

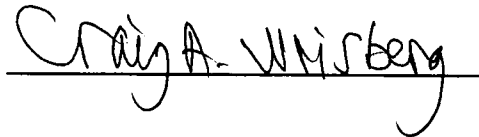
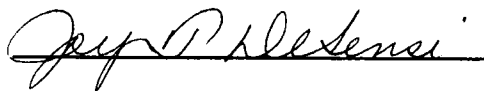
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Ann Catherine Bertucci entitled "The Life and Sport Experiences of Former Collegiate Women's Basketball Players." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Human Performance and Sport Studies.



Patricia A. Beitel, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

THE LIFE AND SPORT EXPERIENCES OF
FORMER COLLEGIATE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL PLAYERS

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Science
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Ann Catherine Bertucci
December 1996

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated with love to my parents, Dorothy and Andrew Bertucci, for their constant support and encouragement throughout all my academic and athletic pursuits. I am especially grateful for their patience and understanding. I particularly want to thank my mother for instilling in me a great love of learning and my father for instilling in me a great love of sports. This thesis is also dedicated to my brothers, John, Paul, and Tom, for their love and support.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express thanks and appreciation to my major professor, Dr. Pat Beitel, for her constant support and guidance throughout my graduate program, and especially for helping me finally reach closure on this degree. My sincere thanks is also extended to the other members of my thesis committee--Dr. Joy DeSensi, for her knowledge and expertise in the field of sport sociology and for her kindness, and Dr. Craig Wrisberg, for his suggestions and support throughout my graduate studies and for his applied sport psychology expertise during my collegiate coaching career.

I would like to express my appreciation to Dutchess Jones and Janie Seat for their input and contributions as members of my qualitative research group. And I want to extend special thanks to the five women who served as participants in this study--"Caryl Ann," "Elizabeth," "Katie," "Paige," and "Stacey"--for their openness and trust.

I would also like to thank two special friends for their invaluable assistance--Maria Veri, for her advice, encouragement, patience, and friendship throughout every stage of this project, and Jana Hunter, for her support and friendship and for her excellent expertise in the editing of this thesis. Additionally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Jenny Moshak and Becky Johnson for their friendship, support, and encouragement. Finally, I would like to offer special acknowledgment to Barbara King, Doug Johnson, Sue Williams, and Patti Gray for their various roles in contributing to my growth and development as an athlete, as a student, as a teacher, as a coach, and as a person.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand the life and sport experiences of former collegiate women's basketball players, with a particular emphasis on exploring initial athletic experiences and the factors associated with continued sport involvement. An overview of the development of women's sport in the United States, with a specific focus on women's basketball, was presented. Additionally, brief discussions of sport socialization, gender role stereotyping, and homophobia were provided. Five former collegiate women's basketball players who had played at NCAA Division I, II, or III institutions and who were under 30 years of age were interviewed using qualitative research methods. The initial interviews with each participant were semi-structured, with six open-ended questions, and lasted approximately 30 minutes to 90 minutes. These women discussed their experiences as female athletes, including the reactions they received from others regarding their sport involvement, and shared their perceptions regarding how society views female athletes. A follow-up interview with each participant served to validate the conclusions drawn from the initial interviews. Preliminary themes were confirmed by a qualitative research group, which further contributed to the study's validity. Six themes emerged from the interviews: (a) early athletic experiences that involved males, including the learning of sport skills from older male family members and playing more with boys than with girls; (b) support and encouragement from significant others that contributed to continued sport involvement; (c) frustration at the existence of gender inequities; (d) awareness of negative stereotypes of female athletes and societal perceptions of "gender-appropriate" sports; (e) acknowledgment of progress achieved by

girls and women in sport coupled with personal regret; and (f) ambivalence regarding the future of girls and women in sport. These themes, along with the unique experiences of each participant, were discussed in relation to the literature on the history of girls and women in sport, sport socialization, gender role stereotyping, and homophobia.

PREFACE

Throughout my life, I have been involved and interested in sports--participating, coaching, spectating, and studying. My background in formal sport experiences has included participating as an athlete in city-league organizations (girls' soccer and softball), on secondary school teams (basketball, volleyball, track and field, and cross country), and at the collegiate level (NCAA Division II cross country and track and field). In addition, I have coached high school teams in track and field, cross country, and girls' basketball; and I have served as an assistant track and field and cross country coach at an NCAA Division I institution.

As a woman, I have a specific interest in issues of gender as related to sport. And as a feminist, I have a specific interest in exploring the sexist aspects of sport. Combining my interests in sport psychology and sport sociology, this study was designed to focus on the psycho-sociological aspects of the sport participation of female athletes.

Through an introspective reflection of my early sport experiences, I realized that I decided to stop playing basketball after my junior year in high school partly because of my own homophobic fears. At that time, although I perceived that girls and women were encouraged to participate in sports, and that it was "acceptable" for girls and women to be athletic, I also sensed that some sports were considered to be more "appropriate" than others. Moreover, while it seemed "acceptable" for a girl to play high school softball or basketball, expressing a desire to play those sports in college was to risk raising suspicion as to her femininity and sexual orientation. In particular, I was cognizant of stereotypes that circulated about lesbian "ball players"--whether referring to basketball or softball;

however, I was also aware that a young woman who chose to pursue tennis or swimming or track in college did not seem to have her femininity questioned. Thus, as a 16-year-old, I believed that continuing to play basketball in high school, and considering to pursue basketball in college, might result in people (family members, peers, teachers) thinking that I was a lesbian.

It is precisely because of my experiences, therefore, that I chose to interview women who decided to play college basketball. In general, I was interested in learning whether other women shared the perceptions and beliefs that I held as a young woman and, if so, how they reconciled those beliefs so that they could pursue basketball at the collegiate level. Specifically, my intention was to interview former collegiate women's basketball players in order to explore their backgrounds in sport, the reactions they received from others regarding their athletic participation, and their perceptions of societal attitudes toward girls and women in sport.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	8
Definitions of Terms	8
Assumptions	10
Limitations	11
Delimitations	11
Significance of the Study	11
Bias Statement	13
2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	15
Historical Background	15
Sport Socialization	36
Gender Role Stereotyping	43
Homophobia	56
Conclusion	64
3. METHODS	65
Participants	65
Rationale for Approach to the Study	66
Data Collection Method	68
Data Analysis Method	71
4. THE ATHLETES	72
Group Description	72
Individual Descriptions	75
Caryl Ann	75
Elizabeth	76
Katie	77
Paige	78
Stacey	78
5. THEMES	80
Early Athletic Experiences	81
Older Male Family Members	81
Played More with Boys	84
Support and Encouragement from Significant Others	87
Frustration at Gender Inequities	95
Awareness of Negative Stereotypes	100

CHAPTER	PAGE
Acknowledgment of Progress Coupled with Regret	107
Ambivalence Regarding Future	112
Summary	116
6. A HAPPY ENDING?	118
Discussion	118
Learning Sport Skills	119
Continuing Sport Involvement	121
Gender Inequities	124
Stereotypes	126
Progress and Regret	130
Future	131
Conclusion	132
So What?	132
Implications	134
REFERENCES	136
APPENDICES	144
Appendix A. Consent Form	145
Appendix B. Interview Guide	147
Appendix C. Participant Information Sheet	148
VITA	149

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1. The Athletes	73
2. Early Athletic Experiences - Older Male Family Members	82
3. Early Athletic Experiences - Played More with Boys	85
4. Support and Encouragement from Significant Others	88
5. Frustration at Gender Inequities	96
6. Awareness of Negative Stereotypes	101
7. Acknowledgment of Progress Coupled with Regret	108
8. Ambivalence Regarding Future	113

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 1994, a dozen years after the last effort to establish a women's professional basketball league in this country failed, the sport's governing body, USA Basketball, announced plans for the formation of a women's national team. The absence of a professional league in the United States meant that every female basketball player desiring to continue her career after college was forced to move overseas to join a team in one of the professional leagues of Europe or Asia. However, with the selection of the USA National Team in May 1995, the nation's best post-collegiate female basketball players finally had the opportunity to train and compete in their own country (Early, Miller, & Williams, 1995).

The ostensible purpose of the National Team was to prepare for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia. But, at a time when women's basketball is enjoying its greatest popularity, USA Basketball was hoping to capitalize on the growing interest in the sport and use that particular squad as a springboard to launch another attempt at a professional league.

The National Team's 1995-1996 exhibition schedule prior to the Olympics was intended to maximize national exposure and to generate additional support for women's basketball. In addition to games against twenty of the best college teams in the country, the squad hosted several international teams throughout the spring of 1996. And, with the help of eight major corporate sponsors, ten games were broadcast nationally on ABC, ESPN, and ESPN2 (Early et al., 1995).

In most Olympic sports, athletes for U.S. national teams are selected much closer to the dates of Olympic competition to ensure that the best athletes will represent the United States. Under these circumstances, once the national squads are chosen, team practice and international competition is limited. That women's basketball in this country was able to embark on the national team venture shows how far the sport has advanced in terms of popularity, exposure, and perceived marketability.

The collapse of professional women's basketball in the early 1980s is blamed on the inability of the game to attract enough paying fans and advertisers (Cahn, 1994). In contrast, the 1990s have seen a steady rise in national attendance figures at women's college games and athletic conglomerate Nike introduce its first athletic shoe named for a woman, National Team member Sheryl Swoopes (Cole & Hribar, 1995).

Additionally, the media presently is covering women's basketball like never before. For example, ESPN, along with ESPN2, broadcasts several more women's games than in past years and includes women's scores in its highlight coverage. Also, CBS periodically airs live regular-season games matching top-ranked teams, instead of only the NCAA Women's Final Four, as it did prior to 1996. In fact, for the first time in the six years that ESPN has honored a college basketball "player of the week," on January 24, 1996, the sport network recognized a female for that honor---Chamique Holdsclaw of the University of Tennessee.

The combination of the increasing fan base, more widespread media coverage, and growing corporate support all demonstrate that women's basketball finally has emerged as viable sport entertainment. A quarter of a century ago this notion would have been

unfathomable.

The passage in 1972 of Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act, prohibiting sex discrimination in all educational programs receiving federal aid, including sport programs, helped change the landscape of the contemporary sport scene, as women began entering the athletic world in unprecedented numbers (Gill, 1994a). After a steady increase in participation rates, women in the 1990s comprise approximately one third of all high school, college and Olympic athletes. However, despite Title IX legislation and recent efforts toward gender equity, discrimination still exists and women are not accorded equal representation in key positions, including coaching, administration, sportswriting, and athletic training (Gill, 1994a).

Although college administrators and the popular media have responded to and reported on gender equity concerns, there has been relatively little research or scholarly writing in sport psychology on gender issues. As a social phenomenon with psychological implications, gender is integral to understanding individuals and society. Gill (1994a) comments on the importance of gender: "From birth our world has been shaped by gender. Our parents, teachers, peers, and coaches reacted to us as girls or boys. Our images of athletes have been shaped by gendered media portrayals" (p. 208).

Since the mid-1960s, the literature in psychology relating to women and gender has evolved from a sex differences approach, looking at the biologically-based differences between males and females; to an approach based on individual differences and personality, looking at gender role orientation to explain gender-related behavior; and finally, to the present social-psychological models that emphasize contextual differences

and social processes (Gill, 1994a).

The idea of gender role as a personality orientation began with the Bem Sex Role Inventory, as cited by Gill (1994a), and progressed into the notion that females experience a role conflict when involved in athletics, in that the role of female conflicts with the role of athlete. The concept of a role conflict has generally been discounted, although Blinde and Greendorfer (1992) concluded that both male and female athletes may experience some types of conflict that are mediated by gender.

While some researchers (e.g., Gill, 1988) have found that gender influences competitive sport achievement, a specific gender-related personality orientation has not been revealed. Eccles and Harold (1991) concluded that gender influences children's sport achievement perceptions and behaviors and that these gender differences may result from gender role socialization.

Critical of studies emphasizing sex differences and individual differences, research in the mid-1980s began to consider the social context and thus looked at gender as a social category (Deaux, 1984). Deaux posited that gender stereotypes have a profound impact on social interaction, suggesting that how people *think* males and females differ is more important than *actual* differences. Csizma, Wittig, and Schurr (1988) found evidence that sports are sex-typed, mostly as masculine; and Matteo (1988) concluded that sex-typing influenced sport choice and that sex-typed people--masculine males and feminine females--did not participate in gender-inappropriate sports.

As reported by Gill (1994a), research has found that gender stereotypes are multi-dimensional--encompassing personality traits, role behaviors, occupations, physical

appearance, and sexuality--and exist in the sport realm:

We expect men with athletic body types to be athletes, and moreover, to be aggressive, competitive, independent, and of course, heterosexual.... We also tend to assume women with athletic body builds or talents are aggressive, competitive, independent, and lesbian. Such stereotypes are prominent and have far-reaching implications for women and men in sport. (p. 218)

In her classic analysis in 1965 of the social acceptability of various sports, Metheny (1974) identified gender stereotypes. According to Metheny, acceptable sports for women emphasize aesthetic qualities and involve individual activities, as opposed to team sports and direct competition. More recently, Kane and Snyder (1989) confirmed this gender stereotyping of sports. Unfortunately, 25 years after Title IX, gender bias and discrimination based on these stereotypes still exist in our society and are especially prevalent in sport.

Socialization refers to the systematic process of integrating individuals into society through the transmission of cultural traditions, values, and beliefs from one generation to the next. Societal expectations shape behaviors and attitudes so that individuals learn to act in ways that are socially acceptable and appropriate (Greendorfer, 1993). In this way, socialization influences whether an individual develops an interest in and becomes involved in sports.

From our infancy, through gender role socialization, we learn the "appropriate" behavior, mannerisms, dress, and activities that are expected of us depending on our biological sex. Greendorfer (1993) explained that gender role stereotyping represents discrimination by limiting a child's experiences:

The argument is that differential treatment is tantamount to discrimination, and

that gender role stereotyping, a specific type of differential treatment, is an extremely powerful and potent form of discrimination. Whenever we hold expectations that are *prescribed* according to biological sex, we are engaged in gender stereotyping. Unfortunately, in many child-rearing practices the biological sex of a child frequently determines which activities he or she will or will not be exposed to or permitted to experience--in other words, biological sex determines opportunity and experience. (pp. 4-5)

Parents and other family members are responsible for early childhood socialization by exposing children to activities consistent with their gender roles. Consequently, discriminatory socialization practices begin when infant males are given "balls, bats, and blue items" and infant females are given "dolls, stuffed toys, and pink items" (Greendorfer, 1993). Because we think these child-rearing practices are normal, we do not question the cultural ideology underlying the beliefs; unfortunately, by not equating differential treatment with discrimination, we may mistake superficial changes (e.g., increase in participation rates) for substantial shifts (e.g., decrease in gender discrimination). Significantly, by the time they enter elementary school, children have determined that active sports are masculine and not feminine (Greendorfer, 1983).

The recent influx of women into the male-dominated sport world has brought gender issues to the forefront of a discipline that had almost exclusively focused on men prior to the passage of Title IX. Both Lenskyj (1986, 1991) and Messner (1992) have shown that our society expects men to dominate women; consequently, our hierarchical and patriarchal society is uncomfortable with women in athletics who are bigger and stronger than some men, and who are more aggressive and dominant than "expected." Somewhat related, several authors (e.g., Griffin, 1992; Nelson, 1991, 1994; Pharr, 1988) have discussed homophobia, the mechanism by which it restricts behavior (fear), and its

effects on women and men--gay and straight--in society and in sport.

Beyond recognizing gender stereotypes and beliefs, there is a current movement in sport psychology to incorporate socio-cultural perspectives into the scholarly dialogue on gender and its related issues. In fact, Gill (1994a) recommended that sport psychologists look to the work of some sport sociologists (e.g., Birrell, 1988; Hall, 1988; Lenskyj, 1986; Messner, 1992) for ways to conceptualize gender and sport from a feminist theoretical framework. Implicit in the work of these feminist researchers are the assumptions that to understand women's, *and* men's, sport experiences, a researcher must consider the historical-cultural context as well as the immediate social context. In addition, a feminist theoretical perspective emphasizes broader social change over personal change; encourages a process-oriented approach rather than an outcome-oriented approach; and is ultimately less hierarchical and more empowering than traditional research methods.

In the fall of 1995, I conducted a study for a qualitative research class in which I interviewed three former collegiate women's basketball players. One player had competed at the community college level, another at an NAIA institution, and the third at an NCAA Division I university. In relating personal stories about their athletic experiences and expressing their perceptions and opinions about the status of women in sport, the participants raised various issues, including socialization, gender role stereotyping, and homophobia. Despite differences in background and competitive experiences, the three participants in this pilot study shared remarkably similar initial athletic experiences and comparable current perceptions of women in sport. The interviews yielded interesting themes regarding: (a) early childhood experiences of playing with older children; (b)

resistance to negative reactions from others about their sport and/or basketball participation; and (c) concern about society's negative view of women's sport in general and female basketball players in particular. This pilot study suggested a need for more qualitative research which examines the experiences of women in sport.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to understand the life and sport experiences of former collegiate women's basketball players. Specifically, I wanted to learn how these athletes felt about participating in a sport which has been viewed by society as generally more appropriate for boys and men and less acceptable for girls and women.

Definitions of Terms

The following meanings were assigned to the terms used in this study:

Equality. A state of being the same or identical in terms of quality, value, quantity, number, or degree.

Equity. A state of justness, impartiality, or fairness. In this study, the term is applied to describe the equal treatment of female and male athletes.

Female Intercollegiate Basketball Player. A woman who is, or was, an official member of the women's basketball team at an accredited 2- or 4-year college or university.

Feminine. Characteristic of, or "appropriate to," women. The term is traditionally associated with behaviors encompassing passivity, submissiveness, weakness, and dependence.

Feminist. A person who subscribes to the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of women and men.

Gender. A social construction whereby behaviors and psychological characteristics are associated with female and male biological sex categories.

Gender Discrimination. Bias or prejudice against members of a gender group based solely on their sex. In this study, the term is applied to describe the unequal treatment of women in sport.

Gender Role. A series of behaviors deemed appropriate for a certain sex in a given society (Murray & Matheson, 1993).

Gender Role Conflict. The internal or external conflict one may experience if she or he exhibits behaviors that are not deemed “appropriate” for her or his gender. In this study, the term is applied to the situation for a female athlete whereby the role of athlete conflicts with the role of female.

Heterosexism. Prejudice or discrimination against homosexuals or bisexuals. The term is further used to deny the homosexual perspective, and to privilege heterosexuality as the only acceptable, sanctioned, and normal sexual orientation (Griffin & Genasci, 1990).

Homophobia. The irrational fear of homosexuality, including hatred of lesbians or gay men; the fear of being perceived as a lesbian or gay man; the fear of one’s own physical or sexual attraction for members of the same sex; and/or the fear of being a lesbian or gay man (Griffin & Genasci, 1989). The term is also used as a powerful political weapon of sexism (Pharr, 1988).

Masculine. Characteristic of, or “appropriate to,” men. The term is traditionally associated with behaviors encompassing activity, aggressiveness, competitiveness, strength, and independence.

Sex. The distinction whereby individuals are categorized according to their biological sex characteristics as female or male.

Sexism. Prejudice or discrimination against women or men.

Sex-typing. The social acceptability of females and males participating in various sports, or the perceived femininity or masculinity of the sports (Csizma, Wittig, & Schurr, 1988).

Socialization. The systematic process whereby societal expectations shape behaviors and attitudes so that individuals learn to act in ways that are socially acceptable and appropriate (Greendorfer, 1993).

Assumptions

I made the following assumptions in this study:

1. Basketball is a sport that is viewed by society as very appropriate for boys and men and less acceptable for girls and women.
2. The interview guide was a valid and reliable means of obtaining information about the participants’ sport experiences, and their perceptions and feelings of those experiences.
3. The participants in the study responded to the questions honestly and accurately.

Limitations

The following limitations existed in this study:

1. The study was limited to women who were under 30 years of age and who played basketball at, and were current or former graduate students from, universities within the United States.
2. It was not possible to guarantee that the participants responded to the questions truthfully.

Delimitations

The following delimitations existed in this study:

1. All the participants were former basketball players and so were not representative of athletes from other possible gender-stereotyped sports (e.g., softball).
2. The participants were not representative of all competitive levels of women's intercollegiate sport.

Significance of the Study

Although there is ample research on gender issues relating to sport, and there are numerous studies on the psychological effects of sport competition, few studies have explored both phenomena. By interviewing former collegiate basketball players, I hoped to learn what a select group of female sport participants perceived about their athletic experiences, and how they felt about those perceptions, as they competed in a traditionally male-defined and masculinely referred realm of sport.

Hopefully, the information from this study will contribute to educating the academic and sport establishment, the media, and the sporting public (including administrators, faculty, coaches, boosters, reporters, editors, scholars, spectators, parents, peers, siblings, and significant others) to be more cognizant of their power to directly and indirectly influence the sport experiences of girls and women. While many factors contribute to an individual's decision to pursue or not to pursue a given sport, if we, as members of society, recognize that our actions or inactions may encourage or discourage a girl or woman from participating in a sport, we may then reevaluate our perceptions and hopefully become more sensitive and considerate in our reactions to, comments about, stories on, treatment of, and decisions regarding female athletes and women's sport.

The gender inequities present at every level of athletics (youth, scholastic, collegiate, and professional), as well as in other areas of society (academia, business, education, law, and medicine), are well known. Conversely, the homophobia that exists in sport and society is rarely acknowledged, and, unlike gender equity, its surrounding issues are rarely ever addressed. Perhaps the information gained from this study will facilitate movement toward true gender equity and a greater intolerance of homophobic attitudes. The means by which to effect such changes, or even to progress toward those ends, begin with a real understanding of the personal experiences of women in sport, which can be acquired by listening to their words.

From the individual participants' perspectives, taking part in this study hopefully may have led to a heightened awareness of their personal experiences in sport and a greater understanding of what meaning those experiences have had for them as women.

In addition, participating in this study may have helped the participants to become more enlightened and knowledgeable about issues in sport and in society relating to gender, including discrimination, sexism, and homophobia. With that greater cognizance, and from whatever their eventual position in life (administrator, coach, health professional, etc.), perhaps these women will now be more active and involved in promoting and supporting human rights issues, especially those relating to women.

Bias Statement

I am aware that my background of sport experiences has uniquely and profoundly shaped my perceptions. I have been involved in sport for as long as I can remember, initially playing games with my brothers and neighbors and watching them play in organized leagues, as few organized sport opportunities existed for girls at the time. It was not until I was ten years old that a girls' soccer league was started in my hometown and I played on my first organized team. In the twenty-odd years since that first experience, I have been directly involved in organized sport as an athlete or as a coach. This involvement, and the memories of watching the neighborhood boys compete when I could not because of my gender, has provided me with a broad knowledge of athletics and a heightened awareness of sport as a female sport participant.

Given my background and familiarity with sport, I realized that I brought prior knowledge to each interview session. I, therefore, consciously and deliberately attempted to avoid imposing my experiences and perceptions onto the participants. In particular, I tried to listen carefully to what each participant said so that I would not misinterpret her

comments to fit my perceptions. I also attempted to probe each participant's responses thoroughly, asking for clarification and/or elaboration when appropriate, in order to avoid reaching conclusions that she did not intend and to prevent making incorrect assumptions because something sounded familiar to me. Furthermore, during each interview, I tried to refrain from contributing personal examples and inserting my own stories.

As a feminist, I am aware of issues of power and oppression in society, and I am sensitive to gender inequalities in sport. Consequently, I possess personal biases regarding discrimination against women in sport and in society. I am especially cognizant of past instances of gender discrimination, both overt and covert, that I experienced as a young girl participating in activities often deemed more appropriate for boys. Additionally, I acknowledge that I am an advocate for women's rights and that I have particularly strong feelings about the rights of female athletes. However, I realize that not all female athletes may be as aware of, or as bothered by, instances of discrimination, and may not consider themselves feminists or even advocates of female rights. Therefore, I made a concerted effort to avoid the tendency to pass judgment on participants who did not respond as I wanted or expected. In addition, I attempted to prevent any sense of disappointment on my part from influencing a participant's response.

Throughout this study, I tried to remain impartial and to prevent my subjectivities from influencing my interpretations. While it may not be possible for a researcher to be completely objective, I feel confident that I was able to hold my personal biases in check as much as possible and to minimize any misinterpretations of the participants' experiences.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this review, I first present an overview of the development of women's sport in the United States, with a specific focus on the evolution of women's basketball. Then, I discuss the process of socialization, particularly as it pertains to women in sport. Next, I describe culturally defined and socially imposed gender roles and stereotypes, and examine how they impact female athletes. Finally, I explain how homophobia disempowers women, and thereby maintains sport as a male preserve.

Historical Background

Discrimination against girls and women in sport has a long history. At the ancient Olympic Games in Greece, from which modern sport evolved, women were excluded not only as participants, but also as spectators. Although young girls in the Greek city-state of Sparta were required to develop skills in running, jumping, wrestling, and javelin and discus throwing, girls and women were generally denied opportunities for physical exertion. Incredibly, despite the physically strenuous reality of childbirth, the dominant belief among ancient patriarchal societies was the inherent weakness and passivity of women (Guttmann, 1991; Kennard & Carter, 1994; Twin, 1979).

The belief in the physical frailty of females went unchallenged for many years, eventually manifesting itself in early 19th-century America with the image of the physically inactive "woman on the pedestal." At that time, popular and scientific opinion held that female passivity was natural and desirable for women to conserve energy and thus bear

healthy children. Sporting and recreational pursuits were encouraged for boys to develop aggression, competitiveness, speed, and strength, but not for girls, as those were not qualities deemed necessary for women (Twin, 1979). Thus, physical exercise and athletic participation became linked to prevailing notions of manhood and masculinity, and consequently, sport in 19th-century America became male-dominated and masculinely defined.

This attitude began to change as early as the 1830s, however, when some educators, health reformers, and pioneer feminists disputed the concept of female frailty and endorsed female exercise. By the end of the 1800s, the physical education profession, bolstered by the medical establishment's advocacy of a moderate exercise regimen for women, began instructing female students in physical education classes and developing academic programs to train future female physical education professionals (Cahn, 1994).

Concurrently, outside the academic institution, women were gradually beginning to engage in more active, competitive athletic games. Initially, women's sport gained its foothold among the wealthier classes whose leisure-time pursuits included croquet, horseback riding, archery, skating, swimming, golf, and tennis (Cahn, 1994; Paul, 1993). Several sports began moving beyond the recreational level when various clubs and resorts started hosting tournament play for women in the 1870s. Before the century was over, national championships were conducted for women in tennis and golf. While some athletes trained intensely for these tournaments and championships, most women continued to play informal games at their leisure. Physical activity at this level was

socially acceptable, as recreational pursuits were consistent with the refinement expected of "proper ladies" and did not violate conventional norms of womanhood (Cahn, 1994).

The bicycle craze of the late 1880s and 1890s brought athleticism to the middle classes and independence to the female athlete. The bicycle gave women freedom by helping them gain popular approval of their right to exercise in public (Cahn, 1994; Paul, 1993). By the 1890s, large numbers of high school girls and college women began joining sport teams and participating in informal competitions and formal intramural contests.

As the 20th century began, women had more opportunities in athletics than ever before. While women with ample money and leisure time joined athletic clubs en masse, working-class women often did not have the income or free time for such pursuits. However, as a result of the Progressive era's urban reform movement, communities and businesses began offering local sport programs through city playgrounds and public schools and in a variety of work-place recreational programs that allowed members of the working class to participate in organized athletics (Cahn, 1994). Women attending college discovered a variety of sport opportunities on their own campuses; besides intramural competition, female students found structured physical education programs that began incorporating competitive sports instruction into a curriculum previously devoted to anatomy, physiology, and hygiene (Cayleff, 1995).

Also during this era, the notion that strenuous physical activity would make a female athlete "mannish" was widely circulated. The threat of "mannishness," or female masculinity, was manifested in the following concerns: (a) too much exercise would damage women's reproductive organs; (b) female athletes would acquire masculine

characteristics and mannerisms; and (c) the passionate intensity of sport would drive women to moral, physical, and emotional breakdowns (Cahn, 1994).

Attached to the idea of the “mannish female athlete” was a subtle suggestion of lesbianism. As early as the 1880s, the medical community believed that female same-sex desire represented an inverted gender identity, because sexual desire for women was considered a trait inherent only in males. Curiously, in the early years of the 20th century, as Americans were shedding the vestiges of Victorian sexual mores, the concern for women in sport was not with homosexuality, but rather with uncontrolled heterosexuality. In fact, journalists created the notion of the mannish amazonian athlete, which helped to perpetuate the image of heterosexual deviance among women in sport (Cahn, 1994). The sport media also coined the derogatory term “muscle moll” to refer to an “unfeminine, rough, unacceptable” female athlete (Cayleff, 1995, p. 91).

Between 1890 and World War I, female college enrollments increased dramatically and women’s athletics became progressively more competitive with the growth of intramural sport programs and intercollegiate varsity club teams (Cahn, 1994). In this increasingly competitive sport environment, female physical educators sought to protect female athletes’ health and morality, from the supposed harmful effects of uncontrolled “masculine” athletic games, by introducing moderation into women’s sports (Cahn, 1994). These sport reformers, however, were opposed by the female students who preferred “masculine” competitive sport over the regimentation and repetition of exercise routines and calisthenics. As a result, female educators tried to create a separate sphere of play for women by disassociating from men’s programs and offering a more “feminine” brand of

activity. More precisely, these educators established separate women's departments and modified rules of existing "male" games, in order to develop distinctly female activities out of the more strenuous "masculine" sport forms (Cahn, 1994). The sport of basketball exemplifies a game modified by physical educators in their effort to preserve the femininity of the participants.

Basketball was invented in 1891 at Springfield College in Massachusetts by James Naismith, who was trying to develop an inexpensive game that students could play indoors during the long winter months between the football and baseball seasons. The ease with which a court could be prepared (i.e., with any rectangular space marked off by ropes or netting, and with peach buckets for baskets) helped the sport spread quickly. The first officially recognized intercollegiate women's game took place in 1896 between the University of California at Berkeley and Stanford University (Guttmann, 1991; Hult, 1994). Even though men played basketball in schools and in recreational programs, the game was especially popular in women's schools and in settlement houses. As an indoor game with a relatively small playing area, the sport was immediately considered well-suited for women and not appropriately rigorous for rugged sportsmen (Cahn, 1994).

Significantly, basketball was particularly widespread in African American communities. Athletic events were often the center of community social activities that served to instill racial pride and foster neighborhood identity among African Americans. For instance, women's basketball teams frequently played in front of capacity crowds at local churches or recreation centers as either the prelude to a men's game or the main attraction after a girls' or boys' game. Live music and dancing often followed the games,

capping off a full evening of entertainment for the black community (Cahn, 1994; Gissendanner, 1994).

Racial segregation and discrimination certainly affected black athletes, in some instances by even precluding their participation in national competitions. Consequently, the close ties that developed between community organizations and black schools and colleges were important in supplying avenues of play. Some regions of the country sponsored formal interscholastic black leagues, such as the Georgia-Carolina College League (Cahn, 1994), while black colleges frequently included community centers and independent black women's teams on their schedules (Gissendanner, 1994).

Despite basketball's initial feminine reputation, the intensity at which the women played and the game's potential for roughness made participation by women highly controversial (Cayleff, 1995; Paul, 1993). Among those alarmed by the rough play and the negative publicity it precipitated was Smith College Athletic Director Senda Berenson, who sought to modify the rules in order to make the game acceptable for "ladies" (Paul, 1993). While the early organizers of basketball varied the rules depending on space constraints and number of players, Berenson intended to create a single set of rules to standardize the game and define an appropriately refined version to be played by women that limited body contact and physical exertion (Cahn, 1994).

In 1901, the first official women's basketball rules were published. Known as the "girls' rules," the new guidelines confined each team's six players into their respective court areas; the floor was divided into front-, center-, and back-court regions, with the corresponding forwards, centers, and guards limited to their respective sections. Initially,

the rules allowed players to dribble the ball only once and prohibited batting the ball from another player's hand or hindering the shooter (Paul, 1993). Eventually, a two-court game replaced the three-court version, as the center-court region was eliminated and the two center-court players became "rovers" who were allowed to run the full length of the court. In contrast, the five-player "boys' rules" allowed all players to run the full court and placed fewer restrictions on dribbling and guarding an offensive player (Cahn, 1994). Thus, with the "girls' rules," female sport reformers modified the conventional rules of basketball in order to keep the women's game immune from the taint of "masculinity."

Following World War I, the fitness of the nation's youth came under scrutiny as a result of the large number of draft inductees who failed their physical exams (Welch, 1993). In response, many states passed legislation requiring physical education for students from elementary school through high school. Additionally, the college level witnessed tremendous growth in athletic opportunities for women, including recreational clubs, leagues comprising dorms and sororities, and interclass tournaments (Cahn, 1994).

At the same time, however, a struggle over the control of women's sport began between female physical educators and male sport promoters. The battle lines were drawn in 1922, as an all-women's international competition modeled after the Olympics was held in Paris, and 22,000 spectators watched female athletes from the U.S. and several European nations compete in 11 different events (Cahn, 1994). Subsequent to that event's success, male leaders of amateur sport suddenly became interested in women's sport. For example, in 1924, the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) began hosting a women's national championship in track and field (Cahn, 1993; Welch, 1993).

As a result of these developments, women in the physical education profession feared that women's sport would face the same exploitation and elitism which saddled men's competitive athletics (Hult, 1994; Welch, 1993). Besides being appalled by the commercialism wrought by promoters, business sponsors, and the media, women physical educators were also worried that male coaches, school and civic boosters, and journalists would exploit the eager but naive sportswoman. Specifically, given the sensationalized news articles that emphasized an athlete's physical beauty or characterized her as an Amazon, as well as the skimpy uniforms that accentuated an athlete's physique, female sport reformers accused the entities surrounding competitive women's sports of sexualizing and objectifying the athletes (Cahn, 1994).

Although physical educators were responsible for the alterations in women's uniforms (i.e., from the sleeveless, scoop-necked tops that the men wore to tops with collars and short sleeves), female sport reformers still considered the uniforms inappropriate. Interestingly, the female athletes generally did not share the educators' opinions about the evils associated with the male model of competitive sports. For example, few players were concerned about the uniforms or the rules, and most players enjoyed the intensive training, extensive travel, and ubiquitous publicity (Cahn, 1994).

Female athletic leaders were also critical of the elitist nature of men's competitive sports, maintaining that varsity teams, tournament play, and international competitions privileged the few truly gifted athletes and excluded the many who were merely mediocre (Cahn, 1994). Another target of the female sport reformers' wrath was the "old boys' network" of coaches, principals, athletic directors, civic leaders, and other administrators

who insulated themselves in their decision-making posts and prevented women from gaining entrance. In response to these concerns, and with the AAU's potential threat to wrest control of *all* girls' and women's athletics away from their profession, female physical educators created a coalition to oppose all public, highly competitive sports and to promote women entering the field as coaches, administrators, and officials (Cahn, 1994). This coalition of female sport reformers felt that with a plan for moderate competition and separate sets of women's rules, they could protect the safety and preserve the femininity of female athletes.

In the spirit of moderation, and to counter the elitist and exploitative "male" model of sport, female physical educators organized "play days," wherein athletes from several colleges came together for a day of competition and socializing. Providing sport activities that did not entail competition between teams nor reward superior individual athletic performances, female sport leaders promoted a more democratic and egalitarian version of athletics (Cahn, 1994; Hult, 1994).

In contrast, African American physical educators actively encouraged highly competitive athletics for their female students. At the high school level, since few black schools had the resources for physical education classes, interscholastic sport was often the sole form of exercise provided for the students. At the college level, a 1939 study found that only 25% of black colleges were opposed to women's intercollegiate athletics, while a survey of primarily white institutions revealed that 83% objected to women's varsity sports (Cahn, 1994). Black schools and colleges were especially supportive of women's basketball, with many favoring the more active and competitive five-player rules

(Gissendanner, 1994).

As white physical education directors continued their efforts at prohibiting intercollegiate competition, many students became frustrated and looked elsewhere to channel their competitive athletic desires. When play days replaced interscholastic basketball, many female athletes turned to industrial leagues and civic recreation programs. The popularity of basketball at this level was most pronounced in Texas, arguably the state which was most receptive to women's basketball (Cayleff, 1995). Semiprofessional basketball, comprised of players from school leagues, recreation and industrial leagues, college teams, and church leagues, flourished there in the 1920s and 1930s. According to Cayleff (1995), women's basketball was the most popular spectator sport in the Dallas area until the 1950s, with press coverage of local games dominating the sports pages from January to March.

Industrial basketball was such a viable enterprise partly because so many working women learned the game in their high school and college years, and wanted to continue playing (Emery, 1994). In addition, many companies began recruiting women with basketball skills, because sponsorship of athletic teams generated beneficial publicity. Southern textile mills were particularly renowned for offering girls and women opportunities to play basketball and develop athletic skills to a degree that was commensurate with the opportunities customarily extended to boys and men (Emery, 1994).

Backed by the strength and success of industrial basketball, the AAU helped to expand women's sport, despite charges that members of its male leadership were self-

serving and opportunistic. For example, besides sponsoring a national basketball championship tournament, the AAU sanctioned a women's national basketball league, composed of teams financed by business companies, wealthy individuals, and civic organizations (Cahn, 1994; Cayleff, 1995; Emery, 1994).

Meanwhile, physical education reformers continued pressuring civic officials, local businesses, and commercial sponsors to stop hosting basketball tournaments. After the inaugural AAU basketball championship in 1926, the coalition of female sport reformers successfully prevented the national tournament from being conducted for the next two years. Then, upon resumption of the national championship tournament in 1929, the coalition of sport reformers focused their attention on limiting competition and improving standards in school, community, and industrial leagues (Cahn, 1994; Emery, 1994).

One way the sport reformers sought to reduce "undesirable" and "unhealthy" competition was to push for universal acceptance of the six-player girls' rules and to prohibit the five-player "boys' rules" that were still adhered to in certain areas of the country. The physical educators even struck down the AAU's compromise proposal of a six-player two-court game that permitted more movement and active guarding (Cahn, 1994).

The coalition also tried to channel female athletic energy away from basketball and into more "suitable" sports. While individual sports, like golf and tennis, were encouraged for their value as lifetime sports, other acceptable substitutes included the supposedly milder team sport of volleyball and the female-dominated field hockey. In contrast to basketball, field hockey was considered an exclusively female sport in the United States

from its introduction. Therefore, because it was never perceived as threatening to a woman's femininity, it was embraced by women physical educators as an appropriate sport for female athletes (Cahn, 1994).

Basketball advocates, on the other hand, were continually hampered by having to repudiate the sport's "masculine" reputation. According to Cahn (1994):

The game of basketball has no essential gender attributes; it lacks any natural properties of masculinity or femininity--it is simply a game. Nevertheless, observers commonly remarked on its gender qualities. After first being introduced to women and labeled an appropriately "feminine" game, the sport gained steady popularity with men and became associated with such "masculine" qualities as ruggedness, explosive power, and technical precision. By the 1920s women players, though active in the game since its invention, had come to be viewed as intruders in a male sport. (pp. 98-99)

Incredibly, the perception of basketball as unfeminine and, hence, inappropriate for women continued for decades, as evidenced by the fact that women's basketball was not sanctioned as an Olympic sport until 1976 (Cayleff, 1995).

The cultural climate of the 1920s spawned a new sexy ideal of femininity captured by the "flapper." Concurrently, heightened public awareness of homosexuality led to criticism and stigmatization of the "mannish lesbian" and the development of a lesbian stereotype. Amid this background, suspicions of lesbianism surfaced among female athletes, as well as among feminists and professional women. Homophobia in sport emerged in the early 1930s, as fears of homosexual deviance firmly supplanted the concern over heterosexual deviance that existed when the century began (Cahn, 1994).

Because of their control over collegiate athletic programs, by the 1930s female physical educators had succeeded in all but eliminating basketball competition between

schools, leaving intramural competition and the occasional play day as the only athletic outlets for women. Eventually, however, the slightly more competitive "sports days," which allowed competition between teams and practice prior to the competition, replaced play days (Cahn, 1994; Hult, 1994).

At the high school level, the campaign to eliminate interscholastic basketball was even less successful, as the game remained popular and received enthusiastic support from students, parents, and townspeople. While some school administrators refused to abandon their state championships, others attempted a compromise; for example, Florida and Tennessee dropped their state tournaments but continued to offer city and district championships (Cahn, 1994). By 1940, a standoff of sorts was reached in the battle over interscholastic basketball. As reported in Cahn (1994), a survey of state departments of education conducted by the University of Texas found that 16 states had no interscholastic girls' basketball, 8 or 9 hosted annual state tournaments, and 20 to 23 held local or county championships. However, in certain regions where there was great interest in high school basketball, such as in Arkansas, Iowa, Tennessee, and Texas, there was intense community support (Cahn, 1994).

Female physical educators also had a difficult time when they tried to force the various community-based basketball leagues to make modifications. Whether sponsored by public recreation departments or by private businesses or industrial organizations, these leagues were extremely popular, especially when both interscholastic and intercollegiate basketball were being suppressed in the 1930s and 1940s. Even the AAU, which capitalized on the successes of industrial and recreational basketball and began sponsoring

the annual championship tournament that continues to this day, was able to withstand the criticism leveled by the physical educators and make only token alterations (Cahn, 1994).

Seeking to balance the new restrictions, beginning in the late 1920s, the AAU attempted to increase the sport's appeal to fans by introducing beauty pageants into the tournament proceedings. In addition to assisting the effort to counteract the "mannish" image of competitive female athletes, and thus prove their femininity, the beauty contest contributed to the festival atmosphere and promotional hoopla surrounding the AAU tournament and other similar championships (Cahn, 1994; Emery, 1994). While the festivities entertained spectators and attracted sponsors, the carnival-like spectacle angered sport reformers.

However, instead of feeling used or exploited in this environment, most female athletes welcomed and appreciated the sponsorship and employment opportunities, and enjoyed the attention and festival atmosphere of the tournaments. The female basketball players generally decided that the publicity and sexual hype were for the audience's benefit and were irrelevant to them as players. As Cahn (1994) explained:

According to this view, if the pageant helped promote the sport, then it served the long-term interests of athletes. Players viewed tournament rituals as either a harmless crowd pleaser or a tolerable sidelight to the real event--the game. The issue faded before their overriding interest in the sport itself. They had come to play ball. (p. 106)

To a great extent, throughout history, society has objectified women and trivialized their accomplishments. The fact that the commercial and sexual components of popular basketball objectified the athletes and diverted attention from their skills meant that the players of this era probably found sport no different than the larger world in which

they lived, worked, and went to school (Cahn, 1994). So, instead of viewing events like the AAU tournament as objectionable, female athletes used the experience to their advantage. As expressed by Cahn (1994):

Athletes accepted or merely tolerated sexual hype and beauty contests in order to pursue a sport that allowed them to break free from confining forms of femininity. Basketball provided opportunities for skill building, achievement, physical expression, sociability, and public recognition--valued elements of experience that could not be taken for granted in most women's lives. (p. 107)

While educators tried to feminize basketball by creating a controlled "female" version of a "male" sport, popular promoters attempted to feminize the athletes by highlighting their beauty and sex appeal. A stalemate between the two factions was reached; ultimately, neither group allowed the athletes the freedom to be themselves. Eventually, the immense popularity of basketball among girls and women led educators and recreation leaders to re-examine their opposition to females in competitive sport (Cahn, 1994).

Meanwhile, cultural changes were occurring that altered the way society viewed female athletes. In the 1940s, as wartime social changes transformed the nation's landscape, burgeoning gay and lesbian subcultures thrived amid the prevailing permissive sexual atmosphere. However, a much different climate existed during the conservative Cold War era, when gays and lesbians were discharged from the government and the military, homosexuals and gay institutions were investigated and prosecuted, and the police cracked down on gay bars and street life (Cahn, 1994).

Amid concerns over postwar changes in the gender and social order, and fears of a "homosexual menace" threatening national security, a panic ensued that promoted fear and

hatred and persecution of homosexuals, and an increase in homophobia. Lesbians were condemned for violating gender norms, especially in an era when "traditional" ideals of femininity, family, and domesticity were emphasized in the wake of a depression and a war that greatly disrupted the gender system (Cahn, 1994).

Because of their muscular bodies and interest in sport, female athletes often appeared to exhibit the gender inversion associated with homosexuality, and thus were in danger of homophobic attacks. College athletes, who were previously thought unattractive to men, were now accused of being unattracted to them. The stigma of lesbianism was especially pronounced in sports with a masculine image, like basketball and softball (Cahn, 1994).

Female physical educators, because of their renowned battles with male sport promoters and their efforts to disassociate from the male model of athletics, were particularly vulnerable to accusations of lesbianism. In response, female physical educators attempted to avoid charges of homosexuality by encouraging heterosexual interest among female student-athletes through co-educational physical education classes and co-recreational athletic activities, such as bowling, volleyball, and swimming (Cahn, 1994). In addition, Cahn (1994) reported that most women's physical education departments imposed dress codes that prohibited women from wearing slacks and men's shirts or socks, and some schools even banned "boyish haircuts" and unshaven legs.

By the 1950s, as a result of the suspicion of lesbianism that permeated women's sport and physical activity, female athletes often felt pressured to express "feminine" interests and to display a "feminine" appearance by using make-up and wearing dresses.

For example, topics that female athletes were urged to talk about when dealing with the media included their “feminine” hobbies, like cooking and sewing, their boyfriends, or their future marriage plans (Cahn, 1994).

After the establishment of women’s intercollegiate golf competition in the 1940s, the next two decades saw a gradual acceptance of female varsity competition. Then, in 1971, the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) was founded. During the 1970s, the AIAW was the primary advocate and only sponsor of women’s intercollegiate sport (Cahn, 1994).

Meanwhile, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, various oppressed segments of American society formed movements that united around the struggle for equal rights, including the black civil rights movement, the American Indian movement, the gay liberation movement, and the feminist movement. With the heightened awareness and increased politicization of issues of fairness and discrimination, women’s sport advocates began to voice their discontent over unequal access to athletic opportunities and resources (Cahn, 1994; Hult, 1994).

At the same time, amid cultural changes sweeping the country that emphasized physical freedom and leisure, women were encouraged to take part in sport and fitness activities for recreational pleasure. Additionally, while the television era contributed to sport’s popularity and accessibility to the masses, the growing consumer economy and, specifically, the multi-billion dollar sporting industry, helped entice greater numbers of Americans to take up sports and buy the required clothing, equipment, and services (Cahn, 1994).

The 1960s and 1970s saw women make tremendous gains in sport. Coinciding with increases in high school and college participation, there was significant growth in women's professional sports, such as tennis and golf. Advocates of women's sport began pressuring athletic officials to address gender inequities, and lawsuits were being filed on behalf of female high school athletes who sought access to boys' teams when no girls' teams existed (Cahn, 1994).

Finally, Congress passed the Educational Amendments Act of 1972, which included a section devoted to sex discrimination, known as Title IX. Specifically, Title IX stated: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance" (in Hult, 1994, p. 95).

Essentially, the provisions of Title IX required equal treatment of males and females in both high school and college athletics. However, implementing the legislation was problematic. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), which was the governing body for men's intercollegiate sport, opposed Title IX, based on the supposition that men's programs would lose resources, through budget cuts and scholarship reductions, that would then be channeled to women's programs. The NCAA delayed enforcement of Title IX until 1975, and schools had until 1978 to be in compliance. Interestingly, by 1979, not one institution had been fined for failing to address gender inequities in its athletic program (Cahn, 1994).

Meanwhile, by the end of the 1970s, the NCAA realized that under Title IX

college athletic departments would eventually be forced to increase their support of women's sports; therefore, the NCAA decided to offer collegiate championships for women in several sports. The AIAW had been sponsoring state, regional, and national championships, but the lure of financial incentives and television exposure that the NCAA offered could not be ignored. Under the NCAA, teams would not have to pay travel expenses to championships, and women's events would be added to the slate of men's events already scheduled to be covered by the major television networks in a multi-million dollar arrangement (Cahn, 1994; Hult, 1994).

Although women athletic leaders were concerned that a move to the NCAA would result in a loss of self-governance, the NCAA offered women some representative positions in the organization. Consequently, when the NCAA sponsored its first set of championships for women in the 1981-82 school year, most women's programs jumped aboard. Finally, after losing an antitrust lawsuit against the NCAA in 1984, the AIAW was forced out of existence (Cahn, 1994; Hult, 1994).

Also in the early 1980s, government inactivity on Title IX was apparent. Boutilier and SanGiovanni (1994) indicated that, as of February 1982, over 150 complaints relating to sex discrimination in athletics were still pending at the Office of Civil Rights (OCR). In addition, officials in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) under President Ronald Reagan were not expedient in enforcing compliance.

In 1984, the Supreme Court ruled in *Grove City College v. Bell* that Title IX applied only to specific programs receiving direct federal funds. The interpretation was that since *athletic programs* did not *directly* receive federal support, athletic departments

were immune to Title IX provisions, even if the *school* received federal funds (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1994; Cahn, 1994).

The Supreme Court's ruling effectively dismantled Title IX, thereby threatening the gains already made and the future progress anticipated for women in sport.

Subsequent to the decision, the OCR dropped all its pending cases (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1994), and HEW discontinued over 800 Title IX complaint investigations and compliance reviews (Cahn, 1994).

In 1988, however, Congress overrode Reagan's veto to pass the Civil Rights Restoration Act, which essentially restored the original intent of Title IX. So, sixteen years after the Educational Amendments Act became law, institutions were required to eliminate gender discrimination in all programs, including athletics (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1994; Cahn, 1994).

Throughout the history of female athletic activity in the United States, women's sport advocates have sought to increase the number of females involved in physical activity while simultaneously maintaining women in positions of athletic leadership and control. Paradoxically, tremendous increases in participation have been matched by precipitous decreases in female leadership (Cahn, 1994).

In contrast to the early years of female sport involvement revolving around informal intramural programs and community-based recreational leagues, women's sport in America now primarily centers around highly competitive high school and college varsity sports. In terms of absolute and relative numbers, female athletic participation has skyrocketed. Cahn (1994) reported that the number of girls participating in high school

sport increased from 300,000 in 1971 to over 2 million in 1992, including females taking part in baseball, football, ice hockey, and wrestling on previously all-male teams. At the college level, women participants increased from 16,000 in the early 1970s to over 160,000 by the late 1980s (Cahn, 1994). Importantly, women also are making significant inroads in fitness and exercise activities, comprising the majority of new participants in jogging, swimming, cycling, and weight training (Nelson, 1991).

Despite the impressive numbers, however, women have not reached parity with men. In high schools and colleges, females make up just over one-half the student body, while they constitute approximately only one-third of the varsity athletes and receive much less than male athletes in terms of resources and media attention (Cahn, 1994; Lopiano, 1993; Simon, 1995).

The astonishing decline in female leadership over the last quarter century contrasts to the dramatic rise in female participation. As a result of Title IX, most schools combined their women's and men's athletic departments, and, with rare exceptions, men were appointed to the highest administrative positions. Similarly, as the status of women's sport rose, coaching salaries increased, and more men became interested in coaching women's teams (Cahn, 1994; Lopiano, 1993). Because administrators were often men, and with the influence of the "old boys' network," male coaches were often selected to head women's teams. Consequently, the severe decreases in the number of women holding administrative and coaching positions reduced, to some extent, the positive impact of the increases in the number of women participating in sport.

As Cahn (1994) explained: "The simultaneous increase in participation and decrease in

leadership suggests that women have struck an unintended bargain, trading control over sport for greater access to sporting opportunities and resources” (p. 261). As a result, although greater numbers of women have the opportunity to develop athletic skills with fewer restrictions, at the same time, women now have less ability to influence their future in sport.

Sport Socialization

The process of socialization involves complex interactions among psychological, social, and cultural aspects of learning and development. Through the acquisition of cultural norms, skills, values, and beliefs, individuals are integrated into society. The expectations of others shape attitudes and behaviors so that individuals learn to act in socially acceptable and appropriate ways. While socialization entails a degree of conforming to societal expectations, it is an interactive process of social learning whereby individuals are active participants (Greendorfer, 1992, 1993).

Sport socialization can be considered from three distinct perspectives: (a) socialization into sport--i.e., how an individual initially becomes involved in sport; (b) socialization through sport--i.e., the values, attitudes, and behaviors an individual acquires as a result of participating in sport; and (c) socialization out of sport--i.e., the factors responsible for an individual disengaging from sport by means of retirement or dropping out (Greendorfer, 1992; Weiss & Glenn, 1992). For the purposes of this review, only socialization *into* sport will be discussed.

Research on socialization into sport attempts to explain how an individual acquires

the skills, knowledge, values, and dispositions to become a sport participant (Greendorfer, 1992). Three factors interact to influence this socialization process: (a) reinforcement from significant others ("socializing agents"), such as parents, siblings, peers, teachers, coaches, and other role models, including professional athletes; (b) socializing situations that provide opportunities for the individual to become involved and develop skills, such as home, school, neighborhood, team, and club; and (c) personal attributes, such as the individual's physical abilities, self-perceptions, and motivation (Greendorfer, 1992, 1993; Weiss & Glenn, 1992). Most studies have focused primarily on the impact of socializing agents, probably because of the relative ease with which these significant others can directly and indirectly influence sport socialization, either because of their physical or emotional proximity to the individual, or their power and authority over the individual (Greendorfer, 1993).

Many of the studies on socialization into sport have employed a social learning theory that considers the influences of the three clusters of independent variables--personal attributes, socializing agents, and socializing situations--on the dependent variable, active sport participation (Greendorfer, 1993). Under this theoretical framework, through observational learning and reinforcement from significant others, the individual internalizes the expected attitudes and behaviors of various social roles (Weiss & Glenn, 1992).

Alternatively, some studies have incorporated a social role-social systems perspective. A slight variation of the social learning framework, this theoretical paradigm also consists of three main elements--significant others (socializing agents who act as role models), social situations, and role learners. However, the social role-social systems

approach encompasses greater complexity, in that it includes psychological and sociological components in an attempt to accurately account for the reality of the socialization process and the dynamics of human behavior. For example, this theoretical framework acknowledges that the role learner is influenced by the specific values and norms of particular social systems, such as family, peer group, school, and community (Greendorfer, 1992; Weiss & Glenn, 1992).

As reported by Greendorfer (1992, 1993), retrospective information gathered from adult athletes, utilizing the social learning paradigm, has resulted in general descriptive profiles. This type of research has revealed that a female athlete: (a) begins sport participation at age eight or nine; (b) has one or both parents actively involved in sport, which probably translates to physical activity being considered normal or expected in the household; (c) perceives that her skill and ability levels are above average; and (d) receives positive support from parents, siblings, peers, teachers, and coaches.

Research on children, applying the social role-social systems approach, has indicated that the family and the peer group predominantly influence childhood socialization, while the school contributes some influence. While relatively little research has examined differences based specifically on race, culture, or ethnicity, the results of certain studies have exhibited racial differences with slight variations according to the sex of the child. For example, a study by Greendorfer and Ewing (1981) that focused on white and black children between the ages of 9 and 12 identified different patterns of influence based on race and sex. Among agents of socialization, father and teacher were more influential for white children, while brothers and sisters were more influential for

black children. Overall, for white girls, mothers and teachers were important influences in sport socialization, while for white boys, peers and fathers were most influential; for black girls, teachers and sisters were important influences, while for black boys, peers were the most influential. In another study, as reported by Weiss and Glenn (1992), Juhasz (1989) examined the influences of significant others on 10- to 14-year-old black males and females. Asked to indicate the three most important persons in their life, most male *and* female subjects selected mother as their first choice.

The type of feedback and reinforcement that children receive regarding their sport participation, as well as the content of underlying messages, are factors that affect the sport socialization process of children. For instance, Greendorfer (1992) discussed the positive relationship that exists between the degree and type of sport participation and the amount and type of social support from significant others. Specifically, children receiving positive reinforcement for their sport participation are more likely to become involved and maintain an interest in sport than those receiving neutral or negative feedback.

As children become adolescents, the family seems to be less influential in sport socialization, while the influence of the peer group becomes more salient (Greendorfer, 1992, 1993). In fact, peers that are the same sex as the adolescent appear to be particularly instrumental as role models (Higginson, 1985). Specifically among young females, there is evidence that teachers and coaches help to encourage involvement in competitive sports by reinforcing performance and refining skills previously learned elsewhere (Greendorfer, 1992, 1993). Research also indicates that siblings may reinforce parental influence in the sport socialization of females (Higginson, 1985).

Interestingly, in her study of female intercollegiate athletes, Greendorfer (1979) found that family members were strong socializing influences during childhood, were less influential in adolescence, and again were strong influences in young adulthood. Additionally, teachers were significant influences in adolescence, while peers were influential throughout all stages. A study by Weiss and Knoppers (1982) on female collegiate volleyball players identified parents, peers, and physical education teachers/coaches as significant influences in childhood, and brothers as the only influential significant other during adolescence and the college years.

In the mid-1980s, some scholars began to critically assess socialization theory in general, and research on sport socialization in particular (Greendorfer, 1992). For example, while Theberge (1985) commended sport socialization research for recognizing the interconnections between sport and other social experiences (such as the family, the school system, and the community), she also was critical of studies for failing to capture the complex, dynamic aspects of sporting practice. Specifically, Theberge (1985) critiqued the research for conceiving of significant others as “units of analysis that are roughly equivalent rather than as cultural agents characterized by different degrees of power and ability to mobilize resources” (p. 188). For example, in terms of socializing agents, parents undoubtedly have a certain degree of power and authority over siblings; likewise, teachers over peers.

Theberge (1984) also challenged the theoretical assumption of social determinism that underlies the social role-social systems framework. Specifically, Theberge criticized the deterministic notion of an individual being “molded” into “roles” that do not allow for

self-determination nor deviation from the "norm." In this vein, Theberge (1985) argued that socialization into sport is more a process of creating roles, rather than of taking on roles.

In essence, Theberge (1985) maintained that sport socialization research does not address the social and political factors that define and limit women's sporting practice. Consequently, she joined other critics in calling for a more integrated and holistic research perspective that includes consideration of issues of power, social conditions, and ideological beliefs (Greendorfer, 1992).

Birrell (1990) noted that although scholars have been acknowledging sport "as an institutional site for the reproduction of relations of privilege and oppression, of dominance and subordination, structured along gender, race, and class lines" (p. 185), there is an absence of critical research dealing with racial issues in sport. Birrell (1990) contended that researchers essentially obscure notions of diversity and gender by considering race as a variable, instead of in terms of a power relationship with cultural connotations, and by using "black athlete" to really mean "black *male* athlete."

In discussing women of color in sport and society, Smith (1992) explained how sport socialization is affected by socioeconomic status. According to Smith, the low socioeconomic conditions faced by disproportionate numbers of African Americans translate to greater participation by black youths in school- or recreation department-sponsored sports, such as basketball and track and field. Smith (1992) argued that as black female athletes continue to achieve success in basketball and track, stereotypic notions of athletic participation by African Americans in these highly visible and traditional

“popular” sports will persist.

In her historical analysis of gender and sexuality in women’s sport, Cahn (1994) stated that stereotypic portrayals of black women as masculine females who lacked feminine grace and refinement resulted in scant attention given to black women’s athletic achievements. In addition, the notion that female athletes were physically unattractive and sexually unappealing, when combined with the idea that black women were less attractive and desirable than white women, resulted in the extreme stigmatization of African American female athletes (Cahn, 1994).

A related issue concerning race is the lack of women of color in positions of athletic leadership, such as sport administrators, athletic coaches, and physical education teachers (Acosta, 1993; Smith, 1992). Consequently, there are relatively few opportunities for black women, as well as other women of color, to serve as mentors and role models for future generations of female sport professionals.

Several scholars have critically assessed the type of research that has been undertaken on women in sport (e.g., Birrell, 1990; Hall, 1996; Hargreaves, 1990; Smith, 1992). Studies have been moving away from categoric research, with its focus on gender or race differences that are attributable to socialization or biology, and distributive research, with its emphasis on the inequitable distribution of resources. Presently, more studies have embraced a relational approach that considers the connections between individuals and society from a socio-cultural perspective (Hall, 1996; Smith, 1992). Hall (1996) described how relational analyses “begin with the assumption that sporting practices are historically produced, socially constructed, and culturally defined to serve the

interests and needs of powerful groups in society” (p. 11). For example, a relational research approach might examine how African American women construct meaning out of their personal and cultural experiences, given the patriarchal power relations that exist in the larger society (Smith, 1992).

Gender Role Stereotyping

Gender role socialization begins in early infancy when parents first communicate their ideological beliefs about gender to their children. Through their child-rearing practices, parents transmit their values and attitudes to their offspring, both consciously and unconsciously (Greendorfer, 1992). For example, by exposing their children to activities considered “appropriate” for their gender roles, and punishing them for behavior deemed “inappropriate,” parents send distinct messages to their children regarding differences between genders. Thus, Greendorfer (1993) suggested that, because of gender role socialization, parents treat their sons and daughters differently, and children learn to distinguish between male and female.

Gender ideology is considered to have entered into childhood socialization as soon as colors are associated with the sex of a child--pink for a girl, blue for a boy--and when toys are designated as “masculine” or “feminine”--trucks for boys, dolls for girls (Greendorfer, 1993). As Greendorfer (1993) pointed out, it is logical to question why certain toys are considered more suitable for boys than girls, and why parents might think a particular activity is appropriate for their son but not their daughter.

In her review of research on toys, play, and motor skill experiences during

childhood, Greendorfer (1992) concluded that, while girls generally do not receive regular, consistent, or systematic encouragement for participating in physical activities, boys usually encounter a positive, rewarding, and supportive environment that, comparatively, is more conducive to athletic involvement. Specifically, boys have a greater number of opportunities than do girls to develop basic motor skills and to engage in gross physical activity; also, boys learn to value sport skills and physical ability to a greater degree than do girls (Greendorfer, 1992). Importantly, Greendorfer (1993) cautioned that limiting play opportunities and early motor skill development for young girls has implications in terms of later restrictions on sport skill development for older girls.

Greendorfer (1993) reported that sex typing in play styles and toy choices affects children as young as four years of age, and these differences continue throughout childhood. The danger of such gender stereotypic practices is that a gender ideology system is established, and children begin receiving the message that masculine games and sports have a higher value and are more prestigious in society. According to Greendorfer (1993):

Most of our beliefs about boys' and girls' "natural" inclinations, skills, and capacities are based on erroneous meanings and beliefs that we attach to biological sex differences. Somehow sex (biological) and gender (behavioral) differences become gender hierarchy--a ranking system conveying meanings about power, worth, and value. This belief system leads us to perceive, falsely, that sexual and gender traits considered male are "better than," "more skilled than," and "of greater natural biological capacity." (p. 8)

By deterring some women from entering sport and discouraging others from persisting at it, gender role stereotyping can be viewed as a barrier to female sport involvement.

However, some women may consider such negative or aversive influences as sources of motivation (Greendorfer, 1992).

In order to examine the process of sport socialization in a child's first organized athletic experience, Landers and Fine (1996) observed kindergarten-aged children participating on two tee ball teams. According to the authors, both head coaches (one male and one female) felt that parents exhibited gender discriminatory practices and did not take their daughters' tee ball participation seriously. Specifically, while most of the boys had their own baseball gloves, the majority of girls did not. Additionally, the coaches believed parents were more likely to play catch with their sons than with their daughters. Landers and Fine concluded that the parents were more concerned with the athletic development of their sons than their daughters.

According to Landers and Fine (1996), the female head coach acknowledged: "None of the girls want to be there. Not one. If I put a coloring station in the corner, every girl would be there. . . . Dads take their sons outside to throw with. Girls stay inside and play dolls" (p. 90). Interestingly, as the authors point out, this coach seemed content to let the gendered social order, which is produced by the family and represented by the media, go unchallenged. Landers and Fine asserted that the low expectations held by the female coach regarding the girls' interest in tee ball effectively discouraged the girls' motivation to persevere in the sport.

Landers and Fine (1996) maintained that the stereotypic attitudes of both head coaches regarding the gender appropriateness of baseball explained why the coaches were less concerned with the girls' athletic development and were more likely to focus on the

girls' mistakes in execution and attention deficits. For example, the authors stated that the girls were reprimanded more often and more severely for exhibiting behaviors very similar to the boys, whose behaviors were *not* punished. Landers and Fine (1996) also observed gender differences in terms of coaching duties. For instance, the male coaches took on "active coaching" roles, such as leading the batting and catching drills, while female coaches performed passive duties involving organizational skills and paperwork, such as collecting money and ordering pizza for a party at the end of the season (Landers & Fine, 1996). Based on their observations, the authors concluded that children learn socially acceptable gender roles in their initial organized sport experience. Gender differences are reinforced by parents and coaches, who can be extremely influential as role models (Landers & Fine, 1996).

The concept of a gender role conflict among female athletes was first articulated in the 1970s, when researchers sought to explain why women were less involved in sport than men (Birrell, 1988). The assumption underlying the role conflict notion was that since sport was a stereotypically masculine activity, women who participated in sport would experience a conflict between their feminine and athletic roles (Theberge, 1985), and would, therefore, be less inclined to participate.

However, the existence of a gender role conflict has not been supported by the research, and, in fact, has been criticized on both conceptual and methodological grounds (Birrell, 1988; Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983; Hall, 1996; Theberge, 1985). For example, Boutilier and SanGiovanni (1983) indicated that gender role research uncritically accepts the conventional notion of sport as a masculine activity that is more appropriately

engaged in by men. Theberge (1985) contributed additional criticism by suggesting that “psychological interpretations of limits on women’s involvement in sport serve to define the problem as one that lies within women” (p. 198). Theberge further argued that gender role research lacks an adequate social perspective, partly because it fails to consider sport as a dynamic and politicized activity that is shaped by individuals with vast arrays of resources and capacities. Hall (1996) maintained that a conflict does exist--not within a female athlete, but rather between gender and culture. According to Hall’s argument, this conflict exists in the feminine realm precisely because cultural practices, including sport and physical activity, are defined by masculine standards.

An analysis of research on gender by Deaux (1984) indicated that studies were shifting their focus away from individual differences and toward the social context, with an emphasis on social categories and broader social belief systems. This approach considered gender stereotypes as pervasive, in that they encompass personality traits, role behaviors, occupations, physical appearance, and sexuality; and powerful, in that they impact social interactions through attitudes and behaviors that may lead to instances of gender bias and discrimination (Gill, 1992, 1994a, 1994b).

A particularly prominent source of gender stereotyping is the media. Cohen (1993) remarked on the unique relationship between sport and the media industry in the United States:

In many cases a symbiotic relationship has evolved, so that sport is used to sell newspapers and magazines, to boost television ratings, and to attract corporate sponsors at the same time sports coverage serves to create interest in and demand for sport. (p. 172)

In making decisions about what and how to cover events, the media industry wields tremendous power by shaping cultural attitudes and perceptions (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983).

Cohen (1993) argued that, despite dramatic performance breakthroughs, the media has inadequately recognized female athleticism, and instead has focused almost exclusively on men's athletics. Further, because female athletes represent a threat to male dominance and the existing masculine power structure, coverage of women's team sports has been especially problematic (Cohen, 1993).

Research on sport and the media has included an exploration of television, newspaper, and popular magazine coverage of male and female athletes (e.g., Duncan, 1990; Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; Duncan, Messner, Williams, & Jensen, 1994; Kane, 1988; MacNeil, 1994; Messner, Duncan, & Jensen, 1993; Theberge & Cronk, 1986). Utilizing quantitative and qualitative analyses of television air time, feature articles, and photographs, research has indicated gender bias in the media. In general, female athletes receive much less media coverage (less than 10%) than their male counterparts. Additionally, while the media emphasized athletic ability and accomplishments for male athletes, femininity and physical attractiveness were stressed for female athletes. As Gill (1994a) concluded, this differential coverage reflects gender hierarchy.

Additionally, Cohen (1993) asserted that the underlying message is clear: "the female sport experience is tangential to the male experience" (p. 174). Because young people are largely dependent on the media industry to present viable role models, and due to the media's ability to showcase personalities and highlight "appropriate" activities, the

implications are profound for the socialization of youth (Cohen, 1993).

Cohen (1993) further suggested that increased television exposure can contribute to neutralizing certain gender-specific sports. According to this argument, as coverage of women's sport has become more extensive and intensive, sports that are televised have come to be viewed as more appropriate, and thus more acceptable, for women. Aided by the growth of cable sports networks, the steady increase in television coverage of women's intercollegiate athletics is representative of this phenomenon, and perhaps is exemplified by ESPN's launching of the women's basketball "game of the week" in 1990 (Cohen, 1993).

In their discussion of media representations of women in sport, Birrell and Theberge (1994) identified several prevalent themes, including: (a) the underrepresentation of women athletes; (b) the trivialization and marginalization of women athletes; (c) the objectification and sexualization of women athletes; and (d) the construction of women as unnatural athletes and of female athletes as unnatural women.

Female athletes have been underrepresented as subjects of media coverage in newspapers, television broadcasts, sports magazines, sports novels, and motion pictures (Birrell & Theberge, 1994). Birrell and Theberge (1994) explained that the media's underrepresentation of women in sport has served to discredit women's involvement in athletics by suggesting that their accomplishments are unimportant and not worthy of public attention. Messner, Duncan, and Jensen (1993) reported that an examination of four major metropolitan daily newspapers revealed that over a three-month period in 1990, 81% of all sports column inches were devoted to men's sports, while 15.5%

covered both men's and women's sports, and only 3.5% covered women's sports exclusively. Duncan, Messner, Williams, and Jensen (1994) studied televised sports news coverage on a major network in Los Angeles for six weeks in 1989 and found that 92% of sports news time was devoted to men's sports, 5% covered women's sports, and 3% covered gender-neutral topics.

According to Cahn (1993), scant newspaper coverage of women's sport reflects basic economics; consequently, only major events that receive substantial financial support (e.g., the US Open Tennis Championships) have been considered worthy of more than superficial coverage. Fortunately, this sexist policy is gradually shifting. For example, local papers have increased their coverage of girls' and women's sports through honoring male *and* female all-star teams and "athletes of the week" (Cohen, 1993).

When sportswomen *are* represented in the media, they often are portrayed as athletically inferior to men, such that their involvement and accomplishments are marginalized and trivialized. Bryson (1987) contended that trivialization functions to ensure that women remain in a subordinate position and that masculine hegemony is maintained. A study by Duncan and Hasbrook (1988) analyzed broadcasts of men's and women's basketball, surfing, and marathon running, and found ambivalence, contradiction, and conflicting messages between the visual and spoken narratives, and between and within the commentators. These researchers argued that television symbolically denies power to women by exclusionary practices, as it rarely televises women's team sports, and by denigrating tactics, when it links images of their strength and speed with comments about their physical attractiveness and private lives (Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988).

Duncan et al. (1994) also compared and analyzed televised coverage (on CBS and ESPN) of the Final Four of the men's and women's 1989 NCAA basketball tournaments. The content analyses of these games revealed gender differences, in that the quality of the technical production of the men's games was demonstrably higher than that of the women's games. For example, men's games were characterized by higher professional quality of visuals and sound, more slow-motion instant replays, and greater frequency and refinement in the use of graphic and verbal statistics (Duncan et al., 1994).

Female athletes are often presented by the media as sexualized objects, or, more precisely, as objects of heterosexual desire (Duncan, 1990). This heterosexualization is exemplified by the annual swimsuit issue of *Sports Illustrated* magazine. Remarkably, despite precipitating angry protests for its objectification of women, this edition is consistently the periodical's most popular and best-selling issue of the year (Birrell & Theberge, 1994).

Duncan (1990) examined the photographs that accompanied sports articles covering the 1984 Summer Olympic Games and the 1988 Winter and Summer Games in five different magazines. Duncan's analysis revealed the photographs to be graphic documentary evidence of the link between women's sport and sexuality. Specifically, by emphasizing physical appearance, by featuring poses that resembled soft-core pornography, by presenting submissive body positions, by highlighting emotional displays, and by including camera angles that looked down on women, the photographs helped transmit the message of female athletic inferiority (Birrell & Theberge, 1994). Cohen (1993) contended that the magazine industry generally highlights "trendy, wealthy, upper-

middle-class white women participating in individual and dual sports and in socially acceptable sports" (p. 177).

Media coverage of sport, with its emphasis on the distinctions between male and female athletes, presents gender differences as important and natural aspects of social life. As Birrell and Theberge (1994) explained, the manner in which the media covers sport effectively constructs female athletes as "unnatural" women, while also constructing women as "unnatural" athletes. Specifically, camera angles in photographic and televised images frequently present men in elevated, dominant and superior positions, while women are often presented in supportive, subservient, or subsidiary positions that imply an inferior status (Birrell & Theberge, 1994).

Messner (1988) suggested that marginalization and trivialization of female athletes have become less potent factors, given the advances in, and increasing popularity of, women's sport, as well as the media's reluctance to endanger their own legitimacy with obviously unfair and inappropriate practices. Nonetheless, the physiological differences between men and women, and the organization of sport around definitions that privilege male performance, ensure that masculine hegemony will be maintained. Specifically, by using statistics as objective measures of performance, the sport media establishment can appear to espouse equality, while actually reinforcing notions of women's physical inferiority (Birrell & Theberge, 1994; Messner, 1988).

A compelling illustration of the media's potential to produce and enforce notions of gender difference is provided by Birrell and Cole's (1990) study of Renee Richards, a constructed-female transsexual who briefly appeared on the women's professional tennis

tour in the late 1970s. The media coverage of the controversy over whether Richards should be allowed to play on the women's tour centered on issues related to the body and power. Specifically, media accounts that described and emphasized Richards's "feminine" physical appearance and "weakened condition" constructed Richards as "less than male" and, therefore, as an acceptable and appropriate challenge for women players (Birrell & Cole, 1990; Birrell & Theberge, 1994). Birrell and Cole (1990) summarized how the media effectively contributed to the construction and naturalization of gender difference:

The discourse on bodies within the Richards controversy demonstrates the cultural significance of constructing women's bodies as different from and representing them as physically inferior to men's bodies. The challenge of Richards' presence in women's sport works to naturalize women as physically inferior. (p. 16)

The notion of gender stereotyping was articulated in 1965, when Eleanor Metheny analyzed various sporting activities to determine their social acceptability for females. In her classic analysis, activities that fit the traditional feminine image were considered appropriate for females (Gill, 1994a, 1994b).

According to Metheny (1974), it was "categorically unacceptable," or generally "not acceptable" (except for those of low socioeconomic class), for women to engage in activities that were team sports (except volleyball); that involved direct competition (i.e., body contact); or that required projecting the body through space over long or moderate distances or applying direct force to heavy objects (e.g., track and field events). In contrast, Metheny concluded it was "generally acceptable" for women to engage in individual activities (e.g., swimming, golf), or those that emphasized aesthetic qualities (e.g., diving, figure skating), or those that utilized light implements to overcome light

objects (e.g., tennis). Although Metheny's analysis was conducted over thirty years ago, her work is considered extremely contemporaneous, largely because she recognized power and physicality as exclusively male traits (Birrell, 1988; Kane & Snyder, 1989).

Using Metheny's sport typology model, Kane and Snyder (1989) conducted a study to ascertain attitudes and perceptions toward female athletes. Specifically, Kane and Snyder examined attitudes held by male and female college students toward the sports of gymnastics (gender-appropriate) and women's basketball (gender-inappropriate). The researchers found support for traditional and stereotypic notions of sport, in that gymnastics was rated significantly more graceful, attractive, positive, and sociable than basketball, by both males and females.

However, when women's basketball and gymnastics were examined in terms of traditionally "masculine" physical characteristics--such as size, strength, and speed--males rated women's basketball in "lesser than" terms (e.g., "smaller," "slower," "softer," "weaker") as compared to the ratings made by females. Kane and Snyder (1989) speculated that the gender differences in ratings occurred because the males in the study were comparing women's basketball to *men's* basketball, not to women's gymnastics. Thus, Kane and Snyder suggested that the males in the study, more so than the females, were "concerned" about the gender-inappropriate, physical game of basketball, and viewed women's basketball as a "'lesser than,' bastardized, perhaps even counterfeit version of the 'real' (men's) sport" (Kane & Snyder, 1989, p. 92). Consequently, physicality was identified as the central feature in gender stereotyping of sport (Kane & Snyder, 1989).

The concept of male power through physicality has prompted the distinctions made between “typically male” and “typically female” sports. Specifically, Kane and Snyder (1989) explained:

By glorifying those sports that most exaggerate male physical and social superiority, we can allow women to be involved in sports as long as they remain in the ‘lesser than,’ ‘feminine’ sports. ‘Feminine’ sport types are considered ‘lesser than’ because they are less physical and thus less powerful and therefore less important than ‘masculine’ sport types. (p. 80)

The idea of male “superiority” ensures that women who take part in traditional “masculine” sports will be trivialized and minimized because of the cultural belief that, despite their efforts, “the best females can rarely beat the best males, especially in the sports that ‘matter most’” (Kane & Snyder, 1989, p. 80).

Sport typing places a higher value on characteristics related to physicality, thereby reinforcing the higher status of “traditional” male sports (Rintala, 1989). Through sport typing, society is able to minimize and control women’s involvement in athletics by “containing” women within “gender-appropriate” sports that do not invite women to use their bodies as instruments of physical power and aggression (Kane & Snyder, 1989). In essence, by discouraging women from participating in “gender-inappropriate” sports, society is attempting to prevent women from challenging the existing ideology of male dominance.

Prior to the study by Kane and Snyder, Theberge (1985) made similar connections between sport, physicality, and women’s oppression in society. According to Theberge, sport reproduces gender inequality by extending the notion of male *physical* superiority to the idea of male *social* superiority. Specifically, Theberge (1985) stated:

Biological differences between men and women are a matter of fact, but what is important ideologically is the reinterpretation of these differences into social distinctions and male superiority. This is accomplished through the trivialization and degradation of women's sporting experience. (p. 185)

More recently, McDermott (1996) maintained that the existing gender hierarchy is reinforced by current restrictions on women's experiences of their physicality that implicitly accept the underlying belief of the "natural" physical superiority of males. Specifically, McDermott argued that a reconceptualization of physicality that is grounded in "the physically active, lived bodily experience of women" may help illuminate how gender hierarchy operates in society (p. 26).

Homophobia

Homophobia refers to the fear, hatred, and/or intolerance of homosexuality and of homosexual people, as well as to the fear of being perceived as gay or lesbian, the fear of being gay or lesbian, and the fear of one's own physical or sexual attraction for members of the same sex (Griffin, 1993; Griffin & Genasci, 1989). Because of the stigma associated with homosexuality in our society, discussion of the topic is controversial and conducting research on the issue is problematic. Some researchers are hesitant to pursue the study of homosexuality, due to their own fears of association with the topic or because of direct or indirect discouragement from others, including administrators, colleagues, or journal reviewers (Griffin, 1993). Stemming from socially learned attitudes and beliefs, the discomfort that people feel about the issue reflects the homophobia that encompasses our culture (Griffin, 1993; Rotella & Murray, 1991).

The degree of discomfort people feel toward homosexuality varies widely. Some who despise and condemn gay people may respond to lesbians and gay men with open hostility or violence, including verbal harassment or physical abuse. Others may express their intolerance by discriminating against lesbians and gay men, by telling "queer" jokes, or by using antigay slurs. Still others may avoid associating with people thought to be gay, refrain from personal behaviors perceived as characteristic of lesbians or gay men, or fail to speak out against homophobia (Griffin, 1993; Griffin & Genasci, 1990).

As Griffin and Genasci (1990) suggested, homophobia can be further defined to include the fear or intolerance of "behavior that is perceived to be outside the boundaries of traditional gender role expectations" (p. 211). Consequently, a woman who challenges existing gender role expectations and chooses to enter male-dominated fields--such as business, politics, or sport--that reward traditional "masculine" attributes of aggressiveness, ambition, competitiveness, and independence, risks experiencing the effects of homophobia (Lenskyj, 1991; Sabo & Messner, 1993).

Gender roles, sexism, and homophobia are all interconnected within a patriarchal culture. Pharr (1988) maintained that while men are predominantly served *by* gender roles, it is primarily women who suffer *from* them. Pharr further argued that gender roles are maintained by sexism, the system through which women are kept subordinate to men. According to Pharr (1988), homophobia is a "weapon of sexism," particularly in conjunction with heterosexism:

Heterosexism creates the climate for homophobia with its assumption that the world is and must be heterosexual and its display of power and privilege as the norm. Heterosexism is the systemic display of homophobia in the institutions of

society. Heterosexism and homophobia work together to enforce compulsory heterosexuality. (pp. 16-17)

By resisting heterosexuality, lesbians are perceived as threats to male dominance and control, as well as to the nuclear family. As Pharr (1988) explained:

To be a lesbian is to be *perceived* as someone who has stepped out of line, who has moved out of sexual/economic dependence on a male, who is woman-identified. A lesbian is perceived as someone who can live without a man, and who is therefore (however illogically) against men. A lesbian is perceived as being outside the acceptable, routinized order of things. (p. 18)

As a social institution, sport reflects the values of a sexist and heterosexist society. Despite the tremendous gains made by women in sport, beliefs about traditional gender roles continue to influence the athletic participation of women. More precisely, fears about homosexuality can potentially discourage or intimidate young girls from becoming involved or maintaining involvement in sport (Griffin, 1993).

Since successful athletic performance is defined by "masculine" traits, like muscularity and aggressiveness, many people still consider sport to be a male activity. Female athletes who exhibit physical strength and competitiveness are often perceived as "masculine." Consequently, women's sport is often viewed as an inferior imitation of "the real thing: men's sport" (Griffin, 1993, p. 194).

Griffin (1993) explained that an effective way for a sexist society to maintain its gender norms is to stigmatize women who are most likely to challenge those norms. Therefore, accusing female athletes of being masculine, or of being lesbians, may intimidate or discourage women from participating in sports, especially those seen as exclusively "appropriate" for men (Griffin, 1993; Hall, 1996). As a result, accusations of

masculinity and lesbianism serve to control, marginalize, and trivialize women in sport (Griffin, 1993).

Sabo and Messner (1993), defined homophobia as a form of prejudice that reinforces gender inequality and maintains masculine hegemony in sports. First of all, homophobia can directly harm a gay athlete, or an athlete suspected of being gay, if she is discriminated against or ostracized by her teammates and/or coaches. In addition, homophobia can discredit gay and straight women who work in athletic professions, through rumors and allegations of homosexuality. In this way, men retain their control of power and resources, and maintain their advantages in status and prestige. Finally, homophobia can hurt gay and straight athletes by forcing females and males to conform to traditional gender roles and to behave according to traditional gender stereotypes (Sabo & Messner, 1993).

Griffin (1992) described several ways in which homophobia manifests itself in women's sport, including: (a) silence; (b) denial; (c) apology; (d) promotion of a heterosexy image; (e) attacks on lesbians in sport; and (f) preference for male coaches. Individuals, academic institutions, and professional sport organizations frequently attempt to avoid any discussion of homosexuality or accusations of lesbianism. Instead of commenting on rumors or refuting allegations, these entities often choose to remain silent on the issue. Additionally, a lesbian athlete often is expected to remain "closeted" and hide her sexual orientation (Griffin, 1992).

Denial of the presence of lesbians in sport is the likely outcome if the silence is broken. Nelson (1991) reported that member players and staff of the Ladies Professional

Golf Association (LPGA), as well as corporate sponsors of tour events, deny the existence of lesbians on the professional golf tour. However, Nelson (1991) cited that the conspiratorial agreement on the tour to keep homosexuality a secret has been referred to as "a silence so loud it screams" (p. 139).

Apology refers to the attempt by female athletes to assure others that sport participation does not masculinize women and that it is consistent with traditional notions of femininity. According to Griffin (1992), femininity is "a code word for heterosexuality" (p. 254). Because of homophobic and sexist standards of feminine attractiveness, women in sport must monitor their behavior and appearance in order to present a "feminine" image that is considered "acceptable" (Griffin, 1992).

Griffin (1992) indicated that as women's sport has become more visible and marketable, greater efforts have been undertaken to combat the lesbian "image problem" by aggressively promoting the heterosexual image of athletes and sports. For example, the media emphasizes stories about married female athletes and coaches that feature discussions of husbands and children to a degree that is uncommon with male athletes and coaches (Griffin, 1992). Crosset's (1995) examination of the women's professional golf tour revealed how the LPGA attempts to showcase female players in a way that does not subvert conventional gender norms: "The LPGA staff and media services relentlessly promote the image of femininity, motherhood, and heterosexuality in an attempt to counter the 'image problem'" (p. 180). Crosset maintains that players who display traditional "feminine" and heterosexual behaviors are more prominently featured in LPGA promotions, television coverage, and print media.

Homophobia, and, more specifically, the fear of the presence of lesbians, can impact administrators' decisions on hiring and firing, as well as coaches' selections of players and starters. A dramatic example of an attack on lesbians in sport can be found in Griffin's (1992) account of the rumored existence of a list that categorized Division I women's basketball coaches by their sexual orientation. Illustrating the practice of negative recruiting, the list's ostensible purpose was to help prospective student-athletes, and their parents, avoid schools with lesbian coaches (Griffin, 1992).

Another example of how lesbians in sport can be attacked is shown in research that looked at attitudes toward women and gay people among college students (Harry, 1995). Specifically, Harry (1995) found that for college men, but not for college women, beliefs about sports were associated with sexist attitudes and prejudices against gays and lesbians. The author concluded that sports may help men to define gender-related prejudices and homophobia, and to validate cultural attitudes regarding masculine superiority (Harry, 1995).

Griffin (1992) contended that because of a combination of homophobia and sexism, many female athletes and their parents, as well as athletic administrators, prefer that men coach women's teams. In particular, Griffin (1992) suggested that homophobic attitudes are at least partly responsible for the increase in the number of men coaching girls and women in sport.

Rotella and Murray (1991) argued that homophobia has prevented some individuals from developing an interest in sport and has deterred others from pursuing athletic careers. Specifically, Rotella and Murray (1991) identified several potential

ramifications of homophobia, including: (a) parents who discourage their children from pursuing sports because of a belief that participation in athletics may influence their children's sexual orientation; (b) athletes (both heterosexual and homosexual) who quit their preferred sport because of an inability to psychologically deal with athletes of a sexual orientation opposite to their own; (c) fans who will not support athletic teams and athletes based on the sexual orientations of coaches or athletes; (d) athletes who avoid careers in athletics (including teaching, coaching, training, or consulting) because of homophobia; (e) people who speculate about an individual's sexual orientation based on her sport, physique, mannerisms, style of clothes, or hair length; and (f) female athletes who avoid becoming muscular, assertive, or competitive because of a fear of being labeled homosexual.

Research conducted by Blinde and Taub (1992) attempted to examine how homophobia affects the lives and sport experiences of female athletes. The study involved interviewing 24 female intercollegiate athletes about societal perceptions of women's sport and female athletes; questions related to positive and negative connotations associated with women's sport, as well as to specific stereotypes about female athletes. The authors identified two themes: (a) a silence about lesbianism in women's sport, and (b) the internalization by athletes of societal stereotypes regarding lesbians and female athletes.

In terms of the silence surrounding lesbianism, Blinde and Taub (1992) found that although the athletes were cognizant of the issue, they were hesitant to discuss it. Specifically, silence was expressed in the following ways: (a) the difficulty and uneasiness with which the athletes discussed the lesbian topic; (b) viewing lesbianism as a personal,

irrelevant issue, that was, therefore, inappropriate to discuss; (c) disguising or hiding their athletic identities in order to avoid the lesbian label or other stigmatized image (e.g., jock); (d) the difficulty or inability of the team to address the lesbian issue; and (e) the difficulty or reluctance of athletic directors and coaches to address the lesbian issue or challenge the lesbian stereotype (Blinde & Taub, 1992).

Regarding the athletes' internalization of stereotypic attitudes and prejudices toward lesbians and female athletes, Blinde and Taub (1992) found that the female athletes generally accepted societal stereotypes. Specifically, the authors identified the following categories: (a) acceptance of societal definitions of lesbianism, including references to "looking like a guy" and remarks about muscularity, short hair, and masculine clothing; (b) acceptance of societal stereotypes that link team sports, such as basketball and softball, with the lesbian label; and (c) acceptance of negative images of lesbianism, including degrading comments, joking remarks, and statements that offend or insult lesbians (Blinde & Taub, 1992).

As Blinde and Taub (1992) indicated, the existence of the lesbian stereotype has potential negative ramifications for female athletes. For example, some female athletes trying to avoid the lesbian label may feel that they need to adopt "socially acceptable behaviors" (p. 163), and that they cannot "be themselves" (p. 164). Restricting and limiting female athletes in this manner effectively disempowers women. Additionally, Blinde and Taub (1992) suggested that the cultural stereotypes about female athletes may result in denying a woman's athleticism, as some women may decide to leave sport, others may choose to participate in "socially acceptable" sports only, while others still may

decide to avoid sport altogether.

Theberge and Birrell (1994) argued that, in general, scholars, administrators, coaches, and teachers have failed to adequately address the issue of homophobia and its use against women in sport. Therefore, as Theberge and Birrell (1994) concluded, it is important to consider the role of homophobia and heterosexism in maintaining masculine hegemony and in further solidifying sport as a male preserve.

Conclusion

Fortunately, in tracing the historical development of women in sport, there is evidence that the conditions under which women have participated in athletics have progressively improved. However, the fact that girls are socialized differently than boys means that the individual experiences of girls and women participating in a sport will differ greatly from the experiences of boys and men taking part in the same sport. In addition, gender role stereotypes and expectations that are held by members of society have important implications for girls and women (as well as for boys and men) who choose to participate in "socially unacceptable," "gender-inappropriate" activities. Finally, homophobia is a problem not with homosexuals but with society, in that it is a particularly insidious type of prejudice that harms both homosexuals and heterosexuals, and both athletes and non-athletes. Thus, given the research discussed, there is a need to explore how girls and women have actually been influenced and affected by sport socialization, gender role stereotyping, and homophobia.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

In this chapter, I describe the participants involved in the study. In addition, I explain the feminist theoretical approach that serves as the framework for the study and provides the basis for the selection of interviewing as the method of data collection. Finally, I discuss the data analysis method that was employed in the study.

Participants

Through network selection, I identified five former collegiate women's basketball players who completed their eligibility between 1990 and 1995. In an effort to achieve diversity, I chose women who represented different races/ethnicities (Caucasian, African American, Native American), who grew up in different geographical areas (the Northeast, the Midwest, and the Southeast), who participated at different competitive levels of athletics (NCAA Divisions I, II, and III), and who played different positions (guard and forward). In addition, the participants selected met the following criteria: (a) they participated in women's collegiate basketball for a minimum of two seasons; (b) they graduated with a baccalaureate degree prior to September 1995; (c) they were less than 30 years of age at the time of the study; and (d) they volunteered for the study and signed informed consent statements (Appendix A) immediately prior to their interviews. No payments or incentives were provided to the participants.

The participants were not expected to be spokeswomen for their respective race, region, school, or position. I simply endeavored to explore the individual athletic

experiences and perceptions of former collegiate women's basketball players from as many different backgrounds as possible.

Rationale for Approach to the Study

Feminist research methods are used in research projects "by people who identify themselves as feminist or as part of the women's movement" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 6). As a feminist, I found a feminist theoretical framework particularly appropriate for my work.

Despite some variations in perspectives, the premise underlying all feminist research is the belief that women's lives are important. Feminist researchers are committed to examining women in their own individual context, as well as in context with other women. More precisely, feminist research considers the world from a women's perspective and, therefore, does not present the male point of view or masculine perspective as the norm or standard of all worthy experience. Hall (1988) has argued that feminist scholarship has the power to transform traditional disciplines so that they are free of their sexist biases.

Feminist research, then, is unique in its non-traditional perspective and as a method of scholarship that gives voices to those from whom we often do not hear. Reinharz has provided examples of the various ways that feminist research is able to carry out its objectives: "Making the invisible visible, bringing the margin to the center, rendering the trivial important, putting the spotlight on women as competent actors, understanding women as subjects in their own right rather than objects for men" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 248). Feminist research methodology is particularly relevant in sport studies, as sport is a

cultural practice in which women are often marginalized, trivialized, or excluded. As Hall (1988) succinctly explained: "To do feminist scholarship in the world of sport is to recognize that female athletes and sportswomen are devalued, often exploited, and very often oppressed" (p. 337).

Another attractive feature of a feminist theoretical approach is its emphasis on the interaction of gender and power in general, and on issues of gender politics and gender conflict in particular (Reinharz, 1992). Feminist research is often directed toward pushing for social change and addressing social policy questions. Therefore, it is with the possibility for positive social and political change in mind that I hope my study, by way of educating people about women's experiences in sport, will contribute to progress toward the attainment of true gender equity and the elimination of gender discrimination.

Feminist research methods attempt to recognize diversity, which I tried to accomplish by selecting participants of different races, of diverse geographical backgrounds, and of a range of abilities (as reflected in the various competitive levels represented). In addition, I examined heterosexism by addressing the issue of homophobia.

A distinguishing characteristic of feminist research is the importance given to the researcher's personal experience. Specifically, using the first person singular voice and describing the personal origins of a research question are hallmarks of a feminist theoretical orientation. Offering the explanation in the Preface for my interest in this topic illustrates how feminist research "reads as partly informal, engagingly personal, and even confessional" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 259). A feminist will often discuss the motivation for

her research in the text of her study. In my case, clearly, the motive for interviewing former collegiate basketball players was to listen to the stories of women who were not discouraged---as I was---from playing basketball.

By starting from one's own experience, a feminist researcher ensures that she begins from a woman-centered focus. As Reinharz (1992) described:

Feminist researchers frequently start with an issue that bothers them personally and then use everything they can get hold of to study it. In feminist research, then, the 'problem' is frequently a blend of an intellectual question and a personal trouble. (pp. 259-260)

For me, the personal experience of reflecting on why I quit basketball in high school was the starting point of my study. And thinking further about the decision informed my research question. I definitely felt a personal connection to the idea of a gender role conflict. And this "troubling" experience developed into a need to explore the topic further---from learning about feminist theory to reading about homophobia to deciding to talk to other female sport participants about their early athletic experiences.

Data Collection Method

In order to best gain insight into the experiences of the participants' athletic involvement, and in keeping with the feminist theoretical framework, I chose interviewing as my method of data collection. The advantage of interviewing is that it offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher. As Reinharz explained: "This asset is particularly important for the study of women because in this way learning from women is an antidote

to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 19).

I utilized an interview guide (Appendix B) consisting of six open-ended questions that allowed the participants to relate their experiences, share their perceptions, and express their feelings. Serving truly as a "guide" only, the interview guide enabled me to engage the participant in a discussion that was semi-structured, in that it allowed me to incorporate related questions to elicit greater description, explanation, and elaboration when new topics arose or when appropriate. Because I had employed the same interview guide in the pilot study I conducted, I was satisfied that I would be able to elicit appropriate responses. Both the first and second interviews with each participant were audiotaped in order to ensure capturing the participants' responses in their own words.

With one exception, I interviewed each participant in a private conference room twice during the course of the study. Because of a geographical distance constraint, I conducted the *second* interview with one participant over the telephone. However, with the use of a recording device, I was able to audiotape this interview as well. Prior to beginning each initial interview, the participant read and signed an informed consent document and completed a participant information sheet (Appendix C). Instead of selecting pseudonyms for the participants, I allowed the women to choose their own. The technique of interviewing, the use of the term "participant" instead of "subject," and the decision to permit the interviewees to select their own pseudonyms are all choices that a feminist researcher makes, and are consistent with "many women's interest in avoiding control over others and developing a sense of connectedness with people" (Reinharz,

1992, p. 20). In addition, before the initial interview began, I stated to each participant that she was the expert and that I just wanted to listen to her stories and her ideas. I referred to myself not as a researcher, but as a learner.

During the interviews, I tried to listen with care and consideration in order to allow the participant to develop her ideas, construct her own meaning, and use words that conveyed what she meant. Throughout the sessions, I tried to be participant-guided and to focus more on understanding the interviewee than on getting my questions answered (Reinharz, 1992). While I encouraged stories and asked for more details when I thought appropriate, I realized that the participant's story marked the boundary of what the individual was prepared to tell. The first interview sessions lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and focused on the participants' personal experiences in athletics and their perceptions of how others view women in sport.

During the second interview, I shared with each participant the transcript from the initial interview and my synthesis of her original responses. I mailed a copy of the transcript to the participant with whom I was not able to conduct the follow-up interview in person, and we arranged the time for the telephone interview to take place. The purpose of this follow-up session was to clarify and verify data from the initial interview. Specifically, this second interview allowed me to check with the participants to make sure that my summary accurately reflected and represented their experiences and perceptions. I also asked if they wanted me to make any corrections, qualifications, additions, or deletions to their earlier comments. Thus, the follow-up interviews served to increase the study's validity.

Data Analysis Method

In terms of data analysis, I personally transcribed each interview and wrote up a synthesis of each participant's responses. I read the transcripts numerous times to become familiar with the data so that I could identify patterns and themes common to all participants. I also attempted to isolate any differences in points of view or any discrepant phenomena among the participants. From the transcripts, I collected direct quotations from the women to provide evidence of the themes and the participants' perspectives of their experiences. In order to contribute to the validation of my findings, I shared the transcripts and my preliminary themes with a qualitative research group and asked for critical feedback regarding my interpretations. The qualitative research group confirmed my initial themes and also prompted me to consider the concept of regret with respect to the participants' perceptions of their personal experiences.

CHAPTER 4

THE ATHLETES

In this chapter, I present an initial general description of the group of participants. Additionally, I provide individual profiles with greater detail for each of the five women interviewed.

Group Description

The participants in this study were five former collegiate women's basketball players (Table 1). In order to ensure confidentiality, and to preserve their identities, I refer to the women by the personal pseudonyms they chose for themselves. Thus, in the study, the women are referred to as "Caryl Ann," "Elizabeth," "Katie," "Paige," and "Stacey." In addition, I do not specifically identify their respective universities; instead, I describe the general location of their schools, as well as the general region where they were raised.

In selecting women from different racial backgrounds and different regions of the country, I sought to create as diverse a group as possible. Three of the women were Caucasian, one was African American, and one was Caucasian with Native American ancestry. Two of the former athletes were raised and educated as undergraduates and played intercollegiate basketball in the Northeast, two were raised and educated in the Southeast, and one was raised and educated in the Midwest.

I also attempted to choose women who participated at different competitive levels and who played different positions. Three of the women played at Division III

Table 1. The Athletes

ATHLETE	AGE	RACE	REGION	DIVISION	POSITION
CARYL ANN	26	Caucasian	Northeast	III	Off - Guard
ELIZABETH	25	Caucasian	Midwest	III	Point Guard
KATIE	24	Caucasian	Southeast	III	Forward
PAIGE	28	Caucasian / Native American	Northeast	III, II, I	Forward
STACEY	24	African American	Southeast	I	Forward

institutions, one played at a Division I school, and one attended a university that changed from Division III to Division I while she was a student-athlete. Three of the former players were forwards, one was a point guard, and one played the off-guard position.

The towns and cities in which the women grew up and attended college were quite varied. Elizabeth was raised in a small rural town and attended school in a suburb of a medium-sized city; Paige was raised in a suburb of a large metropolitan city and went to school in a medium-sized city; Stacey grew up in one medium-sized city and attended college at another medium-sized city in the same state; Caryl Ann grew up in a medium-sized city and went to college in a small city; and Katie was raised in a small city and went to school in a medium-sized city.

Each woman I interviewed was speaking solely for herself and, thus, was not meant to be a spokeswoman for any other female collegiate basketball players, nor even for any former female athletes of her race or region of the country. Rather, I intended to conduct an in-depth exploration of the sport experiences and perceptions of five women who loved basketball and who chose to pursue the sport in college.

By attempting to include a diverse group of women, I hoped to be able to examine how racial or regional factors may have influenced the sport experiences of the individual participants. Although the participants do not represent all regions of the country (e.g., the West) or any other races (e.g., Asian Americans), this group of women does represent a selective sample from a population of all possible female intercollegiate athletes.

The family backgrounds of the participants were fairly similar. Each had at least one sibling, and each was the youngest member of her family. All of the women grew up

in households where participation in sport was supported. From very young ages, all of the participants were physically active, playing a variety of games, both informally with family members or neighbors, and more formally in school settings (e.g., recesses or physical education classes).

All five of the women participated in more than one scholastic sport, and two competed in another sport besides basketball at the collegiate level. To various degrees, athletics was a factor for each athlete in making her decision on where to go to college; however, academics was often the primary consideration. Besides being highly motivated athletically, all five participants were academically oriented, as evidenced by the fact that at the time of the study, each woman had either completed a graduate program or was in the midst of pursuing a graduate degree. Interestingly, also during the course of the study, four of the five participants were working in athletic-related fields or were in school preparing for athletic-related careers--i.e., two in athletic training, one in athletic administration, and one in coaching (basketball, of course).

Individual Descriptions

Caryl Ann

At the time of the interviews, Caryl Ann was 26 years old and was serving as a certified athletic trainer in a physical therapy clinic in her hometown in the Northeast. She is Caucasian, and has three older brothers and one older sister. Although she grew up learning sport skills from her brothers, Caryl Ann described herself as the "most athletic" in her family.

Caryl Ann attended private elementary and secondary schools. Additionally, she went to a private all-women's college (Division III) within thirty miles of her hometown, where she received a Bachelor's degree in physical education with a specialty in athletic training. Because she needed to work in the training room for a required number of hours in order to become a certified athletic trainer, Caryl Ann was unable to play basketball for more than two years. However, because of the time of year, she was able to compete for her college softball team for four years.

Caryl Ann was a reserve on the basketball team, where she played the off-guard position. After graduating from college in 1991, she went to graduate school at a Division I school in the Midwest, where she often played pick-up basketball. Upon receiving her Master's degree in physical education/athletic training in 1993, she returned to her hometown and began working as a trainer in a clinic setting. Ultimately, Caryl Ann would like to work as an athletic trainer for women's sports at a university.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth was 25 years old and was pursuing a Master's degree in college student personnel at a large university in the Southeast, while simultaneously working in the school's financial aid office. She is Caucasian, and has one older sister. She grew up on a farm in a rural part of the Midwest, and as a child she played many sports with her older boy cousins. Elizabeth was from a very sports-minded community, and she felt that her girls' high school basketball team received as much support as the boys' team.

Elizabeth attended a Division III university which was located near a mid-sized Midwestern city, and she graduated in 1993 with a Bachelor's degree in psychology.

Elizabeth competed on her school's basketball team for four years; she was a consistent starter, playing the point guard position.

Elizabeth enjoys playing basketball recreationally with friends. Upon completion of her degree, her goal is to work in a university setting, preferably at a small college similar to the one she attended, where she would like a position in athletic administration or financial aid.

Katie

Katie was 24 years old and was serving as a graduate assistant athletic trainer while pursuing a Master's degree in sport psychology at a large Southeastern university. She is Caucasian, and has one older brother. She learned sport skills from watching her father and brother, and cited her brother as her biggest influence in athletics. She competed in tennis, basketball, and softball throughout high school, but her childhood dream was to play college basketball.

Katie went to a Division III school in a mid-sized Southeastern city. She competed in basketball for four years and played at the forward position. She also played tennis for two years in college. As a freshman, Katie was the last player to make the basketball team; however, she steadily improved, starting half of her team's games as a sophomore and being a consistent starter in her junior and senior seasons.

Katie completed her Bachelor's degree in sports medicine in 1994, and then started graduate school. Her goal is to be an athletic trainer at a university, where she can apply her education in sport psychology inside the training room.

Paige

Paige was 28 years old and was serving as a graduate assistant in athletic administration while pursuing a doctorate in sport sociology at a large Division I institution in the Southeast. She is Caucasian and of Native American descent. She has two older brothers, with whom she grew up playing sports. Paige was raised in a suburb of a large Northeastern city, and was the only girl on her Little League baseball team. She played both basketball and softball when she got to high school.

Paige attended a university in the Northeast that was in the midst of upgrading from Division III to Division I while she was a student-athlete. The school was classified as Division III during her freshman year, Division II during her sophomore year, and Division I during her third and final year of basketball competition. She graduated in 1991 with a Bachelor's degree in Communications. Paige wanted to play softball in addition to basketball in her sophomore year, but was denied that opportunity when the school dropped the sport after her freshman year. She quit playing basketball at the end of her junior year, as a result of a personal conflict with her head coach.

Paige completed a Master's degree in higher education in 1993. After she completes her doctorate, her goal is to become an athletic director.

Stacey

Stacey was 24 years old and was pursuing a Master's degree in recreation and leisure studies at a large Southeastern university. She is African American, and has one older brother. She grew up in a mid-sized city in the Southeast. She initially learned athletic skills from her father; both her parents were supportive of her participation in

sports. In high school, Stacey competed in both basketball and volleyball, but her goal was to play basketball in college.

Stacey attended an historically black Division I school in a medium-sized Southeastern city. She competed in basketball for two seasons, until she suffered an injury. Stacey played at the forward position on her basketball team. She graduated with a Bachelor's degree in health and physical education in 1994.

While completing her graduate studies, Stacey was working for a municipal recreation program and coaching a girls' youth basketball team. Although she expressed an interest in working for a city's parks and recreation department, Stacey's ultimate goal is to coach women's intercollegiate basketball.

CHAPTER 5

THEMES

Caryl Ann, Elizabeth, Katie, Paige, and Stacey all shared an intense love of competition and a particular joy in playing the game of basketball. Although these women grew up in the same relative time period (all were born between 1968 and 1972), they were raised in diverse geographic locales, which could explain some differences found in their early sport experiences. For example, because she grew up in the Northeast, it was not surprising that Paige's experiences included playing street hockey in her neighborhood at pre-school age and participating in interscholastic field hockey as a ninth-grader. In contrast, sporting opportunities for Elizabeth, who grew up on a farm in the Midwest, were much different; because softball was not offered in her community, Elizabeth's first organized sport experience was playing girls' baseball in second grade.

Thus, despite some obvious and real differences in the backgrounds and competitive careers of the five women interviewed, some remarkable similarities appeared in the accounts of their athletic experiences and in the comments regarding their current perceptions of women in sport. In this chapter, I present the following common themes that emerged in the narratives of all five participants: (a) early athletic experiences that involved males, including the learning of sport skills from older male family members and playing more with boys than with girls; (b) support and encouragement from significant others that contributed to continued sport involvement; (c) frustration at the existence of gender inequities; (d) awareness of negative stereotypes of female athletes and societal perceptions of "gender-appropriate" sports; (e) acknowledgment of progress achieved by

girls and women in sport coupled with personal regret; and (f) ambivalence regarding the future of girls and women in sport.

Early Athletic Experiences

A major theme was that, for all five participants, early athletic experiences involved males. Within this broad theme, two sub-themes emerged: (a) the participants initially learned sport skills from older male family members, and (b) the participants played sports more with boys than with girls.

Older Male Family Members

In terms of the first sub-theme, each participant described her earliest athletic experiences in terms of playing with fathers, older brothers, or male cousins (Table 2). In addition, each woman explained that these older male family members, from whom she first learned fundamental sport skills (e.g., shooting, catching, batting, throwing), were very influential to her athletic development.

Caryl Ann explained that while she was the only one among her three older brothers and one older sister to pursue sports in college, her brothers were “*big influences*” on her athletic skill development: “*I learned . . . how to shoot from my brothers; how to throw a football from my brothers; how to bat . . . --everything. It’s mostly from my brothers.*” From a young age, Caryl Ann participated in a variety of activities besides basketball, including football, baseball, soccer, kickball, and tennis.

When asked about her earliest athletic experiences, Elizabeth explained that because she grew up on a farm, she did not have neighborhood friends with whom to play,

Table 2. Early Athletic Experiences - Older Male Family Members

ATHLETE	COMMENTS
CARYL ANN	"I learned . . . how to shoot from my brothers; how to throw a football from my brothers; how to bat . . . --everything. It's mostly from my brothers."
ELIZABETH	"I have an older sister, but . . . we didn't play sports. I played a lot with my older boy cousins. So, I guess you could consider me a tomboy. . . . I did play football a lot with my boy cousins."
KATIE	"Watching my dad and my brother outside shooting and stuff--I kind of picked up on that. . . . I was constantly watching sports on TV, just because my dad and my brother were; I mean, it was on and I liked watching it."
PAIGE	"I have two older brothers, and I used to play sports with them. . . . I would want to play, because they were my role models, and that's what they did."
STACEY	"My first experience was with my father, when I was about five years old, just shooting around at home. We had a basketball goal at my house."

so she primarily played with male cousins on weekends and holidays:

I have an older sister, but . . . we didn't play sports. I played a lot with my older boy cousins. So, I guess you could consider me a tomboy. I played Matchbox cars; we had semi-trucks that we played with. Of course, I also had Barbies; so, you know, I had a little mix. But I did play football a lot with my boy cousins.

Katie stated that her earliest athletic experiences were in her backyard, playing basketball with her father and brother: *"I lived in a really small town, and there wasn't much opportunity for girls to play. . . . So, watching my dad and my brother outside shooting and stuff--I kind of picked up on that."* The athletic influence of her father and brother was exhibited in other ways, as Katie remarked: *"I was constantly watching sports on TV, just because my dad and my brother were; I mean, it was on, and I liked watching it."*

Katie's biggest influence was probably her brother: *"When I was young, and my brother was in 'little league' sports, I was always at those games."* Later on, Katie described how her brother *"played everything growing up,"* and how that impacted her: *"I was always there watching him; he and his friends would be shooting hoops in the backyard, or whatever. So, I think just seeing him being involved kind of made me more involved."*

When asked about her earliest experiences in sport, Paige explained that her brothers were her role models when she was growing up:

I have two older brothers, and I used to play sports with them. They're six and seven years older. So, they would dress me up in the hockey gear, and I'd always be the goalie because I was the little girl and I was the youngest.

The significance of her brothers' influence was not lost on Paige, as she later added:

I would want to play, because they were my role models, and that's what they did. You know, I'm sure if I had sisters, it might have been different, but . . . being the only girl--that, and being the youngest--I did what my older brothers did.

Stacey explained that her initial sport experience involved playing basketball with her father: *"I would say my first experience was with my father, when I was about five years old, just shooting around at home. We had a basketball goal at my house."* Stacey learned athletic skills from her father, as evidenced by her description of her success in basketball in junior high despite poor coaching: *"As I look back, I would say that I was experienced enough to play. . . . I knew the game. I knew the fundamentals, I guess, because my father taught me."*

Played More with Boys

With respect to the second sub-theme, each participant indicated that she played more with boys than with girls while in grade school, informally at recess, or more formally in an organized setting (Table 3). For example, in addition to playing with her brothers, Caryl Ann also remembered taking part in activities at school with boys her age: *"I always played with the guys through grade school. It was always . . . me playing with the guys. A bunch of us would play, but I was always wanting to be where the guys were."* Caryl Ann readily acknowledged that she was considered a 'tomboy': *"I was always the tomboy, because . . . I had three older brothers . . . and everybody on my street was guys, so I kind of did the whole 'guy' thing. I didn't want to play with Barbies."*

Elizabeth also recalled frequently playing with the boys: *"I was around the guys a lot. . . . I was always competing, in my mind, with the guys, not with the girls."* With

Table 3. Early Athletic Experiences - Played More with Boys

ATHLETE	COMMENTS
CARYL ANN	"I always played with the guys through grade school. It was always . . . me playing with the guys. A bunch of us would play, but I was <u>always</u> wanting to be where the guys were."
ELIZABETH	"I was around the guys a lot. . . . I was always competing, in my mind, with the guys, not with the girls."
KATIE	"I played more with the guys than the girls--just racing and doing that kind of thing. . . . I was always wanting to play football, somehow or another."
PAIGE	"That [playing Little League baseball] was a really good experience, because you did have to really take a lot of junk from the boys. But, you know, if you were good, then they would get over it."
STACEY	"I was almost the only female sometimes. I always tried to hang with my brother; wherever he went, I went. . . . I was always playing, because I didn't want to be left out."

pride, Elizabeth related a particularly memorable experience of playing dodgeball in elementary school, in which she was responsible for getting a number of the boys "out," and she was one of the last people to remain in the game:

I think that was when I first realized that I was considered athletic, because I was one of the last people that was tagged out. . . . And I remember getting some of the boys out; and I just felt so cool, about getting the boys out.

Similarly, Katie discussed playing with the boys on the playground in grade school:

"I played more with the guys than the girls--just racing and doing that kind of thing.

There was a little football; I was always wanting to play football, somehow or another."

Paige grew up playing basketball, football, street hockey, stickball, and kickball with her brothers, as well as with a group of neighborhood friends that included approximately twelve boys and six girls. Additionally, Paige described her experience of being the first girl in her area to play on a boys' Little League baseball team. Starting at age nine, Paige played baseball for five years and was proud of that opportunity and the challenge it represented: *"That was a really good experience, because you did have to really take a lot of junk from the boys. But, you know, if you were good, then they would get over it."*

Stacey indicated that she frequently played athletic games with her brother, who was two years her senior, as well as with children from her community. Besides basketball, the group played whiffle ball, dodgeball, and kickball. Similar to the other participants, Stacey spent much of her youth playing with boys, as she recalled that among the group from her community, there were not many girls:

I was almost the only female sometimes. I always tried to hang with my brother;

wherever he went, I went. And I played. And he got mad; but I was always playing, because I didn't want to be left out.

Support and Encouragement from Significant Others

Another theme that emerged was that all five women indicated that the support and encouragement they received from significant others contributed to their continued involvement in sport (Table 4). To varying degrees, family members, friends, peers, coaches, and teachers were influential to each woman's pursuit of athletics.

Caryl Ann explained how her parents' involvement in athletics supported and encouraged her participation: *"They came to all my games. And my parents were actually coaches--my mom coached softball, and my dad coached a guys' grade school basketball team for a number of years--so they were very involved."* Caryl Ann credited her high school coaches for instructing her in the fundamentals of basketball: *"They were a big influence; I learned a lot from them."* In terms of athletic role models while growing up, Caryl Ann mentioned that she was a *"big fan"* of professional tennis player Chris Evert.

Interestingly, three of the five participants reported having two distinct groups of friends while engaged in athletics. Caryl Ann described her two separate groups of friends, and explained that her non-athletic friends supported her athleticism:

It's funny because . . .--even going through high school and college--I always had two separate groups of friends. Not that the two groups were unfriendly. . . . Like, in college, there was a group that I lived with and went to classes with, and there was the group that I played basketball with. And I got along with both groups. And the ones that didn't play sports . . . would come to my games and were very supportive and encouraging.

Athletic peers and coaches were also influential in providing significant

Table 4. Support and Encouragement from Significant Others

ATHLETE	COMMENTS
CARYL ANN	"I always had two separate groups of friends. . . . Like, in college, there was a group that I lived with and went to classes with, and there was the group that I played basketball with. . . . And the ones that didn't play sports . . . would come to my games and were very supportive and encouraging."
ELIZABETH	"I . . . had great support. And when I was playing basketball, I got a lot of attention--all positive. And I think that's why I liked it so much. . . . I had nothing but wonderful, supporting people, friends, family--all through college, all through high school."
KATIE	"I think just the idea of [my brother] is what kept me going. He was really supportive and, a lot of times, like a father to me. . . . I always had [this feeling that] 'he's really behind me and he believes in me.'"
PAIGE	"My third grade teacher was so cool. . . . She was a role model, because she played golf. . . . And she was very supportive of us doing sports. Like, she knew I was the dodgeball champion in elementary school. And so she was wonderful."
STACEY	"I had, I would say, a 'big sister' that wasn't a related sister, but she was someone I looked up to. . . . She was just awesome. . . . She didn't play in college. But, I still looked up to her, because she was a role model for me when I was younger. . . . She would always take me out and play ball."

encouragement and support. Caryl Ann expressed that as an incoming college freshman, she had a strong desire to play basketball, but was somewhat hesitant to try out for the team until she encountered some of the current players:

Some of the older students that knew who I was from high school came by [my] freshman year, and they kind of encouraged me; they said: "Are you going to try out? Are you going to try out?" And I was kind of . . . a little bit wishy-washy, but I thought I would do it. But then, when they came by and they asked me, I was like, "Well, I'm definitely going to do it now." And there was no question I was going to play.

Elizabeth described her parents as being supportive and encouraging regarding her sporting involvement: *"My dad would always get out and throw the softball, or shoot the hoops when I was a little older, after I got into that,"* and: *" . . . [my Mom] would get out there and do stuff, too."* In terms of role models when she was growing up, Elizabeth mentioned admiring and looking up to the players on the high school girls' varsity basketball team. Specifically, when she was in junior high, Elizabeth went to basketball camps and attended high school basketball games, where *"there were a bunch of girls that I kind of looked up to, [who] I kind of . . . perceived as role models."*

Elizabeth revealed that she initially lacked confidence in her ability to play college basketball, because she attended a small high school and thus did not receive much attention from college coaches. In fact, when discussing her reasons for choosing the college she ultimately attended, Elizabeth added to the list: *"And the fact that the coach wanted me."* Interestingly, her lack of confidence partly derived from her first experience in organized basketball, when she made the seventh grade team, but the coach did not let her play in the first game; Elizabeth stated that the incident left her *"mortified."*

Similar to Caryl Ann, Elizabeth described having different groups of friends: *"My very best friend . . . from high school is not athletic at all. . . . I had my friends on the court; I had my friends off the court. And . . . they mixed somewhat."* Elizabeth maintained that she received positive support and encouragement from people in her community regarding her athleticism. As she stated:

I never felt like I was looked down upon because I was a female [athlete]. I was always looked very highly upon. Everybody would always say, "Oh, you're the one that plays basketball. . . ." It was a very sports-minded community, so, therefore, it was a very positive thing when a person was involved in sports.

Elizabeth acknowledged that the positive support she received from family and friends probably contributed to her decision to persevere in sport, even suggesting that had her experience in athletics been negative, *"I wouldn't have played."* As Elizabeth succinctly expressed:

I . . . had great support. And when I was playing basketball, I got a lot of attention--all positive. And I think that's why I liked it so much. Maybe if I had had negative attention, it [basketball] may not have been such a powerful force in my life. But I had nothing but wonderful, supporting people, friends, family--all through college, all through high school.

Katie expressed that both her mother and father supported her involvement in sport: *"They were always encouraging me to participate and to stick with things. It wasn't an option to quit something in my household."* While both parents encouraged her, Katie identified her mother as particularly supportive. According to Katie, her mother attended almost all of her games: *"My mom was at everything. . . . I can't think of very many times when she wasn't. Some of the away games she didn't get to; but, a lot of them, she did."*

However, because her father was a very good high school athlete and even played college basketball, Katie acknowledged that, between her parents, she really looked more to her father for support: *"He was the one that I was always looking for the encouragement from, but just because he had had the background."* According to Katie, although her father was supportive, *"he worked a lot, so he didn't get to a lot of the games. . . . It was more an exception, rather than the rule, when he came."* In addition, because her father attended all of her brother's high school football games, as well as some of his baseball and basketball games, Katie perceived that her father was actually more supportive of her brother. In fact, Katie related a particularly memorable incident that occurred one evening when she was in middle school and playing tennis, and her brother was in high school and playing football. Earlier that afternoon, Katie was victorious in one of her first tennis matches and was understandably very excited; at the dinner table that evening, however, her father spent most of the meal talking to her brother about that day's football practice, and never said anything to Katie about her tennis match.

Katie also indicated that her brother was supportive of, and inspirational to, her athletic endeavors. With her brother expressing regret over failing to make the most of his athletic opportunities, Katie was determined to avoid carrying such a burden, and so she resolved to try to pursue her sport career in college. As Katie explained: *"I didn't want to end up saying 'What if . . . ' like he had."* Katie commented on the importance of her brother's support: *"I think just the idea of him is what kept me going. He was really supportive and, a lot of times, like a father to me."* Katie further explained that she always had the feeling from her brother that *"he's really behind me and he believes in*

me.”

Similar to Elizabeth, while in high school, Katie received tepid responses from college coaches and so lacked confidence in her ability to play collegiate basketball. In fact, when one of her high school coaches inquired into some of the nearby colleges, according to Katie:

I didn't get a very positive response from it. It was more like "Well, if you want to go try out, you can, but . . ." And there was always that "but." I didn't really get a lot of strong encouragement to play.

Similar to Caryl Ann, it wasn't until Katie had started classes in college that she was absolutely certain that she was going to try to make the basketball team. As Katie described:

I really didn't know that I was going to try out for the team until I got to college, and I met one of the girls that was on the team. She was a senior, and she lived on my floor-- right down the hall from me. She said, "Yeah, we heard about you. . . . Come out and play a pick-up game." And, up until that point, I didn't think anybody knew anything about me.

So, as was the case with Caryl Ann and Elizabeth, until she perceived clear and unambiguous positive feedback from coaches and her athletic peers, Katie did not have enough self-confidence to pursue an intercollegiate athletic career.

Then, in discussing her experience in college basketball, Katie indicated that during her freshman year, she harbored doubts about being able to continue playing basketball because of negative feedback from the head coach. As Katie described:

It was so mentally taxing, just because . . . whenever you made a mistake, she [head coach] was on you. And it was consistent; she did it with everybody. But there were some days when I felt like she was just picking me apart.

According to Katie, while the head coach seemed to dwell on the negative, the assistant

coach emphasized positive and constructive feedback. The impact of the assistant's support and encouragement was profound, as Katie declared: "*Had it not been for him [assistant coach], I don't know whether I would have kept playing.*"

Paige explained that both of her parents supported and encouraged her involvement in athletics. For example, Paige remarked that whenever her two older brothers would go outside to play, "*my parents would be like, 'Take your sister with you,' or 'Make sure she plays.'*" Both her mother and father were supportive of Paige when she was the only girl on her Little League baseball team. In fact, she indicated that her father intervened when the baseball coaches assigned Paige to right field; thereafter, Paige was the pitcher or the catcher, or she played at first base. After playing basketball and softball in high school, Paige was more interested in playing softball in college, but her father encouraged her to play basketball, as she explained: "*He really liked the idea of me playing basketball at the school that I ended up going to.*" While her father supported her decision to go out for softball in her second year of college, that dream went unrealized when the school dropped the softball program before her sophomore year.

As far as having role models who were elite athletes, Paige mentioned a female collegiate softball pitcher, Kathy Arenson, and two female collegiate basketball players, Pam and Paula McGee. Additionally, she listed a male professional baseball pitcher, Tom Seaver, and a male professional basketball player, Julius Erving.

In terms of her teachers, Paige recalled that when she was eight years old and her family moved to a different city, the elementary school teacher at her new school was particularly influential:

My third grade teacher was so cool; because you know how it is when you're the new kid when you're little. She was so great, and she was so supportive. To this day, I just appreciate how easy she made it for me. She was a role model, because she played golf. . . . And she was very supportive of us doing sports. Like, she knew I was the dodgeball champion in elementary school. And so she was wonderful.

Then, in high school, Paige maintained that the teachers were supportive and often came to athletic competitions. Regarding her classmates, Paige explained: “[Being involved in] sports wasn’t a bad thing at my high school. You know, it was cool that you were an athlete. . . . People came out and watched you and supported you.” In the discussion about her classmates, Paige also referred to the support of her non-athletic friends: “And even my friends who didn’t participate would always come and watch--which was nice--like my close friends.”

Significantly, Paige’s decision to stop playing collegiate basketball involved a conflict with her coach. According to Paige, the female head coach made sexual advances toward her, which Paige rebuffed. Then, following a knee injury that prevented her from playing for much of her sophomore year, Paige sat on the bench for most of her junior year. She eventually decided to quit the basketball team before the final game of her junior season, because, with all the turmoil revolving around her conflict with the head coach, Paige was no longer having fun participating in sport.

Stacey explained that her parents were supportive and encouraging of her sport involvement because “*they are athletic people.*” According to Stacey: “*We were an athletic family. So they didn’t mind me wanting to go out and play sports with the guys, or hang with my brother.*” Stacey indicated that her parents were supportive of her desire

to play college basketball. And, when Stacey was recruited to play basketball at a university located within three hours of her hometown, and in the same city where her aunt lived, “*they were really supporting me!*”

As far as her friends in school, Stacey indicated: “*They were all athletes. . . . We all just hung out and played sports together.*” In terms of athletic role models when she was growing up, Stacey recalled an older girl she knew who would “*always take me out and play ball.*” Stacey admired this young woman’s athletic ability and her basketball skills. Acknowledging the young woman’s influence on her as an athlete, Stacey described wanting to emulate her:

I had, I would say, a “big sister” that wasn’t a related sister, but she was someone I looked up to. I met her in . . . middle school, and she was like two years older than me. She went to another high school . . . [but] she played basketball at the school where I went to middle school. And she was just awesome. And I was like, “I want to be like her.” And so, from then on, I was always wanting to be like this friend of mine. . . . She didn’t play in college. But, I still looked up to her, because she was a role model for me when I was younger. And I admired her playing sports. She was really good.

Frustration at Gender Inequities

All five women expressed frustration at the existence of gender inequities (Table 5). Whether or not she chose to refer to such instances as gender discrimination, each woman recognized observing the unequal distribution of resources (budgets for travel, uniforms, etc.) or of rewards (media coverage, fan support, etc.).

Caryl Ann was especially cognizant of, and disturbed by, discrepancies between genders in the aforementioned categories. For example, Caryl Ann argued that in her

Table 5. Frustration at Gender Inequities

ATHLETE	COMMENTS
CARYL ANN	"The guys always got new uniforms every three or four years, and the girls' uniforms were like from eons ago. The guys always got the money; the guys always got the press. . . . We just always were the 'runts of the litter.' I mean . . . the guys weren't any better than we were; they just always seemed to get all the attention and all the money."
ELIZABETH	"We saw the men's team getting the new uniforms, getting the nice buses to drive, getting to go to Taiwan to play over Spring Break, or getting to go to Florida. . . . We weren't getting to do any of those things. . . . So, I think it was a little frustrating, because, for the first time, I felt like I was being discriminated against because I was a female athlete."
KATIE	"I was always upset in high school, because . . . the guys . . . got more press and the big pictures. . . . And in college, too, I always felt that the men's teams got more press, and more coverage, and more headlines. And that always just infuriated me."
PAIGE	"I've seen [gender inequities] at all the levels I've played. And it's always been frustrating. . . . [In college] we were never in the school paper; we never got any coverage. Nobody marketed our games."
STACEY	"It's like the men got more attention [in college]. . . . As far as getting money for . . . new uniforms, or just practice uniforms, it was a struggle. We had to fight for what we wanted; we had to prove ourselves to get anything. The men automatically got new shoes; I mean, they just dressed them to a 'T.'"

sporting experience, female athletes did not reap the same benefits that their male counterparts achieved: *"When I was going through college and high school, the women were always dumped on; you know, the bad uniforms, and the no support and no money."* And in terms of coverage by the mass media, Caryl Ann declared: *"Nobody batted an eyelash at our scores or . . . our games or anything."*

When asked to discuss her feelings regarding how the television coverage of men's basketball differs from the television coverage of women's basketball, Caryl Ann responded:

Oh, I hate it. It drives me crazy. . . . I mean, just the other day I was home watching, trying to find a game; and out of like six sports channels, none of them had women's games. And I just think it's very, very frustrating.

Addressing the discrepancy in media coverage in terms of her own athletic experience, Caryl Ann argued that the coverage contrasted depending on the gender of the athletes:

The guys could be playing somebody really bad, and they'll have TV there. But, when I was playing, I never had any kind of TV coverage—never, ever. I mean, we weren't all that great . . . but we never, ever had TV coverage. We never had any interviews, or anything. . . . They only show clips of the guys' games on TV; they never show clips of the women. And they never show the women's scores. If they don't have any highlights, they'll never show the women's scores. . . . Never the women. It's always the men.

Specifically addressing her high school athletic experience, Caryl Ann expressed her agitation at the differential treatment she observed:

The guys always got new uniforms every three or four years, and the girls' uniforms were like from eons ago. The guys always got the money; the guys always got the press. And it's so funny because for the guys' games, they open up both sides of the bleachers; for girls' games, even now, they just open up one side. It's like they're not encouraging anybody to come, you know; it's not like it's a big deal. We just always were the "runts of the litter." I mean . . . the guys weren't any better than we were; they just always seemed to get all the attention

and all the money--all the booster club money always went to the guys. I don't understand that at all.

In addition, Caryl Ann commented that the crowd at girls' games was composed primarily of family and friends.

Finally, Caryl Ann expressed irritation that women are never visible as referees of men's games, while men serve as referees of both men's and women's basketball games. As Caryl Ann declared: *"The . . . thing that bugs me is that . . . guys can ref girls' games, but women can't ref guys' games. It's the same game, why won't they do that?! That annoys me."*

Elizabeth maintained that when she was in high school, her girls' basketball team received as much fan support as the boys' team. However, when she was in college, Elizabeth observed that her women's team drew considerably fewer fans than did the men's team. According to Elizabeth, *"You had your parents [at the women's games]; people who had to be there [laughs]. Whereas, you had the student body at the guys' games."*

In addition, Elizabeth recognized some inequities between the women's and men's basketball teams at the collegiate level. As Elizabeth described her frustration:

We saw the men's team getting the new uniforms, getting the nice buses to drive, getting to go to Taiwan to play over Spring Break, or getting to go to Florida. And when they go to Florida, they fly. . . . We weren't getting to do any of those things. Finally, I think we took a trip to Florida --my senior year--over Spring Break. But, still, we had to drive, and it just wasn't the same thing. So, I think it was a little frustrating, because, for the first time, I felt like I was being discriminated against because I was a female athlete.

While Elizabeth did not recall any significant discrepancies in terms of media

coverage (e.g., in the student newspaper) between her women's team and the men's team, she did identify some real gender differences with respect to game management.

Specifically, according to Elizabeth, at the men's games, *"They had the band come to play; they pulled out both sides of the bleachers. It was just totally different."* In contrast, as Elizabeth explained, *"It was like 'Dudsville' whenever we were playing. . . . I think I remember having the band there occasionally, like Saturday games or something. But it was not common; it didn't happen all the time."*

Katie acknowledged that at the time and place in which she grew up, *"there were more opportunities for the boys,"* in terms of organized sport activities for children. Moreover, Katie noticed gender differences in media coverage at both the high school and college level. The discrepancy in the coverage of male and female interscholastic and intercollegiate athletic events bothered Katie:

I was always upset in high school, because our high school girls' team was usually better than the boys' team, and the guys still got more press and the big pictures. . . . And in college, too, I always felt that the men's teams got more press, and more coverage, and more headlines. And that always just infuriated me.

Paige identified several instances from her past athletic experiences wherein she perceived inequities relating to gender. As she declared, *"I've seen it at all the levels I've played. And it's always been frustrating."* Specifically, in recalling her childhood, Paige remarked, *"Even my first experience; it was fun to play with my brothers, but I was always the goalie. . . . I wanted to go out and shoot, but I was the goalie."*

In high school and in college, Paige was frustrated whenever the women's teams played prior to the men's contests. Paige expressed her opinion regarding that scheduling

decision: *"Let's just play a different day. I don't want to be an 'opening act' for someone. We want to be the 'main act.' Let them play before us."* Furthermore, Paige noted that as a collegiate athlete, she was annoyed by the differential treatment accorded to female athletes: *"We were never in the school paper; we never got any coverage. Nobody marketed our games."*

Stacey indicated that when she was in college, she perceived that the men's basketball team received more support, with respect to the number of fans attending games, as well as in terms of the amount of money available in the budget. With female athletes generally considered to be at a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts, Stacey maintained that she and her teammates essentially had to fight to earn respect:

It's like the men got more attention. The attendance at the games were low for women. And people would always want to go to the men's games. As far as getting money for . . . new uniforms, or just practice uniforms, it was a struggle. We had to fight for what we wanted; we had to prove ourselves to get anything. The men automatically got new shoes; I mean, they just dressed them to a "T." And . . . we had to really work for what we got.

Awareness of Negative Stereotypes

The five participants shared an awareness of negative stereotypes about female athletes and of societal perceptions regarding "gender-appropriate" sports (Table 6). Moreover, all of the women were similar in that not one participant appeared to internalize the negative stereotypes or societal perceptions. Specifically, although the circulation of negative stereotypes bothered each woman, all five participants emphasized that they did not allow such stereotypes to dissuade them from remaining involved in sports.

Table 6. Awareness of Negative Stereotypes

ATHLETE	COMMENTS
CARYL ANN	"It frustrates me that guys could play any sport they want, but, [for] girls, it's not so good to play certain sports. . . . Guys play football; women <u>don't</u> play football, because stereotypically, you know, they 'can't.' And that annoys me."
ELIZABETH	"I feel like . . . if I'm talking particularly to my employer, who is a male, that he tends to kind of condescend to me about sports. Whereas, I never felt like that around people who have seen me play. . . . I get the sense that he thinks: 'She probably can't play.' It's just like he doesn't think that I could be good, more than anything else."
KATIE	"My dad always was encouraging me to . . . kind of put basketball to the side, and do tennis. And I think that was part of the whole physical nature [of basketball]. . . . Tennis was somewhat more accepted for females to play in. . . . [My father] wasn't interested in me doing well in basketball."
PAIGE	"There was that perception of college athletes. . . . The stereotyping of being a 'dumb jock.' And then being an art major. . . . There was definitely that negative feeling [about being athletic] within the [art] department."
STACEY	"There shouldn't be any 'Well, this is a man's sport; you can't do that.' I just have a problem with that. . . . I think if I want to go play football, I can go play football. . . . I feel that if you have the ability and interest to play, you should be able to play any sport you would like."

Additionally, all five women acknowledged that certain sports were considered by some members of society to be inappropriate for their gender. However, participants were generally not affected by the notion of “gender-appropriate” and “gender-inappropriate” sports, except in isolated instances when the participant’s mother expressed concern about her daughter’s participation in a particular sport.

For example, when Caryl Ann was asked if she had ever felt a gender role conflict when participating in any sport or activity, she responded: *“No, I never really broke any gender barriers so to speak, as far as trying anything different. I always wanted to; I wanted to play football, but my mother didn’t want me to.”* However, Caryl Ann discussed her annoyance that certain sports seemed to be restricted to one gender:

It frustrates me that guys could play any sport they want, but, [for] girls, it’s not so good to play certain sports. Like, guys can play in softball leagues, but do you ever see women playing in baseball leagues? No; women play in softball leagues. Guys have volleyball leagues; women have volleyball leagues. Guys play football; women don’t play football, because stereotypically, you know, they “can’t.” And that annoys me.

As was the case with several of the participants, Caryl Ann acknowledged the use of the term “tomboy” in reference to herself and maintained that the term did not carry a negative connotation. In fact, Caryl Ann indicated that she was conscious of the term’s usage and considered it to be a positive thing:

To me, I thought it [the term “tomboy”] was a good thing. I enjoyed doing the things that I was doing, so I just never really thought about it that much. It never carried any negative connotation to me anyway.

Similarly, Elizabeth indicated that she was aware of the term “tomboy,” and that its use did not bother her. As Elizabeth explained:

It was a source of getting attention, so it was pretty cool. Girls do "girl things," and when you do "boy things," it's like you get attention for that. . . . They nicknamed me "Joe" when I was young because I looked like a boy. So, it was instilled in me, I guess.

Elizabeth maintained that she never felt a gender role conflict. However, she expressed frustration at instances when she perceived her athleticism was not taken seriously because she was a woman. For example, Elizabeth related a recent incident with her male employer, wherein she felt she had to prove her athletic skills because he had never seen her play and was therefore dubious of her ability. As Elizabeth explained:

I feel like . . . if I'm talking particularly to my employer, who is a male, that he tends to kind of condescend to me about sports. Whereas, I never felt like that around people who had actually seen me play. . . . I get the sense that he thinks: "She probably can't play." It's just like he doesn't think that I could be good, more than anything else. . . . I had never felt [before] like I had to prove myself; and I guess I felt that way with him.

Katie expressed her opinion that society considers it more appropriate for women to participate in some sports rather than others. In particular, she suggested that perceptions of the gender "appropriateness" of certain sports are due to the long history of participation by women in those particular sports. As Katie indicated:

I think there are certain sports that are more accepted in society for women to be part of. Tennis and golf come to mind, just because the professional level has always been around. . . . You know, I remember watching Chris Evert and Martina [Navratilova] when I was little.

Katie indicated that although she was aware of the popular stereotypes of lesbian athletes, she did not internalize the negative stereotypes or perceptions. When she was asked if she had ever felt a gender role conflict, she responded: *"I guess a little. I never really took it to heart. It never really did bother me. But there was always the stereotype*

of . . . 'women players are all gay.'"

Katie discussed some homophobic perceptions when she described an exchange she had in college with a male friend. As Katie explained:

When I was a senior, I had a couple of friends on the baseball team. Actually, I started dating one of them, and we got to talking. . . . And he was like, "Yeah, well, the first time I saw you, I thought you were gay." And I was like, "Why?! . . . Women can have short haircuts without being one or the other, or 'who cares?' as far as that goes." And he was like, "Well, basketball player . . ." And I've never had the "feminine" walk or the make-up and the fixed-up hair, and all that. . . . And I always knew that . . . a lot of people thought that [about lesbians]. I don't know why people can't be aggressive and still be feminine. But . . . it never really bothered me. I never worried about . . . being stereotyped. I was just like, "Well, that's their problem."

Katie explained that, to a certain degree, her father encouraged her to pursue tennis rather than basketball. Although she is not absolutely sure, Katie suggested that her father's motivation for pushing her toward tennis may have been due to societal perceptions about the perceived "inappropriateness" of basketball for women, because of its physical nature. As Katie described:

I remember my dad always was encouraging me to . . . kind of put basketball to the side, and do tennis. And I think part of that was the whole physical nature [of basketball]. Tennis was more "accepted," and you had chances to go after college with that. I don't know whether he was thinking that I'd ever go "pro" or not, but there was always that kind of a push.

Katie further expressed that she perceived that "tennis was somewhat more accepted for females to play in." Regarding her father, Katie emphasized: "He never said, "Don't play [basketball]," but . . . the way that he said things made me think he didn't want me to play. He wasn't interested in me doing well in basketball."

Paige indicated that she did not perceive a gender role conflict. She explained that

her family and friends were supportive of her athletic involvement; thus, she did not have to negotiate between the expectations and demands associated with being female and being athletic:

Of my two older brothers, my one brother played on the tennis team in high school, but my other brother didn't play high school or junior high sports. So, I was always the athlete of the family. So, there never was that conflict for me. . . . No one ever really questioned that--or I never questioned it--because no one in my immediate environment, or my support system, questioned it.

However, Paige did reveal that when she was thirteen and playing Little League baseball, her mother wanted her to start playing softball instead. According to Paige: "My mother was like . . . 'Well, you're changing now, so I think you should be playing softball.'"

Moreover, Paige credited her parents with instilling in her the importance of the values that are transmitted through sport participation:

It's not the sport that matters; it's the participation that matters, and the fact that you're doing something. You know, it's much easier to be in a mall, or to be on a street corner hanging out, than playing sports. And really, what are you going to learn more from? I think that's always been my view. And that came down from my parents.

While she never felt a gender role conflict, Paige explained that she did feel a role conflict in college between being a student and an athlete, especially during her first two years of school when she was an art major. As Paige described:

There was that perception of college athletes. . . . The stereotyping of being a "dumb jock." And then being an art major was so different. It was like, "Wait a minute. You're an art major, and here's all this creative energy, but you're also an athlete?" And it just seems like two different ends of the universe. So, I think . . . there was definitely that negative feeling within the [art] department.

Similarly, Stacey indicated that a college professor contributed to her perception of a role conflict between being a student and an athlete: "I had a professor that did not like

athletes at all. Plus, I am a female also, so that probably was a double negative. That was the only experience I got negative [treatment] from anybody." When asked if she had ever experienced gender discrimination, Stacey explained that she felt discriminated against in graduate school:

In one of my classes, I had a professor who did not like women, did not like tall women, and did not like black people. I just felt like, "How am I going to make it through school?" And I had to take this professor every semester, except my last semester. . . . That's been a bad experience for me, but I overcame it.

Stacey acknowledged that she was considered a tomboy when she was growing up, and she also indicated that she did not perceive the term as negative: *"I guess I was a little tomboy. I just grew up, just being outdoors playing sports. I didn't really feel any negative reactions from anybody."* Stacey maintained that she did not perceive a gender role conflict throughout her sport involvement: *"The sports that I played--basketball, volleyball--were versatile; men and women both play them. I haven't really experienced any sport or activity, as far as 'This is a man's sport,' 'This is a woman's sport.'"*

Just as Paige believed that gender should not dictate choice of activity, Stacey expressed her objection to the sex-typing of sports:

I have a problem with: "These sports are men's;" "These sports are women's." I think if you can do it, you can play it--that's it. There shouldn't be any: "Well, this is a man's sport; you can't do that." I just have a problem with that. I don't like that. I think if I want to go play football, I can go play football. . . . I feel that we should all be equal enough to play whatever you want to play. . . . I feel that if you have the ability and interest to play, you should be able to play any sport you would like to play.

Similar to Elizabeth, Stacey expressed frustration when she perceived her athleticism was not taken seriously because she was a woman. Just as Elizabeth felt she

had to prove her sporting talent to her male supervisor who did not believe she was a good athlete, Stacey found herself in a similar situation with one of her male colleagues who wanted to challenge her to a game of "one-on-one." After Stacey defeated him, he wanted to play again. After Stacey defeated him a second time, he wanted to play yet again, arguing that the first two games were flukes and conceding that if he got beat a third time, he would finally say that Stacey was the better player. After Stacey defeated him for the third time, she reported that she never saw him again because he failed to return to work. She suggested that he was probably ashamed that a woman defeated him. Stacey was annoyed because he was not even conditioned to play basketball, yet he still believed he would be able to defeat her, solely because he was a man and she was a woman: *"He still thought he could beat me, because he was a male. His ego was way up there."*

Acknowledgment of Progress Coupled with Regret

All five women acknowledged that they believed that girls and women in sport had achieved progress, in terms of attention and resources. However, each woman also expressed personal regret at not having had the same opportunities and advantages that they observed young female athletes enjoying today (Table 7).

When asked to share her perceptions about how society views female athletes today, as compared to when she was growing up, Caryl Ann responded: *"I think it's gotten a lot better, in the past few years. . . . I think it's gotten much more positive; it's getting a lot more press."* Additionally, Caryl Ann expressed regret at not being in

Table 7. Acknowledgment of Progress Coupled with Regret

ATHLETE	COMMENTS
CARYL ANN	"People are more interested in it [women's basketball] right now. Just because of the level of play--it's gotten so better. . . . And it's just getting a lot more support, and I think that's great. I mean, I really wish that I was playing now, and see how different it is."
ELIZABETH	"I don't remember playing basketball . . . before junior high. Simply because it was never offered as a sport. Which now I regret, because they have all these leagues for . . . little girls now, starting them off so young. And I never had any of that experience, and I think that may have hurt me in the long run."
KATIE	"I think that the time and the places that I was growing up, you didn't see any girls on the playgrounds playing pick-up ball [like you do now]. . . . And I wished that I would have been encouraged to do that."
PAIGE	"I love turning on ESPN and seeing women's basketball; and turning on the 'Deuce' [ESPN2]. And that's so different than five years ago. It's so great to see how we've pushed the boundaries."
STACEY	"I do think society has progressed. . . . I know from back when I could remember, to me, it [women's basketball] wasn't all that great, as far as being popular. . . . But, as the years went by, I saw that women's sports were up there with the men."

competitive athletics today, as she explained:

I wished that I was playing now. Just to play in a nice uniform, instead of a polyester thing that clings to your body. . . . And it's funny now, because I look back at my high school team right now and they're undefeated, and they have been for the past two years. And they've got these really nice uniforms--they have warm-ups and everything--because they're really good. Well, so what, they're good? Why couldn't I have played in that kind of stuff?

Caryl Ann contended that as female players have improved their skills and gotten stronger, the game of women's basketball has become much more exciting, and, hence, much more appealing to the public. She discussed how the increase in women's physicality has contributed to the growing popularity of the game:

People are more interested in it now. Just because of the level of play--it's gotten so better. The skills out there are better, and the kids are learning a lot sooner. And it's just getting a lot more support, and I think that's great. I mean, I really wish that I was playing now, and see how different it is. Because I'm sure that it would be a lot different than when I was playing. . . . I think it's much better now, it's much different now. It's much more exciting, it's much more fast-paced. The women are stronger, and that makes it a lot more appealing. . . . It's definitely a different game; it's much more exciting.

Elizabeth also expressed regret at not having the sport opportunities when she was a young girl that young female athletes have today. Specifically, Elizabeth explained that she did not have the chance to play organized basketball until seventh grade. She maintained that her relatively late start in basketball placed her at a disadvantage in terms of her future prospects in the sport:

I don't remember playing basketball, or doing much with basketball, before junior high, simply because it was never offered as a sport. Which now I regret, because they have all these leagues for . . . little girls now, starting them off so young. And I never had any of that experience, and I think that may have hurt me in the long run.

Katie described her regret at the lack of opportunities and encouragement she

perceived as a young aspiring female basketball player. Specifically, Katie addressed why she primarily practiced her skills on her own, and why she did not participate in pick-up basketball games:

Most of my play was during the season, and then just in the backyard, or on my own in the gym. . . . There wasn't an opportunity [to play pick-up games in high school]. Even when I was a freshman, I couldn't have said, "Hey, can I go play ball with them?" It wasn't that type of structure, and there wasn't an opportunity for it. That was one thing I look back on, and I wish I either would have done [it] on my own, or would have been encouraged to do [it]. But I think that the time and the places that I was growing up, you didn't see any girls on the playgrounds playing pick-up ball. . . . And I wished that I would have been encouraged to do that.

Katie acknowledged that she believes women's sport has progressed, in terms of greater public acceptance of, and media attention on, female athletes and female athletic events. Specifically addressing women's basketball, Katie stated:

I think basketball, in particular, is becoming more accepted. I remember, just in the past ten years, you didn't see women's games on TV. You didn't even see the championship games--I don't remember ever seeing that until probably high school--on TV. And now you've got regular season games; you've got pretty much the whole Final Four, and everything like that.

When Paige was asked her perspective on how society now views female athletes in contrast to when she was a young athlete, she remarked on the tremendous growth in women's sport that she has witnessed in her lifetime:

It's funny because when you think about all the women who have helped Title IX--and you hear all their testimonials and their stories and how much they've seen it change-- today, at the young age of twenty-eight, I could say that. . . . We could see how it has changed so much.

In particular, Paige emphasized that women have pushed boundaries through their integration into athletics: *"I love turning on ESPN and seeing women's basketball; and*

turning on the 'Deuce' [ESPN2]. And that's so different than five years ago. It's so great to see how we've pushed the boundaries." Paige also stressed the value and import that a generation of participants in coed sports has had on young athletes of both genders: *"The people now who are having children are people who participated with girls on their team or with boys on their team. They participated in coed sports, and they understand the value and the meaning of it."*

Given the changes that have come in the recent past, and the promising developments of the present, Paige expressed regret that she is not a young female athlete now: *"I wish I was five. I really do. I wish I was young again."* Paige described a book about women's basketball that she recalled seeing within the previous few years that featured photographs of female college players. Specifically, Paige commented on how she was struck by the fact that these female athletes had posters of professional male athletes on their dormitory walls:

I remember there were a couple of pictures in there, where they show the college girls in their dorm room. And all over their room are posters of Michael Jordan and Larry Bird. And I'll never forget looking at that and saying, "That has to change." I just get so disheartened when I see that. . . . Those are our models? We need female sports posters! That's really what we need. . . . And finally we're starting to see that. We're starting to see Sheryl Swoopes posters, and Lisa Leslie, and Dawn Staley. . . . And it needs to happen on a grand scale. But, it's happening. So, I wish I was five.

Stacey acknowledged that because of the great progress women have made in athletics, female athletes have earned respect and admiration from the public:

I think that a lot of people admire women in sport because it's such a tough road, as far as men are dominant. And, so, I think that women have come a long way in sports. I really think that people admire women in sports today.

When asked to share her perspective on how society's view of women athletes has changed over the course of her lifetime, Stacey remarked on the increased popularity of women's basketball that she has observed:

I do think society has progressed. . . . I know from back when I could remember, to me, it [women's basketball] wasn't all that great, as far as being popular. I know it was popular, but I didn't know about it too much. But, as the years went by, I saw that women's sports were up there with the men. . . . So, I feel that women's sports in society today is really growing, and a lot of people respect women in sports today.

Ambivalence Regarding Future

The final theme that emerged was that all five women expressed ambivalence regarding the future prospects of girls and women in sport (Table 8). While all the participants declared their optimism about continued improvements in media coverage of, and fan support for, female athletes and female athletic events, each woman articulated a degree of pessimism about women's sport ever matching the popularity and riches that men's sport has achieved.

Caryl Ann suggested a reason why men's basketball receives so much more attention in the media than women's basketball:

I guess it's like that just because it always has been. And the women are always three steps behind. I think it's really hard to "teach an old dog new tricks"-type of thing. People have always seen the guys; the guys have always gotten the most press, and the women are always behind. They're catching up a little bit, but they still have a long way to go.

Caryl Ann cited recent television commercials featuring female basketball players as examples of positive promotion that have helped publicize the sport of women's

Table 8. Ambivalence Regarding Future

ATHLETE	COMMENTS
CARYL ANN	"The women are always three steps behind. I think it's really hard to 'teach an old dog new tricks'-type of thing. People have always seen the guys; the guys have always gotten the most press, and the women are always behind. They're catching up a little bit, but they still have a long way to go."
ELIZABETH	"I think a large majority of the people believe that maybe men's [basketball] is more physical and aggressive and more exciting. . . . I just think it's maybe ignorance more than anything else. If they'd actually get out and see how exciting it could be--and is--that might do something. . . . It's just the way society is. . . . That's always bothered me. . . . Maybe it's just taken a long time for it to evolve. Hopefully."
KATIE	"Unfortunately, I don't think that the women's sports will ever have the support, and be able to draw the crowds and have the revenue that the men's sports have. And I don't know whether that's pessimistic of me. . . . Because . . . it's just this tradition with men's sports. And I just don't know whether enough people will be enlightened to make that equal."
PAIGE	"Unfortunately . . . the people who still run network TV, and who still run newspapers, are older men who just probably don't get it yet. And as we see that turnover--as the baby-boomers come in, and then Generation Xers . . . come into power--I think you'll see more of a change, because <u>they've</u> played sports with girls. Or, they are women themselves. And the glass ceiling is being removed. . . . We're just on the verge of something great. I really think that."
STACEY	"I think it's been that way for years. Women have always been discriminated against, because of our gender. So, I don't like that too much, but it's something you have to deal with. But hopefully, in years to come, it will stop. But I don't think it will. But hopefully . . . [it will]."

basketball. But, as Caryl Ann declared, more are needed: *"They need fifteen more of those, just to even out with the men. I think that would help."* Additionally, Caryl Ann presented other possible strategies for increasing the interest in, and the appeal of, women's sport:

I think female sportscasters help a lot, too. Especially when they're in the right setting; [when] they're talking about things that they really know about. . . . When they stick them in the right area, and it's somebody that's really enthusiastic, I think that helps. Good role models, too, I think.

Elizabeth maintained that women's basketball has not been as popular as men's basketball because of an ignorant public:

I think a large majority of the people believe that maybe men's [basketball] is more physical and aggressive and more exciting . . . They don't realize what women can do and have done, and how physical and aggressive they can play. I just think it's maybe ignorance more than anything else. If they'd actually get out and see how exciting it could be--and is--that might do something.

Similar to Caryl Ann, Elizabeth was pessimistic about the reason for the disparity in the number of fans that attend women's basketball games as compared to men's games: *"It's just the way society is. . . . That's always bothered me."* However, Elizabeth expressed a degree of optimism in suggesting that women's sport is still in the process of evolving: *"Maybe it's just taken a long time for it to evolve. Hopefully."*

Katie expressed a similar pessimism about why male athletes and men's athletic events are more popular and draw larger crowds than female athletes and women's athletic events. Additionally, Katie explained why such discrepancies in fan support may never change:

I think there are a lot of people still left in the old line that "women can't play; it's not something that you'd want to watch; it's not something that's appealing;

the men's sports are always going to have the crowd and be supported," and all that. And I think, probably, for some reason, that that's going to just be a perpetual thing; like, the adults are going to teach the kids that the men's sports are the strongest and are the best, and all that.

Later, Katie expounded on why she is pessimistic:

Unfortunately, I don't think that the women's sports will ever have the support, and be able to draw the crowds and have the revenue that the men's sports have. And I don't know whether that's pessimistic of me. . . . Because . . . it's just this tradition with men's sports. And I just don't know whether enough people will be enlightened to make that equal.

However, Katie expressed optimism in discussing the increasing popularity of women's sport: *"I think that there's a growing population that are seeing that, 'Hey, these women's sports are pretty doggone exciting to watch,' and 'These are some awesome athletes,' and that type of thing."* Katie later elaborated on her reasons for being optimistic about the future of the women's game:

One of my theories is I think that as women keep discovering that they are able to do these things that only men have done . . . --like dunking and . . . fancy dribbling or whatever--that people are going to get more interested. . . . And now, I think it's more accepted--especially in the larger cities--that girls can be out playing [on the playground]. And so they have to be out, and they have to be physical and aggressive, and they have to jump, and they have to out-jump people, and all this. And I think, starting at a younger age, they're . . . placing on themselves more demands to do these physical things. And, therefore, by the time they reach the collegiate level, you see people that can dunk. We're starting to see that in women's basketball. And I think when that comes around, that . . . a lot of the people who had never thought about it before are going to wake up and say, "Hey, look! They can do some of this stuff, too."

Paige maintained that women's sport is on the brink of a breakthrough in terms of the quality and quantity of opportunities becoming available for girls and women in sport. Despite the need for some changes, Paige discussed her reasons for ultimately being optimistic about the future:

Unfortunately, at this point, the people who still run network TV, and who still run newspapers, are older men who just probably don't get it yet. And as we see that turnover--as the baby-boomers come in, and then Generation Xers . . . come into power--I think you'll see more of a change, because they've played sports with girls. Or, they are women themselves. And the glass ceiling is being removed. . . . We're knocking on the ceiling, and trying to get rid of it. We're just on the verge of something great. I really think that. It's exciting; it's very exciting.

Similar to the other participants, Stacey indicated that the status quo is a reason for pessimism about the future status of girls and women in sport. Specifically, Stacey expressed her ambivalence about the future when she discussed the gender inequities she observed as a competitive athlete:

I think it's been that way for years. Women have always been discriminated against, because of our gender. So, I don't like that too much, but it's something you have to deal with. But hopefully, in years to come, it will stop. But I don't think it will. But hopefully . . . [it will].

Summary

In this chapter, I presented six common themes that emerged from the interviews with the participants. While these general themes were revealed in each narrative, the women expressed their perspectives on each theme with slight variations.

Each woman described early athletic experiences that involved learning sport skills from older male family members, including fathers, older brothers, and male cousins. In addition, all of the participants indicated engaging in sports and physical activities more often with boys than with girls throughout their grade school years.

All of the women described receiving support and encouragement from significant others, including family members, friends, peers, coaches, and teachers. Moreover, Caryl

Ann, Elizabeth, and Katie described feeling hesitant about pursuing athletics in college until they received clear and unambiguous positive feedback from their coaches and/or athletic peers.

Each participant expressed frustration at gender inequities she observed or perceived as an athlete, in terms of budgets, media coverage, and fan support. All five women indicated an awareness of negative stereotypes about female athletes and of societal perceptions about "gender-appropriate" sports. However, not one of the participants internalized the negative stereotypes or perceptions, and thus did not become dissuaded from continuing her athletic participation.

Moreover, when each of the five participants was asked if she perceived a gender role conflict, Katie was the only individual who indicated that perhaps she did ("*I guess a little*"); the concept of a gender role conflict clearly was not one she internalized, however, as Katie explained that she never "*took it to heart.*" Actually, Paige and Stacey reported that in college they did feel a conflict, but it was between their roles as students and as athletes. Additionally, Caryl Ann, Elizabeth, and Stacey recognized that the term "tomboy" had been used to describe them, but they indicated that the term did not involve a negative connotation for them.

Each participant acknowledged that progress had been achieved by girls and women in sport, and consequently, each expressed some degree of regret at not being a young female athlete today. Finally, all five women expressed ambivalence regarding the future of girls and women in sport, as each woman described reasons for pessimism as well as reasons for optimism.

CHAPTER 6

A HAPPY ENDING?

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the life and sport experiences of former collegiate women's basketball players. Specifically, I wanted to learn how these athletes initially became involved in athletics, why they continued their sport involvement, and who influenced their participation. Additionally, I hoped to learn how these athletes felt about participating in a sport which has been viewed by society as generally more appropriate for boys and men, and less acceptable for girls and women. Finally, I wanted to learn how these athletes felt about the present and future status of girls and women in sport. In this chapter, I discuss how the themes that emerged from the participants' narratives relate to the literature. In addition, I comment on the significance of the study and its implications in terms of practical application and further research.

The five participants in the study were former collegiate women's basketball players who had competed at NCAA Division I, II, or III institutions. All five women were under 30 years of age and had completed their intercollegiate careers within the past eight years. A feminist theoretical approach provided the framework for the chosen qualitative research methodology, which involved six open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview format.

The participants' narratives yielded six common themes: (a) early athletic experiences that involved males, including the learning of sport skills from older male family members and playing more with boys than with girls; (b) support and

encouragement from significant others that contributed to continued sport involvement; (c) frustration at the existence of gender inequities; (d) awareness of negative stereotypes of female athletes and societal perceptions of “gender-appropriate” sports; (e) acknowledgment of progress achieved by girls and women in sport coupled with personal regret; and (f) ambivalence regarding the future of girls and women in sport.

All six themes can be considered in relation to the literature discussion of gender role stereotyping. In addition, the early athletic experiences theme and the support and encouragement from significant others theme can also be considered with respect to the literature topic of sport socialization; the frustration at gender inequities theme and the acknowledgment of progress coupled with regret theme can be viewed in relation to the discussions of the historical background of women in sport; the awareness of negative stereotypes theme can be linked to the literature topic of homophobia; and the ambivalence regarding the future theme can be considered in relation to all four literature topics.

Learning Sport Skills

Studies on socialization into sport have attempted to explain how an individual acquires the skills and knowledge to become a sport participant (Greendorfer, 1992). All five participants described early play experiences that involved initially learning sport skills from older male family members. Specifically, Caryl Ann, Katie, Paige, and Stacey identified their older brothers and fathers, while Elizabeth referred to her older male cousins and father, as serving integral roles in their athletic development. This data supports the existing literature, which has shown the family and peer group as primarily

influential in childhood socialization (Greendorfer, 1992). Additionally, a study by Higginson (1985) indicated that siblings reinforced parental influence on the sport socialization of females.

Moreover, all five participants indicated that they played sports and engaged in physical activities more with boys than with girls while in grade school. Again, the research is supportive, in that among adolescents, the peer group attains greater salience (Greendorfer, 1992, 1993).

As Greendorfer (1993) suggested, gender role socialization begins when parents transmit gender beliefs to their children through child-rearing practices. Research has indicated that girls, in contrast to boys, generally do not receive the regular or consistent encouragement for participating in physical activities which is conducive to athletic involvement. In addition, boys generally have greater opportunities than girls to develop basic motor skills and to engage in gross physical activity; thus, boys tend to place more value and importance on developing sport skills and demonstrating physical ability (Greendorfer, 1992). Consequently, by deterring some girls from entering sport and discouraging others from persisting at it, gender role stereotyping can be viewed as a barrier to female sport involvement.

Landers and Fine (1996) observed the sport socialization process on two tee ball teams and concluded that children learn socially acceptable gender roles in their first organized sport experience, and that gender differences are often reinforced by coaches. Paige's experience in organized Little League baseball, where she was initially assigned to right field, is illustrative of the research. In youth baseball or softball, the weakest player

on the team is usually placed in right field, due to the minimal amount of balls hit to that position. So, automatically placing the only girl on the team in right field, without taking her ability or skills into account, is a blatant example of gender role stereotyping.

The significance of this theme is evident in the fact that the individuals who provided the initial sport skills instruction for each female participant, as well as a majority of her play friends, were male. Each participant was certainly influenced by female role models throughout her athletic career (e.g., peers, coaches, teachers, and professional athletes), yet each woman's first influences were male family members and most of her early play friends were boys her age. Had there not been an athletically inclined male in her midst, one could speculate that a participant in the present study perhaps would not have chosen to pursue sports. As Paige stated: *"You know, I'm sure if I had sisters, it might have been different . . ."*

Continuing Sport Involvement

Research on the sport socialization process of children has indicated that the type of feedback and reinforcement children receive regarding their sport involvement, as well as the content of the underlying messages, are important factors. Specifically, there is a positive relationship between the degree and type of sport participation and the amount and type of social support from significant others (Greendorfer, 1992). In other words, children who receive positive reinforcement for their sport involvement are more likely to maintain an interest in sport than those receiving neutral or negative feedback.

All five women received positive reinforcement from significant others, including family members, friends, peers, coaches, and teachers. Parents, in particular, were

supportive and encouraging of their daughters' athletic pursuits. For example, Katie reported that her mother attended nearly all of her games, including many of her "away" games. Stephanie referred to her mother as her "taxi," for providing daily transportation to and from practices. Paige indicated that when she was assigned to play right field on her Little League baseball team, her father intervened to the point where Paige thereafter pitched, caught, or played first base. Additionally, Paige explained that her father was especially supportive and encouraging of her participation in collegiate basketball.

Research has indicated that a typical female athlete comes from a family in which one or both parents are actively involved in sport, such that physical activity would be considered normal or expected in the household (Greendorfer, 1992, 1993). Among the participants, Paige's father coached Little League baseball, and Caryl Ann's mother coached girls' softball and her father coached boys' basketball. Similarly, Stacey referred to her family as "athletic."

Katie also described her brother as extremely supportive and encouraging throughout her athletic career. This data is congruent with research conducted by Weiss and Knoppers (1982) on female collegiate volleyball players, which revealed that their brothers were the only significant others who encouraged the athletes' sport participation during adolescence and the college years.

All five women in the present study expressed that their friends were generally very supportive of their athletic involvement, even their non-athletic friends. Two of the participants, Caryl Ann and Katie, were directly influenced by their collegiate athletic peers, in that neither woman was absolutely certain she would pursue basketball in college

until veteran players encouraged her participation. Higginson (1985) found that among adolescents, peers of the same sex were particularly influential as role models. In the current study, Stacey specifically referred to a non-related "big sister" who was a particularly powerful role model.

Studies have also shown evidence that teachers and coaches encourage continued involvement in sport by reinforcing performance and refining already-learned skills (Greendorfer, 1992, 1993). Katie, in particular, singled out her college assistant coach for the role he played in her decision to continue participating in competitive basketball. And Paige's decision to stop playing basketball was primarily because of a conflict with her head coach that resulted in Paige's lack of playing time. Paige also described how supportive her third grade teacher was of her athleticism and how important that support was to her perception of sport participation as a positive endeavor.

The impact of the support and encouragement received from significant others was dramatically revealed by Elizabeth, who stated that she probably would not have played basketball in college had her experience in athletics not been so positively reinforced by family and friends. Elizabeth's comments about the importance of a supportive family corroborates research by Greendorfer (1979) which found family members to be strong socializing influences during childhood, less influential in adolescence, and then strong influences again in young adulthood. Overall, this theme suggests the power of significant others to influence sport involvement and the importance of positive reinforcement on the sport experience. In communicating that sport participation is either acceptable or not, the collective group of family, friends, peers, teachers, and coaches can greatly impact the

athletic experience of young sport participants and either encourage their perseverance in, or hasten their exit from, the sport arena.

Gender Inequities

All participants expressed frustration at the gender inequities they observed in athletics with respect to budgets, media coverage, and fan support. For example, Caryl Ann, Elizabeth, and Stacey remarked that the men's teams (high school and/or college) had greater financial resources for new uniforms and more elaborate travel arrangements. Some researchers have addressed the gender disparities in resource allocation which have existed for a long time and which are gradually beginning to fade with the increasing enforcement of Title IX stipulations (e.g., Cahn, 1994; Lopiano, 1993).

In addition, Caryl Ann, Katie, and Paige referred to noticing that the local media provided greater coverage of boys' and men's teams at the high school level, the college level, or at both levels. Several researchers have reported on gender bias in the media (e.g., Birrell & Theberge, 1994; Cohen, 1993). Specifically, studies have documented how the media underrepresents female athletes, trivializes and marginalizes their accomplishments, and portrays them as sexual objects (e.g., Duncan, 1990; Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; Kane, 1988; MacNeil, 1994). For instance, research has determined that less newspaper column inches are devoted to female athletes on the sport pages (Duncan, Messner, Williams, & Jensen, 1994) and less airtime is dedicated to female athletes on television newscasts (Messner, Duncan, & Jensen, 1993).

In terms of fan support, all participants in the present study acknowledged that generally much larger crowds attended boys' and men's games. The only exception was

Elizabeth, who maintained that her high school girls' basketball team received as much fan support as the boys' basketball team. A possible explanation for this discrepant case could be the fact that, to the residents of her state, basketball--as played by both girls and boys--is popularly regarded as the most important sport in that region of the country, especially at the scholastic level. However, Elizabeth did admit that her observations in college were much different. Interestingly, Elizabeth and Caryl Ann each specifically referred to the decision by her college and high school, respectively, to open up one side of the gymnasium bleachers for women's games, while opening up both sets of bleachers for men's games.

The comments made by the participants regarding observed gender inequities support the existing research that female athletes receive quantitatively and qualitatively less resources and media attention than male athletes (Cahn, 1994; Lopiano, 1993). The significance of this theme is reflected in the fact that, despite implementation of Title IX provisions, the women in the current study still perceived the existence of inequitable differences in the resources available and the rewards bestowed upon male and female athletes and athletic teams. Additionally, the disparities these women previously felt and continue to observe have caused them to become frustrated, annoyed, and angered. Consequently, although they have experienced the joys of competition, these women also have been made to feel like lesser athletes, with their accomplishments viewed as inferior to those achieved by men.

Stereotypes

All of the participants were cognizant of negative stereotypes about female athletes and societal perceptions regarding "gender-appropriate" sports; yet none of the participants internalized the stereotypes or perceptions, nor became dissuaded from remaining involved in athletics. The five women were similarly bothered by the fact that some sports appeared to be restricted to one sex; likewise, they all were disturbed that, in terms of participation by girls and women, certain sports were perceived as more "acceptable" than others. In fact, both Caryl Ann and Katie explained that as young girls they had desired to play football, but that they were disappointed when they "learned" that football was not an appropriate sport for girls. Paige expressed how much she enjoyed playing Little League baseball with boys and how upset she became as a teenager when her mother persuaded her to start playing softball instead.

The historical background of women's sport includes the transformation of the popular perception of basketball, which initially was considered to be a sport appropriate for women (as an indoor game played over a small area), but then later was viewed as a contradiction to traditional feminine images of passivity and restraint. Ever since Metheny's (1974) analysis of the social acceptability of various sports for females appeared in 1965, researchers have generally categorized women's basketball as gender-inappropriate (e.g., Kane & Snyder, 1989). Interestingly, among the five women in the study, only one acknowledged the perception that basketball is considered less appropriate for women than for men. Katie suggested that her father's desire for her to play tennis instead of basketball was because of basketball's "physical nature," in addition to the

prevailing attitude that tennis was a more socially "acceptable" sport for women.

Elizabeth and Stacey shared recent experiences wherein each perceived that her athleticism was questioned. Elizabeth explained that her male employer expressed doubt regarding her sport ability; Stacey described a situation with a male colleague who had challenged her to a game of "one-on-one" and was defeated by her in three consecutive games, and then failed to return to work. Both women were frustrated that their athletic abilities were not taken seriously, and that they felt they had to prove their athleticism on the court because their skills were disputed. The two episodes related by Elizabeth and Stacey support research which has shown evidence of the marginalization and trivialization of female athletes that occurs in the media (e.g., Bryson, 1987; Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; Duncan et al., 1994).

Sport is a social institution that reflects the values of a sexist and heterosexist society. Beliefs about traditional gender roles continue to influence female athletic participation, such that fears about homosexuality can potentially discourage young girls from becoming involved in or maintaining involvement in sport (Griffin, 1993). Homophobia refers to the fear, hatred, and/or intolerance of homosexuality and of homosexual people, as well as to the fear of being perceived as gay or lesbian, the fear of being gay or lesbian, and the fear of one's own physical or sexual attraction for members of the same sex (Griffin, 1993; Griffin & Genasci, 1989). Researchers have suggested that women who challenge existing gender role expectations and enter male-dominated fields (such as sport) that reward traditional "masculine" attributes of aggressiveness and competitiveness risk experiencing the effects of homophobia (Lenskyj, 1991; Sabo &

Messner, 1993). Scholars have contended that accusing female athletes of being masculine or of being lesbians may intimidate girls and women from participating in sports, especially those considered "appropriate" for men. Thus, accusations of masculinity and lesbianism serve to control, marginalize, and trivialize women in sport (Griffin, 1993; Hall, 1996).

A study by Harry (1995) that examined college students' attitudes toward women and gay people indicated that for college men (but not for college women), beliefs about sports were associated with sexist attitudes and prejudices against gays and lesbians. Thus, sports may help men to define gender-related prejudices and homophobia, and to validate cultural attitudes regarding masculine superiority. Additionally, Rotella and Murray (1991) listed several possible ramifications of homophobia, including people who speculate about an individual's sexual orientation based on her sport, physique, mannerisms, or hair length. In the present study, the exchange between Katie and a male friend supports this research. Specifically, Katie described a conversation she had with a baseball player she was dating who admitted that he had assumed Katie was gay because she played basketball.

Blinde and Taub (1992) conducted a study that examined how homophobia affects the lives and sport experiences of female athletes. The authors identified the existence of a silence about lesbianism in women's sport, as well as the internalization by athletes of societal stereotypes regarding lesbians and female athletes. Specifically, Blinde and Taub found that the athletes were reluctant to discuss the issue of lesbianism and that they accepted societal stereotypes regarding popular definitions of lesbianism (e.g., short hair)

and the linkage of team sports, such as basketball and softball, with the lesbian label. Thus, the authors concluded that the existence of cultural stereotypes about female athletes may deny a woman's athleticism, such that some women may decide to leave sport, others may choose to participate only in "socially acceptable" sports, while others may decide to avoid sport altogether. Katie's description of her father encouraging her to pursue tennis rather than basketball, because "*tennis was somewhat more accepted for females to play in,*" supports the literature on societal perceptions of "gender-appropriate" sports.

The significance of this theme is reflected in the fact that each participant was aware of negative stereotypes that circulated about female athletes. Equally relevant is that, despite their ambitions as young girls, Caryl Ann and Katie eventually discovered that football was not an appropriate sport for them, and Paige had to be persuaded by her mother to switch from baseball to softball. Also revealing is the fact that Elizabeth and Stacey, as working women in society, did not feel that their athleticism was taken seriously by men in their work environments.

Moreover, it is significant that none of the women appeared to internalize the negative stereotypes. For example, Caryl Ann, Elizabeth, and Stacey indicated that the term "tomboy" did not carry a negative connotation for them. Thus, the participants did not become dissuaded by societal perceptions from maintaining their involvement in sport.

That none of the women described perceiving a definite gender role conflict is noteworthy and supports the literature that has called for abandoning the concept (e.g., Birrell, 1988; Hall, 1996; Theberge, 1985). The comments by Paige and Stacey indicating

that they perceived a role conflict between "student" and "athlete" supports research by Blinde and Greendorfer (1992) which concluded that both females and males may experience some types of conflict not relating exclusively to gender, but only mediated by gender. Finally, the fact that only one of the five participants chose to specifically refer to the stereotype of the lesbian female athlete reinforces the notion that there is a silence surrounding lesbianism in women's sport.

Progress and Regret

Each participant acknowledged her perception that girls and women in sport had achieved progress. Specifically, each participant remarked upon the tremendous gains in women's sport that she had observed over the course of her lifetime. With the five participants being of similar ages (24 to 28 years old), the commonalities in their perceptions are not surprising. Although there were some differences in the regions of the country where they grew up (Northeast, Southeast, and Midwest), as well as some differences in the size of the communities in which they were raised and went to school (ranging from a small rural town to a suburb of a major metropolitan city), they all expressed similar comments regarding the increased opportunities that they perceive are available to young female athletes today. Moreover, each participant expressed personal regret at not being able to experience the same opportunities and advantages they have recently observed in both youth athletics and collegiate athletics.

All five participants discussed the increased popularity of female athletes and female athletic events, in terms of greater public acceptance and media attention. Additionally, each woman specifically commented on the increased exposure of women's

basketball, and several remarked on the fact that gradually more people are discovering that women's basketball is exciting and fun to watch.

The comments expressed by the participants about the growth of sport opportunities is supported by the literature. Specifically, research has documented that female athletic participation has skyrocketed. For example, the number of girls participating in high school athletics has increased from 300,000 in 1971 to over 2 million in 1992, including girls that have joined previously all-male baseball and football teams. Additionally, the number of women taking part in college athletics has increased from 16,000 in the early 1970s to over 160,000 by the late 1980s (Cahn, 1994).

The literature, however, has not addressed the topic of regret. The fact that each participant expressed some degree of personal regret about missing out on potential opportunities and experiences as a female sport participant is significant.

Future

Finally, all of the participants expressed ambivalence regarding the future outlook for girls and women in sport. Specifically, each woman indicated that she was optimistic that continued progress would be made in terms of public acceptance and media coverage. However, each woman also explained that she was pessimistic to some extent about the possibility of women's sport ever reaching parity with men's sport in terms of popular interest and financial resources.

Several participants suggested that the recent advances observed in increased popularity and media attention is evidence that women's sport is still in the midst of an evolutionary process. These comments by the participants support the literature covering

the history of women in sport, which has indicated that greater opportunities are being realized in the wake of Title IX enforcement and the recent push toward gender equity in college athletics.

The pessimism expressed by the participants varied slightly. Caryl Ann, Elizabeth, Katie, and Stacey suggested that the inferior status of women in sport was because of the status quo; in other words, since that is the way things have been, that is the way things will stay. Paige was less pessimistic, as she assessed that as soon as a younger generation of male and female network producers and newspaper editors replace the older generation of predominantly male media executives, prospects for dramatic change are imminent. The general pessimism articulated by the participants reflects the existing literature on sport socialization, gender role stereotyping, and homophobia. Overall, the pessimism that the women expressed is indicative of their realization that they live in a patriarchal society and that sport is an arena where gender hierarchy operates and where masculine hegemony is maintained.

Conclusion

So What?

The significance of this study rests on the authentic voices of the five experts who served as participants for this project. The actual words of the interviewees were captured as they related personal stories about their athletic experiences and expressed their perceptions and opinions about the status of women in sport. Because I gained a better understanding of the experiences of these former collegiate women's basketball players, I

believe that I satisfied my research objective.

I cannot insinuate that the five women interviewed were speaking for all former women's basketball players; nor can I generalize their comments to any other women who have participated in athletics. However, I can testify to the value of listening to these women, who came from diverse backgrounds and who had different athletic experiences, as they expressed their opinions and feelings about girls and women in sport.

Six major themes emerged from the interviews. First, all five participants described early athletic experiences that included learning sport skills from older male family members and playing more with boys than with girls. Second, all five interviewees received support and encouragement from significant others that contributed to their continued involvement in sport. Third, all five women were frustrated by the existence of gender inequities. Fourth, all five participants were aware of negative stereotypes about female athletes and of societal perceptions of "gender-appropriate" sports. Fifth, all five women acknowledged the progress that had been achieved by girls and women in sport, but also expressed personal regret at not having been able to experience the same opportunities and advantages that are available to young female athletes today. And sixth, all five former college athletes were ambivalent about the future of girls and women in sport.

That these five individuals, as young women, did not internalize negative stereotypes about female athletes and societal perceptions about "gender-appropriate" sports, points to their strength of character and determination to overcome obstacles and play the sport they love, and it indicates the importance of the support and encouragement

they received from significant others. However, other young female sport participants may not be similarly encouraged and positively reinforced in athletics, or in the sport of their choice, by their family, friends, peers, teachers, and coaches. Consequently, such girls may choose to participate in a sport more "acceptable" and closer to the feminine ideal (e.g., tennis or gymnastics), or may opt out of athletics altogether.

Significantly, the fact that these five individuals--as former collegiate athletes and as future sport practitioners (as athletic trainers, athletic administrators, or coaches)--believe that female athletic events have not received the same respect and attention as male athletic events, and that their athleticism has not been taken as seriously in contrast to male athletes, indicates that society still has a negative bias against female athletes.

Implications

The themes revealed in this study suggest it would behoove sport practitioners and others influential in shaping public perception and opinion (e.g., administrators and members of the media) to become more sensitive to the messages they are sending to prospective female sport participants. While some of the issues raised by this study refer to social problems--such as sexism and homophobia--that are larger, more complex, and beyond the scope of a single sports editor or athletic director, it is still important to bring attention to these issues at every opportunity, since any struggle for broad social change must be initiated at the individual level.

This study also indicates the need for more qualitative research focusing on women in sport. Although increasingly more studies in sport psychology and sport sociology are including female athletes and the female perspective, few studies ask these women to talk

about their personal experiences and their private feelings.

Further studies are needed to explore in greater detail some of the issues raised by this study, such as the effects of homophobia on female, and male, athletes. In addition, similar interviews could be conducted with athletes who participate in other sports, with high school athletes, or with much older former athletes. And, other studies inquiring into similar issues could be carried out with sportswriters, administrators, or parents, including both women and men as interviewees, as it would be interesting to examine the male perspective on women's sport participation.

Gender is pervasive in society, and particularly pervasive in sport society. Regardless of the precise direction that future research on girls and women in sport follows, it is imperative that girls' and women's athletic experiences continue to be explored from all perspectives. In order to understand gender and sport, researchers must view gender beliefs, relations, and processes as multi-faceted, and they must consider the historical-cultural context together with the immediate social context (Gill, 1992). Given the perceptions and observations of these five women, who came of age during a time of tremendous transformation in girls' and women's athletics, it is not difficult to be hopeful about the future status of girls and women in sport, despite their expressed reservations and regrets. Perhaps, as Paige succinctly stated, "*We're just on the verge of something great.*"

REFERENCES

REFERENCES

- Acosta, R. V. (1993). The minority experience in sport: Monochromatic or technicolor? In G. L. Cohen (Ed.), Women in sport: Issues and controversies (pp. 204-213). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publishers.
- Birrell, S. (1988). Discourses on the gender / sport relationship: From women in sport to gender relations. Exercise and Sport Science Reviews, 16, 459-502.
- Birrell, S. (1990). Women of color, critical autobiography, and sport. In M. A. Messner & D. F. Sabo (Eds.), Sport, men, and the gender order: Critical feminist perspectives (pp. 185-199). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Birrell, S., & Cole, C. L. (1990). Double fault: Renee Richards and the construction and naturalization of difference. Sociology of Sport Journal, 7, 1-21.
- Birrell, S. & Theberge, N. (1994). Ideological control of women in sport. In D. M. Costa & S. R. Guthrie (Eds.), Women and sport: Interdisciplinary perspectives (pp. 341-359). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Blinde, E. M., & Greendorfer, S. L. (1992). Conflict and the college sport experience of women athletes. Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal, 1, 97-113.
- Blinde, E. M., & Taub, D. E. (1992). Homophobia and women's sport: The disempowerment of athletes. Sociological Focus, 25, 151-166.
- Boutilier, M. A., & SanGiovanni, L. F. (1983). The sporting woman. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Boutilier, M. A., & SanGiovanni, L. F. (1994). Politics, public policy, and Title IX: Some limitations of liberal feminism. In S. Birrell & C. L. Cole (Eds.), Women, sport, and culture (pp. 97-109). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Bryson, L. (1987). Sport and the maintenance of masculine hegemony. Women's Studies International Forum, 10, 349-360.
- Cahn, S. K. (1994). Coming on strong: Gender and sexuality in twentieth-century women's sport. New York: The Free Press.
- Cayleff, S. E. (1995). Babe: The life and legend of Babe Didrickson Zaharias. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Cohen, G. L. (1993). Media portrayal of the female athlete. In G. L. Cohen (Ed.), Women in sport: Issues and controversies (pp. 171-184). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Cole, C. L., & Hribar, A. (1995). Celebrity feminism: *Nike style* post-Fordism, transcendence, and consumer power. Sociology of Sport Journal, 12, 347-369.

Crosset, T. W. (1995). Outsiders in the clubhouse: The world of women's professional golf. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Csizma, K. A., Wittig, A. F., & Schurr, K. T. (1988). Sport stereotypes and gender. Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 10, 62-74.

Deaux, K. (1984). From individual differences to social categories: Analysis of a decade's research on gender. American Psychologist, 39, 105-116.

Duncan, M. C. (1990). Sport photographs and sexual difference: Images of women and men in the 1984 and 1988 Olympic Games. Sociology of Sport Journal, 7, 22-43.

Duncan, M. C., & Hasbrook, C. A. (1988). Denial of power in televised women's sports. Sociology of Sport Journal, 5, 1-21.

Duncan, M. C., Messner, M., Williams, L., & Jensen, K. (1994). Gender stereotyping in televised sports. In S. Birrell & C. L. Cole (Eds.), Women, sport, and culture (pp.249-272). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Early, A., Miller, C., & Williams, C. (1995). A team of our own. 1995-96 USA Basketball Women's National Team: Commemorative Guide (p. 8-11). Colorado Springs, CO: USA Basketball.

Emery, L. (1994). From Lowell mills to the halls of fame: Industrial league sport for women. In D. M. Costa & S. R. Guthrie (Eds.), Women and sport: Interdisciplinary perspectives (pp.107-121). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Eccles, J. S., & Harold, R. D. (1991). Gender differences in sport involvement: Applying the Eccles expectancy-value model. Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 3, 7-35.

Gill, D. L. (1988). Gender differences in competitive orientation and sport participation. International Journal of Sport Psychology, 19, 145-159.

Gill, D. L. (1992). Gender and sport behavior. In T. S. Horn (Ed.), Advances in sport psychology (pp. 143-160). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Gill, D. L. (1994a). Gender issues: A social-educational perspective. In S. M. Murphy (Ed.), Sport psychology interventions (pp. 205-234). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Gill, D. L. (1994b). Psychological perspectives on women in sport and exercise. In D. M. Costa & S. R. Guthrie (Eds.), Women and sport: Interdisciplinary perspectives (pp. 253-284). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Gissendanner, C. H. (1994). African-American women and competitive sport, 1920-1960. In S. Birrell & C. L. Cole (Eds.), Women, sport, and culture (pp. 81-92). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Greendorfer, S. L. (1983). Shaping the female athlete: The impact of the family. In M. A. Boutilier & L. SanGiovanni (Eds.), The sporting woman (pp. 135-155). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Greendorfer, S. L. (1992). Sport socialization. In T. S. Horn (Ed.), Advances in sport psychology (pp. 201-218). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Greendorfer, S. L. (1993). Gender role stereotypes and early childhood education. In G. L. Cohen (Ed.), Women in sport: Issues and controversies (pp. 3-14). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Greendorfer, S. L., & Ewing, M. E. (1981). Race and gender differences in children's socialization into sport. Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 52, 301-310.

Griffin, P. (1992). Changing the game: Homophobia, sexism, and lesbians in sport. Quest, 44, 251-265.

Griffin, P. (1993). Homophobia in women's sport: The fear that divides us. In G. L. Cohen (Ed.), Women in sport: Issues and controversies (pp. 193-203). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Griffin, P., & Genasci, J. (1989, April). Homophobia (101) in physical education, sport, and dance. Workshop presented at the annual convention of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance, Boston, MA.

Griffin, P., & Genasci, J. (1990). Addressing homophobia in physical education: Responsibilities for teachers and researchers. In M. A. Messner & D. F. Sabo (Eds.), Sport, men, and the gender order: Critical feminist perspectives (pp. 211-221). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

- Guttmann, A. (1991). Women's sports: A history. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hall, M. A. (1988). The discourse of gender and sport: From femininity to feminism. Sociology of Sport Journal, 5, 330-340.
- Hall, M. A. (1996). Feminism and sporting bodies: Essays on theory and practice. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Hargreaves, J. A. (1990). Gender on the sports agenda. International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 25, 287-308.
- Harry, J. (1995). Sports ideology, attitudes toward women, and anti-homosexual attitudes. Sex Roles, 32, 109-116.
- Higginson, D. C. (1985). The influence of socializing agents in the female sport-participation process. Adolescence, 20, 73-82.
- Hult, J. S. (1994). The story of women's athletics: Manipulating a dream 1890-1985. In D. M. Costa & S. R. Guthrie (Eds.), Women and sport: Interdisciplinary perspectives (pp.83-106). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Juhasz, M. (1989). Black adolescents' significant others. Social Behavior and Personality, 17, 211-214.
- Kane, M. J. (1988). Media coverage of the female athlete before, during, and after Title IX: *Sports Illustrated* revisited. Journal of Sport Management, 2, 87-99.
- Kane, M. J., & Snyder, E. (1989). Sport typing: The social "containment" of women in sport. Arena Review, 13, 77-96.
- Kennard, J., & Carter, J. M. (1994). In the beginning: The ancient and medieval worlds. In D. M. Costa & S. R. Guthrie (Eds.), Women and sport: Interdisciplinary perspectives (pp. 15-26). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Landers, M. A., & Fine, G. A. (1996). Learning life's lessons in tee ball: The reinforcement of gender and status in kindergarten sport. Sociology of Sport Journal, 13, 87-93.
- Lenskyj, H. J. (1986). Out of bounds: Women, sport and sexuality. Toronto: The Women's Press.

Lenskyj, H. J. (1991). Combating homophobia in sport and physical education. Sociology of Sport Journal, 8, 61-69.

Lopiano, D. A. (1993). Political analysis: Gender equity strategies for the future. In G. L. Cohen (Ed.), Women in sport: Issues and controversies (pp. 104-116). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

MacNeill, M. (1994). Active women, media representations, and ideology. In S. Birrell & C. L. Cole (Eds.), Women, sport, and culture (pp. 273-287). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Matteo, S. (1988). The effect of gender-schematic processing on decisions about sex-inappropriate sport behavior. Sex Roles, 18, 41-58.

McDermott, L. (1996). Toward a feminist understanding of physicality within the context of women's physically active and sporting lives. Sociology of Sport Journal, 13, 12-30.

Messner, M. A. (1988). Sports and male domination: The female athlete as contested ideological terrain. Sociology of Sport Journal, 5, 197-211.

Messner, M. A. (1992). Power at play: Sports and the problem of masculinity. Boston: Beacon Press.

Messner, M. A., Duncan, M. C., & Jensen, K. (1993). Separating the men from the girls: The gendered language of televised sports. In D. S. Eitzen (Ed.), Sport in contemporary society: An anthology (4th ed.; pp. 219-233). New York: St. Martin's Press.

Metheny, E. (1974). Symbolic forms of movement: The feminine image in sports. In G. H. Sage (Ed.), Sport and American society: Selected readings (2nd ed.; pp. 289-301). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Murray, M., & Matheson, H. (1993). Competition: Perceived barriers to success. In G. L. Cohen (Ed.), Women in sport: Issues and controversies (pp. 217-229). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Nelson, M. B. (1991). Are we winning yet? How women are changing sports and sports are changing women. New York: Random House.

Nelson, M. B. (1994). The stronger women get, the more men love football: Sexism and the American culture of sports. New York: Harcourt Brace.

Paul, J. (1993). Heroines: Paving the way. In G. L. Cohen (Ed.), Women in sport: Issues and controversies (pp. 27-37). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Pharr, S. (1988). Homophobia: A weapon of sexism. Little Rock, AR: Chardon Press.

Reinharz, S. (1992). Feminist methods in social research. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rintala, J. (1989). The gendered body: A synthesis and more paradox. Arena Review, 13, 134-144.

Rotella, R. J., & Murray, M. M. (1991). Homophobia, the world of sport, and sport psychology consulting. The Sport Psychologist, 5, 355-364.

Sabo, D., & Messner, M. A. (1993). Whose body is this? Women's sports and sexual politics. In G. L. Cohen (Ed.), Women in sport: Issues and controversies (pp. 15-24). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publishers.

Simon, R. L. (1995). Gender equity and inequity in athletics. In W. J. Morgan & K. V. Meier (Eds.), Philosophic inquiry in sport (2nd ed.; pp. 293-304). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Smith, Y. R. (1992). Women of color in society and sport. Quest, 44, 228-250.

Theberge, N. (1984). On the need for a more adequate theory of sport participation. Sociology of Sport Journal, 1, 26-35.

Theberge, N. (1985). Toward a feminist alternative to sport as a male preserve. Quest, 37, 193-202.

Theberge, N., & Birrell, S. (1994). Structural constraints facing women in sport. In D. M. Costa & S. R. Guthrie (Eds.), Women and sport: Interdisciplinary perspectives (pp. 331-340). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Theberge, N., & Cronk, A. (1986). Work routines in newspaper sports departments and the coverage of women's sports. Sociology of Sport Journal, 3, 195-203.

Twin, S. L. (1979). Out of the bleachers: Writings on women and sport. Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press.

Welch, P. (1993). Governance: The first half century. In G. L. Cohen (Ed.), Women in sport: Issues and controversies (pp. 69-78). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Weiss, M. R. & Glenn, S. D. (1992). Psychological development and females' sport participation: An interactional perspective. Quest, 44, 138-157.

Weiss, M. R., & Knoppers, A. (1982). The influence of socializing agents on female collegiate volleyball players. Journal of Sport Psychology, 4, 267-279.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Title

The life and sport experiences of former collegiate women's basketball players.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences, perceptions, and feelings of former intercollegiate women's basketball players. This project will serve as the basis for my Master's thesis.

Description of Study

You will be asked to participate in two informal interviews. The initial interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes and will focus on your experiences in sport and competitive athletics, especially those you experienced while growing up. The initial interview will be tape-recorded so that I will be able to accurately capture your words. I will transcribe the audiotape and then schedule with you a follow-up interview to allow you to read over the transcription and my summary and make additional comments and/or amend your responses, if you so desire. The follow-up interview will last approximately 30-60 minutes and will also be audiotaped.

Confidentiality

You will select a pseudonym which will be used during your interview to ensure confidentiality. My thesis advisor and I will be the only individuals with direct access to the interview tapes. Additionally, the consent forms will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in Room 339, HPER Building, on the UTK campus throughout the study and for three years following the project's completion, after which they will be destroyed. The audiotapes will be kept in a separate locked filing cabinet, also in Room 339, HPER Building, and will be destroyed upon completion of the study. Only my thesis committee, a qualitative research group, and I will have access to your transcript, on which you will be identified by pseudonym only. In addition, no proper names, of places or people, will be used in the transcript or text of the study.

Potential Risks

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks associated with your participation in this project. Your participation is entirely voluntary. If at any time you are uncomfortable about answering a question or you wish to terminate the interview, please feel free to say so, and we will go on to the next question or stop the interview altogether. There will be no penalty or prejudice if you decide to withdraw from the study.

-over-

Potential Benefits

The possible benefits include an opportunity for you to talk about your experiences in sports and to reflect on what these experiences have meant to you. Keep in mind that you are the expert here---I am simply interested in hearing your stories, comments, and thoughts about participating in athletics. Also, taking part in this study may result in a heightened awareness for you regarding your personal experiences as a female basketball player. Additionally, your participation will contribute to the existing body of knowledge relating to the experiences of female athletes.

Finally, you may contact me at any time if you have further questions or concerns about the project or your participation in it.

I HAVE READ THE ABOVE STATEMENTS AND I UNDERSTAND THE EXPLANATION OF THE PROJECT, THE PROCEDURES TO BE USED, MY ROLE IN THE RESEARCH, AND THE POTENTIAL RISKS AND BENEFITS INVOLVED.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

For further information or questions contact:

Ann C. Bertucci and/or Patricia A. Beitel, Ed.D.

Cultural Studies Unit
1914 Andy Holt Ave.
The University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996-2700
Phone: (423) 974-5111

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me about your earliest experiences in sport.

Probes: what sports did you play?

what sports were you encouraged and/or discouraged to learn/play while growing up?

what were the reasons for playing/not playing any particular sport?

who were your primary teachers, coaches, and/or role models?

2. Tell me about your experiences in basketball.

Probes: when did you start playing?

who influenced you?

what are the reasons you kept playing?

3. Tell me about the reactions you received from others regarding your participation/involvement in athletics/basketball.

Probes: from parents/relatives?

from peers?

from others?

4. How do you think society views women's athletics and female athletes/basketball players?

Probe: how do you think society views male athletes/basketball players?

5. Can you tell me about a specific time when you experienced gender discrimination as an athlete?

Probe: did/does that affect your basketball/sport participation?

6. Some sports and activities have been viewed by society as more appropriate/acceptable for one gender, e.g., wrestling for males and gymnastics for females, even though both genders may participate in that sport. Individuals who take part in those activities deemed more appropriate for the opposite sex may feel a conflict between what activity they choose to participate in and what activity society "expects" them to choose. Can you tell me about a specific time when you have experienced a gender role conflict?

Probe: has that affected your basketball/sport participation?

APPENDIX C
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

PSEUDONYM: _____

DATE: _____

HOMETOWN: _____

AGE: _____

COLLEGE: _____

DEGREE: _____

MAJOR: _____

YEAR OF GRADUATION: _____

OF SEASONS OF BASKETBALL PARTICIPATION: _____

YEARS OF BASKETBALL PARTICIPATION: _____

POSITION: _____

RACE / ETHNICITY: _____

VITA

Ann Catherine Bertucci was born in Petaluma, California, on June 3, 1964. She graduated from Petaluma High School in June 1982 and began attending the University of California at Davis in September of that year. While at UC Davis, she majored in managerial economics and minored in physical education, and she was a member of the women's varsity cross country and track and field teams. She graduated with honors from UC Davis in August 1987 with a Bachelor of Science degree. Bertucci received a teaching credential in June 1989 from Sonoma State University in Rohnert Park, California, and taught in the Petaluma High School District for two years. Additionally, from September 1987 to June 1991, she coached high school cross country, track and field, and girls' basketball. In August 1991, she entered the University of Tennessee at Knoxville to begin graduate studies. She served as an assistant women's cross country and track and field coach at UT Knoxville from August 1992 to August 1995. In December 1996, she completed a Master of Science degree in Human Performance and Sport Studies with a concentration in sport psychology.