; Wann & Waddill, 2003). The saturation of literature within the fields of sport psychology and sport management regarding fan motivations is understandable based on how valuable that research can prove to be to the marketing departments within professional sport organizations. As for the field of sport sociology, there is a lack of literature regarding the experience of female fans of men's professional sports. Within sport sociology we can use this research to better understand the female fans experience and understand the influence societal gender norms have on their fandom. Through this research study, not only will the research community gain a better understanding of the experiences of female sports fans, but also sport-marketing administrators will be better able to understand this particular fan base, so women can be targeted as consumers.

Beyond merely understanding the female fans experience at MLB games, a further understanding of the role gender norms play in one's fandom will be gained. As discussed earlier, gender norms are social constructions that help us create meaning as to what constitutes masculinity and femininity (Cameron & Lalonde, 2001; Coakley, 2009). The sport sociology research community is aware of the influence gender norms have on children's toys and even their selection of leisure activities (Schmalz, Kerstetter, 2006), but how do these norms influence

adult females serving as spectators at sporting events? Understanding the influence of norms on spectators will help to analyze these norms, their influences and ways the gender binary among sports fans can potentially be broken down. This study brings to light specific gender stereotypes in society that are put onto female fans. By gaining an understanding on how norms may or may not influence a female's fandom, we will be able to better educate people as to what stereotypes exist based on gender norms in society and how this can influence multiple areas of people's lives, in this case their fan experience.

Professionals in the sport industry note that nearly 44 percent of their fan base consists of female sports fans, but this is a population that is largely ignored when they should be the target of researchers and organizations (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000). By gaining a deeper understanding of the female sports fans and their experiences, the sport organization will be able to better understand how to enhance the female fan's experience at a live sporting event. With professional sport organizations relying on millions of fans to attend games at their stadiums each year, being able to understand what can enhance a fans experience will be valuable information to those trying to expand into the female market. Obtaining the attention of the female fan and focusing on gaining their fandom and attendance would be beneficial to any MLB team because studies have found the it is the women who control the disposable income within the home as well as the majority of the purchases (Clark, Apostolopoulou & Gladden, 2009).

Theories Employed in Research on Female Fans

Within research that focuses on female sports fans, the most commonly used theories in the analysis are hegemony and feminist theory (Ben-Porat, 2009; Jones, 2008). These theories may be expressly used or ones that can be inferred from the analysis of the data. Hegemony is

focusing on the power that one group holds over the other (Rigauer, 2000). According to hegemony, the subordinate group has consented to their subordination to the dominant group at hand (Riaguer, 2000). Feminist theory also focuses on power issues in society, but with a specific focus on gender (Birrell, 2000). To go one step further, feminist theory analyzes ways women have been discriminated against, but also examines how these wrongs can be changed and the way in which the social structure of society can be changed to eliminate these wrongs (Grosz, 2010). Unlike other theories, there are multiple forms of feminist theory that one can take up based on their beliefs and goals. Some of these forms of feminist theory include liberal, radical, Marxist, Black feminism, eco-feminism, and standpoint feminist theory to name a few (Beasley, 1999). When someone identifies as a feminist, it is important to understand that there is not one set definition for feminist, given that there are multiple variations with which an individual can identify.

Amir Ben-Porat's (2009) work on female Israeli soccer fans shows evidence of hegemony while Jones (2008) displays liberal feminist theory in her work on female English football fans. In the study by Ben-Porat (2009), men set the standards for fan behavior in the stands at the Israeli soccer games, and it was expected that the females who choose to invade the male domain observe these standards. Jones (2008) provides three liberal feminist strategies to deal with the sexist behavior by men at Rugby matches in England and substantiate their personal fandom. These strategies include defining sexist behavior as repulsive, downplay sexism, and embrace the gender stereotypes (Jones, 2008). Both of these studies, their use of the theory, and their findings will be presented in detail in chapter two.

Depending on the researcher and the study design, a theory can be chosen from the outset of a study to utilize when analyzing the data or the researcher can allow a theory to emerge from

the data collected (Grbich, 2007). For this study, the form of feminist theory that will be utilized was not chosen at the start of the study; rather the particular form of feminist theory used was determined after analysis. Based on the stories shared by the participants, I interpreted what form of feminist theory best explained the female fans experiences.

Delimitations/Limitations

Delimitations include confining this particular study to interviewing female sports fans of MLB over the age of 18. Limitations of this particular study were that only female baseball fans were interviewed thus not allowing male fans to share their views on the experiences or their interpretations of the female MLB fan experience. The findings of this study cannot be generalized to the greater population, rather the goal of qualitative research is transferability (Creswell, 2007).

Definition of Terms

1. Code: “word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or an evocative attribute for a portion of language based of visual data” (Saldana, 2009, p. 3).

2. Feminist Theory: Focuses on understanding ourselves as gendered female. This concept of female gender is the center of analysis (Birrell, 2000). There is a move to action that can also be used to challenge and change a current status quo that puts women at a disadvantage to men (Chafetz, 1997; Gill, 2001).

3. Gender: Sociological constructions as to what constitutes masculine and feminine (Coakely, 2009). Influences everything from leisure activities people participate in to what we wear (Cameron & Lalonde, 2001). For example, masculine men should be aggressive, highly competitive and participate in team sports such as football while feminine females should

participate in activities such as dance that are aesthetically appealing (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006; McCabe, 2008).

4. Gender Norms: Shared beliefs among individuals in a society on what behaviors are acceptable for those of a specific sex. This can vary based on the culture the individual is a member of at the time (Halloway & Valentine, 2000). These gender norms are socially constructed and influence aspects of our lives such as behavior and choice of leisure activities (Cameron & Lalonde, 2001).

5. Hegemony: The dominance, whether it is political, economic, ideological or cultural, that one group (the dominant) is exerting over another group(s). Dominance continues to be held by influencing ideals, as well as, discussions and the understanding of specific events or issues (Clark, 2011). The dominant group has power, but the subordinate group has consented to being dominated (Rigauer, 2000). The knowledge of the dominant group becomes the norm (Hoerber, 2007).

6. Qualitative research: Seeks “to study real-world situations using descriptive methods of inquiry” (Murillo, 2004, p. 157). In addition, it “informs action, enhances decision-making, and applies knowledge to solve human and societal problems” (Patton, 2002, p.12).

7. Sport: “Established, officially governed, competitive physical activities in which participants are motivated by internal and external rewards” (Coakley, 2007, p. 5). To expand upon this definition, modern sport includes characteristics such as: record keeping, public access to information, competition, roles, rules, and organization (Mechikoff, 2009).

8. Sports Fan: Fan is the root word of the term fanatic meaning, having a strong emotional attachment to an object (Rojek, 2006). Melnick and Wann (2004) define sports fan as, “a person with an abiding interest in sports” (p.1).

Organization

To help the reader understand the layout of the study, the following is a roadmap for how the dissertation will be organized. Chapter one includes an introduction of the topic, statement of the problem, purpose statement, significance of the study and a list of terms and definitions. Included in chapter two is a literature review covering motivation of sport fans, emotional attachment of fans, fan experiences in European football and rugby leagues, gender, subcultures, and the emergence of theory. Chapter three outlines the methodological approach and procedures for data collection and analysis, as well as a description of participants. In chapter four, the findings are be presented and discussed in-depth. Chapter five includes conclusions of the study, as well as, recommendations for future research on the topic.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Year after year people around the country flock to sporting venues to watch their favorite teams compete. Within the Big Four (NHL, NFL, NBA, MLB) there are nearly 100 teams offering spectator opportunities at 100 locations across the country (Melnick & Wann, 2004). The crowds in these venues are diverse in nature across categories such as: race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, age, and gender. Though all types of people can be found in a stadium, there is one group to whom most of these sporting events are centered around or focused towards, men. Much of the world of sport is focused around men even though the National Football League has reported that nearly 40 percent of their fan base is female (Scarborough Sports Marketing, 2010). Men are often seen as the true fans, the knowledgeable fans or the fans that are there for the game and not motivated by other reasons, such as to spend time with their families.

Prior to discussing specifics about research on sports fans, I will first define sports and fans, discuss the concept of subcultures and their relation to sport and fans, and the concept of gender. These topics will be followed by discussion of literature regarding sports fans in terms of fan motivations, dysfunctional fans and emotional attachments of fans to their favorite team or player. Lastly, this chapter will focus on social theories used in the literature on sports fans.

Defining Sport

Sport is a term generally used, however, there is not a concise agreed upon definition as to what sport means. Dunning (1999) defines sport as, “a form of non-scripted, largely non-verbal theater and emotional arousal” (p. 3). This may seem to be one of the more vague definitions of sport, however when we discuss the concept of emotional attachment as it relates to sport it is a perfect match. To expand on this definition of sport, I turn to the definition

provided by Coakley (2009) who defines sport as, “well-established, officially governed competitive physical activities in which participants are motivated by internal and external rewards” (p. 6). For those watching sport it is seen as a chance to experience ambiguity since it is unscripted where as other forms of entertainment such as pseudosport have fixed outcome (Boddy, 2010). For me, sport is a competitive, physical activity, which can serve as a source of entertainment.

Defining a Fan

Fan is the root word of the term fanatic meaning, having a strong emotional attachment to an object (Rojek, 2006). This term is not only used in sport, but can be used when describing one’s admiration for things such as the performing arts or for a particular artist or writer. Melnick and Wann (2004) define sports fan in their study as, “a person with an abiding interest in sports.” (p.1). I examined the idea of a fan in terms of a sports fan. Defining what sports fan is can vary from person to person. Everybody has his or her own ideas as to what exactly qualifies a person as a fan. James and Ridinger (2002) discuss an idea proposed by Dietz-Uhler that defining what a sports fan is should be done on an individual basis. Each individual may perceive himself or herself differently as a fan, thus altering their definition of a fan (James & Ridinger, 2002). For me personally, being a fan not only means that you are enthusiastic about a team, but that you are knowledgeable as well.

When discussing the idea of what exactly qualifies a person as a fan it is important to talk about the different levels of fandom and terminology used to describe or categorize fans. When describing fans you commonly hear people using terms such as, avid fans, die hard fans, or even a true fan. These are a few of the positive labels given to fans that I will provide definitions for at this time. An avid fan has been described as someone who would be more apt to discuss their

favorite team and be in search of social opportunities where everyone is there to support the same team or focus on the same game (Laverie & Arnett, 2000). Behavior of a fan is important to note when examining different levels of fandom. An avid fan's behavior may violate social norms (Laverie & Arnett, 2000). They may yell in a public setting or may high five everyone around them, things that would be seen as against the norms if not for sport. A true fan is one who is a devotee or loyal follower of a team. They expect or are ready to attend every game or any game to which they can obtain tickets (Hall & O'Mahony, 2006). Die-hard fans consider their fandom as an important part of their identity (Laverie & Arnett, 2000). Fans who see their fandom as central to their personal identity are also known as high-identification fans, these fans often experience intense emotional reactions to their team's performance on the field (Wann & Schrader, 2000). These fans see their support and cheering of the home team as a reason for the team's success (Wann & Schrader, 2000). According to Hall & O'Mahoney (2006), die-hard and true fan characteristics have been found to be more important aspects to men than to women.

In addition to labeling those who see themselves as top level fans, there are also labels for those who are new fans or fans only because a team is winning. A novice fan can be a person who is not viewed as being as loyal as other fans. They are often fans that have the required paraphernalia so they are dressed "appropriately" for the game (Laverie & Arnett, 2000) but may not be the most knowledgeable. They may have the jersey, the hat or the t-shirt, but does that make someone a fan? If one follows the dictionary definition of a fan being "an enthusiastic devotee" (Merriam-Webster, 2012), you could argue yes because they are showing devote enthusiasm for their favorite team. Others may question if this is a façade. On the other hand, there is the person who suddenly becomes a fan of a team only once that team begins to win and

become competitive. This person is commonly referred to as a bandwagon fan. The loyal or true fans that were discussed above may not take these fans seriously.

Shayne Quick (2000) discussed fan typology for rugby in Australia. In this article, he notes work done by Stewart and Smith (1997) in which they detail five specific categories of spectators. The categories used were: aficionado, theatergoer, passionate partisan, champ follower, and reclusive partisan. An aficionado is a fan who watches sport in appreciation of the athletic skill exhibited on the field. Theatergoer's are there for the entertainment value of watching a sporting event. They hope to see a competitive game. A passionate partisan, more commonly known as a loyal or die-hard fan, is described as someone who deeply wants to see their team win and chooses to strongly identify with the team (Stewart & Smith, 1997). The fourth type of fan designated by Stewart and Smith (1997) is the champ follower or a fan that is loyal to a team that succeeds. Lastly, there is the reclusive partisan fan, which is a fan that identifies with a team but does not necessarily attend live sporting events. These fans may choose to participate in sport through multiple forms of media.

For some, being a sports fan allows them to become part of a specific community or culture. This culture has requirements that must be met to gain access and acceptance. Fans, of differing levels, may be considered a subculture of society due to multiple aspects that will be discussed further in the following section.

Subcultures

The term subculture was first seen used in the literature in the 1940s (Wheaton, 2007). The term subculture, much like other terms used in sport sociology, does not have an agreed upon definition across the discipline. Terms as simple as sport, or more complex such as

feminism, are also commonly used terms in the field that do not have standard agreed upon definitions.² However, there are theories as to what subcultures are or may include.

Subcultures are referred to as ‘taste cultures’ with a focus on the ‘us versus them’ distinction between subcultures and the greater culture they are within (Thornton, 1995). Within a subculture, the dominant values of the greater society, which the subculture is a part of, may be opposed or negotiated (Donnelly & Young, 1988). It is not enough to say you are part of a subculture or a specific community rather you must be able to look and speak the part to fully be accepted by those who are established members (Donnelly & Young 1988; Wheaton, 2000).

As with joining any social group in society there is a socialization process one must endure to be accepted by members of the established group. Donnelly and Young (1988) discuss a sport model that demonstrates the stages of assimilation into a subculture. The stages outlined are as follows: pre-socialization, selection and recruitment, socialization, and acceptance/ostracism (Donnelly & Young, 1988). New members of a subculture, as was previously mentioned, will learn to adapt to their surrounding in the new subculture they are assimilating into. For example, they will learn the style of dress, language or jargon used by insiders, as well as attitudes and behaviors deemed appropriate (Donnelly & Young, 1988; Wheaton, 2000). In the world of sport, female baseball fans may try to assimilate into the fan subculture by purchasing team jerseys and hats, learning the terminology used within the particular sport and learn the cheers that are specific to a particular team or sport. For example, at Yankee Stadium, if one is to sit in the bleachers they must wear Yankee paraphernalia as well as know the protocol for the roll call and the rules of the cowbell. The importance of assimilating

² For a discussion on the term “sport,” see:

From *Sports in society: Issues and controversies (10th ed.)* by J. Coakley, 2009, New York, NY: McGraw-Hill or “Is sport unique? A question of definability,” by S. K. Wertz, 1995, *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 22(1), 83-93.

fully into a subculture is so that the individuals can establish their identity, which must be confirmed by other members of the subculture. This occurs when the new member accepts the cultural values in place, this may occur over a period of time. It is important to note that one's identity within a subculture is dynamic and subject to change (Donnelly & Young, 1998). The idea of identity being dynamic within a subculture is similar to more modern takes on identity in society in that our identities can be dynamic, personal and multiple (Wheaton, 2000).

Subcultures are influenced not only by the greater society and its members but by the media as well. The rise of media coverage across the world of sport, from the mainstream to the alternative, has increased the creation of various subcultures in sport (Laverie & Arnett, 2000; Wheaton, 2007). Those subcultures that form through the media are generally commodity oriented, encouraging a consumer to purchase a particular product, such as snowboarding, surfing or even the skateboarding subcultures (Wheaton, 2007). Much attention has been paid to these lifestyle or commodity oriented subcultures whether it be through the media or in the literature. Some of the more popular subcultures investigated, especially pertaining to females, are that of windsurfing, rock climbing and snowboarding (Thorpe, 2010; Wheaton, 2000; Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998). In these studies, the researchers focused on the formation of the subcultures, how one can be seen as authentic or part of the subculture and the role female's play. When examining female baseball fans, I examined where women perceive themselves in this baseball fan subculture, and how they feel others perceive them in the fan subculture. Understanding how female baseball fans do become authentic members of the fan subculture can help to understand how they are perceived as fans and if they can be fully accepted into this specialized subculture.

Wheaton and Tomlinson (1998) focus on the windsurfing subculture, a lifestyle subculture, and its gendered state in their study. Like most work on subcultures, this was an ethnographic piece in that the researchers spent time as part of the subculture. The population of the windsurfing subculture is very similar to that of other sporting subcultures in that it is predominantly male with females being the minority. In my study, I examined the baseball fan subculture, through the experiences of my participants, where women are also among the minority earning their spot in the subculture. Wheaton and Tomlinson (1998) found that there were different groups of women within the windsurfing subculture itself. There were the women, who did not participate in the sport, but their spouse did and they would come to watch their male partner windsurf thus perpetuating standard societal gender norms. The remainder of the women involved surfed themselves, however, the level of commitment to the sport varied among the women. Not only did these women vary in their commitment to the sport in the way of time and energy spent within the subculture as a whole, but in their attire and level of involvement. This included how they participate in the subculture, that is, surfing or watching from the beach. The range of involvement from women who were highly skilled and participated on a regular basis as a means to establish an identity outside of mother or partner, to the “girlies” whose priority was to look cute on the beach and watch the male surfers (Wheaton & Tomlinson, 1998).

When analyzing the concept of a subculture, what constitutes a subculture and how one can assimilate into a subculture, one can pinpoint characteristics that would categorize sports fans as a subculture in their own right. There is an extreme insider/outsider relationship established between those within the subculture and those in other areas of society (Wheaton, 2007). Fandom is a lifestyle for people with going to or watching games being part of their daily life routine. Within the sports fan subculture, there is jargon one must be familiar with, which

may vary by sport, as well as attire and behavior seen as acceptable by those established in the subculture (Donnelly & Young 1988; Wheaton, 2007). Not only must a fan be familiar with appropriate jargon for a sport, but also within a particular fan base they must know the chants and rituals of the fans in that particular subculture thus establishing their common identity (Levin, Beasley & Gilson, 2008). Referring to this as a fan subcultures can be a broad category and would probably be better-served being broken down by sport, seating location within the stadium and possibly city as fan behaviors and expectations can vary based on these criteria. Analyzing the subculture of female MLB fans and their experiences, as I do in chapter four of this dissertation, will provide an opportunity to gain understanding of the female MLB fans experiences within the fan subcultures.

As with studies conducted about the world of sport, subcultures generally focus on masculine ideals (Thorpe 2010; Wheaton, 2007). Work that does discuss females in subcultures generally focuses on their role in the subculture in relation to men. This is true in research regarding sports fans as well. Much research has been published as to the motives of sports fans and gender differences, but not on the experiences of female baseball fans. Those articles that do touch on the subject focus on European football and rugby not on the “Big Four” in the United States (NHL, NFL, NBA, MLB). Of the research that discusses the experiences of female sports fans, the focus is on the feminization of the sports crowd (e.g. decrease in hooliganism and violence) and the general perceptions of violence among male fans (Ben-Porat, 2009, Pope & Williams, 2011). This establishes the need for more research to be done on female sports fans in the United States and their assimilation into the fan subculture, especially of men’s professional sports.

Gender

To discuss the literature examining female sports fans, one must understand the distinctions between sex and gender. These two terms are generally used interchangeably in society though there are significant distinctions between the two. Sex is assigned at birth, while gender is socially constructed (Reiner, 2002). The social construction of gender is what forms our ideas regarding masculinity and femininity (Coakley, 2009). These social constructions of femininity and masculinity are related to everything from typical behavior, to attire, to leisure activities (Cameron & Lalonde, 2001). For example, research shows perceptions that masculine men should play aggressive and highly competitive sports such as football, while feminine females should do aesthetically pleasing activities like dance or cheerleading (McCabe, 2008; Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). Coakley (2009) refers to this idea as gender logic. Team sports are often deemed appropriate for only males or only females based on the stereotypes of the sport in question (McCabe, 2008). For example, contact sports such as football are deemed more masculine and for males only, while sports such as gymnastics where grace is emphasized are seen as female only sports.

Men and women seen as exhibiting too many traits of the “opposite” gender are generally scrutinized, and men and women may have their masculinity or femininity questioned (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). The notion of opposite gender reinforces the ideas that there is a gender binary. It is these ideas about masculinity and femininity that establish gender ideologies, or beliefs, that are ever present in our society. Many in society often find it necessary to place people into categories, when people do not fit neatly into one of the two gender categories established in society, some become uncomfortable. People try to label others as masculine, feminine, male or female, and do not allow room for anything outside these specific categories, only accounting for heterosexual norms in defining these terms based on our gender ideologies

(Cameron & Lalonde, 2001). Since sport is considered a microcosm of society, it is only natural that we would find the same gender ideologies and controversies in the subculture of sport that we do in society. The same ideas can be true for female fans that are too enthusiastic or seen as knowing too much about sport (Cameron & Lalonde, 2001; Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000). I argue that women's knowledge of sport alone challenges gender norms and may blur the lines of what is gender appropriate.

In sport, these gender ideologies are present from little league to the professional level. They can be seen anywhere from the team names in girls and boys leagues, uniform styles, choice of sports, and the commentary around sports. Children are generally encouraged to participate in specific sports based on what is deemed appropriate based on their gender. Starting at an age as young as two years, children are able to acknowledge and perpetuate gender norms (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). Parents may not be aware, but they often pass along gender stereotypes to their children through activities they sign their children up to participate in, or the toys they give them (Lopiano, 2004).

These distinctions are often based on what people in society believe about masculinity, femininity (Coakley, 2009). Masculine and feminine traits and norms established within society have an influence over the world of sport (McCabe, 2008). The influence goes beyond what sports a person may or may not participate in, to what sports they become fans of, and their behavior as a fan. Here the concept of gender-role attitudes is important, because it explains the beliefs each individual has about what is appropriate for males and females (McCabe, 2008).

Before we can fully discuss genders influence on the sports fan, we must delve deeper into the discussion on how gender-role attitude or gender norms influence sport participation and then the spectator. Participating in sport can be a gateway to being a sports fan for many people.

On average young girls begin participating in sport two years later than their male counterparts for whom it is considered a right to play sports. For the female population, participating in sport is seen as less of a right and more of a privilege (Lopiano, 2004). Though it has become increasingly more acceptable for females to participate in masculine sports it is still not as acceptable for males to participate in feminine sports (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006).

Women, especially in sport, are viewed as having a minority status in relation to men who are deemed advantaged (Cameron & Lalonde, 2001). Women are given minority status based on gender, thus they are the focus of gender discrimination (Becker & Wagner, 2009). This is also true in the business world where women feel as though their work is devalued and may be victims of sexual harassment. Often this is the case when their male counterparts feel threatened by them (Jones, 2008). Females who cross over into the male world of sport are seen as outsiders and their abilities are generally devalued through sexualizing the athlete (Dietz-Uhler et al, 2000). The media, both television and print, play a large part in the sexualization of female athletes. Media outlets generally focus on the female athletes' physical appearance as opposed to their athletic prowess (Cooky, Wachs, Messner & Dworkin, 2010). Focus on physical appearance leads to the creation of concepts known as the "female apologetic" (Cooky et al., 2010) and "cosmetic fitness" (Coakley, 2009). This is no different for female sports fans that are called terms such as "puck bunnies." These female fans are critiqued based on their looks, much like female athletes.

Ensuring that we take into account gender identity and gender norms when we analyze sport in general and sports fans are important criteria to take into consideration. With gender and fandom being significant identity markers for individuals, researchers have spent time analyzing

what motivates an individual to be a sports fan. Beyond basic motivations, gender differences have been noted between fans and will be discussed in the following section.

Fan Motivations

Research in the area of fan motivation has saturated the fields of sport management, sport psychology and sport sociology in recent years (Bernthal & Graham, 2003). It seems that everyone is fascinated with what motivates a person to be a sports fan. This information is no doubt of great value to the teams hosting events because every person they can bring through the gate is money in their pocket. With a boom in the amount of research done on fan motivation, a Motivational Scale for Sport Consumption (MSSC) was developed (James & Ridinger, 2002). This scale assesses nine particular motives of sports fans: achievement, acquisition of knowledge, aesthetics, drama/eustress, escape, family, physical attractiveness of participants, the quality of the physical skill of participants and social interaction (James & Ridinger, 2002).

In a study by Wann and Waddill (2003), eight potential motives for sports fans are identified. These motives, reflecting those used in the MSSC, are listed as: group affiliations, family, aesthetics, self-esteem, economic, eustress, escape, entertainment (Wann & Waddill, 2003). (See Appendix A for a detailed list of studies and motives found). Numerous studies on fan motivation found that these motives vary by gender (Dietz-Uhler, et al., 2000; Wann & Waddill, 2003; Wann, Waddill, & Dunham, 2004; Wann, Schinner & Keenan, 2001), however this is not often a focus of the studies (James & Ridinger, 2002). These assessments are helpful in understanding what motivates a fan, but there is room to expand this literature and understand what is the individuals experience of being a fan.

When exploring what motivates someone to attend a live sporting event additional factors may come into play. Being a fan and watching a game on television is one thing, but being

motivated to attend a live sporting event is another idea entirely. Hall and O'Mahony (2006) analyzed this idea in Australian sport. In their study they found the following to be attendance motives for fans: economics, geography and socio-demographic factors, accessibility, entertainment, performance, attractiveness of the game, preference for the sport or team at hand (Hall & O'Mahony, 2006). Some of the motives for attendance do overlap motives previously listed for an individual's fandom. This may be due to the fact that many people become fans and develop their love and loyalty for a team based on an experience at a live event. My love for the game of baseball started at home, but was enhanced by being able to attend live games each summer with my family.

Bernthal and Graham (2003), agree that motivations can differ when it comes to attending a live event, but they go a step further claiming that motives can vary by the specific sport and sport type. They examined fan motives for attendance between minor league baseball and collegiate baseball. Survey data was collected from different venues on two different game nights. The main motives in their study were found to be: rivalries, quality of play, outstanding players, value, entertainment, and community. In relation to community, they researchers suggested that the slow paced nature of baseball might allow for more socializing with others while at the game (Bernthal & Graham, 2003).

As was mentioned previously, the motives of sports fans were found to differ based on gender. Females were found to be motivated by the social aspects of being a sport fan and saw it as a way to spend time with their families (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; Wann, Schinner & Keenan, 2001). In the Dietz-Uhler (2000) study, survey data noted that females were motivated to be fans because they liked the cheering aspect of being part of a crowd at a live game. For these females being a fan is about going to games, cheering as was previously mentioned, but other fan

behaviors are not part of what motivates their fandom (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000). The entertainment value of games and broadcasts, such as celebrities or half time performances, were notable motivational factors for females (Clark, Apostolopoulou, & Gladden, 2009). Males indicated they were sports fan based on the pleasure they gain from learning about sports. In addition, they currently participate in or had participated in the particular sport and they enjoy the nature of sport in general (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; James & Ridinger, 2002).

These studies found that males were more likely to highly identify as fans and to be more involved in their fandom than females (Wann, Waddill & Dunham, 2004). Though the research shows that males may be more involved in being a sports fan, the findings also state that males and females are equally likely to be sports fans (James & Ridinger, 2002). Research shows that males and females are equally likely to report that they are a sports fan, but I believe there are still gender stereotypes present when determining sports fans. In James and Ridinger's (2002) study, they found that although women did report being sports fans, the male fans were found to have a stronger connection to sport overall. The males indicated a stronger connection to sport, but the females indicated an attachment to a particular team.

Melnick and Wann (2004) looked at ideas of what influences sports fans on an international stage as opposed to just within American sports. For this particular study the researchers examined sport in Norway and the fans. In Norway, sport is viewed positively and thought to be part of the common good. The study, using a survey, found that 66 percent of females and 87 percent of males reported that they watch some sort of sport on television at least once a week. From this study, it was found that 84 percent of females said they held conversations with others about sport compared with 97 percent of men. Lastly, each participant

was asked to list a favorite team. Nearly 70 percent of the teams listed were male sports teams (Melnick & Wann, 2004).

As a society we do not always distinguish between sex and gender however these terms denote two very distinct parts of our personalities and personal characteristics as previously mentioned. Wann & Waddill (2003) discovered that gender roles were a greater predictor of fan motivation than sex. Those showing traits, male or female, traditionally deemed more masculine showed motives typically associated with males fans over those exhibited by female fans. These fans exhibiting more masculine characteristics were more likely than their feminine counterparts to attend a sporting event or watch sports for the entertainment value and for the feeling of excitement and sometimes anxiety that comes with being a sports fan. Fans who exhibited more feminine characteristics, whether they be males or females, were motivated more by aesthetics and self-esteem reasons over the entertainment aspect (Wann & Waddill, 2003).

Over the past few years, there have been researchers who have explored gender and the role it plays on someone being a fan of a particular sport. McCabe's (2008) study investigated the role gender plays on fans feelings towards the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA). In particular, this study wanted to, "Examine the contribution of spectators' sex, psychological gender identity traits, and gender-role attitude in explaining spectators' affect or attitudes toward WNBA" (McCabe, 2008, p. 348). It was found that sex did not contribute to a fans affect towards the WNBA, while gender-role attitude did (McCabe, 2008). The focus of this study was on a women's professional sports league, therefore it would be interesting to see how this would manifest in men's professional baseball.

Many of the gendered stereotypes exhibited within sport based on ideas of masculinity and femininity carry over to sports fans. Much like females athletes can be seen as an outsider in

a masculine domain, female sports fans may be rejected by their male counterparts (Wann, Schinner & Keenan, 2001). The view of female sports fans can be related to the view of female athletes by society. When it comes to female sports, the female athletes are often sexualized and their athletic ability de-emphasized by both society and the media. It is thought that this trend may hold true among female sports fans as well (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000). Males may view female fans as interfering with their male bonding in this masculine sphere, thus causing male fans to detach themselves from their female counterparts (Wann, Schinner & Keenan, 2001). This is assuming that the males are viewing female fans as invaders in this environment. Through the analysis in chapter four, I explain the participants thoughts on this idea.

Females within the world of sport are once again the focus of gender discrimination much as they are in society (Becker & Wagner, 2009). If female fans were trivialized much like female athletes, then why would they want to be sports fans? In the study by Dietz-Uhler et al. (2000), it was found that nearly 73 percent of females identified themselves as sports fans. There is no way to know the extent of their fandom or their sport knowledge based on the study, however we can understand what being a fan means to these particular women. For the female fans in this particular study being, a fan meant going to games and cheering, but no other fan behaviors were important to them. Is this a reason for women being seen as outsider when it comes to sport fandom?

While there are cases where female fans are seen as outsiders and ignored by their male counterparts, there are male fans that respect and admire the female fans in attendance. Some male fans view their female counterparts positively in that they now share a common interest (Wann, Schinner, & Keenan, 2001). The influence of one's peers can have a significant influence over a person's fandom (Melnick & Wann, 2004). This peer influence could be the reason why

women continue to attend sporting events in masculine domains where they are seen as outsiders. As long as they are with peers who respect them then they may not feel as though they are outsiders, being ignored or disrespected.

In an effort to try to market towards and include female fans, sports leagues and specific organizations have created female specific programs and merchandise. During the 2002 National Football League (NFL) season, Reebok hosted the “Be a woman, be a fan” campaign (Clark, Apostolopoulou, & Gladden, 2009). This campaign was targeted specifically at female fans since they make up nearly 45 percent of the fan base (Wann, Schinner & Kennan, 2001). Beyond commercials aimed at female fans, the NFL opened an entire new market of merchandise for their female fan base. The pink jerseys and pink memorabilia that have been created for the female football fans quickly became the fastest rising new business market of the NFL (Clark, Apostolopoulou, & Gladden, 2009).

There have been other avenues created aimed at the female fan in hopes of creating more female fans. Some NFL teams now host a program called Football 101, which teaches females the basics of football (Clark, Apostolopoulou, & Gladden, 2009). Football 101 provides women an opportunity to learn the basics of football from positions, to simple strategies and plays. During these clinics, there is often a question and answer session with a few coaches, as well as time to spend on the field and in the locker room. There are teams, such as the Cincinnati Bengals, who introduced Football 201, where the clinic went a bit more in depth on strategy and plays and also provided more time with coaches and players. Websites have also been created just for females that provide updates on games, teams and players from a “female perspective” (Clark, Apostolopoulou, & Gladden, 2009). These websites provide information about the

athletes off the field, their families, and their childhood. Such efforts are aimed at trying to encourage female fans to learn more about the sport and possibly convert them into lifelong fans.

Emotional Attachment

A large portion of the literature pertaining to sports fans addresses what motivates fans (Dietz-Uhler, et al., 2000; Wann & Waddill, 2003; Wann, Waddill, & Dunham, 2004; Wann, Schinner & Keenan, 2001). Beyond what motivates someone to be a fan others have gone a step further and linked emotional attachment and attachment theory, which is normally used in psychology literature, to sports fans attachment to a team. A person having an emotional attachment to a sports team that he/she is not necessarily a part of can be seen as a foreign concept to some people, especially non-sports fans. Attachment theory has been used to explain the phenomenon of fans developing an emotional attachment to a team or player.

Attachment theory is generally used in psychology literature, and was used by Bowlby to analyze the attachment between parent and child, specifically mother and child (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Bowlby, 1979). The term attachment has been given slightly varying definitions based on the researcher describing the term. For Bowlby (1979), attachment is simply an attachment based on emotion between a person and object. Funk and James (2001) as well as Matsuoka, Chelladurai, and Munehiko (2003) each provide definitions of attachment based on one's attachment to a sports team. The main points of their definitions include power of the association one feels to a team, and that the attachment occurs over a period of time based on personal experiences (Funk & James, 2001; Matsuoka, Chelladurai & Munehiko, 2003). The stronger one deems their attachment to a team or object, his/her emotional reaction and attachment to that object or team increases (Bowlby, 1979).

Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991) were each studying ideas of attachment between parent and child at the same time. There were times during this period where they worked together and times where they did their own research and later discussed mutual findings. Bowlby (1988) discussed four main characteristics of attachment theory: proximity maintenance, safe haven, secure base, and separation distress. Proximity maintenance refers to a child wanting to be near the person they have attached to, in this case the caregiver, so they feel safe. Safe haven means that the child feels as though they can return to the caregiver when frightened. A secure base is to be provided for the child by the caregiver so that the child is able to explore other relationships in their world. Lastly, there is separation distress when a child is separate from the caregiver. Here the child will become upset or stressed due to the separation from the person they feel safest and most secure around.

Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall's (1978) research found there to be three styles of attachment: secure, ambivalent, and avoidant. Secure attachment can be recognized when a child is found to become visibly upset upon the departure of a caregiver. The child would rather be in the presence of their caregiver than a stranger and relies on the caregiver when frightened. Children experiencing ambivalent attachment are also become upset upon the absence of the caregiver, but are not immediately relieved upon the caregivers return. This is said to be a rare style of attachment among children. Lastly, children experiencing avoidant attachment do not seek nor do they avoid caregivers at any given time.

Emotional attachment has been used by researchers to distinguish fans from one another based on their level of attachment to a team (Hunt, Bristol & Bashow, 1999). As was mentioned earlier, there are many different types of fans and terminology used to describe fans. Hunt, Bristol & Bashow (1999) use the terms temporary and devoted fans. For temporary fans, the

personal association with sport is not central to identity and is not everlasting (Hunt, Bristol & Bashow, 1999). I argue temporary fans can be categorized along with the novice fans discussed by Laverie and Arnett (2000). Devoted fans endure the ups and downs of their team's performance and keep their attachment to the team in tact (Hunt, Bristol & Bashow, 1999). The devoted fan may be most closely linked to the idea of a passionate fan noted earlier by Laverie and Arnett (2000).

In sport, we generally think of the idea of emotional attachment being to a team when discussing fans. This emotional attachment can be to a specific player, much like the attachment research done by Bowlby (1979) and Ainsworth et al. (1978) showing attachment between parent and child (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1989). In Rojek's (2006) article, celebrities as commodities are discussed in relation to causing the spectator to view the celebrity as an object to which they can attach themselves. I believe that this belief that the celebrity is a commodity, can be used to encourage consumerism by the fans. By increasing the marketing of the star player on a team, an organization will hopefully boost jersey sales. The increase in media exposure and the prominence of professional sport in American culture have only increased the standards professional athletes are held to and how society idealizes them. It is argued that attaching one's self to a team or in this case a celebrity (athlete) can be a fantasy for some fans to "go to" as a means of escaping their day to day lives (Rojek, 2006).

Attachment to a person, team or object is not something that occurs instantaneously. Rather it occurs over time through lived experiences with the team that is the focus of the attachment and is linked to positive experiences at these sporting events (Koo & Hardin, 2008; Laverie & Arnett, 2000). Beyond attachment occurring over a long period of time, there are other more specific ways which attachment to a team is generated based on the literature. Two

particular ways in which attachment is generated based on the Psychosocial Continuum Model (PCM) are: (a) learning about a particular sport or team, and (b) person is viewed as having a favorite team. This model was proposed as a way for people to see the differences between fans and spectators in the ways in which they are in contact with the team that is the focus of their attachment (Funk & James, 2001).

This brings us to the idea of fan versus spectator and how they differ. It seems as though every researcher has a slightly different idea as to what differentiates a fan from a spectator. The following are a few of the concepts expressed regarding the fan versus spectator. Fans are looking for their favorite team to succeed and cheer for this success, and continue to stay loyal to their team (Trail, Robinson, Dick, & Gillentine, 2003; Quick, 2000). Those fans that identify highly with a team are more likely to have emotional reactions/attachments to a specific team. In addition, the team's performance has a direct influence over the fan's personal self-esteem (Wann & Schrader, 2000). Spectators on the other hand are about the entertainment value of the sporting event and do not necessarily have a tie to a specific team (Trail et al., 2003).

Being emotionally attached to a team can have an effect on the fan's experience and behavior in a fan setting. Identifying and attaching to a team has an influence over a fans decision to attend a live game. Fans that identify strongly with a team are more likely to be dysfunctional fans (Wakefield & Wann, 2006). Identification references the psychological connection one may have to a team (Donahue & Wann, 2009). In a study about fans of the Florida Gators, it was found that dysfunctional fans are not more attached to a team than a loyal fan, but exhibit abnormal behavior in a social context related to sport. These fans are generally found to be the louder of the fans at a ballgame and may show anger towards officials and players (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2002). Wakefield and Wann (2006) found that fans who

strongly attached to a team were more likely to harass officials. The majority of the fans in their study, that were classified as dysfunctional fans were, less educated, younger in age, and single males with no children. Highly dysfunctional fans, viewed alcohol consumption as a necessary part of their game experience (Donahue & Wann, 2009; Wakefield & Wann, 2006). It is not surprising that alcohol consumption is high at sporting events, or that it leads to problems among fans, because alcohol is readily available at professional sporting events in the United States (Lenk, Toomey, & Erickson, 2009).

Research on a fans emotional attachment to a team can prove invaluable to sport marketers if they have the information and abilities to properly acknowledge fans attachments to a team or player (Koo & Hardin, 2008). Sport marketing is a key aspect of the business side of sports and as such, those working within the field can use the knowledge of attachment and positive fan experiences to help increase attendance (Laverie & Arnett, 2000). By acknowledging the concept of attachment, marketers can quickly learn what motivates their fans. This information can help marketers attempt to increase attendance, merchandise sales and their fan base in general. These are just a few reasons as to why this research is important to sport organizations. Creating a link between fans emotional attachment and their motivation can better help sport marketers to reach their fans.

Though attachment theory comes from psychology, sport researchers (Koo & Hardin, 2008; Laverie & Arnett, 2000) have adapted the theory to meet their needs to analyze the world of sport and help improve strategies for marketing. The researchers have now used the theory to examine the emotional link between a fan and their favorite team, and how this can lead to dysfunctional fan behavior (Donahue & Wann, 2009; Koo & Hardin, 2008; Laverie & Arnett, 2000; Wakefield & Wann, 2006). Attachment theory is not the only theory used when analyzing

sports fans in the literature. Beyond theories based in psychology, sociological theories are used to critique sport, and two such theories will be discussed in the next section.

Social Theories

Hegemony. For the purpose of this study, I focus on how hegemony is taken up and discussed in research on sport by researchers such as Rigauer (2000), Ingham (2004), and Ben-Porat (2009). Hegemony by definition is the dominance or control, whether it is political, economic, ideological or cultural, that the dominant group is exerting over another group or groups (Rigauer, 2000). A main point of hegemony is that power and control occurs with the consent of those being dominated. Ingham (2004) explains the idea that those that are “subordinate suffer from a false consciousness” (p. 24). The existence of a false consciousness causes people to be oblivious to oppression and exploitation they may be experiencing. It is the dominant social groups in society that developed the norms and values of that society (Rigauer, 2000).

When taking into account the notion that one group is subordinate to another, it is easy to understand how hegemony is recognizable within research on sport that addresses gender. Looking at the preexisting structure of sport, one can see that sport is organized for and by males, thus making females the subordinate group. In a study about football (soccer) fans in Israel, the researcher, Amir Ben-Porat (2009), went to great lengths to show examples of hegemony both in the world of sport and among sports fans. Israeli male football fans, much like football fans from around the world, view sport as a man’s world with women being the outsiders. Men hold the power positions and are the dominant group in the sports world not only on the field, but as fans as well. Though men may be the dominant group among sports fans, it is no longer strange to see female fans in the crowd at Israeli soccer games. Women are slowly

working their way to equality in the fan setting. As a sports fan, women may see equality as being viewed as an authentic member of the fan subculture. It is important to note here that women are not looking to take over for the male place in sports fandom but rather they want to create their own space as fans (Ben-Porat, 2009). Looking at soccer fans in Israel, men are the dominant group over women insinuating that there is potential for masculine hegemony to exist in this environment. Examining female fans and their experiences of being fans of MLB will likely exemplify similar trends of masculine hegemony.

Male fans set the standards and norms within each group of fans in attendance at a soccer game. These norms of behavior are established not just for the fellow male fans but also for the female fans that choose to invade this male space and attend a game (Ben-Porat, 2009). By setting regulations for female fans, the males are asserting their dominance in the setting and control over the subordinate group. Rigauer (2000) brings to our attention that hegemony should not be taken for granted and can be lost. Therefore the dominant group must continue to work to maintain their present status and thus the hegemonic order is established (Rigauer, 2000). To maintain dominance in this setting men tend to control all aspects of sport from the game including the institutionalization of sport (Ben-Porat, 2009). By controlling all aspects of sport, they are ensuring that their dominance over females or the subordinate group remains in tact. This domination is not total, but it may seem as though it is. There is room within the hegemonic order for there to be resistance and for norms to be negotiated by the subordinate group.

Those who are among the subordinate group at times resist hegemony (Rigauer, 2000). It is these conflicts that enable the negotiation between the dominant and subordinate groups and helps to establish the norms and ideals (Rigauer, 2000). Women consistently attending live football games in an environment where they are an outsider is a form of resistance in itself.

Though these women feel they are now accepted within particular seating sections at a match, they also feel they are viewed as “honorary men” (Ben-Porat, 2009). These women are resisting in that they are entering a male domain and participating in the sports world. Men are negotiating with the subordinate group by providing them the opportunity to attend the football game but it is still clear that they establish the rules for all fans and create the game day atmosphere (Ben-Porat, 2009). Women can be seen as negotiating in that they have a space at a game to cheer, but they are not challenging norms of the male fan’s behavior in that setting. Women’s attendance at professional sporting events in the United States has increased over the years but it is likely that masculine hegemony still exists in this setting.

Hegemony is a way to theorize about oppression in society, more specifically a dominant group ruling over a subordinate group(s). What makes the hegemony different from other social theories is that it does not consider just one social factor’s affect on power like conflict theory would with economic capital, but it can look at political, economic, and cultural factors too (Rigauer, 2000). In addition, hegemony can be used to analyze gender and race issues in society and in the case of the article about the Rutgers University women’s basketball team (Cooky et al., 2010) that was discussed earlier.

Feminist Theory. Feminist theory examines power struggles in society, much like hegemony, but has a more specific and narrow focus. Researchers who use feminist theory study the ideas of power and gender relations in society (Beasley, 1999; Chafetz, 1997; Coakley, 2007). Critical theory’s societal critique looks at ideas of gender among other aspects of power relations, but it is this focus on gender that brings us to feminist theory and its analysis of power in society. Both critical and feminist theories critique power relations, but it is feminist theory that brings the focus of this power to gender relations. Feminist theory can be defined as theories

that “seek to understand how gender is related to social inequities, strains, and contradictions” (Chafetz, 1997, p.98). It can also be used to challenge and change a current status quo that puts women at a disadvantage (Chafetz, 1997).

Those utilizing feminist theory believe that gender equity is necessary for progress to occur in society (Coakley, 2007). Much like the idea of hegemony, feminist theory is looking at the domination of one particular group over another. In this case, it is the domination of women in society. For example, as the previously discussed study on football (soccer) in Israel demonstrated, there was a domination of male football fans over female fans (Ben-Porat, 2009). Feminist theory is comprised of multiple aspects. For example, feminist theories include the following categories: radical, liberal, eco, Marxist, socialist, standpoint and post modern (Beasley, 1999). A researcher does not have to focus on just one type of feminism. At times, multiple forms of feminist theory can be used in a theoretical framework based on the study at hand. In research on females in sport, some of the more prevalent form of feminist theory are: liberal feminism, radical feminism, and marxist feminism (Caudwell, 2011; Roper, Fisher, Wrisberg, 2005). Liberal feminists want to “incorporate women into the mainstream of public life, which includes politics, the workplace, and sport” (Costa & Guthrie, 1994, p. 237). Radical feminists believe society privileges men based on its organizational structure. Do to this belief, radical feminists want to overhaul this existing power structure in society. Lastly, Marxist feminists want women fully integrated into the work force in order to relieve oppression (Costa & Guthrie, 1994).

Through the research that exists on female sports fans, it is evident that women are not looking to overhaul the existing nature of sport, but rather much like the female athletes post Title IX, they are merely looking to find their own place within the existing world of sport and

sport fandom (Ben-Porat, 2009; Jones, 2008; Pope & Williams, 2011). This would be classified as liberal feminism in that the women now had a place and were not looking to transform the current system (Birrell, 2000). It is important to note that Birrell (2000) does discuss other forms of feminist theory and their implications. I believe that being happy with a place within the male-centered world is not enough for all women in society. There are women who want a complete transformation of the current system, in this case of sport, and achieve equality between the sexes.

When people discuss women as fans, they generally note that females are fans of things such as a specific actor or a specific television show, but not necessarily sport (Pope & Williams, 2011). At this point in time, it has become increasingly more common for females to attend live sporting events and even consider themselves to be sports fan (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000). They are still attempting to be fully respected as sports fans and not be seen as merely being at a game to observe the players on the field for their looks. According to Crawford and Gosling (2004), female fans are referred to as “puck bunnies” at hockey games and are assumed to only be there to see the male players. Some may view women as sexual beings at a game, the women have expressed being sexually harassed and devalued by male counterparts much like women working in male dominated fields in society (Jones, 2008).

According to Susan Birrell (2000) feminist theorists are giving greater attention to the relationship between gender and sexuality. There has been an assumption that women involved in sports must be homosexual (Birrell, 2000). Other women and men at times reject women who exhibit masculine traits or characteristics, because other females view this as demeaning to girls and women involved in sport. In this case, the women are putting their fan identity ahead of their gender identity (Jones, 2008).

Sexist behavior by males can be exhibited both on the field and in the stands and can be anything from language used between men or words aimed at females present. Phrases as seemingly innocent as “you play like a girl” can be offense to many feminists aiming for equality among the sexes. These remarks are generally aimed at the players on the field, but are offensive to the female fans because phrases such as this imply that being a female means one is missing physical skill when it comes to sport (Cooky & McDonald, 2005; Jones, 2008).

In order for women to deal with the sexist behavior of men at games, Jones (2008) provides three liberal feminist strategies for women to utilize so they are able to substantiate their fandom and establish their own spot within the sports crowd. The research done by Jones (2008) suggests women need to define this sexist behavior as repulsive, downplay the sexism, and embrace gender stereotypes. These gender stereotypes are part of the game and as such it is seen as though women should accept it and establish their fan identity accordingly (Jones, 2008). One goal of feminist theory is to challenge the gender dynamics that exist in sport and go beyond critiquing them to finding solutions to gender inequities (Birrell, 2000). According to Birrell (2000) we must go beyond the strategy stated by Jones (2008) and challenge the gender stereotypes present and not blindly accept them as the norm.

As was noted by Birrell (2000) the main focus of critical feminist theory, like other theories that come out of critical theory, is power. This power can be defined as one’s ability to influence others even when faced with opposition and to be able to control his or her environment (Coakley, 2007). For female sports fans, the power lies with the White males as they control sport from the ground up. Sport has proven to be a gendered activity and as such they are grounded in the ideals and values of men. In addition, sport in our society emphasizes the dominant masculine ideals present in society (Coakley, 2007). These same concepts of

power can be seen in the work by Jones (2008), Pope and Williams (2011) and Ben-Porat (2010), where each analyzes the experiences of female sports fans in relation to their male counterparts. Each of the studies discussed, examines how women are outsiders and how men establish the norms present at sporting events (Ben-Porat, 2010; Jones, 2008; Pope & Williams, 2011).

Feminist theories emphasize gender awareness and often critique gender related issues in society. Feminist theory goes beyond examining the individual and looks at the structure of society (Coakley, 2007). Researchers have an opportunity to utilize feminist theory to analyze female sports fans and their experience in the male dominated world of sport that exists in our society.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the concept of sports fans, their role as a subculture and the concept of gender and its significance in sport. Previous research on sports fans examining fan motivation and emotional attachment was discussed to show where previous research on sports fans has focused. Lastly, social theories, hegemony and feminist theory, were discussed in relation their use in research on female sports fans.

Chapter III

Methodology

As discussed in chapter one, the purpose of this dissertation is to understand the experiences of females who self-identify as fans of Major League Baseball (MLB). The study seeks, through a qualitative research approach and a thematic analysis of the data, to examine the following research questions stated in chapter one.

The following is an explanation of my positionality, description of participants, methodology for data collection and analysis, validity and limitations of the study, as it relates to my dissertation research topic of female sports fans of Major League Baseball.

Positionality

Everything in my life affects how I see the world. My opinions and beliefs on issues are all based upon my experiences, knowledge I have gained, and truths I have discovered. Criteria such as race, gender, geographic location, social class, and being a sports fan all have an effect on my views however; they do not all affect every situation. Rather they can each be situationally specific as to when they alter my views based on my lived experiences. I am a White, female from an upper middle class background. Due to my parents socio-economic status, I had the opportunity to not only take part in several different sports as an athlete, but I also had the privilege to attend several Yankee games each year at Yankee Stadium in the Bronx, New York. Each of these facets of diversity can also affect the paradigms with which I identify myself, as well as what I want to study. Based on my own system of beliefs I align myself as constructivist for this study. The following section will outline paradigms I align myself with, as well as different elements of my identity that may influence my positionality within the study.

Constructivism. As a woman, my position in society allows me to see a gender double standard in society in a way that may differ from the person sitting next to me. In my research, I find myself leaning towards constructivism. I agree with constructivism where an individual's reality and knowledge are based on their own lived experiences (Gribich, 2007). Gribich (2007) states a major characteristic of the research focus of constructivism is an

exploration of the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences in the worlds in which they live, and how the contexts of events and situations and the placement of these within wider social environments have impacted on constructed understandings" (p.8).

Based on an individual's experience of being a fan, his or her construction of this particular reality may differ greatly. No two people have the same experiences in society throughout their life; therefore their construction of reality will be different from someone else's. Each person bases his or her realities on his or her experiences as well as their personal ideals. The context surrounding each individual's experience will have an effect on the truths they create, thus differing his or her truths from other individuals. Factors such as race, social class and gender can all play a part in influencing one's experiences and in turn, the realities they construct for themselves. These paradigms help frame my research and how I create realities. In a sense, my analysis of the data will vary from somebody else's based on our experiences in society and the fact that I do not believe there is always one shared meaning.

Race. For research purposes I acknowledge the privileges that come with being White in society. Racism is often seen as something that denies another group or puts another group at a disadvantage, and is rarely looked at in terms of privileging another group. In many cases it is the concept of White privilege that goes unnoticed (McIntosh, 2008). Reflecting on the racial

issues and stereotypes were necessary when interviewing and analyzing my interview transcripts because I cannot ignore their influence on one's fan experience, or lack of experience. Baseball has stereotypically been seen as a sport for White males, and as such this may limit the experience of individuals in becoming a fan of the game. Societal factors do not exist in a social vacuum rather they overlap and influence one another. This is not something that I examine on a daily basis; rather it is something I seem to take for granted in my life because I am a part of the privileged race. My position in society is advanced by my being White, privileged, and having a support system, whether I use these aspects to advance my position or not. Nonetheless, being White will affect my lived experiences and thus it will have a constant influence on the experiences of my life and the knowledge I create. This puts me in the majority and does not afford me the ability to know what it is like to be among the minority.

Gender. As a female in society there are instances where you are expected to fulfill certain roles and act in a certain respect to meet the criteria of what is appropriate for a female (McCabe, 2008). This is especially relevant in sport where females are now allowed to participate, however, there is still pressure for them to appear feminine according to societal ideals. We have the idea of cosmetic fitness, where women can be athletic, but they must have long lean muscles and still maintain a feminine physique while in competition (Coakley, 2009). Societal gender norms, influence females in the sport realm whether it be as fans or on the playing field.

Being a female athlete and sports fan, I have my own ideas as to gender roles and what is appropriate for a female in society and in the sports world. For me, I do not believe women need to act in a specific way or that they need to act different than their male counterparts. Personally, I believe women should wear what makes them comfortable and act as they see fit in any

situation. Whether they want to wear the pink jerseys teams sell with them in mind, or the jersey that matches the male players on the field, they should do what is comfortable for them not what is deemed appropriate by society. Personally, I choose to wear the replica player jersey and not the pink jerseys marketed towards women, but that is my personal choice as to what I feel is appropriate for me as a fan. These ideas will be reflected in my research and analysis due to my own lived experiences as a female and sports fan.

Society has constructed ideas as to what “female” means and how a females should act. Due to the knowledge I have created for myself I have my own thoughts on what “female” means and this idea will very likely differ from another individuals ideas of female and femininity. Idea behind masculinity and feminity in society are related to thing such as leisure, attire and behavior (Cameron & Lalonde, 2001). Some may see femininity as being dainty, passive, and wearing pink, while others believe you can be feminine, physical in sport and competitive at the same time. I believe you can be feminine, physical in sport, competitive and compassionate. Being feminine to me does not mean that you have to wear pink, have long flowing hair, wear make-up every time you leave the house, or meet the characteristics of cosmetic fitness (Coakley, 2009). Rather, it is a state of mind, a confidence one exudes in how they carry themselves through their daily routine.

If someone were to ask me a few years ago if I was a feminist, I would have said no. As many people do, I had a negative perception about feminists based on the stereotypes that are portrayed in society of radical feminists. On television, I saw radical feminists portrayed as women who are leading rallies, burning bras, and moving for a complete overhaul of the current system. Through my education, this has changed for me in that I now understand that there are different forms of feminism. I would classify myself as a liberal feminist in that I am not

someone who is looking to make radical changes to the preexisting structures in society. I want women to be treated as equals in the structures present in society and in sport.

Geographic Location. Prior to leaving home for college and then graduate school, I spent my life in the state of New York. My mom grew up in the same area where my sister and I grew up, about an hour north of New York City. Dad grew up in northern New Jersey, also relatively close to New York City. Our proximity to New York City and my families financial privilege, allowe me to take advantage of what the city has to offer. It provided me the opportunity to attend plays, visit historic landmarks, and attend many live professional sporting events.

Due to the location where I grew up, my family was able to drive to Yankee Stadium fairly easily. This allowed me the opportunity to see my favorite team play in person and develop a stronger attachment to the team by seeing them play live. Not everyone has the ability to watch their favorite team live, due to their geographic location. Many people do not live anywhere near their favorite sports teams and therefore never have the opportunity to watch their team play live. Some fans must watch their favorite team in an opponent's ballpark, something that can provide a different experience depending on the opponent.

Class. I grew up in a middle/upper middle class family in New York. This allowed for certain privileges in my life that no doubt have had an impact on my views and ideas of realities and truths. Due to my parent's socioeconomic status, I was afforded certain privileges and was able to gain a certain amount of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital refers to education, knowledge and skills a person has that provide them with a higher status within a society. Growing up, I was fortunate enough to be able to attend several New York Yankees games each year. This was an experience I was fortunate to have due to the

socioeconomic status of my family and now realize it is not something that everyone has the chance to experience. As a child, I never thought twice about the social class of my family. It was something that was exploited and used to as an advantage without me realizing it on a daily basis.

As a child, I did not realize what advantages that were afford to me and how these experiences may have differed from my peers. It was not until later in my life when I looked back and reflected on my life that I fully understood and appreciated the privileges that were afforded to me based on my parent's socioeconomic status. Beyond the monetary aspect, the social class of my family allowed my mom to stay home with my sister and me when we growing up, thus allowing us to always have at least one parent at all of our athletic events. In addition, my father's position, as owner of his own business, allowed him the opportunity to take time off work and to take us to professional sporting events or attend games we participated in, especially when we reached the high school level.

Scholar. In my household, attending college was never an option in our household for my sister or myself. It was a requirement placed on us by our parents. Continuing on to a Master's and a PhD program were my own decisions due to my love for academics and learning new things. Choosing to focus my studies in the area of sociology of sport has allowed me to spend my time analyzing the sports world that I love in a way that is rather outside the box. Studying the socio-cultural side of sport, has allowed me the chance to dissect sport utilizing the same social issues we see in the greater society.

My studies and review of previous research have caused me to focus on this particular research topic and as such, have influenced my thinking about female sports fans and their representation within the literature. Based on research I have reviewed and topics we have

discussed in my courses, I have already developed my ideas about the sociological influences present in the sports world and the influence of gender roles on men and women. Keeping my thoughts separate from the research and the ideas of the participants needs to be acknowledged from the start of this dissertation. Topics I deem relevant may differ from someone who does not focus their thoughts around sociological concepts.

Sports Fan. For most of my life I have identified myself as a sports fan. This has been a large part, if not the biggest part, of my identity for many years. This identification is something that I developed throughout my life with the urging and acceptance of my parents. My dad introduced me to sports, both as a spectator and a participant, at a young age. For me, sport was something I was socialized into from the beginning. According to Coakley (2009) socialization is a process of social development in which we are interacting with others in these new social worlds. The new social world I was being introduced to as a child was that of the baseball fan. My parents would bring me to live games as a child, even taking me early so I could watch batting practice and catch my first foul ball. I was enrolled in little league baseball and recreational soccer leagues at the age of five, the earliest my town allowed children to play. Softball became a sport I played all the way through my senior year of high school. In the seventh grade, I took up volleyball and quickly learned to love the game, attending summer camps to improve my skills, playing competitively through high school and in recreational leagues in college.

Growing up, sports were a part of our daily routine, whether it be going to practice, watching a game on television or going to Yankee Stadium to see our favorite team play. I was never told I could not or should not enjoy sports merely because I was a girl. Being a female and a fan of men's professional sports I obviously have views on what being a fan means and how

gender roles play into this idea. My own spectator experiences will no doubt have an effect on how I view female and male sports fans today.

Influence of my positionality on study, participants and interpretation of data. It is important to note how my positionality influences this work and my relationship with the participants. Being a sports fan myself had a great influence on my work. To start, being a sports fan led me to this topic based on experiences I have had in my life and my curiosity regarding what other female sports fans have experienced in a similar setting. One of the best examples I can give based on my experiences that can show how I may view male and female fans at a sporting event happened in the spring of 2009. It was my first Yankee game of the season versus the Minnesota Twins. I was sitting behind a group of men who were having a trivia contest among each other. At one point the men asked me a question that they had been stumped on trying to see if I knew the answer. I quickly told them the correct answer and they immediately assumed I must have asked my father for the correct answer. They said there was no way I could possibly know the correct answer and that I was only there to look at the cute ball players. It is moments like these, where my sports knowledge is doubted based on my gender that infuriate me.

Personal experiences such as the one described above, caused me to have to focus on not influencing the data or the interviews based on my realities. When I heard stories from the participant that I could directly relate to, I was careful to not share my stories with the participants. Throughout this process, I was conscious of separating myself from the participants and not putting my experiences onto their stories. The values of sport spectatorship I was taught and carry with me, such as support of your team, and respect for the opponent, may differ from other female fans based on lived experiences.

As a scholar, I am able to combine my education and love of learning with my love of sports. Combining areas of interest to me helps to ensure my continued excitement with the topic at hand. In terms of the participants, my knowledge of sports helped in my relationships with the participants in that we were able to establish a relationship based on insider knowledge of sports and terminology used among sports fans. Utilizing thematic analysis and vignettes, will allow me to share the experiences of the participants in this fan setting and allow me to discover the transferability of the experiences.

Research Design

Participants. Participants in this study are all self-identified female fans of Major League Baseball. The reason for focusing on fans of MLB is because this is an environment where women are generally seen as the outsider and I am interested in understanding their experiences in this setting. The participants ranged in age from twenty-two to fifty-six years old, were from various regions of the country, and self-identified as female fans of MLB (See Table 1 below). All of the female participants were White. Based on geographic location of the participants, three interviews were conducted in person, two via Skype and five on the telephone. Each participant will be described in greater detail in chapter four. The participant group did not exclude participants based on characteristics such as race, social class or geographic location to name a few.

Table 1

List of Participants

Name	Age Range	Married/Single	Location
Jamie	50's	Married	New Jersey
Michelle	30's	Married	Ohio
Violet	50's	Married	New York
Monica	30's	Married	Texas
Dawn	20's	Single	Connecticut
Marie	20's	Single	Florida
Vivian	40's	Single	Oregon
Katie	20's	Single	Ohio
Lynn	40's	Single	Florida
Pam	20's	Single	Tennessee

Institutional review board, confidentiality, risks and benefits. Prior to data collection, a Form B was submitted to IRB for approval. After receiving approval, participants were contacted in order to arrange individual interviews. The interviews were arranged at a time and place convenient to the researcher and the interviewee. The participant was asked to pick the location of the interview, if there was an opportunity to conduct an in-person interview, to ensure they were comfortable during the interview process. If the participant was not geographically accessible to the researcher, interviews were conducted via telephone or Skype based on the interviewees preference.

There were minimal, if any risks to the participants. As was previously mentioned, pseudonyms were used to identify all participants. No identifying factors of the participants will be given in the final written document. Digital recordings and transcripts were kept on a password-protected computer. Each participant was notified that they were free to withdraw

from the study at any time without penalty. As a benefit, their participation and willingness to share their experiences will help to contribute to sport sociology literature.

Each participant signed a consent form, (Appendix C) or verbally consented to participating if the interview was done over the phone, before participating in the study and was ensured confidentiality. In addition, participants chose a pseudonym, which was used to identify them from that point forward. These interviews were digitally recorded so that I was able to transcribe the interview at a later date. Once the interview transcription was completed the audio file was deleted. In addition, after the interview was transcribed, the transcription was sent to the participant to ensure accuracy of the transcription. This also allowed the participant an opportunity to add any information or stories they wished to share or remove anything they were no longer comfortable sharing.

Design. To recruit participants, a snowball sampling method was utilized (Patton, 2002). Snowball sampling will allow me to utilize connections the participants have to other female fans to grow my participant pool. For example, I conducted an interview with a female sports fan and then asked her to identify other female sports fans that she thought would be interested in participating in the study. To begin, a participant from my pilot study, conducted in the spring of 2011, was contacted and asked to suggest a peer who would be willing to participate in the study and the snowball sampling started from this point. Being a female sports fan myself, my peer group includes many women who are fans of men's professional sports teams. These women would not be ideal participants for the study based on my previous relationship with the women. There may be a problem of too much insider information within the interviews. Rather I used these women as an additional starting point and asked them to recommend friends that may be interested in participating in my study.

There are many different ways to describe the qualitative research interview. One definition describes an interview as, “a conversation with a purpose” (Mason, 2002). Information generated may be seen as meaningful insights into the social reaction the research question is looking to explore. An interview may be a beneficial way to add depth and examine the social reality the researcher is trying to understand. When attempting to understand the social reality the researcher must take into account the complexities of the interviews interaction. To properly generate the data researchers must make sure they are active and reflexive throughout the process (Mason, 2002). When conducting qualitative interviews, the researcher should focus on his/her ability to interpret what the interviewee says and thus represent the interviewee’s story (Turner, 2010). It is important that the researcher does not alter what the interviewee says to support their research, utilizing a third party who is not immediately involved in the research can be beneficial to help ensure validity of the study (Turner, 2010). Providing context gives more meaning to the researcher’s interpretations. This is important to ensure the validity of the study, which will be discussed later.

There are multiple types of interviews that can be used: structured, unstructured, and semi-structured interviews. In a structured interview there are set questions asked to every interviewee in the same order throughout the study. There are qualitative researchers who say that they do not use this method because if they want to ask the same questions in the same order they could just use a survey. In an unstructured interview the interviewee guides the interview. The researcher must be able to tell when an interview is going off track and be able to put the interviewee back on track. In a semi-structured interview approach, there is a list of set questions to ask however there is also a sense that the interviewee controls the flow of the interview and the researcher asks guiding/probing questions (Shank, 2006). The questions were open-ended

questions in order to leave room for the participants to share their stories and interpret the question as they saw fit based on their experiences. If the participant was short with their answers or did not share stories, probing questions were asked to encourage them to dig deeper into their experiences and share those moments with me in greater detail, recalling emotions and specifics of the events.

Interviews. For my study, there were a total of ten interviews conducted to ensure that saturation of the topic was reached (Mason, 2010). I determined saturation was reached when I was no longer hearing new information from my participants. The interviews lasted from thirty to sixty minutes depending on the participants' willingness or eagerness to share their experiences with me. To ensure that all the necessary questions were asked and answered in the interview, I used semi-structured interview format (Appendix B). There was a list of questions for me to refer to during the interview to ensure the interview remained on track. This allowed for the participant to feel as though they were in control of the interview, but also allowed me to have the questions answered and guide the interviewee if they veered from the topic of my study.

As was mentioned previously, interviews were conducted in person, over the telephone or via Skype depending in the location of the participants and what would make them most comfortable. Conducting interview over the telephone and via Skype did not take away from the quality of the interview in this study. These interviews were some of the richest data I was able to collect through this process. Participants that were interviewed in person seemed more uncomfortable with being interviewed than those who were at home and talking to me on the telephone or on Skype.

Data Analysis. The first step of analyzing the data was to code the interview transcripts to generate codes and themes produced from the stories shared by the participants. A code

according to Saldana (2009) is a, “word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or an evocative attribute for a portion of language based of visual data.” (p. 3). Several different forms of coding were used as I went through the transcripts. Each pass utilized a different type of code and these varied based on whether I was looking at first or second cycle codes. For example, when doing first cycle coding with these particular transcripts I used attribute coding, emotion coding, value coding, invivo coding, and holistic coding (Saldana, 2009). In second cycle coding I was looking to make the move to themes and families and as such I used pattern coding and focused coding (Saldana, 2009). When going through the coding process, Atlas.ti was used to help code transcripts as well as organize the codes and emerging themes.

According to Saldana (2009), attribute coding, also known as descriptive coding, notes characteristics of the participant, setting and time to name a few. Next for me would be emotion coding. Emotion coding takes note of any emotions the participant is experience while talking to you or emotions they may be remembering as they shared their story. Invivo coding is important because it focuses on using the participant’s own language as the codes. More specifically, this code could be a phrase used by the participant or a particular word used that may have stood out to the researcher. Value coding as Saldana notes, “reflects the participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldviews” (89). Based on this definition and what value coding looks to examine, this is a code that was of particular interest to me because it analyzed the values of the participant in relation to their fandom. Lastly, within first cycle coding there was holistic coding. Here I was looking to examine themes by looking at a whole section of text as opposed to going through the same section analyzing each individual line.

Once first cycle coding was completed, I moved to second cycle coding using pattern and focused coding. Pattern coding is used in the second cycle because it helps to develop themes in the data (Saldana, 2009). The last form of coding that will be used is focused coding. This type of coding caused me to focus on what were the most significant codes emerging across the interview transcripts (Saldana, 2009).

After coding each individual interview, I moved to looking for themes across all of the interviews. In addition to looking for commonalities across the interviews I also took note of any outliers that were present. These outliers can prove to be just as informative as common themes across all interviews. Thematic analysis is a process where the researcher has the ability to narrow the data down into meaningful units of information that may be easier to work with as opposed to attempting to keep a story intact (Grbich, 2007). To make this organization of themes easier, Grbich (2007) provides us with two approaches to go about this: block and file and conceptual mapping. No one-way is better than the other; rather it comes down to personal preference based on the researcher and what works best for them with the data. With a block and file approach the researcher looks to keep large block of text in tact, where as with conceptual mapping short phrases are used as a way of summarizing main points (Grbich, 2007). In my study, a combination of both approaches were used in that short phrases were used to note themes across transcripts, but large blocks of text were kept to note outliers or relevant stories shared by the participants.

When using thematic analysis there is little focus on how the story is told, the audience it is meant for, or the language used (Reissman, 2005). Rather, thematic analysis focuses on the “common thematic elements across research participants, the events they report” (Reissman, 2005, p. 74). Finalized themes came from terms found in previous research on the topic, views

of the participant or based on the researcher's thoughts when reviewing the transcripts (Grbich, 2007). For my purposes, I looked for common themes across interviews in terms of the female's experience of being a fan of Major League Baseball. When compared to narrative analysis, thematic analysis is rather straightforward and can be a more comfortable fit for the novice researcher (Reissman, 2005).

Validity

Throughout the research process I, as the principal researcher, took steps to ensure the validity of the study. Reliability was necessary so that I was able to ensure that what I pulled out of the data was actually there (Patton, 2002). The peer review was beneficial to see if others picked up on codes or outliers in the transcripts that I may have overlooked. Not only was reliability helpful to ensure that I did not overlook a theme but it was also helpful to ensure that what I am pulled out of the transcripts, as themes, were actually present. To achieve reliability, a colleague, who is also PhD candidate, reviewed the transcripts. My colleague was sent a hermeneutic unit through Atlas.ti of the transcripts, so that they were then able to review the transcripts in a method easier for us to share information. After analyzing the data set, we would discuss areas where codes may have differed between us and explain what each saw in that section. In the end, it would be my decision as to the code placed on a particular section of the data. Making the move from code to theme is where the most discussion took place between my colleague and myself. This was a difficult move to make, and as such we would talk through what codes fell under what themes and what to name each theme. By talking through this process with my colleague we were able to bounce ideas off one another to develop the final themes included in the dissertation.

Member checking was also used as a way to integrate the participants comments further into the study. Once the interviews were transcribed, each interview was emailed to the corresponding participant so they were able to review the transcript. Reviewing the transcript allowed the participant an opportunity to ensure that I transcribed everything accurately, and note any stories that they no longer felt comfortable sharing (Lapadat, 2000). Five of the participants responded after reviewing their transcripts. Only one of the participants added any additional information to their transcript.

Though the results of this study will not be generalized to the general population, transferability is the more accurate goal of the final product. The advantage of transferability is that the reader will be able to relate to the shared experiences as they see fit, however it cannot be generalized out across the population (Creswell, 2007). My hope is that readers can see similarities and differences between their experiences and the experiences of the participants in the study.

Limitations

One limitation is that I chose to only interview female sports fans. Second, the format of the interviews was limited based on geography. Due to my geographical location, the only feasible way for me to interview female fans from different locations was by telephone or Skype. Conducting interviews over the phone took away from the face-to-face interaction with the participant and my ability to pick up on body language cues. Utilizing snowball sampling may have limited me in that participants recommend peers similar in age, race and fans of the same team. All of the participants were White, which was a limitation of using snowball sampling because I obtained my participant pool based on the peer group of the participants.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the research design and methodology for the dissertation. Ten female fans of MLB were interviewed about their experiences of being fans of MLB. Interviews were conducted in person, via Skype, or by phone depending on the location of the participant in relation to myself. Once interviews were completed, they were each transcribed by myself, and then sent to the participants to ensure accuracy. The next step in the research process was coding of the interview transcripts. At the completion of the coding process, the codes were organized into themes. A thematic analysis of the experience of female MLB fans will allow me to understand the experiences the women have in the male dominated sports world and to further understand the space women have created for themselves within the fan subculture. The findings of this research will be discussed in chapter four.

Chapter IV

Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents findings and provides discussion for the research questions of this study. It begins with a profile of each participant, including how they define what a fan looks like, as well as who influenced their fandom. The profiles are intended to help draw a more complete picture of who the participants are and the role being a fan plays in their lives. James and Ridinger (2002) discuss an idea proposed by Dietz-Uhler that defining a sports fan should be done on a person-by-person basis. This is the approach employed in this dissertation, and as such, the participants' beliefs behind what a fan is and what it means are provided in each participant's profile. After each participant is introduced to the reader, the major themes and sub-themes that were produced from the data will be introduced and analyzed. The research questions are answered through the discussion offered in this chapter. Due to the nature of using thematic analysis, findings related to some of the research questions will be embedded across multiple themes.

Participant Profiles

Jamie. Jamie is a married, White, middle class, female in her mid-fifties from New Jersey. She was first introduced to sport, baseball in particular, by her father at a young age and it became an integral part of her life as she grew up. As far as what constitutes a fan, Jamie believes a fan to be someone who follows a specific team and knows what is going on with that team. In her life, this manifests in many ways, she openly admits to never missing a game and sneaking radios into events such as bridal showers so she can obtain score updates. She refers to herself as a "lunatic" when it comes to her fandom and portrays this in many ways. Not only

does she wear the gear of her favorite team, but she has two tattoos on her body of different team logos. For Jamie, her main focus are the New York Yankees and their players. Jamie shared with me that her and her husband consider attending and watching Yankee games as their main source of entertainment, something they can share together throughout the season.

Michelle. Michelle is a married, White, middle class, female in her mid-thirties from Ohio. Throughout her life she has always enjoyed sport, but baseball became of particular interest to her once she was married due to her husband's extreme interest in Major League Baseball, particularly the Cleveland Indians. To Michelle, a fan is someone who not only watches the games but "has a working knowledge of both the game and the team" (Michelle). Watching and attending baseball games is a family experience for Michelle, her husband and their three children. They encourage their children to learn the game and cheer on the Indians.

Violet. Violet is a married, White, upper middle class, female in her early fifties from New York. Her father ignited her passion for baseball at a young age. She could remember being five years old and her father yelling for her and her brother to come into the room every time Mickey Mantle stepped up to the plate. His excitement for players and the game is what led to her love of the game. Violet believes a fan is someone who is passionate about a team, knowledgeable, and "has the team infiltrating their lives in some form." She and her husband often attend games together and see it as something positive that they can share in their lives.

Monica. Monica is a married, White, middle class, female in her early thirties from Texas. Her grandfathers were both baseball fans and influenced her fandom. In high school, her fandom increased due to a boyfriend's interest in the team and continued throughout her life. To Monica, being a fan means you purchase apparel, watch games, attend games, and have knowledge of the team and their performance through the season. She sees it as being loyal to

where she grew up and as a way to have something in common with her husband that they can enjoy together.

Dawn. Dawn is a single, White, upper middle class, female in her mid-twenties from Connecticut. She explains becoming a fan as part of how she was raised. Her father was a Yankee fan and watched the games and made Dawn and her brother watch the games growing up. Since her father was constantly watching Yankee games, she and her brother took on the Yankees as their favorite team as well. She believes a fan to be someone who enjoys watching a team, rooting for a team, and going to team sponsored events.

Marie. Marie is a single, White, middle class, female in her early twenties from Florida. Like many others, she became a fan due to her father's influence. In addition, growing up in Florida was a huge influence on her fandom due to the great number of MLB teams that hold Spring Training throughout the state. Due to the vast amount of Spring Training facilities throughout Florida, Marie was able to see several MLB teams each spring as they prepared for their season. The easiest facility for her to access was the Wide World of Sports Complex in Orlando, where the Atlanta Braves train. This led to the Braves being her favorite MLB team. Marie believes a fan is someone who follows the sport, and at the minimum can name the teams playing when the game is turned on.

Vivian. Vivian is a single, White, middle class, female in her early forties from Oregon. She developed her interest in baseball in a way that differs from the rest of the participants. Growing up, Vivian was a fan of the *Peanuts* comic strip, which often discussed the play and stats of Willie Mays. She remembered running around as a child quoting all of Willie Mays' statistics not really know what she was doing. As she grew older, she began playing little league, and would watch the American Legion teams when she was in high school. It was about the time

that she was in high school that she really became interested in MLB. Vivian's becoming a Yankee fan in Oregon, was due to the fact her grandfather rooted for the Yankees. Recently, Vivian moved from Oregon to New York so that she would be able to attend games at Yankee Stadium. For Vivian, being a fan means that you are passionate about the game, following a team, and knowing what is going on throughout the year with your favorite team.

Katie. Katie is a single, White, middle class, female in her mid-twenties from Ohio. Her fandom began when the family moved to Cincinnati in the early 1990s when the Reds were one of the best teams in the league and won the World Series. In 1990, when the Reds won the World Series, is when her brother really began to follow the team and in turn, the whole family started to follow the Reds and become more avid fans. When asked to define a fan, Katie noted that there are several different types of fans from the die-hard to the bandwagon fan. On average, she believed a fan is someone who goes to games, watches games on television, knows the players, and where the team stands.

Lynn. Lynn is a single, White, middle class, female in her mid-forties from Florida. She said that she became a fan of baseball because her grandfather was a die-hard Yankee fan, something he instilled in her at a young age. Lynn describes herself to be a die-hard fan, to the point where she has a Yankee tattoo on her ankle. She believes a fan to be someone who rallies around his or her team, wears team apparel, and gets excited for his or her team. In her life, she sees being a fan as, "dedication, means going to the games, cheering on my players, and rooting for my team" (Lynn).

Pam. Pam is a single, White, lower middle class, female in her early twenties from Tennessee. Her fandom developed in a slightly different way from the other participants. Pam was influenced by her grandmother who was a die-hard Braves fan. She remembers her

grandmother always having the Braves game on when she would arrive home from school. For Pam, being a fan consists of going to games, watching games on television, and supporting the team whether good or bad.

Discussion of Findings

Through analysis of the participants' interview transcripts, I produced four major themes. These themes help to illustrate not only similarities of the participants' fan experiences, but also how their experiences differ. Although each participant's experience was unique to them, the themes help us to understand the personal and societal influences affecting their fandom. Through interviews with the participants, each revealed thoughts and stories reflecting on how societal beliefs regarding what is appropriate based on gender has influenced their life, and more specifically their fandom. The four main themes of this study are: (a) gender logic surrounding sport, (b) female views, (c) fan atmosphere and (d) total experience. Each of these themes and their subthemes are discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Theme 1: Gender logic surrounding sport. The first theme to be discussed is that of gender logic surrounding sport. In this theme the women acknowledged gender ideologies that exist around sport and how that influenced their fandom. These gender ideologies are socially constructed and influence aspects of our lives such as behavior and choice of leisure activities (Cameron & Lalonde, 2001). Stereotypes around these ideologies include ideas as to the gender appropriateness of particular sports. For example, men should be a part of the world of football or highly competitive and aggressive sports, while women should participate in more aesthetically pleasing and graceful activities such as dance (McCabe, 2008; Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). There were instances where the women had mentioned these gendered concepts having a negative impact on their fandom. The sub-themes for this theme include: (a)

initial assumption, (b) knowledge being questioned, and (c) evolving ideas about gender appropriateness.

The first sub-theme is that of the male fan's "*initial assumption*" that the female fan is not a true fan or not knowledgeable about MLB. Nine of the women discussed the initial assumption male fans would have of them as a fan. Two different assumptions were discussed in that the women were there to look at the players and that they were not as knowledgeable because they were female. These stories were expressed when the participants were asked how they felt they were perceived as a fan. A few of the women (four) related instances where male fans expressed that they were only at games to watch the "good looking players" and not for the game itself. This is a concept the women refute in that they were "real fans," but Lynn noted, that yes, she may find Derek Jeter to be attractive, but she notes, "I'm a Yankee fan because I'm a Yankee fan." Monica also stated, that she felt male fans assumed women were only present to look at players stating, "The guys usually assume that I am there to look at the players and not that I enjoy the game." Vivian became a bit more annoyed at the idea that she was only there to look at the player. She explained that often when people learn that she is a Yankee fan their first comment is, "Oh you are a fan of the Yankees, who is your favorite player Jeter?" Her response to me shows her annoyance with the assumption as she states, "Like he is only my favorite player, because he is good looking. Then after I talk to them, and because I can rattle off a lot of stats, then it becomes, oh wow, you are pretty knowledgeable for a girl" (Vivian).

In addition to the assumption that the women are only present to watch the male players, the participants shared that there is the assumption that just because they are female they cannot be as knowledgeable about baseball, the teams, and the players as their male counterparts. This idea goes back to the stereotypes developed in society based on gender appropriateness.

Competitive sports have long been considered a male domain, and women are the outsiders (McCabe, 2007). For a female to be involved in sport is seen as a privilege, in that they are being granted a spot in a male domain (Lopiano, 2004). Michelle felt as a female fan she was perceived as, “less knowledgeable and not as into it. Not as aware of things, of specifics of players and some of the more intricate details of the game.” She sees the most significant gendered idea surrounding MLB fans is the initial assumption that the males are real fans and the females are not. Pam shares a similar sentiment saying, “Like we don’t know enough about baseball to be considered a true fan. You are a girl, it’s considered a guy’s sport so you don’t know as much as I do because I’m a man.”

The initial assumption that females are present within a particular subculture for the wrong reasons is not limited to female MLB fans. Appleby and Fisher (2005) found the same idea was true for females trying to be accepted within the rock climbing subculture. These women were called “crag girlfriends,” meaning they were only present because their boyfriends were climbers (Appleby & Fisher, 2005). The female fans in this study felt they had to prove their knowledge and that they were present at the game for more than just the good looking players.

The second sub-theme within this theme is “*knowledge being questioned.*” Within this sub-theme, the women discussed having their knowledge of MLB and their favorite team questioned due simply to their gender. In society, it is assumed that males are knowledgeable about sport but the same assumption does not exist for females. This idea can be tied back to the gender-role attitudes that exist in society and the beliefs each person may have about what is appropriate for males and females (McCabe, 2008).

Eight of the participants shared stories of instances where this assumption infiltrated their fandom. These stories were shared when the women were asked about how they felt they were perceived as fans or when talking about interactions with male fans. Marie talked about watching games with her family (she is the only female) and how whenever she mentions a statistic about the game or a player her dad and brother both immediately say, “No, you don’t know. There is no way that you know.” Her knowledge is completely disregarded even among those who know her best. Marie goes on to talk about how having her knowledge doubted makes her feel as though she is being looked down upon by her male counterparts.

Others shared this idea and felt as though they had to prove their knowledge more than a male fan would have to in order to be seen as a legitimate fan. Vivian expressed that in order for her to be taken seriously by male fans, she feels as though she has to prove her knowledge by outwardly showing what she knows. For example, Vivian said,

I think it takes a little bit more convincing to believe that a woman is a sports fan. Like a guy can say Jeter hit .300 last year with twenty homeruns. I would have to say well he hit .300 last year, hit twenty homeruns, and Mo had forty saves. I would have to go a little bit further to show I am as big a fan as the guy standing next to me.

Marie felt similar in this scenario in that she had to prove her knowledge to male fans but at the same time, this would lead to an argument because she was a female. When asked how she handles these situations Marie said, “I’m more cautious around male fans. I don’t really like to talk a lot around male fans just because you can get into heated arguments. It is better to just not say anything.” Listening to experiences such as those shared by Marie and Vivian, remind me of

times male fans have doubted my knowledge of baseball. Though I wish to commiserate with the participants while they share these stories, I am careful to focus on their experiences as a fan.

Katie did not note a specific situation where her knowledge was doubted, but rather she did say, “I do think some guys are shocked when girls know so much about sport.” This idea of surprise or shock from males based on the female fans knowledge is something that was echoed across the participants. Lynn said, “They are usually quite surprised to find out how much I know about the team and about the players.”

Jamie had a unique story to share in accordance with this topic. When attending games Jamie has noticed that there is a difference in terms of who will talk to her regarding the game because some assume she is not knowledgeable. In her case, Jamie provided the example of a man in his 70s who used to sit next to Jamie and her husband at Yankee Stadium. This man had been going to games since Babe Ruth wore the uniform and he did not value female fans and their knowledge of the game. Jamie said, “ He would rather talk to Matt, her husband, than to me.” This was not a singular event for Jamie; rather this is something she has experienced several times with several different male fans. She explained it by saying,

When you do know something, they don't know what to say. They turn their back on you. I have had guys turn their back on me. How rude! Can you imagine? I am having a conversation with you and you turn your back on me to talk to some dude about the same thing we were talking about. Really insulting!

While Jamie was ignored by this particular male fan, Melissa believed that, “People would not seek her out for sport information.” She sees herself as a knowledgeable fan, but she does not believe others have that same idea.

Three of the women in this study had the opportunity to attend Yankees Fantasy Camp for Women. Through the stories they shared about the fantasy camp experience, it was evident that the male players who ran the camp were not sure what to expect of the women or how to handle a women's only camp. For years the camps had been for males only and these women attended the inaugural women's camp in 2011. Each woman stated that they thought the instructors (retired MLB players) were surprised by the women's knowledge of the game. Violet in particular, said that she felt the retired player's were "pleasantly surprised" by the female participants, their knowledge, and focus.

The final sub-theme under the gendered ideas theme is that of "*evolving ideas of gender appropriateness.*" Within this theme the women thought the ideas surrounding female sports fans have evolved through time. For several of the participants they saw these changes develop over the course of their life. Jamie talked about growing up and how when her family would go to visit her grandmother she would always run to her aunt's house where all the men were hanging out and talking sports, as opposed to staying at her grandma's where the women were cooking and talking about children. She said, "I just know the ins and outs of sports. So for my male peers growing up, I was very much a threat." Males feeling threatened by a strong and knowledgeable female is something that is common not only in sport, but also in the business world (Jones, 2008). Lynn also noted a change in these ideas since she was a child. While reflecting on her experience, Lynn recalled a moment from her childhood when she first asked to play baseball saying, "I was just a kid and I remember I wanted to play baseball as a kid and I couldn't. They said I could play t-ball as a kid, but I could not play baseball."

Looking at the attendance in the stadium at games Jamie now attends, she says it still seems to be predominantly male but that the make-up of the crowd is shifting. One particular

aspect she pointed out was that of children in attendance saying, “I see more little boys than little girls at games. Even though that is shifting somewhat.” Gender stereotypes are put onto children as young as two years old based on the toys they are given, and the activities they are enrolled in (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). Parents may unknowingly perpetuate such stereotypes by only taking their son to MLB game and not their daughter (Lopiano, 2004). Violet agreed with Jamie in terms of attendance, saying, “To me it stills feels a little more male dominant, but increasingly there are a lot more women coming to games and not just because my boyfriend wants to go.”

Vivian discussed the idea of shifting or evolving ideas of gender appropriateness in terms of it shifting in favor of female fans in general not just in terms of attendance. She believes that women are still not seen as sports fans, by men, in the same way men are seen as sports fans. In her discussions she said, “It seems there are still some people out there to me that it seems like, ‘I’m only a fan because the guys look good in their uniform.’ or whatever, but that is shifting.” In her eyes, these ideas may be shifting due to the increase in female sports reporters and that women are “starting to come into their own as being seen as true sports fans” (Vivian). For Vivian, she feels that women are finally be recognized as fans. This shift in thought has led Vivian to feel as though she and other women can be more open about their fandom and not be ridiculed or questioned.

The participants were not trying to overhaul the gender norms that exist in society; rather they may have been looking to broaden how these norms are defined. The women consented to their subordinate status, thus bring to light the presence of male hegemony, by not taking action against the norms (Rigauer, 2000). There were instances discussed where the women’s knowledge or motivation for attendance was doubted, by male fans, based solely on their gender. In a way, the women would combat this power dynamic by proving their knowledge to the

doubting male fans. Proving their knowledge could be seen as a way of resisting hegemonic norms present within the fan subculture. Similar to the female rock climbers in the study conducted by Appleby and Fisher (2005), the women felt that they had to prove their knowledge of sport to be accepted into the fan subculture. The participants were not looking to be invaders or take over the male domain; however, they were trying to enjoy the game they love in the same setting as the male fans. I argue liberal feminism was exhibited here because the women were not trying to change the current nature of the fan environment, rather they were looking to enjoy the game in the same environment, and not be questioned as to why they were present (Birrell, 2000).

The participants felt that they were perceived differently based on gender or that gender stereotypes were still present in society. What is interesting is that though the women felt gender stereotypes existed about women in sport, a male introduced nine out of ten participants to the game. The participants felt as though they were doubted as fans based on gender, however the person who initially introduced them to the game did not see gender as an issue when teaching them about baseball.

Theme 2: Female views. The second theme that I produced from the interviews was the idea of the female fans views. This theme includes perceptions the female fans have of other female fans, as well as how the participants feel female fans perceive them in a fan atmosphere. Within this theme, three sub-themes were produced and are discussed further in the following section. The three sub-themes discussed are: (a) how am I perceived, (b) out of place, and (c) people like me.

The first sub-theme is “*how am I perceived*” by other female fans. Each woman discussed how she felt other female fans viewed her when in a fan setting. Their experiences

differed in that four of the women did not feel as though other women noticed or cared that they were present. On the other hand, half of the women felt that other female fans were envious of their knowledge or not accepting of them due to their extensive knowledge of sport. Women were asked how they felt other fans perceived them, which spurred thoughts surrounding other female fans perceptions.

To begin, I will focus on the women who felt others were indifferent towards them in a fan setting. Michelle felt that, much like with male fans, she is relatively unnoticed by female fans. She explains this thought saying, "About the same as the men, but I can see female fans noticing that there is a response, an appropriate response. Not that I just clap whenever my husband claps." Dawn seconded this idea of being unnoticed by female fans, mainly because as she said, "I don't assign much value to other people's thoughts of me." Vivian hoped that she was seen as just another fan same as other females.

While three of the women felt as though they went unnoticed, the others felt there was more of a negative perception of them by female fans. Jamie believed that initially other female fans do not accept her, because as she says, "I am a lunatic fan." Violet stated that other female fans might be jealous of her and her knowledge of the game. She stated, "Maybe a little jealous only because they might see that I might have the inside track with the guys because I know something about the game." Though Dawn did say she was unnoticed, she later mentioned that, "I think they might be envious. I could talk to the guys about it and maybe they couldn't." Interestingly, both Dawn and Violet mentioned that knowledge of MLB was a way to communicate with males and that was why others would be jealous. Where as Jamie and Violet see the other women as being envious of their knowledge, Monica, Pam and Lynn felt that their knowledge of the sport would be shocking to other female fans. In Monica's word she said, "I

guess they would see me as at the opposite end of the spectrum from them. They are surprised at what I know about it.” Pam in particular said that others might see her as a know-it-all. She explains by saying, “I have a tendency to try and be a know it all around other female fans, so I guess I can come off as rude, or a smart-aleck.”

Stereotypes based on gender can be perpetuated by all members of society. When discussing gender stereotypes, people often think of the perceptions men and women have of each other and what is appropriate for each based on gender. As we can see from the experiences of some of the participants, females can be just as shocked by another female’s sport knowledge as a male fan. Female fans that are seen as being too knowledgeable or too enthusiastic about their team, may be viewed as masculine or have their sexuality questioned (Cameron & LaLonde, 2001; Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000). None of the participants shared any stories where their sexuality was questioned based on their level of knowledge of MLB. As a sports fan myself, I had previously never taken into consideration how other female fans might view me as a fan. Therefore, while talking to the participants, it was interesting to me to hear how they felt other female fans perceived them as a fan.

The next sub-theme to be discussed is women who are seen as “*out of place*” at an MLB game. Here the female participants talk about women they have seen at games that did not fit. This sub-theme answers the second research question, asking how the participants view other female fans. These women may not have been focused on the game at all or may not have been dressed the part according to the participants. In the same way that the participants being perceived as too knowledgeable based on their gender (Cameron & LaLonde, 2001), the women discussed in this section are assumed not to be knowledgeable or that they do not belong based on cues surrounding their actions or attire at the game.

One of Jaime's biggest pet peeves is a woman who attends games, but is not interested in the game. She said,

Listen to how sexist I am going to be. When I go to games you know, I don't know why some women are there. They are not interested in the game. They talk a lot. They drink a lot. They talk to the point where I want to tell them to shut up. They have the most obnoxious voices I've ever heard.

Vivian shared Jaime's sentiment in being annoyed by the women who attend games and do not care. Vivian talked about guys who bring their girlfriend to the game on a date and you can tell that the girlfriend wants no part in being there, but is there to be with her guy. She said, "It drives me bonkers to sit there and listen to him try and explain the game to her."

Violet did not necessarily see this behavior as gender specific, but she noted seeing men and women at games who are constantly on the phone or on their handheld not paying attention to the game. She felt these people may have been given tickets to the game and figured they would go, but were not there for the game itself. Along the same lines, Dawn recalls, "One time I saw a woman reading a book at a game, which I thought was kind of funny."

Marie's thoughts go beyond people who are not interested in the game; to women she sees at the game and is confused by their attire. She shared a story of being at Braves spring training games and seeing women in attire that she did not deem appropriate for a game. Marie said, "At the Wide World of Sports, people from all over the world go to that stadium, and they are really dressed up. Really nice dressed and you are like, 'why are you at a baseball game?' It's ninety-eight degrees and you are all dressed up!" Vivian and Lisa also had negative perceptions of the women they see at games who are all dressed up in dresses and heels. Although, Vivian

did admit that she was surprised one time when she did make a snap judgment about a female fan at a game based on her attire and it turned out that the woman was very knowledgeable.

Monica found mothers with babies as being out of place at a baseball game. She said, “I’m surprised by moms that bring their babies. I’m thinking that’s passed your bedtime and they are fussing and don’t want to be there. I’m thinking, why did you bring them?” This was an interesting observation coming from someone who has children.

Within this sub-theme, it is interesting to note how critical the participants were of other female fans in attendance. They seem to be placing the same stereotypes as to what they see as a “true fan” onto other women at the game that they felt have been placed on them by male fans. By dressing a specific way, the other females in attendance had their fandom questioned by some of the participants, much like they have their fandom questioned based on their gender. Thinking back on my time in the stands as a fan as I talk to the participants, I remember attending games and having similar thoughts about other females in attendance. Only now realizing that I was critiquing these female fans in the same superficial way I felt male fans were critiquing me. My personal experiences in this instance, were mirroring those of the participants, however I did not take the opportunity to share this with the participants.

The final sub-theme is that of the women having an opportunity to be around “*people like me.*” For these women, it was exciting to find women who were baseball fans to the same degree that the participants were baseball fans. Wann, Waddill and Dunham (2004) studied stated that males were more likely to identify as sports fans. Other research shows that females are just as likely to be sports fans as men, though men are found to be more involved with their fandom (James & Ridinger, 2002). The participants are challenging the standard hegemonic order of MLB, much like the female soccer fans in Europe and those in South Africa during the FIFA

World Cup in 2010 (Clark, 2011). It is assumed that men are the majority of the consumers for sport, but as numbers now show, the numbers of female sports fans is on the rise.

When talking about seeing female fans at games, Jamie mentioned that, “Its nice to see people like me.” She appreciates the women older than herself who are huge fans and paved the way for her to be a die-hard fan. Jamie was appreciative of the older female fans who she viewed as responsible for providing her an opportunity to be a MLB fan. She explains this by saying,

I see it as generational. I see people that are older than me that are so into it. And I give them a lot of credit because they were not accepted initially. I understand because I was not accepted initially for being such a lunatic. These women are older than me and just as into it. I give them so much credit for being like that doing it because they had to be like the icebreakers.

For Jamie, these women may have been radical feminists in that they were, as she noted, “paving the way” for other female fans. On the other hand, Jamie and the other participants may be exhibiting liberal feminism in that they just wanting to be viewed as a fan like the male fans in attendance. Vivian also mentioned that going to fantasy camp was amazing because she could be surrounded by a group of like-minded women. She said that at times she wondered if there were other women that are as big a fan as her. Pam, who is in her early twenties, shared this sentiment as well. When talking about how other female fans may see her as a know it all she said,

I’ve gone to games with friends who have no idea about baseball and I’ll rattle off all this stuff and they will just be like I don’t know what you said and I don’t care.

To them I come I have a big head and think that I know everything. But to

someone who knows the game its like yes, there is another one out there who knows what I'm talking about.

These women are not trying to take the power from the men in the fan environment, they are merely looking to be seen as a true fan in that space. Within this theme, the women are focusing on other women in the environment and at times, exhibit moments where they feel they are superior to other women who may not be as knowledgeable. This creates a power divide among the only the women in this setting, with men being discussed in terms of who can carry on a conversation with the men. The women, who are more knowledgeable, see the other women as invaders or as a nuisance at times. The women could be challenging their subordinate state by critiquing others as they feel they are critiqued and providing them a space where they can feel as though they have power.

In this theme, the women are pushing against the hegemonic gender norms of the baseball fan subculture. Similar to the women in Appleby and Fisher's (2005) study on female rock climbers looking to become accepted into the male dominated rock climbing subculture. Males generally introduced the women in the study to the sport of rock climbing. After the initial introduction by males, they valued females with the same interest in rock climbing (Appleby & Fisher, 2005). The participants in my study were introduced to the game by males, but were excited to find a female fan that was similar in their level of fandom. When another female fan showed excitement for or an understanding of the game, the participants were excited that they could share this fan experience with another female fan. Bonding with another female fan in this subculture, challenged the hegemonic norms established in which the males were seen as the true fans.

Theme 3: Fan atmosphere. The third theme produced was that of fan atmosphere.

Within this theme, the women discussed what it was like to be in a space as a fan, people's attire in this setting, and the emotions that come along with being a fan in this space. Conversations around this theme started when the participants were asked what it was like to be in a space as a fan. Though the women were experiencing games at different stadiums, at different times, they shared similar ideas as to what it is like to be in a fan setting. The three sub-themes for fan atmosphere are: (a) community, (b) gendered behavior, and (c) emotional attachment.

The first sub-theme is the idea of *community*. Many of the women had referenced the idea of feeling a sense of community while at the ballpark. Research shows that identifying with a team provides the individual with a larger connection to society (Wakefield & Wann, 2006). Bernthal and Graham (2003) found that fans of minor league and collegiate baseball said they were motivated to attend games based on the community atmosphere of a ballpark. The participants felt as though when they are at the ballpark they are part of a group, at times one that exceeds fifty thousand people who are all there with a common goal, to cheer their team to a win. This shared goal and shared love for a team can strengthen community bonds (Wakefield & Wann, 2006). Violet said, "You just feel like you are all there for the same reason, you are all part of a community. You are all there to hopefully support and encourage the Yankees on to a win." She later goes on to say that there is an excitement that comes along with, "fifty plus thousand fans that are all there with the same purpose." Violet continues this sentiment saying,

What is kind of cool is when something great happens in a game, and I am pretty vocal so I will stand up and cheer when something big happens, its nice when there are other really excited male fans around and you high five them. They have no problem high fiving men and women equally.

Michelle and Pam both also specifically mentioned the idea of community when in a fan atmosphere. They shared similar ideas to Violet in that there was a shared goal among the fans that enhanced the sense of community. Pam said, “There is a feeling of community, kind of because you are all there for the same reasons, same goals.” Michelle shared this idea and found it as positive, especially when she and her husband bring their children to the ballpark. Feeling as though you are part of a community, with everyone cheering for the same team and participating in group cheers, added to her positive experience at the ballpark.

Vivian felt as though there was a sense of camaraderie among the fans at the ballpark. She explains this by saying, “There’s this camaraderie there, win or lose, you are just kind of in it together. There’s a great team feeling being part of the fan base when you are at a stadium.” She went on to say it was hard to describe what hits really felt like, but that the best way she could think to explain it was, “that you were all a team when at the ballpark.” One interesting thing that Vivian mentioned was that this sense of community travels. She said, “That is the neat thing of the camaraderie, there is just this little community of Yankee fans out there that seem to show up when you need them.”

Next, is the sub-theme titled “*gendered behavior*.” Across interviews, the participants commented on people’s behavior at games and how this behavior differed based on gender. One of the most noted behaviors among the participants was that there were more intoxicated males at games than females. The other discussion around gendered behavior had to do with male fans being the louder of the fans at the stadium. Research on dysfunctional fans in attendance at sporting events, showed that these fans were more likely to be the young males in attendance (Donahue & Wann, 2009).

In terms of gender differences based on alcohol consumption, Jamie said that there were more intoxicated males than females at the ballpark. Violet specifically referenced the behavior among fans at an Opening Day game. This is typically an electric environment because the fans are excited for the season to start and all the possibilities that brings. Violet describes this saying, “If you go to Opening Day, it’s predominantly male and it’s more about the drinking and the carrying on. Being really boisterous and the male bonding aspect of it.” She feels as though people would tend to tolerate drunken boisterous males more than females. To further explain what she sees happening on Opening Day she says,

You almost expect on Opening Day that you are going to see a bunch of over the top drunken, boisterous guys running around. I think that people would tend to tolerate that more than a bunch of drunken boisterous women running around.

Katie believes that, “Males are always the drunk ones taking their shirts off and screaming at the players on the field and girls are the ones just sitting there and not really entertained.”

Over the years, I have attended games with my family where intoxicated fans have been an issue. As the participants shared their stories, I would remember instances where I saw intoxicated male fans and the affect that had on the game day experience. I was reminded of one particular Sunday at the ballpark when numerous fights broke out among fans in the bleacher section where we were sitting. This did not impact my experience on that particular day, but it ruined the game for my mom who said she would never sit in that section again. I took note of this experience coming to my mind while conducting the interview as a reminder to myself of what I was thinking at the time.

Beyond the alcohol consumption that may influence behavior, other participants discussed the gender differences based on fan behavior in general. Michelle sees the males as the

“louder piece” of the crowd at MLB games. She says the females are present, but males are louder and more visual at games. Dawn said, “Guys are usually louder and more obnoxious. Pretty much everything that’s wrong with sports.” She said she sees females as present at games, but men are the more obnoxious of the fans in attendance. Lynn sees both men and women as being present at games, but women are normally sitting calmly while men are more vocal. Pam believes that if a woman were as vocal as a man at a game then people would be caught by surprise. She talks about women who have surprised her at games saying, “I guess in games that I’ve seen there are the few crazy women that are crazy, and you are like wow, I’ve never even seen a man act like that.”

The participants may have seen the intoxicated male fans as obnoxious, but they did nothing to combat the behavior of male fans in this setting. In many stadiums, there are actions that a fan can take if there are fans behaving negatively or hindering their experience. There are hotlines where fans can text stadium security their section number, and security will come deal with an unruly fan. In addition, some stadiums now have alcohol free sections at games for those fans who wish to try and be away from that kind of behavior. The participants did not mention ever taking such actions; therefore they were not challenging the behavior norms of the male fans. Male hegemony within the fan setting remained intact due to lack of action by the female fans. Similar to the females discussed in Ben-Porat’s study (2009), the participants were not looking to challenge the norms of behavior established by male fans, rather they wanted a place in the fan setting. I argue the women are consenting to their subordinate status due to their lack of action against the male hegemonic norms in this subculture. Vivian spoke about wanting to write a letter to the organization asking why there were no female specific fan activities, but never did take such action. There were no instances in the interviews where the participants

verbally spoke about consenting to this subordinate position or acknowledging that they were satisfied with the current system.

The final sub-theme is that of “*emotional attachment.*” In this theme the women described what it was like to be a fan and in a fan environment. The participants used language emphasizing emotions towards their favorite team, favorite players, or the stadium environment itself. Though the women live in different areas and do not necessarily cheer for the same team, they have similar reactions towards watching MLB games and the fan atmosphere. Research on emotional attachment states that forming an attachment to a team or player occurs over time and leads to a positive experience for the fan (Koo & Hardin, 2008; Laverie & Arnett, 2000). The teams and players are commodities for the fans to attach to emotionally (Rojek, 2006).

Participants spoke about a love for being in a stadium watching their favorite team play. Michelle described the environment of a stadium saying,

That environment is very loud, very fun, almost in a festive way. When you are seeing a good game you are feeling very energized, you are inspired. I love the group cheers and watching fan cams in between innings.

Violet consistently referred to her love of the team and her love to see baseball played by those who do it best. When talking about her love for the atmosphere she said, “I love the game because I play it. I love seeing good quality baseball. It is fun, exciting to be in such a huge venue with so many other people who are all there to cheer on the team.” Monica elaborated on this idea saying, “I have been to games where the atmosphere is just absolutely electric, where the fans are out of control, when the team is good.”

In Dawn’s interview, she proclaimed that, “It is definitely more fun to be at a game than at a bar or at home watching it.” Vivian whole-heartedly agrees with Dawn’s statement saying,

“I like going to the ballpark because to me there is nothing better than being at the ballpark. Even if the team is losing there is nothing better than being at the ballpark.” She explains that there is a buzz in the stadium; a sense of excitement and that is what she loves. Pam and Lynn both describe experiencing a rush when they are in a stadium watching game. Lynn said, “It’s very euphoric, it’s exciting. Certain places, certain stadiums just have an aura about them knowing that certain players at one time actually played there. “ Later, Lynn mentioned, “It can be overwhelming sometimes, in a good way, to walk into your favorite stadium.”

When talking about their favorite players or team, the women often expressed amazement at their skill or a love for that player or team. Many of the women viewed their favorite team as being part of their lives on a daily basis. Researchers discuss this identification with a team as having a psychological connection to a team (Donahue & Wann, 2009). This was true for many of the participants in this study.

Jamie from the start was not shy in hiding her love and admiration for Mariano Rivera and his abilities as an MLB closer. In 1996, Jamie was lucky enough to be at the stadium when the Yankees clinched the World Series and she describes that as a “truly amazing experience.” Prior to Mariano Rivera joining the team, she loved the play of Don Mattingly. Jamie explained that it was a treat to watch him play because as she said, “He was such an amazing ball player.” One of her favorite things, especially when rosters expand in September, is to see young players come up and develop. Violet referred to players as “larger than life,” especially when she was a child. She said she has watched the Yankees in good seasons and in bad because she loves the team. To this day she explains that she still loves the team and the players, but is sad that some of her favorite players, such as Paul O’Neill, have moved on to retirement. Lynn has been fortunate enough to get to know some of her favorite players off the field. These relationships developed

after she watched them play and considered them her favorite player. When asked what it was like getting to see and spend time with these men she has idolized she said, “Your heart still beats really fast.”

Beyond, loving just the players and a team in general, Katie explains that she loves to see the game played at his highest level. Katie says, “I like going because I kind of know what’s going on. You get to see the athletes doing what they do best. It’s fun to sit and watch the game that you love played at its highest level.” Violet also agrees with this because like Katie she grew up playing the game and continues to play to this day. Pam and Marie both enjoyed seeing the game played well, but given their choice they prefer to sit as close to their favorite player on the field as they possibly can.

Discussions around favorite teams and players, which generally began at the start of the interview and continued throughout, were some of the first instances where I was able to really connect with the participants. If a participant mentioned a favorite player or team and we had that in common, I would tell them that immediately. This gave the participant and I an opportunity to connect and find common ground. I found that this was helpful in emphasizing that we were having a conversation about being a fan, and they were not in a structured interview setting. Having an emotional attachment to a team or a stadium is something I have had the opportunity to experience in my life, thanks in large part to my parents. Each of them women was able to express to me what it was like to be in a setting as a fan, this was only possible because they had the means to purchase a ticket and attend a live game. This is something that not everyone has the opportunity to do based on their socio-economic status in society and the ever-increasing ticket prices at ballparks.

All of these women showed an emotional attachment to the stadium environment, teams and players. Bowlby (1979) used attachment theory when studying the relationship between a mother and child. Attachment theory has been used among researchers in sport to distinguish the level of attachment to a team or player between fans (Hunt, Bristol & Bashow, 1999). Each of the participants spoke about a love for a team and at times a specific player. Some participants were more attached to a team than others, which coincides with the concept presented by Hunt, Bristol & Bashow (1999) which notes that fans can be distinguished based on their emotional attachment. Fans such as Jamie, Vivian and Lynn seemed to be more attached to their team than Monica and Katie might be.

Theme 4: Total experience. The final theme to emerge across interviews was the idea that being a fan is a total experience. This idea of a total experience encompasses memorable moments the participants experienced as a fan, being with family and friends, and how others can influence this experience. A majority of the participants' fan experiences were positive; the only negative experiences involved the behavior of fans surrounding the participants. Stories within this theme came from several different questions across interviews. For example, for some the stories started when asked what it was like to be a sports fan, for others it was when they were asked about a positive or negative experience as a fan. The five sub-themes to be discussed in this section are: (a) family and friends, (b) alcohol, (c) dysfunctional fans, (d) socializing with others, and (e) memorable moments.

The first sub-theme under total experience is that of "*family and friends.*" For the participants, their fan experiences revolved around time with family and friends. Including family and friends in their fan experience, enhanced the game day experience for the all of the participants. Female fans being motivated to attend sporting events because they are able to

spend quality time with friends and family is consistent with fan motivation literature (Dietz-Uhler, et al., 2000; Wann, Schinner & Keenan, 2001). Not only were they able to watch the game they loved, but were able to share it with the people they loved.

Jamie and her husband have been attending games together for thirty years. They have been season ticket holders since 1981; and going to games is their source of entertainment. If her husband does not go to a game with her, which is rare, Jamie will bring along her cousin or co-workers who she enjoys talking baseball with at the office. When talking about going to a game with two male co-workers, Jamie says, “It was a great time. I was just a part of the group so it was just a great experience. We ran around the stadium like little kids, granted they are half my age. It was great fun.”

For Michelle, baseball has become a family event in her life. Her husband initially sparked her love of baseball and she has now developed her own appreciation for the game. When talking about how sharing a love for baseball has influenced their relationship she says, “Some of my fondest memories now are going to games or listening to games on the radio or sharing that with the kids.” Michelle and her husband consider baseball as part of their family culture and something they now share and teach their three children. They encourage their children to get to know the game as a fan and to learn the rules of the game. When asked to elaborate how baseball fits into their family culture she says,

Just trying to instill the value in him (the oldest child). I think there is a lot of value to being a fan and being an informed person of whatever sport you are watching. So baseball is a big part of our life. That is an everyday thing for our kids whether it is watching a game, going to a game, wear the clothes, something.

Violet's earliest memories involve watching games with her father, grandfather and brother. Later in life, she was fortunate enough to marry someone who was as big a fan as she was and is now able to share the experience with her husband. They too are season tickets holders and attend games together on a regular basis, at times bringing her stepdaughter to games to help encourage her fandom. One of Violet's fondest memories as a fan was being able to attend a game with her father later in his life. It was the final game of the 1998 season and the team was honoring the legendary center fielder, Joe Dimaggio, and Violet was able to bring her father to the game. It was one of the last times her father was still physically able to leave the house and enjoy a game before he passed away. As she was remembering this day, Violet said, "That particular day, I will remember it always because Joe Dimaggio came out and they celebrated him and my father was with us and it was just amazing." For her to be able to share this day with the man who introduced her to the sport was an experience in itself.

Monica and Marie both enjoy baseball and going to games because it is something they can do with family. Monica sees it as something she and her husband can enjoy and talk about together. In addition, she said that going to games is always a positive experience because, "you are having fun and you are with friends or family, doing something you enjoy." Marie also saw it as a way to spend time with family, but for her it was the only way she felt she could have a connection with her father. She said, "That is the only time my dad would communicate because I'm a girl. So he was like you are going to watch baseball." Marie sees going to Braves games as a family outing with parents in attendance with their kids trying to instill the love of the game in their children. Every experience Marie has had around baseball, whether it be positive or negative, revolves around her family. The negative experiences are connected to her father and brother doubting facts and statistics she shares based on her gender. On the other hand, she

always sees it as a positive experience because as she said, “It’s with my family, it’s easier to have a good time when there is something in common that you can watch.”

Lastly, Katie and Pam share the idea that it is a positive experience to share a game with family and friends. Katie remembered watching the Reds play in the 1990 World Series and seeing that as something that, “kind of got our whole family excited,” about baseball. It became something her whole family could enjoy together. As she grew older, Katie began to go to games with her friends, as well as her family. She described going to games with her friends as, “It’s just kind of fun, being there with your friends watching the players do what they were born to do.” Pam too, often attends games with college friends, though her fondest memories are being able to attend games with her grandmother, the person responsible for her love for the game. The games she attended with her grandmother were memorable to her, not because of the outcome of the game, but for the experience of sharing the game with grandma. Now, she often attends games with friends from school. She remembers going to a Braves game with a group of male friends who were not thrilled that she was attending at first. Pam explained that day saying,

The first game that I went to with college friends was with a bunch of guys, and when I said yea I will go they said OK Pam is going. But after the game, after all of the conversation that had gone on, after all the situation in the game, a guy said, ‘You know more about baseball than I know.’

For her, it was about spending a day and experiencing a game with people she is close to.

The second sub-theme is “*alcohol*.” In this sub-theme, the women were discussing the alcohol consumption by others when in a fan setting and how it affects their experience. The sale of alcohol at professional stadiums is a huge area of profit for the team and is easily available to fans. In most cases, alcohol is sold to fans at concession stands and in their seats. This high level

of alcohol sales at stadiums leads to a numerous amount of alcohol-related problems at the stadium (Lenk, Toomey & Erickson, 2009). The intoxicated fans in attendance generally caused a negative experience for the participants. The rest of the women shared stories about how intoxicated fans took away from their experience on any given day.

Jamie said the negative experiences she has had at games have been due to obnoxious fans that were also intoxicated at the time. In her opinion, one specific National League fan base is worse than all the others she has dealt with at games. She said, “ They get drunk, are arrogant, and are just over the top in their fandom.” Most of the time she believes you are able to remove yourself from a situation where your experience is being affected by intoxicated fans. In her own experiences, she has gone to guest services and asked to have her seat relocated due to intoxicated fans next to her and the organization had been very accommodating.

Dawn also elaborated on her experience dealing with intoxicated fans while watching MLB games. She said, “These drunk guys are just obnoxious and spilling beer all over the place. People spilling beer on you is never fun.” She and Vivian both commented about having beer spilled on them by intoxicated male fans and it not even being acknowledged by the male fan. For them, a simple apology would have gone a long way, but they never received one. Vivian shared the following story,

I actually had a guy behind me drop his beer, and it was full, and it splattered on me. Ok you are at a game and expect that is going to happen, but what really ticked me off was that he apologized to all of his friends and I turned and glared at him and he didn't even acknowledge me. I was like, OK I'm not going to get into it with you.

Though not every participant shared a specific story where they had to deal with intoxicated fans, they did reference how these fans can ruin their experience at a game. Some of the women, Michelle, Monica and Pam specifically, were of the belief that for some male fans it was about going the games, “to drink, hang out with their buddies, and watch the game because they played the game.” For Michelle, it is when the fans become intoxicated and are yelling obscenities that it begins to affect her experience. This yelling of obscenities in conjunction with alcohol consumption, can lead to physical altercations in the stands. Nearly eighty percent of law enforcement agencies, which deal with stadiums, reported receiving complaints about fights among intoxicated fans (Lenk, et al., 2009).

Interestingly, none of the women spoke about the behavior of intoxicated female fans. They each noted that the fans that were intoxicated and thus creating a negative experience were the males. The only reference they made to female fans in terms of drinking and being intoxicated, is that they thought people would be surprised to see a woman behave that way at a game and would tolerate it less.

The third sub-theme is “*dysfunctional fans*” in terms of fans behavior while attending MLB games. When discussing the behavior of others also attending MLB games, the participants said that everyone should be respectful of the game and those around them. The behavior of other fans did not pose a problem to the participants unless it affected theirs or someone else’s game day experience.

When asked about other fans attending a MLB game and their behavior, many of the women said they should be able to act how they choose, but with limitations. Pam said,

I think fans should act however they want to. Of course, there are lines as with anything. If a fan wants to yell, let them yell whatever they want to yell. As long as they are not hurting anybody I think its fine.

Her thoughts come from personal experiences where she nearly ended up in an altercation with a male fan sitting behind her, because she was offended by what he was yelling at the Braves game. Jamie also, believed that fans should act how they see fit, as long as it does not interfere with another fans experience at the game. Lynn finds it disrespectful when fans of other teams yell at and attack her based on her choice of team. She recalled a story where she thought another fan was disrespectful to her saying,

In Fenway Park, I was actually screamed at by some other woman, surprisingly enough, for rooting for Derek Jeter. I voiced my opinion, they voiced their opinions but no fists were thrown. It was a little disrespectful, I felt. I probably should not have even reacted, but you know, I couldn't keep my mouth shut.

Vivian shared similar stories of minor altercations with fans that were showing little respect to those around them. In one instance, she saw another fan get spit on at a game. The fan who was spit on was the person being disrespectful. At a game in Oakland, a male fan began taunting Vivian for wearing a Yankee shirt. When talking about the situation she said,

I was actually at a game where I was called out for being a Yankees fan. I was at the Oakland Coliseum. You know, you need to have respect for the game, because if you are sitting there being disrespectful to the fan sitting next to you, that happens to be a fan of the opposing team, then you are disrespecting the game.

This type of dysfunctional behavior by fans usually occurs among fans that highly identify with a specific team. This is not to say that all highly identified fans behave in a dysfunctional way, but it is more common among these fans. These fans are more likely to act aggressively act games, letting their anger and frustration be known to coaches, officials and other fans (Wakefield & Wann, 2006).

Monica also thought that fans should be respectful, even to those rooting for the opposing team. She said, “I don’t think they should be rude and disrespectful, especially to other people from opposite teams. I think that is what gets under my skin more than anything.” Hating the opposing team is part of the game according to the participants, but there is a line. Vivian said, “It pisses me off when Yankee fans are yelling Boston sucks. Grow up! We are adults!” Katie and Dawn shared the idea, that hating the opponent is part of the game, part of being a fan, but there is a line. One can hate the opponent, but you have to be respectful of the team and the game at the same time.

Michelle thinks it is important to, “carry yourself with respect and honor” as a fan. She said it baffles her when she sees fans at a game that do not behave with any sense of respect for themselves or the game. As a mom, she sees it as important to teach her children to respect the game as well. Vivian also believed that it is important for parents, who are trying to instill a love of the game in their children, to teach them to respect the game and those around them. She said, “You should really be respectful of the people around you and not behave in a way that is going to undermine their experience or ruin their ability to enjoy the game.” Jamie believes there should be a “mutual respect” between fans at a game. Respect that everyone is there for their own experience and do not interfere with the experience another person is trying to have at that game.

The fourth sub-theme is “*socializing at an MLB game.*” This theme focuses on the social aspect each participant has experienced as a fan at a MLB game. For the participants, going to a game is about more than the game itself. There is a social aspect to games for the women. Not necessarily just with the people they attended the game with, but fellow fans and those working at the venue. As was previously mentioned, attending a game due to social motives is consistent with previous research on fan motivations (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; Wann, Schinner & Keenan, 2001).

Jamie repeatedly said, “It’s more than the game itself. It is so much more than the game. The game is the main feature but it is the whole total experience.” For Jamie, this total experience starts from the moment she leaves the house prior to a game. She details out this game day ritual for me saying,

The game is the main feature, but for me it’s a whole total experience. Going to the same places on game day to get our sandwiches, our cappuccinos. I knew Annette for 20 something years, the popcorn lady that passed away. I would always go to her to buy my popcorn, which is the only thing I buy at the stadium. They moved her when they came to the new stadium and she was on the opposite side from where I sat, but I went and found her and that’s where I got my popcorn. I would go into the bathroom and talk to the assistants in there and they did not speak English, but lucky for me I speak Spanish, so I talk to them. I talk to vendors all over the place. I know this guy “Cousin Brewski” who has sold beer at the stadium for 30 years. His name is Rob so I talk to him all the time. I say hello to people who sell programs. Unfortunately some of them have passed. Just part

of the experience, but there is always somebody there. I say hello to a lot of people, so for me it's a total experience.

As Jamie shares her game day routine, I smirk because it reminds me of exactly what my family and I do before every game, a thought I did share with Jamie. We would go to the deli and get sandwiches for the game, parked in the same garage, and always arrived two hours early to watch batting practice. Living within an hour of my favorite team's ballpark provided me with the opportunity to attend games easily, much like many of my participants. Only two of the women do not live in the vicinity of their favorite team's home ballpark. Lynn lives by her favorite teams spring training facility and Vivian lived across the country from her favorite team, but has moved, and is now able to watch her favorite team play live all season.

One of Katie and Vivian's favorite aspects of being a fan is being able to talk to anyone who is also a fan. Katie believes that being a fan is like being part of a club where you can talk to anyone else who is a fan of that team. If people are wearing a shirt of your team, Vivian will often start up a conversation with them about the team or that day's game. When she goes to a game, Vivian goes alone, owning a single season ticket. Being that she attends games alone, she loves talking to the fans sitting around her, if they are willing. In her experience, younger couples were not as willing to talk to her as older couples might be. Vivian explains her situation saying,

I have one seat by myself, and its funny because if it's a young couple, oh no they are not going to speak to me for nothing. One time, the guys that were sitting next to me, I was talking to them and we are talking about the game and within five minutes of talk to them they were like oh yea my wife, my wife. I'm sitting here thinking do I really come across that I am trying to pick you up? I hope not.

Though this was a negative experience with another fan in that they questioned her intentions, she has had positive experiences with fans in the same setting. While attending her first game at a new stadium, she ran into two male fans that helped her find her way to the stadium, her seat, and home. This is one of her fondest memories of being a fan and how fans can come together to support each other.

Katie and Vivian appreciate the opportunity to talk with others who follow or show interest in the same sport or team. While talking to Katie, she referred to belonging to a club, where everyone shares a common interest and can have conversations on shared interests. This idea is similar to that of a subculture or a taste culture in society (Thornton, 1995). In the work by Donnelly and Young (1988), they discussed the specifications of subcultures and that those who are within the subculture must be able to speak that part. This is similar to Katie's idea; where those who are part of the "Reds Club" can all speak about the Reds and the team's season. In order for someone to be accepted within a subculture there are requirements that must be met. As discussed in chapter two, Donnelly and Young (1988) note that those looking to gain acceptance within a subculture must look the part in addition to knowing the jargon of that particular subculture. Those looking to be viewed as part of the subculture must be accepted by the already established members of the subculture. Looking at the subculture of MLB fans, male fans are the established members of the subculture, and thus the people that would have to accept another fan into the subculture. This is a case of hegemony in that the female fans are the subordinate group, with the power lying with the male fans established in the subculture. By complying with the hegemonic norms established in the MLB fan subculture, the women are able to gain acceptance by the males in power. The female fans worked to gain acceptance into the subculture, but do not challenge the power the males hold within the subculture.

The final sub-theme is “*memorable moments*”. The women spoke about the time spent at MLB games as some of their most memorable moments in life based on the events of the day or the people with them at the game. Some of the women have been lucky enough to be present when something historical as happened at a game, while others have explained that at times, they have felt as though they were part of the history. For three of the women, one of their most memorable experiences came at their team’s fantasy camp, where they were able to be a player for a few days.

Over the years Jamie, Lynn, Violet and Vivian had the chance to be present at games where historical events have taken place. Jamie was at game six of the 1996 World Series, where her team clinched the World Series win. As she talks about this experience, you can hear the excitement in her voice. She explains this experience saying,

When they won that game against all odds after losing the first two games by these ridiculous scores. They got their asses kicked! Then they went down to Atlanta and turned it around there, oh my god! Paulie was great! Then they came back and they won that game. I don’t know when I left the stadium; I didn’t sleep all night because I couldn’t miss the opening of the first local deli to buy all the papers. So that was truly amazing!

She was also lucky enough to witness two perfect games in person and see Derek Jeter break Lou Gehrig’s Yankee hits record in person.

Violet remembers every moment of Joe Dimaggio Day in 1998 because they were honoring one of the all-time greats to play the sport. It ended up that his health was in decline and that day was his very last appearance in Yankee Stadium, he died the following spring before Opening Day. For her, this day was memorable not just because the team was honoring a

legend, but because it was one of the final games she was able to attend with her father. In terms of historic events, Violet was in attendance for Roger Clemens's three hundredth win, as well as numerous playoff and World Series games. In her words, Violet explains these experiences as, "It's a bit of being part of history. It's a bit keeping that tradition that you had for a long time going and not losing it."

Katie and Dawn's memorable moments include being in attendance at games with friends, but also opportunities to obtain the ultimate game day souvenir, a foul ball. Much like Monica, Marie and Pam mentioned, attending games with friends and family is what makes games memorable for these win. A win is a bonus to being able to spend a day with the people you care about. As Katie so clearly stated, "It's negative if they lose, it's positive if they win." For Pam, any game she attended with her grandmother was a memorable one. Katie and Dawn are a bit different in that they each had an opportunity to attempt to catch a ball while at a game. For Dawn, this was a positive moment because she caught a ball off the bat of Ricky Ledee during the 1999 World Series. On the other hand, Katie shared a story of a negative experience saying, "I had a Ken Griffey Jr. pop fly about ten inches from my glove and a guy reached in front of me and catch it. That is me being negative because I did not get the ball." Though this experience was a negative one, it was still memorable to Katie because she was at that game with her family, watching her favorite team.

Vivian was present at Yankee Stadium in July of 2011, when Derek Jeter collected his 3,000th career hit. This is a tremendous milestone for any ballplayer to reach and to do so at home is an added bonus. Vivian had tickets for Thursday and Saturday's games that week and was upset when he did not reach the milestone on Thursday. She explains her thought process over the next few days saying,

I had Thursday's game and he didn't do it and I woke up Friday and I was so bummed because I knew he was going to do it that day. I was really bumming because I was at some awesome games, including the last game at the old stadium. I have had some awesome experiences as a fan. Then Friday's game was rained out. I was on top of the world on Saturday because I knew he was going to do it.

She was able to be in the stands to see the 3,000th hit after the rain out and could not have been more excited. Since she generally goes to games alone, the most memorable moments for her are the ones that happen on the field, whether it be an amazing play or a milestone being reached by a player.

Vivian was not the only person to experience Jeter's 3,000th hit in person Lynn was also present. Though she lives in Tampa she was able to travel north for the game. When asked about her positive experiences Lynn said, "I have lots of positive experiences! I've had a baseball thrown to me; I've been on the field. I saw Derek Jeter hit his 3,000th. I have lots of positives. I could go on all day about the positives." Lynn has also had the chance to attend World Series games with friends and games of different teams around the league. One experience she shared was going to Cubs versus Yankees game with a friend. Each wore the gear of the team they supported and they had a healthy give and take throughout the game about each other's team.

As each woman shared their most memorable moments that they experienced at games, I realized that there were instances where I was at the same game as some of the participants or that I was envious of the experience they had at a particular game. These are emotions and thoughts that I openly shared with the participants. I found that they responded positively and were more willing to share their experience in greater detail. As the women had mentioned, they

found it exciting when they found a female fan as into the game as they were, so by me expressing that I was also at a game or jealous of a game they were at, they would go talk more about that particular memory and share others.

Three of the participants, Violet, Vivian, and Lynn, were able to attend the inaugural Fantasy Camp for Women, hosted by the New York Yankees. Each of these women proclaimed this the most memorable moment they have ever had as a fan. For a few days they were able to live the life of a player, being issued a uniform, playing at the team's spring training facility and dressing each day in the Yankee clubhouse. Being a Yankee is something only males can do, as there has yet to be a female in MLB, so this was the one chance the women had to be a Yankee. This could be seen as radical feminism at first thought in that the women have created their own space in the men's world of MLB. However, upon further examination of the fantasy camp it would more accurately fall under the idea of liberal feminist theory and hegemony (Beasley, 1999; Rigauer, 2000). It would be considered liberal feminist because the camp is set-up, designed and run by men, and women are allowed to take part in a historically male activity for a few days. In the context of male hegemony, it is worth noting that the women did not have the power in this setting, even though it was a camp for women. The women spoke about being coached by males each day and that female executives from the organization gave keynote speeches at the group dinners. The camp was created so that women could have the experience of living their dream of being a Yankee for a few short days, however the camp was still male dominated from the organizers, to the coaches, to the clubhouse attendant.

Each woman proclaimed camp to be an amazing experience. That was the first word each woman used when talking about camp. The basics of camp were that you go to Tampa for four days and are put on a team with a former Yankee as your coach for the time you are there. Each

day you go to the clubhouse, dress in your uniform and are brought to the field for drills run by the players. After drills the women participated in actual hardball games. Many of the women had experience playing softball, not hardball, but many women had never played the sport.

Violet explained how the Yankees were the first to run a fantasy camp for women and explained that it was a source of pride for the organization. She went on to say,

The Yankees pioneered this. It was the first ever, in any sport for women. They were really proud of that. They had a couple women; Jennifer Steinbrenner and some other female executives within the Yankee organization, do some of the key note speeches at dinner. It was a real prideful thing for the Yankees.

Lynn also commented on the female executives being involved and was excited to see Jennifer Steinbrenner involved. She said, “You know, Ms. Steinbrenner, George’s daughter, was part of it. That was neat because she was actually part of it. She suited up, the bosses daughter! So that was fun.”

When it comes to the players running the camp, the women stated that they did not think that the retired players had any idea what to expect in running a women’s camp. All three women noted that by the end of camp all the retired players said they now preferred to work the women’s camp. The players felt that males who come to the camp are too competitive and the women were there to enjoy the entire experience. Being taught and able to interact with the players that these women idolized was a rare and phenomenal experience for each of the women.

Having the opportunity to attend a fantasy camp of this nature is not something every fan can experience. There is a substantial price to attend the camp. The camp cost \$2,000 and that price does not include airfare to Tampa, Florida. One’s socio-economic status, would seemingly play a part in a person’s ability to attend fantasy camp. Personally, I would love to attend fantasy

camp, however the price is more than I can currently afford. Hearing the women talk about camp, and the excitement that came through when they shared stories of this experience would make anybody want to attend.

There is a highlight video online that prospective campers can watch to see if they would be interested in attending the camp. After watching the short video, I realized that an overwhelming majority of the participants at the camp were White women. This relates directly to the participants in this study, in that the participant pool consisted of all White women. This was a factor due to snowball sampling where the participants recommended participants from within their peer group. Is baseball still viewed as a predominantly White sport? The number of African Americans in MLB has been cut in half over the last 50 years (Nightengale, 2012). Looking at the statistics of MLB players, only 8.5 percent are African American, while 84.5 percent of the fans are White. Statistics also show that roughly only ten percent of the MLB fan base is composed of African American fans (Scarborough Sports Marketing, 2010). Considering the statistics on the make-up of MLB players and fan base, it is surprising how low the numbers are for African Americans as both fans and players. It is interesting how close the numbers for African American players are to the numbers for African American fans. MLB is working to combat this idea by starting programs where they are teaching baseball to youth in the inner cities.

At no point in my interviews with the participants did race become the topic of conversation. The women did not note race influencing their fandom in anyway. Based on the demographics of MLB fans above, one can understand why the participants may not have acknowledged race. Being White women in a predominantly White fan base such as MLB, they are among the dominant racial group, and as such there is no sense of other.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the four main themes and the sub-themes that I produced from the interviews with the female MLB fans. The four main themes were: gendered ideology, female views, total experience and fan atmosphere. Each of these themes was discussed and related to pre-existing literature, as well as how they fit with the research questions for this dissertation. Not every research question was directly referenced under a specific theme, because some questions were answered across multiple themes (e.g., research questions 1 and 1a).

Liberal feminism came through across interviews and themes in this study. The women merely want to have a place in sport as a fan and are not looking to create their own fan setting. These women were looking for the acceptance in the present world and established order of MLB. Similar to the female soccer fans in Ben-Porat's (2009) study, the participants are seeing that they are now becoming accepted with the men's world of MLB, even if they have to prove their knowledge to the male fans at times.

Hegemony focuses on the domination of a subordinate group in society. In this particular case it is the domination of female fans by male fans that are setting the norms of the MLB stadium environment. Hegemony comes with it the belief that dominant social groups in society establish the norms, much like has been found in sport settings (Ben-Porat, 2009; Rigauer, 2000). The women have consented to this subordinate position in that they continue to put themselves into this setting without challenging any norms.

In relation to the research questions set forth at the beginning of this study, the following is how I see them answered according to the experiences of my participants. The first research question, focused on the shared experiences of the participants and how their experiences differed. In terms of shared experiences, for the women being fans and in a fan setting was a time

to spend with family and friends. Every woman stressed their love for attending a live game and being in a setting as a fan. For the women going to a game was a great way to enhance their fan experience. They loved the atmosphere and the feeling of community that comes with being at a ballpark.

To start, the women were discussing experiences watching games in different ballparks across the country. Each setting led to different experiences based on location, fan base, and if they were rooting for the home team or the opponent. There were differences in what made for a negative experience at a game. For women such as Jamie, sitting next to other females who were not engaged in the game annoyed her, while other women had negative experiences with males fans.

Research question two asked the participants to discuss their perceptions of other female fans in attendance. This was interesting to me in that the participants were critical of other female fans in attendance. I likened this to how the females felt male fans perceived them at a game. The participants were placing similar stereotypes onto other female fans in that they were judging them based off their attire or if they were on their cell phone and not paying close enough attention to the game at hand. Though they were critical of other female fans in attendance, when they did come upon someone who was as knowledgeable as they were, the participants were excited to talk to another female that loved the game or the team as much as they did.

Research question three focused on the participant's thoughts on the perceptions male fans had of the participants as MLB fans. The participants focused on two main ideas in terms of how the male fans perceived them as fans. The first was that the male fans had an initial assumption that the women were only at the games because they wanted to see the good-looking

ball players. The second was that the male fans did not think they were knowledgeable about baseball because they were female. The participants noted that they felt as though they had to prove their knowledge to the male fans.

Research question four asked the female fans to discuss the perceptions other female fans in attendance had of them as an MLB fan. Two main thoughts developed on this topic. The first was that other females did not take notice of the participants as fans. Second, the participants thought the other females might be jealous of them and their knowledge of the game. This knowledge may give them an “in” to talk to the male fans and thus cause other females to be envious. The women who felt others might be jealous were not just the single participants, but also participants who are married.

Lastly, research question five addressed the effect societal gender norms had on the participant’s fandom. Lynn spoke about not being allowed to play tee-ball as a child because that was for boys. The gender stereotypes in society influenced the women most in having their knowledge doubted by males based on their gender. This was something that annoyed the participants and caused them to respond in such a way that they could prove how much they knew. Though the participants felt sport was still gendered in nature they felt that these norms were shifting. They spoke about looking at the crowd on game day and seeing more little girls at the game than in the past.

Chapter V

Conclusions, Implications & Recommendations

This chapter presents conclusions, implications of the research, and recommendations for future research based on the analysis of the data in this dissertation. The purpose of this dissertation was to understand the experiences of females who self-identify as fans of Major League Baseball (MLB).

Implications

How can the findings of this study impact sports fans, sport organizations and the field of sport sociology? As a researcher who focuses on sport sociology, I made a conscious effort to note where the findings of this study could cross over into other fields of research. The findings and conclusions of this particular study cross both the fields of sport sociology and sport management. This was not a conflicting position for me, but rather one I was aware I would face through in this study. In the following section, the implications of this study are discussed in relation to these two professional fields.

First, I will focus on the implications for the field of sport sociology. Examining the experience of female sports fans is an area that researchers have seldom studied. Gender norms are discussed in terms of what sport an individual may choose to participate in as a player, but not necessarily in terms of being a spectator. The fact that gender norms were found to have an influence on the female fans' experiences, shows that gendered stereotypes are still present in society surrounding sport.

One interesting aspect that came to my attention was the fact that nine out of ten women were introduced to the game by a male fan. Pam was the only participant introduced to baseball by a female fan. These male fans were fathers, grandfathers or in some cases significant others,

however the case may be, the participants were introduced to the sport by males. Coakley (2009) notes that children are socialized into sport by those closest to them. Having significant others who enjoy a specific sport and having the opportunity to experience the sport personally both influence the process of socialization into sport a person might experience (Coakley, 2009). Surveys conducted examining sport spectatorship from 1960 through the early 2000s shows that the number of adults identifying as sports fans as increased from 30 percent to over 70 percent (Gantz, Wilson, Lee & Fingerhut, 2008). During this time, Title IX was passed introducing more women to the world of sport, which could account for the increase in the number of adults identifying as sports fans.

Looking at the participants and their families, who will be the person in their household to introduce baseball to their children? Michelle and Monica both have young children and spoke about how the game of baseball is a part of their family culture. If other participants one day have children and they are the only MLB fans in the household, will they teach the game to their children? By the participants taking on the role of teaching sport in their household, they could begin to resist the hegemonic gender norms in society. By a mother taking on the role of introducing sport to the child, they would not only be resisting hegemonic norms, but they would also be helping to socialize the child into sport. As was previously mentioned, children are more likely to be socialized into sport when a person they have a close connection with is involved in the sport in some way. We most commonly see this in relation to a father figure introducing sport to a child, but will we now see this trend shifting to more mother figures introducing children to sport? This is an area that research in the field of sport sociology can expand into over the coming years as we move through this post Title IX era.

As was mentioned in chapter two, research on sports fans has focused on male fans. Emotional attachment literature exhibits this by concluding that those male fans that are more emotionally attached to a team are those likely to be dysfunctional fans (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2002). Talking to the participants, they have an extreme attachment to their team, much like the male fans discussed in the literature (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2002; Hunt, Bristol & Bashow, 1999; Wakefield & Wann, 2006). The women formed an attached to a team and/or a specific player during their years as a fan, thus enhancing their fan experience. Paying to attend a live game, a privilege based off the social class of the participants, was a way for the women to feel closer to their favorite team or be in the vicinity of their favorite player.

These discussions help to fill gaps in the literature, which tend to only focus on male fans and their experiences and behaviors. In addition, the literature does not examine female fans of men's professional sports. Literature that does include female fans focuses on their motivations for attendance and is generally in a college sport setting (Clark, Apostolopoulou, & Gladden, 2009; Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; Wann, Schinner & Keenan, 2001). Lastly, the research done on sports fans has historically been quantitative. This qualitative study allows the reader to hear stories of the female fans experiences, as opposed to quantitatively measuring their experiences.

In the field of sport management, this study can help sport organizations to better understand their female fan base. Research shows that it is the female in the household that normally controls the disposable income for leisure activities (Clark, Apostolopoulou & Gladden, 2009). By understanding the part of the fan base that may be in control of expendable funds, the organization can increase their revenue. Other companies trying to bring in consumers have focused on ways to target their female markets. For example, in a seminar at the Professional Audio Retailers Association (PARA) Management Conference in 2005, focused on

how retailers can better target female consumers. This presentation stressed that retailers should acknowledge the female consumer and focus on addressing their needs (Smith, 2005). If consumer electronics companies are acknowledging the importance of a female consumer, then a sports organization should acknowledge their female fan base more. By acknowledging the female fan base, the organization would be opening themselves up to a new revenue base, so the organization can increase their ticket and merchandise sales. Understanding that a large portion of the fan base is female is the first step. Now MLB teams can understand the experiences of female fans and how they can improve that experience. For example, other teams should now realize how impressed the women who attend Yankees Fantasy Camp were with their total experience, and may want to start a women's camp of their own to cater to their female fan base like they do for their male fans. Creating a women's camp provides female fans their own space where they can live the fantasy of being a member of their favorite team for a few days. This experience increased the attachment each of the participants in my study had for their team and the players who served as coaches. Enhancing a fans attachment to an organization will help to encourage fans to come see the team live and be in the same setting as their favorite players. Perhaps, MLB teams should offer a program similar to Football 101 in the NFL where it is more of a classroom activity for women who are fans, but are not comfortable with going on the field and playing hardball. In addition, teams could focus on the female market and mothers in particular by having play areas for the children where moms can let the children play and they can enjoy the game. Many minor league parks and college ballparks have playgrounds for children that are in view of the field. This is something that major league teams, especially those in smaller markets who are trying to draw more fans could adopt for little cost. With a play area

for children, mothers with young children could come enjoy a game while their child is playing and not worry about the child getting bored.

Understanding what aspects of the fan experience have enhanced or hindered a fans experience can help an organization keep fans returning to the ballpark. For example, participants noted that alcohol consumption by other fans, at times led to a negative experience for the participant due to the behavior exhibited by the intoxicated fan. Some stadiums now have seating sections that are alcohol free, though many people do not know that such an option exists. Making these options more known to the fans, and possibly adding a second section if demand requires such an option.

The cost of attending a game is not something every member of society can afford. The participants in this study were fortunate, much like myself, that they have been able to attend games throughout their lives. Each participant believed that being in a stadium was the best way to watch a MLB game. Attending an MLB game is on average the least expensive ticket of the “Big Four” in the United States. The average ticket price in MLB is \$26.91 per person. When looking at the cost of taking a family of four to the ballpark for the day, the average cost in MLB is \$197.35. This price includes tickets, hotdogs, sodas, parking, two game programs, and two baseball caps (Team Marketing Report, 2011). With the cost of going to the game being about \$200 for a family of four, how often can a family attend a game when the household income is averaging \$67,019 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2008)? Teams do have discount ticket nights throughout the season, but why not guarantee a set number of discounted tickets be available each night like the NBA? These do not have to be front row seats, but rather an opportunity for a fan who is not as financially secure, to come to the stadium and see their favorite team and player live to form that emotional attachment. Looking at the cost of attending a game, will the

increasing ticket prices at the major league level encourage more people to attend minor league games where the ticket prices are generally lower?

Lastly, the women's line of clothing that is now available at stadiums and online from teams is an area where organizations are marketing towards their female fans. The participants noted that they enjoy the female line of clothes because they are cut to fit a woman's body, but they do not necessarily want to wear pink attire. They are looking for the same player replica jerseys the men's line carries, however they want them cut to fit their body type. Katie mentioned that in order to get the player replica jersey she wanted, she had to purchase it from the children's collection because of the fit and the fact that she did not want a pink jersey. Organizations need to take into account what female fans actually want to have available to them and not assume pink is the option based on gender.

Recommendations

Based on results of this study, there are recommendations for future research that I will share in this section. For this study, I was concerned with the overall experience of the female fan and the influence of gender norms. The women in this study discussed how they felt male fans of MLB perceived them. In a future study, I would interview male fans to ask them their perceptions of female fans of MLB to see how the responses compare. It would be interesting to see if how the females feel men perceive them is congruent with how the males view the female fans. For example, do the male fans feel they discredit the knowledge of the female fans?

Another recommendation would be to focus on a particular city in terms of the fan experience. When focusing on one stadium, in one city, I would be able to focus on different social aspects within on particular fan setting and not on an overall experience. This could show how the fan experience in a particular setting may vary by socio-economic status, gender, age or

race. This could then be compared to another specific city to see if the fan experience changes based on location or team affiliation. Is one city more intense about their fandom than another?

The final recommendation I would have for future research would be to examine the women's only fantasy camp hosted by the New York Yankees and the experience of women who attended that camp. I would be interested to delve deeper into the experiences and lives of those who attend such camps to find out their motives for attending the camps. Analyzing the make-up of the camps, how it is run, what it emphasizes, and the interaction of the women, are all areas that could be beneficial in understanding another layer of the fan experience. This may be best accomplished through an ethnographic experience where I, as the researcher, am able to take part in the camp and interact with the other participants.

Conclusions

Through a qualitative approach and a thematic analysis of ten self-identified, female, MLB fans' experiences were analyzed. Through analysis of the interview transcripts, the following research questions were answered:

1. What are the shared experiences of a female sports fan of Major League Baseball?
 - a. How do the experiences of female Major League Baseball fans differ?
2. How do female fans of Major League Baseball perceive other female Major League Baseball fans?
3. How do female fans of Major League Baseball believe male fans perceive them?
4. How do female fans of Major League Baseball believe other female fans perceive them?
5. What effect do societal gender norms have on female fans of MLB?

As discussed in chapter one, understanding the experience of female MLB fans, can help to better understand this particular fan base. Where many believe sport to be a male domain and thus much marketing is focused towards men, women are found to make up nearly 44 percent of the fan base (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000).

In order to understand better a small section of this demographic, and more specifically ten self-identified, female, MLB fans were interviewed. Participant transcripts were analyzed through a coding process. It was through this coding process that four major themes were produced. The four major themes were: a) gendered ideas surrounding sport, b) female views, c) fan atmosphere, and d) total experience. Gendered ideas surrounding sport were mentioned by the participants in that they believed there were still stereotypes present surrounding females and their sport involvement, even as a fan. Under the theme, female views, the women talked about how they perceived other female fans at games and how they felt these women perceived them at games. The theme of fan atmosphere discussed how the women feel about being in a setting as a fan. For many of the women, who participated in the study, they saw this as an opportunity to spend time with friends and family in a fun and energetic environment. The final theme was total experience. In this theme, the women talked about how being a fan is a total experience from socializing at games to memorable moments experienced being a fan.

Feminist and hegemony were used to analyze the experiences of the female fans participating in this study. It was evident through the stories shared by the women, that hegemonic ideas favoring men are dominant among MLB fans. Though the women are the subordinate group among MLB fans, they have consented to this domination and continue to participate in an environment where men are the dominant group, setting the norms, and standards (Ingham, 2004). Since the women did not challenge the norms established by male

fans, liberal feminist theory was applied. The women wanted to be seen by the males as fans and only wanted to be allowed to participate as a fan equally and not overhaul the fan setting previously established. One story that may be construed as radical feminist is that of the three women who were able to attend women's fantasy camp. This was a camp designed specifically for women where men were not allowed to participate. Upon further review, the camp was designed and run by men, meaning it was a setting where women were given a place to participate in a man's world (Beasley, 1999; Rigauer, 2000).

This study concluded that being a fan and taking part in the fan experience is an integral part of the lives of the participants. For the women, it was generally a positive experience to attend live games, despite receiving occasional, unwanted attention from inebriated male fans, because it was an opportunity to spend time with friends and family. The participants noted that they often felt as though they had to prove their fandom and their knowledge to their male counterparts, thus societal gender norms surrounding sport are still upheld. The women were never told that they could not be a fan; rather, there was often shock when their male counterparts were able to see how knowledgeable the women were about MLB and their favorite team. Through this study it was found that the participants are as knowledgeable and as dedicated to being an MLB fan as any male fan; however, they do not receive the same recognition.

Overall, the women in the study are dedicated fans of MLB and/or their favorite team. They have not allowed the norms of gender appropriateness surrounding sports to affect their fandom. When needed they were eager to prove their knowledge to the male fans, to show that a female can be an informed MLB fan. In relation to other female fans, it was found that the

participants would question the knowledge or motives of other female fans in attendance, much like the men had questioned their knowledge or motives.

Closing Thoughts

It was my goal, to understand the experiences of female fans of MLB and the influence of gender norms on their fandom. It is my hope that by analyzing the female fan experience, I brought to light what enhances and hinders their overall fan experiences. It is evident, through the experiences of the participants, that there are still stereotypes based on gender in the sports world. By sharing the experiences of the participants, I hope that these stereotypes can be acknowledged and people can work to eliminate them. Some of the women spoke about teaching their children about MLB and encouraging their fandom, it is through this younger generation that we can help to eliminate gender stereotypes.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Fan Motivations			
Cite	Method of Data Collection	Sample	Motives
Clark, Apostolopoulou & Gladden, 2009	Online Survery	1,090 respondents	Social experience, Time with family, Part of Thanksgiving, Love the game, Half-time show
Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End, & Jacquemotte, 2000)	Questionnaire	76 Undergraduates	Play sports, Enjoy cheering, Watch sport, Attend live events, Watch with friends and family, Enjoy learning about sport, Loyal to a team, Grew up with sport, Sport memorabilia, Sport heroes
Hall & O'Mahony, 2006	Telephone Interviews	460 participants	Back room/Front room factor, Emotional Arousal, Event factor, Social factor, True Fan
James & Ridinger, 2002	Questionnaire	1200 Basketball Fans	Action, Achievement, Drama, Empathy, Escape, Family, Knowledge,

			Social Interaction
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Wann & Waddill, 2003	Questionnaire	264 Undergraduates	Aesthetic, Economic, Entertainment, Escape, Eustress, Family, Group Affiliation, Self- Esteem
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Appendix B Interview Questions

Do you think of yourself as a fan of MLB?

When you think of a fan what does that look like?

How did you become a fan?

What does being a fan mean to you?

As a female, how do you feel you are perceived as a sports fan?

What role do you see gender playing in fan identity?

How do you describe your style? (dress, mannerisms, etc.)

Do you see your ----- playing a part in your fandom?

How do you see your femininity playing a part in your fandom?

Tell me about the role you feel you fit as a sports fan?

How do you feel you must present yourself while at a live sporting event?

Or watching it with peers?

Tell me what its like to be in a space as a fan.

What is it like as an MLB fan?

What does gender look like in this space? Male fans? Female?

How do you feel you are perceived by males in this space?

How do you feel your female counterparts view you as a fan?

Tell me how you see yourself as a fan.

Contrast what you think of as a fan, and tell me about someone at a game that surprised you.

How are fans supposed to act?

Tell me how you see yourself behaving around male sports fans?

Tell me about the ways gender affects being a fan.

Do you feel as though you can't let your fandom show through based on your gender?

How does gender limit your performance as a fan?

In what ways does gender define your fandom?

Can you share with me an experience as a negative experience you have had as a fan?

A positive experience?

Can you share an experience you have had with male fans whether it be positive or negative?

How do you feel your male counterparts view your level of interest in MLB?

Now that we are done, how do you feel?

Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix C
INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT
“Life in the stands: Understanding the experience of female fans of Major League Baseball”

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study that examines the experiences of female sports fans of Major League Baseball and the role gender norms play in their fandom.

PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

You will be participating in an interview. The interviews will be semi-structured in that there will be a list of questions to guide the interview, but ultimately you will direct where the interview goes.

The interview will last anywhere from 45 to 60 minutes, and will be digitally recorded to ensure accuracy in your responses and then transcribed by the researcher. The interview will be held at a time and place agreed upon by you and the researcher. If necessary, the interview will be conducted via telephone or skype.

Once the interviews have been transcribed, you will have an opportunity to review the transcript to ensure accuracy of the transcription.

RISKS

There are no known physical risks to participating in this research study. Through self-reflection during the interview you may begin discussing memories and previous events that had been emotionally hurtful to you in the past. If necessary, you will be provided with information on counseling.

BENEFITS TO THE PARTICIPANT

The benefit of participating in this research study is to help contribute to the body of knowledge regarding gender and fan identity among female Major League Baseball fans.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information from your interview will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely (in room 233 HPER) and will be made available only to the researcher conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports, which could link you to the study. You will be asked to select a pseudonym of your choice, which will be used to refer to you throughout the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact:

Principal Investigator Co-Principal Investigator:
Kelly Balfour
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1914 Andy Holt Ave.

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Knoxville, TN 37996
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If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Vita

Kelly Balfour grew up in Goshen, New York where she graduated from Goshen Central High School. She received her B.S. and M.S. degrees in Sport Studies and Sport Organization respectively, from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. After completing her M.S. degree at Miami University, she became an adjunct professor at the university. This experience was what brought her to the PhD program at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. From 2009-2010, Kelly held the Emerging Scholar position on the board of Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal. In 2012, Kelly earned a PhD in Kinesiology and Sport Studies with a concentration in Socio-Cultural Studies while serving as a graduate teaching associate. Currently her research interests include gender issues in sport, more specifically the experience of the female sports fan of men's professional sports.
