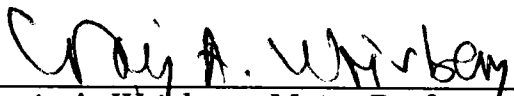
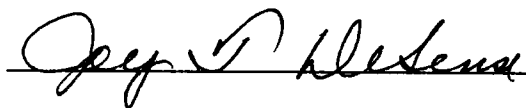


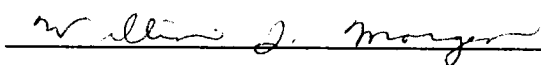
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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Maria Kwiatkowski entitled "Sporting Femininity: Perceptions of Femininity and Homophobia Within the Sport and Recreation Experiences of Women." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.

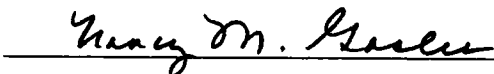

Craig A. Wrisberg, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and
recommend its acceptance:









Accepted for the Council:


Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of the Graduate School

SPORTING FEMININITY

**Perceptions of Femininity and Homophobia
Within the Sport and Recreation Experiences of Women**

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Maria Kwiatkowski

May, 1998

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents,
Edward Kwiatkowski and *Mary Fica-Kwiatkowski*
whose love and support surpassed all expectations.

And to my sister and brothers,
Laura Mahler, *Jon Kwiat* and *Edward Kwiatkowski*
for always loving me and being proud of your little sister.

And to my nephews,
Daniel Mahler and *Thomas Mahler*
because I believe in you.

I also dedicate this work to the memory of my dearest friend,

Joseph Borieo

August 10, 1960 to March 29, 1998

We shared the same birthday -- we were like twins,
dancing our way through the trials and joys of life.

We should have shared many more dances.

(I'll cut in when I get there.)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to many people who shared with me the experience of qualitative research. However gratifying, it is an emotional experience. Therefore, first and foremost, thank you to my major professor, Dr. Craig A. Wrisberg, who understood my need to see this work through and believed, as I did, that the experiences of these women deserved to be heard. Thank you as well to the engaging members of my committee, Dr. Patricia A. Beitel, Dr. Joy T. DeSensi, Dr. Nancy M. Goslee and Dr. William J. Morgan. You provided insights, knowledge, and enthusiasm reflecting the uniqueness of your individual perspectives; not only in this final process, but throughout my program of study.

Thank you to Dr. C. Glennon Rowell, who in his role as "acting" Dean, truly showed himself to be a student advocate.

Special thanks to Dr. Vikki Krane of Bowling Green State University for providing information and guidance that helped me immensely as I was formulating this study.

I owe much to Dr. Kirsten Benson, Writing Center Consultant, who helped so much to shape and improve this document.

Thanks also to those who played various roles in the development of this study and/or consultative assistance: Dr. Janet Anderson; Ron Emge; Peter Hager; Dr. Schuyler Huck; and Angie Vicars.

To Leslie Klein who, through a working relationship, became a wonderful friend and helped me in so many ways I will spend a lifetime trying to say thank you.

And with much love:

To Reverend Jeffrey Proctor of the Knoxville Center for Positive Living: you provided me with so much spiritual support as well as an incredible amount of time, insight and assistance with this study; your messages have helped me to, at least, strive to live consciously. Besides, you're just *so much fun* - thank you doesn't begin to cover it.

An enormous thank you hug to Don Gillson, another partner in fun, prayer and the spiritual quest. Though we have worked together to see clearly, I feel like I did most of the leaning - now, it's your turn.

Gratitude also to very special people who provided so much encouragement throughout our friendships: Paul Berger, Sondra Bernard, Dr. Leon & Gloria Bogartz, Pamela & Heather Briley, Lisa Brimhall, Kathleen Erickson, Eric Evers, Ed Ewing, Jon Fisher, Jeff Gorbski, Susan Hawthorne, Ursula Henry, Mary Lukowski, Lynnette Norris, Dr. Sheldon & Terry Soss, and Paul Wrobleski.

Finally, as examples of courage and heroicism:

To the women who participated in this study, "Lulu," "Toni," "Elaine," "Billie Jean," "Nelle," and "Katherine," your willingness to share your experiences, your genuineness, eloquence, and openness allowed me to capture your experiences - you are the story.

ABSTRACT

Female athletes participating in non-traditional ("masculine") sports often find that society's expectations of what is or is not "feminine" pose conflicts and raise gender-typed issues regarding their sport participation. Moreover, the very nature of questioning an athlete's choice of sport participation reflects perceptions and/or fears of homosexuality. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to provide a description of the sport participation experiences of women as they relate to: (a) the participants' perceptions of societal expectations of women and their influences; (b) the participants' definitions of "femininity," "masculinity," and "homophobia" and (c) to understand the ways in which both personal definitions of these terms along with perceptions of society's definitions have affected their sport experiences.

This study used the qualitative methodology of the dialogic interview from a feminist perspective analyzed within an interpretist framework. Six Caucasian female athletes ranging in age from mid-twenties to late sixties were interviewed. Interviews lasted between one and two hours. Participants participated in a variety of sports within both organized school and community leagues and recreation and physical education settings. Differences in opportunities regarding sports played and competitive levels reflected the diversity in ages and accompanying historical context within which the participants' perceived experiences existed.

A thematic analysis of the data produced themes in the categories of: (a) "family matters" discussed as the crucial role that the women's families played in the participants' involvement in sport regarding both

support and concerns; (b) "participatory restrictions" that reflect inaccessibility to a *particular* sport or competitive level as participant; (c) discrimination and/or marginalization reflecting "inequities" within participants' experiences; (d) participant views and personal definitions of "femininity" describing attempts to harmonize personal definitions with societal expectations; (e) understanding of the term "homophobia" and reflections of one's own perceptions of it as well as those of family, fans, administration and fellow athletes; and (f) participant "determination" that prevailed within their experiences. Each theme was discussed separately. Differences between participants were also noted regarding the extent to which various themes did or did not affect their participatory experiences as well as the unique and individual approaches each used to contend with them.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

It's like they're saying "Look pretty and act feminine, and I'll give you a chance to play."

Donna Lopiano (Sherrington, 1996, p.23B)

I would notice people who looked at me. At my height, when you are a woman, you're tall and you have large muscles, people think you are a transvestite. There are many times people would ask me that.

"Karen" (Kwiatkowski, 1995, p. 40)

Some people even questioned her being, you know, she looked - she wore her hair a little short and she was so strong and did all these things - and they would say well she never lost her tomboyishness.

Betty Jameson speaking about Babe Didrikson
(Cayleff, 1995, p. 90)

The women only play about 25 percent as good as the men. Their best player couldn't even beat an old man like me.

Bobby Riggs (Axthelm, 1973, p. 77)

The above quotations illustrate some of the issues women athletes face as they pursue their right to participate in sport despite the prevailing controversy that continues to cloud their experiences. The first emphasizes the overriding importance that a woman athlete always maintain her "femininity." The second underscores the fear that women's sport participation will result in the development of unfeminine-like musculature making them "masculine" or, worse yet, as implied in the third quotation, "her being, you know" perhaps a

lesbian. Within this demand that women athletes maintain their femininity, don't become "mannish" and provide unquestionable evidence of their heterosexuality comes the challenge to play their selected sports "as well as a man" (Kane & Snyder, 1989; MacKinnon, 1987; Theberge, 1985; Willis, 1982). The latter challenge stands as the ultimate compliment paid to a competent female athlete. These issues, embedded in the previous quotations, reflect the controversial nature of women's experiences in sport that have dominated the analysis of their participation throughout history. They also portray the prevalent issues within women's sport that this study seeks to address; namely, "femininity," "masculinity," and "homonegativism" (see Definition of Terms). To better understand how these issues emerged in women's sport, a historical context provides some clues.

Early in the nineteenth century women were discouraged from participation because science and medicine suggested that it would jeopardize their reproductive health. Moreover, it was believed that physiological functions related to the reproductive system, such as menstruation, mood swings, and pregnancy, hampered a woman's ability to engage in sport (Costa & Guthrie, 1994; Davenport, 1980; Hargreaves, 1985; Lenskyj, 1986; Mangan & Park, 1987; Metheny, 1965; Smith-Rosenberg, 1986; Vertinsky, 1987, 1994). Especially by the time of the freedom of the "flapper" of the 1920's and carrying into the post-war 50's the focus changed to public concern over the "masculinizing effects" of sports participation. School administrators, parents, and the media protested that a female's participation in strenuous physical activity would result in "mannish" physical characteristics that would alienate her from men, dating, and, most importantly, a marriage proposal (Cahn,

1994; Costa & Guthrie, 1994; Del Rey, 1978; Festle, 1996; Mangan & Park, 1987; Mrozek, 1987; Stanley, 1996; Willis, 1982).

However, by the beginning of the 1970's, some breaks were appearing in attitudes toward and laws concerning women and sport. Title IX of the Education Amendments Act (PL 92-318) of 1972 was passed by Congress on June 23, 1972. Because nearly 10,000 public responses were received by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (DHEW) in reference to proposed regulations regarding Title IX's prohibition of sex discrimination, DHEW proposed substantive changes and President Ford approved the regulations. The final regulations implementing Title IX were published on June 4, 1975 and appear in the Federal Register, Vol. 40, No. 108. Section 86.41 covers guidelines pertaining specifically to athletics and the "General" Section (a) states:

No person shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, be treated differently from another person or otherwise be discriminated against in any inter-scholastic, intercollegiate, club or intramural athletics offered by recipient, and no recipient shall provide any such athletics separately on such basis. (p. A-10)

Despite this call for an end to discriminatory practices in women's sport, the law's actual implementation progressed slowly and met with stiff resistance (Cahn, 1994; Chandler & Kelly, 1997; Lenskyj, 1990; McKay, 1997; Naughton, 1997; Roach, 1995; Sabo, 1994, 1998; Sage, 1987; Staurowsky, 1996, 1998). As the 1970's through the 1990's ushered in decades of increasing opportunities for women to express themselves in the career market with an expanding consciousness of women's capabilities, women's sport subsequent to Title IX continued to experience slow progress. Indeed, few aspects of womanhood have been more heatedly contested than that of the athletic woman.

Numerous researchers, primarily sport sociologists, have offered suggestions as to why Western society resists the notion of the athletic woman (Birrell, 1988; Boutilier & San Giovanni, 1983; Cahn, 1994; Costa & Guthrie, 1994; Felshin, 1973; Festle, 1996; Gill, 1994; Hall, 1996; Hargreaves, 1982; Harris, 1980; Kane & Snyder, 1989; Lenskyj, 1990; Nelson, 1991; Oglesby, 1983, 1990; Willis, 1982). These scholars offer theories that range from Western society's belief that prized characteristics of athleticism such as aggression and competitiveness meet the expectations of "masculine" gender constructs, thus positioning sports as a masculine domain, to the extreme notion that any woman wanting to play a traditional "male" sport such as basketball, rugby, or baseball must "want to be a man." This questionable perception by society is sometimes further interpreted to mean that the female athlete also wants to exhibit the behaviors of men, which includes sexual behaviors; hence, she must be a lesbian. Whatever the reason behind the resistance, there is no questioning that the athletic woman is an enigma who challenges traditional concepts of "feminine" as constructed by our society. Because of this, women who choose to participate in sports, particularly in those traditionally created "for and by men," find themselves facing unique and complicated issues of self-doubt and identity crises not experienced by male participants. (It should be noted, however, that men who choose to compete in the more aesthetic or "feminine" sports, such as figure skating and dance, face similar dilemmas.)

The experiences of women become magnified as they endure the additional pressures of athletic participation within a patriarchal (see Definition of Terms) society that considers many characteristics required

of all sport participation, such as competitiveness and discipline, to be masculine traits (Connell, 1987; Halbert, 1997; Nelson, 1991; Postow, 1988; Pronger, 1990; Wrisberg, 1996). The accomplishments of women in sport are also exacerbated by administrative and media control that dictates the economic distribution of resources as well as the quality and quantity of representation and exposure women receive in print, film and advertising (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983; Cole & Hribar, 1995; Creedon, 1994; Daddario, 1994; Davis, 1997; Duncan, 1990; Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; Duncan, Messner, Williams, & Jensen, 1990; Duquin, 1989; Guttman, 1996; Higgs & Weiller, 1994; Hilliard, 1984; Holmlund, 1989; Kane, 1989; Kane & Greendorfer, 1994; McKay, 1997; Shifflett & Revelle, 1994; Women's Sports Foundation [WSF], 1995). The relative scarcity of mentors and role models as a result of too few female coaches and "marketable" female athletes further impairs the advance of women in sport. Finally, additional pressures posed by the fear of recrimination and discrimination engendered by a homonegative society lead many female athletes to adopt a heterosexy (see Definition of Terms) image, apologize for success and closet "inappropriate" behavior regardless of their actual sexual orientation.

It is within the context of these unique pressures that women are expected to find their place in sport. Society imposes standards upon the female athlete that require her to excel by honing masculine traits; hence, "play as well as a man" or "don't throw, run, jump like a girl" (Nelson, 1994; Young, 1980) but still find a way to satisfy culture's comfort level of femininity through heterosexist displays of marriage and family, dress, aesthetics and grace.

Sociologists within and without sport have begun to examine the construction of gender within culture (Birrell & Cole, 1990; Brady, 1995; Bredemeier, 1992; Cahn, 1994; Cole, 1993; Connell, 1987; Deaux & Major, 1987; Gill, 1994; Hale, 1996; Hood-Williams, 1995; Lenskyj, 1990; Messner, 1996; Obel, 1996; Vertinsky, 1994; Whitson, 1994). While these individuals have led the way in scrutinizing these issues, sport psychologists have also been challenged to "step up to the plate" to contribute their own perspective:

Sport psychologists can advance our understanding of gender by investigating gender belief systems in sport and exercise. There has been some work, but we have not yet begun to consider multiple components and interrelationships, and many questions remain unanswered. (Gill, 1994, p. 272)

In order to address this challenge, it is necessary to come to an understanding of how established gender constructs (see Definition of Terms) affect women's preparation, participation, and competitive performance in sport. Moreover, as will become evident (see Review of Literature), there is a strong correlation between the traditional gender construct of "feminine" and the homonegative behaviors that exist within women's sport (Blinde & Taub, 1992; Burroughs, Ashburn, & Seeborn, 1995; Cahn, 1993, 1994; Cayleff, 1996; Festle, 1996; Griffin, 1992; Griffin & Genasci, 1990; Guthrie, 1982; Herek, 1984, 1991; Killiam, 1994; Kolnes, 1995; Krane, 1996; Lederman, 1991; Lenskyj, 1986, 1990, 1991, 1992; Palzkill, 1990; Peper, 1994; Pharr, 1988; Rogers, 1994; Rotella & Murray, 1991; Theberge & Birrell, 1994; Woods, 1992; Wughalter, 1978; Young, 1995; Zwerman, 1994). Because of this, it is fruitful to explore the issues of femininity and homonegativism in tandem, in order to gain insight into the athletes' perceptions of the

relationship between these two issues. This assumes that the participant is the authority regarding her own perceptions of what constitutes characteristics of "masculine" and "feminine," as well as her definition of "homophobia" and the resultant ways that her interpretations of these concepts influence her experiences. In this way, the "gender constructs" examined reflect both the participants' personal interpretation as well as those she perceives are reflected by society.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide a description of the sport participation experiences of women as they relate to: (a) the participants' perceptions of societal expectations of women and its influences; (b) the participants' definitions of "femininity," "masculinity," and "homophobia" and (c) to understand the ways in which both personal definitions of these terms along with perceptions of society's definitions have affected their sport experiences. In order to address these issues, a dialogic interview methodology was employed.

Definition of Terms

Feminist Perspective - Bringing women's experiences from marginalized status to the center, contextualizing sport and exercise experiences with an emphasis on social constraints and values, challenging assumptions of traditional scientific research and emphasizing alternative methodologies that incorporate a wider range of methods of inquiry and forms of knowledge (Krane, 1994).

Gender Construct - Refers to the characteristics that are "constructed" or attributed by a culture or society concerning beliefs about what constitutes "appropriate" or acceptable behavior for males as "masculine" and females as "feminine" gender differences (Bredemeier, 1992).

Gender Verification - Testing in competitive sport whereby women who wish to compete as *women* must prove that they are really women and not men cheating (Hall, 1996, p. 16; Hood-Williams, 1995).

Hegemony - "A fairly complete system of ideological dominance that works through the apparent complicity of those disenfranchised by it." (Theberge & Birrell, 1994, p. 327). For discussions pertaining to its relationship to sport see Bryson, 1987; Hall, 1996; MacNeil, 1994; Morgan, 1994a, 1994b, 1997; Parry, 1988.

Heteroglossia - "Bakhtin's (1975, 1981) way of referring, in any utterance of any kind, to the peculiar interaction between the two fundamentals of all communication. On the one hand, a mode of transcription must, in order to do its work of separating texts, be a more or less fixed system. But these repeatable features, on the other hand, are in the power of the particular context in which the utterance is made; this context can refract, add to, or in some cases, even subtract from the amount and kind of meaning the utterance may be said to have when it is conceived only as a systematic manifestation independent of context." (Holquist, pp. xix - xx)

Heterosexism - Usually used to refer to the projection of a particular "image" of a person reflecting overt heterosexual appeal, but also incorporates the belief and promotion of heterosexuality as desirable. Also sometimes referred to as "hyperfemininity" when applied to women (Lenskyj, 1994).

Homonegativism - An inclusive term meant to incorporate the concepts behind the terms cultural, institutional, interpersonal and personal homophobia describing purposeful negative attitudes and behaviors toward nonheterosexuals (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980 Krane, 1996).

Homophobia - "The irrational fear and hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex." (Pharr, 1988, p. 1)

Cultural Homophobia - "The social norms or codes of behavior that, although not expressly written into law or policy, nonetheless work within a society to legitimize oppression." (Blumenfeld, 1992, p. 6)

Institutional Homophobia - "The ways in which various organizations (religious, governmental, educational and professional) systematically discriminate against persons based on perceived or acknowledged sexual orientation." (Blumenfeld, 1992, p. 5)

Interpersonal Homophobia - "Personal bias or prejudice that influences relations between and among individuals such as verbal or physical harassment, rejection, and violence." (Blumenfeld, 1992, p. 4)

Personal Homophobia - "A personal belief system that views homosexual behavior as unfortunate, perverse, inferior, immoral or abnormal." (Blumenfeld, 1992, p.3)

Patriarchy - "The manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general." (Lerner, 1986, p. 239)

Paternalism - "Describes the relationship of a dominant group, considered superior, to a subordinate group, considered inferior, in which the dominance is mitigated by mutual obligations and reciprocal rights." (Lerner, 1986, p. 239)

Sexism - "Starting from the traditional belief in the difference between the sexes, sexism embodies two core concepts: (a) men are more important and valuable than women; and (b) women exist for the pleasure and assistance of men." (Freeman, 1979, p. 561)

Assumptions of the Study

The following assumptions were made in reference to this study:

1. The subjective experiences of the participants are important to understand their initial selection, participation and continued involvement in sports, generally and competitively.
2. The participants have, to the best of their memory and ability, honestly answered those questions outlined in the Interview Guide as well as reported additional perceptions and feelings about their experiences.
3. The qualitative method of dialogic interviewing is a valid procedure for obtaining information about the personal experiences of the participants in this study.
4. The participants were able to offer their own interpretations of the terms "masculinity," "femininity" and "homophobia."
5. I (the interviewer) was able to understand and convey the feelings and perceptions of the participants' experiences.

Limitations of the Study

1. A "well-seasoned" competitor may have difficulty reflecting on experiences that possibly occurred many years prior to this study.

This limitation may be most prominent in reflection of initial phases of each participant's experiences.

2. The use of a small number of participants represents an additional limitation. This was necessitated by the application of the dialogic interview method designed to present each participant's experience in an in-depth conversational format in order to provide a "thick" description. However, the results may not be generalizable to other women athletes.

3. It is impossible to guarantee that each participant responded honestly to the questions and issues presented.

Scope of the Study

Because this study uses a qualitative method of analysis, neither the collected data nor the interpretist results can be generalized to the larger population. The focus of a limited number of individual experiences is intended to enhance portrayal of the female athlete in the current literature by offering a detailed description of each person. While generalizations to other female sport participants would be inappropriate, an attempt was made to determine the extent to which the experiences expressed by the participants in this study are similar to those reported by other female athletes in the extant literature.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study emerges primarily from its representation of the uniqueness of the female athlete's experience. This

experience is exceptional as it is performed within the context of social constraints regarding notions of femininity as well as within the application of homonegative behaviors. It is hoped that this examination of women's experiences has uncovered ways in which these constraints influence the experience and/or ability of female athletes to perform and compete in an atmosphere of conflicting expectations between the athlete herself and that of the surrounding culture. Such information may be of particular relevance for coaches and sport psychology consultants.

Within the feminist perspective (see Review of Literature and Rationale), the information obtained from this study has been examined solely for its uniqueness as an experience of the participants as women and to understand and value such experiences without comparing or contrasting them with those that may have been reported by male athletes in a similar context of social constraint.

Additionally, it is hoped that this study offers insights into the discriminatory practices of the various primary social groups surrounding athletes such as coaches, parents, peers, and educational and administrative athletic organizations. As such, this study, perhaps, provides a basis for discovering better ways to address the needs of the female sporting population at large.

Finally, it is anticipated that the voices of participants in this study speak to female athletes themselves with insights into various aspects of sport participation and shared experiences.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The experiences of women in sport have only recently been acknowledged as uniquely placed within the larger context of a society developed according to a patriarchal model which encompasses expectations of "appropriate" behavior for both men and women. Consequently, much of the extant literature within sport psychology makes note of gender differences emergent in research results with little attention paid to the underlying causes of these differences. However, as noted in previous analyses of women's sport participation, "sport behavior does not occur in a vacuum" (Dewar & Horn, 1992; Krane, 1994), which prompts an examination of the various features of women athletes' experiences that reflect aspects of societal expectations affecting women's sport behavior.

Hence, in reviewing the literature that addresses unique issues, constraints, and expectations of women in sport, the following themes have been identified:

- 1) Because of the uniqueness of the experiences of women athletes, researchers are challenged to reconsider traditional approaches of analysis based on objective empiricism in favor of alternative approaches of gender analysis placed within a feminist epistemology as suggested by various sport sociologists (Birrell, 1984, Bredemeier, 1992; Cole, 1993; DeSensi, 1992; Dewar, 1993; Dewar & Horn, 1992; Hall, 1984, 1985; Lenskyj, 1987; Messner & Sabo, 1990), sport psychologists (Gill, 1994;

Krane, 1994) and feminist social scientists (Allen & Barber, 1992; Bristow & Esper, 1988; Daly, 1978; Donovan, 1994; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Gilligan, 1982; Gergen & Davis, 1997; Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991; Reinharz, 1992).

2) Gender role stereotypes and related expectations of appropriate "femininity" and "masculinity" dominate the sport experiences of women regarding entry into, continued participation in, and discontinuance of sport in general but "non-traditional" women's sport in particular.

3) Media vehicles such as print and television serve as enforcers of gender construction and are used to prohibit women's entry into various sports and marginalization of women's achievements subsequent to involvement.

4) Homonegativism is the most-used weapon to prohibit women's inclusion in sport, yet it is the most-neglected area of research and open discussion regarding women athletes' experiences.

The purpose of this chapter is to present an overview of the extant literature regarding women's sport experiences within the context of the above themes.

Research: Challenges and Suggestions for Gender Analysis

Most scholars and proponents of feminist research agree that the feminist approach is not identified as a methodology itself but rather as a *perspective* applied to existant (or developing) fields of inquiry (Birrell, 1994; Butler, 1990; Gergen & Davis, Donovan, 1992; Gill, 1994; Hall, 1979, 1996; Hohne & Wussow, 1994; Krane, 1994; Reinharz, 1992). As Reinharz (1992) notes, "Feminism supplies the perspective and the

discipline provides the method," thus describing the dual task of the feminist framework to ground itself both in academic discipline and feminist scholarship. In this way, academic concerns for rigorous methodology are addressed and the feminist perspective remains steadfast in its commitment to a scholarly approach. The need for the feminist perspective in sport is addressed by Birrell (1994) who comments that early women's sport research:

...relied on methodologically primitive attempts to measure complex psychosocial constructs; conceived of women as not fitting into sport; and by subtly assuming that the problem behind women's low involvement lay within, tended to blame women for their own lack of participation. (p. 467)

Apparent in this criticism is the call for the application of a new way of seeing, or "perspective," that may draw from a traditional methodology while bringing new life to it. This has been the goal of the feminist approach. In effect, feminist researchers are using the new perspective to expand the horizons of the old: to explain data, to generate theory, and to test theory (Reinharz, 1992). At its core, the feminist perspective first emerged and continues to develop in an attempt to uncover the patriarchal bias that dominated and, to some degree, still prevails in research for and about women (Birrell, 1994; Bredemeier, 1992; Bryson, 1987; Cole, 1993; Daly, 1973; DeSensi, 1992; Donovan, 1992; Gill, 1994; Gilligan 1982; Hall, 1979; Hall, 1996; Kane & Snyder, 1989; Klein, 1983; Krane, 1994; Lerner, 1986; MacKinnon, 1983; McKay, 1997; Minnich, 1977; Pateman, 1988; Reinharz, 1992; Vertinsky, 1994). To illustrate, feminist research is used to: uncover, not ignore, the interplay between gender and power as it explores the political ramifications of the power structure within women's experiences; to

refrain from making comparisons of research data using women as participants to similar studies of male participants with the latter taken as the "norm" and the former "deviant"; to value the participants, male or female, as the expert witnesses in their own experiences which includes the recognition of diversity within experiences such as race, culture and sexual orientation (Carby, 1982; hooks, 1988; Hohne & Wussow, Spivak, 1986; Stimpson, 1989). These goals are examined separately in the following sections.

Power Plays

Sport participation experiences of women occur within the context of the larger society, bringing to their experiences the societal constraints and expectations imposed by the surrounding culture (Birrell & Cole, 1994; Cahn, 1994; Costa & Guthrie, 1994; Dewar & Horn, 1992; Festle, 1996; Hall, 1996; Kane & Snyder, 1989; Krane, 1994; Lenskyj, 1991; Messner, 1996; Nelson, 1994). Hence, a number of scholars recommend the incorporation of a feminist perspective which recognizes the effects of the established culture upon women's experiences, particularly in sport, even amidst apparent advances within the sporting arena. As discussed earlier (see Introduction) research in both the social and applied sciences has perpetuated arguments against increased female participation, citing biological and physical inferiority (Davenport, 1980, Lenskyj, 1986, Mangan & Park, 1987; Smith-Rosenberg, 1986; Stanley, 1996; Vertinsky, 1994). Moreover, the questions themselves are often grounded in the experiences of men and do not reflect the perspective of the women studied. The constraints posed by such slanted research have not gone unnoticed by Lenskyj (1990) who points out that there is a

notable difference between research about women and "woman-centered" research; the latter being described as research concerned with empowering women as well as facilitating social relations between men and women.

In the attempt to address the uniqueness of women's experiences qualitative work has emerged as the most chosen form of feminist research because of the emphasis it places on the idea that participants and researcher are "collaborators." Quantitative research may prove telling in identifying factual inequalities but does not explain their perpetuation. Applying the qualitative method to feminist research can play an integral role in expanding the dimensions of traditional research by questioning the roles that male hegemony (see Definition of Terms) and patriarchy play in the exclusion of women from sport through the use of biological arguments, male violence, and sex-role stereotypes.

While scientifically constructed biases are sometimes used to exclude female participation from male-dominated and "violent" sports, additional challenges to women emerge as men oppose women's female-only programs and gender equity goals as retaliatory reverse discrimination agendas (Cahn, 1994; Chandler & Kelly, 1997; Lenskyj, 1990; McKay, 1997; Naughton, 1997; Roach, 1995; Sabo, 1994, 1998; Sage, 1987; Staurowsky, 1996, 1998). Lenskyj (1990) proposes that men are at odds with these women-only programs for reasons such as: they are a threat to male hegemony, promote female bonding and solidarity, and allow women to become real athletes as opposed to holding traditional roles that reflect the "male gaze" (Davis, 1997; Duncan, 1990, 1993; Halbert, 1997; Holmlund, 1989; Kane & Greendorfer, 1994; Kidd, 1983; Lenskyj, 1990; Mrozek, 1987; Young, 1988; Willis, 1982).

Patriarchy can continue as long as sex differentiation is maintained within our social structures and institutions. Writes Lenskyj (1990):

The notion of sex differentiation encompasses a range of physical, social, emotional and sexual attributes inherent in gender appropriate behavior, in presentation of the self as feminine or masculine, and in one's sexual identity. The maintenance of male power and privilege depends in part on ensuring that sex differences are carefully constructed and institutionalized in social structures, beliefs and practices. Sport, by prevailing definitions concerned with physical ability and body comportment, provides and appropriate site for instruction in masculinity and femininity. (p. 240)

This element of promoting sex differentiation is the customary explanation for the exclusion of women from male-only settings. The female presence can be said to upset the apple cart in the development of "masculine" character traits in men. Unfortunately, the dissemination of such is often accompanied by training in domination. Femininity and homosexuality are not valued equally with masculinity and heterosexuality; thus:

the transmission of masculine identity cannot be described simply as a neutral developmental task; it is a complex enterprise aimed at maintaining male heterosexual hegemony. (Lenskyj, 1990, p. 240)

Sexual harassment of women athletes, straight and gay, is another method by which women's participation in sport is attacked and used as a means to preserve "male heterosexual hegemony." Discrimination against female homosexual athletes, coaches and administrators endures despite prohibitions against discrimination based on sexual orientation. Covert discrimination against female applicants perceived as gay can result in their exclusion in hiring and recruitment. The disproportionate number of male coaches to female coaches has widened subsequent to Title IX and offers fewer role models for women to emulate

(Knoppers, 1987) Additionally, female athletes may suffer from both physical and psychological abuse at the hands of male administrators and coaches who recognize that young women look to them as patriarchal models offering approval and support.

Feminist standpoint research can examine barriers to full female participation (Cole, 1993; Gill, 1994; Kidd, 1983; Krane, 1994; Lather, 1988; Lenskyj, 1986, 1990, 1991; Lopiano, 1984; Reinharz, 1992; Stanley, 1980). It can expose the inequality of the gate-keeping role of the male-only sporting enclave challenging the female-only programs. Feminist research can challenge the traditional forms of methodology that promote rather than resolve gender inequities and confront discrimination and abuse by using a woman-centered approach when defining women's sporting participation.

Aren't Women "Norm"al Too?

Reflecting the concern of primacy given to the male's experience as normative, feminist research understands that although female participants are being included in sports studies, they are still, invariably, compared to men, with men's experiences held up as the yardstick against which all experiences are to be measured. However, the fact that women have only recently gained greater access to the sporting domain would necessitate differences between men's and women's experiences. Additionally, no one has been able to demonstrate that emulation of men's experiences is necessarily desirable (Festle, 1996; Hall, 1996; Lenskyj, 1990; Oglesby, 1990; Theberge, 1995). Gilligan (1982) also challenged traditional studies through her work with moral development showing that girls' approaches to moral solutions are not

necessarily *inferior* to boys, just *different*. Sport studies are beginning to make use of Gilligan's approach, viewing women's ways of playing and competing as different from men's ways. It is suggested that feminist research should focus on two primary concerns: female participants' relationship to the "wider social-cultural context" (as discussed in the previous section) and acknowledgment of cross-relationships of various marginalized groups within the larger female participant population (Lenskyj, 1990), to be examined in the next section.

Multiple Voices

In the analysis of women in sport, it seems that the notion of a "generic" woman that has emerged does little to reflect the diversity that exists within women's sporting experiences. Dewar (1993) is compelling in her challenge to researchers to question previous methods of theoretical analyses of women in sport and to look to new ways to change oppression and male hegemonic power by recognizing the ways that feminist work can itself be elitist and exclusionary toward some women.

Women who are considered to be part of the dominant group, those women that Dewar (1993) describes as largely "white, middle-class, anglophone, heterosexual, thin, able-bodied, and Christian-raised" are most focused on in feminist research and literature, resulting in the exclusion of women who do not fit the "generic" description. While the need to address women's issues is not to be questioned, the tendency to assume that all women experience struggles and battles very similarly, does require questioning. Our need to address oppression and sexism has resulted in approaches that are "unidimensional" and primarily

representative of the perspectives of the dominant representation of women. Recognizing the differences of women's experiences of oppression does not mean that feminism is "doomed," only that the complexities of personal experiences between women has to be addressed to support each other's unique struggles against oppression (Birrell, 1989, 1990; Boutilier & San Giovanni, 1983; Dewar, 1993; hooks, 1981; Jaggar & Rothenberg, 1984; Lauretis, 1986; Smith, 1980; Smith, 1992).

Consequently, Dewar (1993) suggests developing practices that recognize all forms of oppression as important, eliminating the need for "hierarchies" of oppression and instead addressing the multiplicity of oppression that occurs in women's sport and physical education programs. In other words, differences in race, ethnicity, disability, class, age, etc. are all variables that change the ways in which women experience forms of oppression and require unique applications of feminist analysis. Though many women may experience oppression in a particular setting, those women who fit more within a dominant representation of women may find themselves able to invoke forms of power that allow them to move within "spaces" that can help alleviate oppressive experiences in ways that women of other minority representation may not. Women at the center, defined as "generic" women, can themselves work to recognize their spaces of privilege and work to eliminate power positions, not by giving personal power over to oppressive forces, but by an inclusive feminism that concerns itself with those at the margins. In order to challenge and eliminate all forms of oppression, silence and marginalization of some cannot be tolerated in favor of barrier-breaking for only those at the center.

While inclusion is the goal, it must be recognized that the word itself implies a space of privilege into which others may be *allowed* inside. Tolerance also is a word that designates an otherness of those to be tolerated. Inclusion and tolerance give those at the center their own power base and choice of dissemination of acceptance or exclusion. Thus feminist work can focus less on notions of inclusion and tolerance and more on the idea of alliances between groups experiencing the same oppression albeit differently. Dewar (1993) has this to say about alliances:

If we do not examine how privilege and oppression work to shape coalition building and the formation of alliances, there is a risk that the process will proceed in ways that continue to silence and subordinate those who are oppressed. If this happens, our work will fail. (p. 223)

Everyone participating in a coalition must be able to identify themselves and their uniqueness; if not identified, strategies, assumptions and definitions will continue to be carried out according to those established by those at the center. Even the oppressed themselves must learn to listen, understand their own points of privilege and fight defensive reactions and criticism when residing at the center.

To move from "center" and identify marginalized groups within women's sport, researchers must continue the work being done that addresses issues of homonegativism in athletics and physical education (Cahn, 1994; Griffin and Genasci, 1990; Griffin, 1992; Gill, 1994; Hall, 1996; Krane, 1994; Lenskyj, 1990, 1991; Messner, 1996; Rotella & Murray, 1991). This work begins with the researcher's self analysis to determine the homophobic manifestations that s/he expresses within his/her own value system, whether or not the researcher is straight or

gay, and how this will affect the researcher's work. Subjectivity is encouraged in lieu of objectivity to be sure that the personal ideology of the researcher is included in the design as it guides the process and product:

Identifying and consciously monitoring researcher ideology throughout the research process have specific implications for research on homosexuality and homophobia in sport and physical education. What a researcher believes about homosexuality, his or her degree of homophobia, and what he or she knows about gay men and lesbians all interact to color decisions made during the research project. A researcher interested in studying homosexuality or homophobia must address three questions before undertaking the project: What does the researcher believe about homosexuality? How will the researcher's sexual orientation affect the research? What does the researcher know about homosexuality? (Griffin & Genasci, 1990, p. 216)

The researcher is encouraged to be self-reflective and investigate the writings examining homophobia and homosexual experiences to heighten perceptions and knowledge of specific areas of research interest. Performing research that is self-conscious, self-analytical, nondogmatic and considerate of the participants' dignity and experiences is the most effective method of self-education that can be spread to colleagues and educational and athletic institutions (Griffin & Genasci, 1990).

While the researcher's self-awareness of homonegative bias is the starting point, the degree to which heterosexism creates opposition in sport must next be acknowledged as a distinct form of oppression (Burroughs, Ashburn, & Seebom, 1995; Cahn, 1994; Dewar, 1993; Hall, 1996; Kolnes, 1995; Krane, 1996; Lenskyj, 1991; Messner, 1996; Rogers, 1994). Lesbian athletes in sport are tolerated and even expected to excel as long as their sexual orientation is not overtly displayed. All women,

straight or gay, are judged by the dominant groups' principles of femininity. Research of sport may be able to challenge or reconstruct these principles through an examination of how and why homosexual women may be attracted to and participate in sport and competition. Traditional feminist analysis has often reinforced rather than opposed heterosexism in sport. Most often, examples are given of women who are both heterosexual and successful as athletes. Dealing with heterosexism as a system of false accusations allows the heterosexual athlete to stay at the center while the lesbian athlete is, again, left at the margin. As Dewar (1993) states, "many successful women are not 'unjustly' suspected of being lesbians--they are lesbians." Sexuality is an issue that causes tension within the sport context and must be recognized as a singular form of oppression within the experiences of women that must be battled using unique strategies.

In light of the fact that women athletes represent the spectrum of sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age, and (dis)ability, the challenge is made to researchers and academicians to dismiss the notion of the generic woman in favor of a new feminist approach that builds alliances and coalitions that form interconnections between differences within oppression:

We need to continue to move forward and to be willing to listen, learn, and act so that we challenge oppression in all its forms and do so by creating sporting practices that help us in our struggles. (Dewar, 1993, p. 227)

The "Femininity" Mandate

Women athletes, in general, are aware of the pressure put upon them by fans, the media and various administrative sports institutions to conform to traditional notions of "femininity." What this means is that even women who choose to participate in those sports accepted as "appropriate" for women such as rhythmic gymnastics, figure skating, or tennis, understand that any display of behavior deemed traditionally "masculine" such as extreme competitiveness, cockiness or aggressive play is "unladylike" behavior and unacceptable for a female athlete (Bernard, 1971; Cahn, 1994; Cayleff, 1995; Festle, 1996; Gross, 1994; Kaufman, 1994; Lenskyj, 1994; Mrozek, 1987; Oglesby, 1990). To complicate matters even more, when a woman participates in a sport that is itself considered to be "masculine" she finds that the totality of her participation is called into question as a blatant exhibition of masculine behavior of which she should have no part (Allison, 1991; Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Halbert, 1997; Obel, 1996; Pedersen & Kono, 1990; Theberge, 1997). As previously discussed (see Introduction), arguments ranging from biological inferiority and reproductive maintenance (Davenport, 1980; Grosz, 1994; Guttman, 1991; Lenskyj, 1986; Mangan & Park, 1987; Smith-Rosenberg, 1986; Vertinsky, 1994) to fears of the masculinizing effects of traditionally male-oriented sports participation (Bolin, 1992; Cahn, 1993, 1994; Fraser, 1995; Griffin, 1992; Gross, 1994; Holmlund, 1989; Hood-Williams, 1995; Jollimore, 1994; Kwiatkowski, 1995; Lenskyj, 1994; Miller & Penz, 1991; Obel, 1996; Todd, 1987) have been used to dissuade female competitors.

The most poignant examples of these concerns and the effect they have rendered upon women are found within the stories, statements and

experiences of the athletes themselves. Dot Richardson, shortstop for the United States' gold-medal winning softball team, speaks for countless women when she says, "I don't mind if someone tells me I'm not good enough, but don't you dare tell me I can't play because I'm a girl" (Sherrington, 1996, p. 27B). Yet, throughout history, "being a girl" is the only explanation most females had to accept for being excluded from sports both competitively and even recreationally. Yet, exclusion is not a thing of the past. Ursula Kechko is a world class weightlifter who has placed in the top ten in the world championships of her sport, but there was no place for her at the 1996 Summer Olympics; women's weightlifting was not an event (Sherrington, 1996). This is not surprising considering the dominant social construction of discomfort with the type of physique a female competitor must develop to effectively compete in this sport.

This very-deeply ingrained discomfort with the "mannish" athlete has emerged as the primary objection to the female athlete and largely replaced the arguments of "natural" inferiority previously touted, perhaps due to the overt "political incorrectness" of those claims. It is a construct that wields great power, as evidenced by women athletes from Babe Didrikson (Cayleff, 1995) to Bev Francis (Dobbins, 1990; Francis, 1989; Mansfield & McGinn, 1993; Obel, 1996), who have consciously reinvented themselves through deliberate alteration of their appearance to conform to expectations of "appropriate" femininity:

Babe gradually adopted traditional female standards of beauty, demonstrating her social graces by applying fingernail polish, styling her hair, and using cosmetics. She knew that her fame would not continue unless she became unquestionably female. (Cayleff, 1995, p. 115)

Bev showed up at Caesar's Palace for the filming of *Pumping Iron II* (in 1983) with a blocky, muscular body developed by years of powerlifting but which she had shrunk and depleted by several months of incredible overtraining and starvation. For some time afterwards Bev became the new "horrible example" in women's bodybuilding, but she came back to silence her critics. After taking time to win more powerlifting titles, Bev returned to bodybuilding, followed a real program of competition training, shaped her body, improved her symmetry, and brought her proportions into line to the point where she was able to win the IFBB World Women's Professional Bodybuilding Championship, defeating none other than the supereesthetic Anja Langer. (Dobbins, 1990, p. 191)

While the male athlete has the freedom to focus on development of skills necessary to succeed in his sport, the female athlete finds she must devote time and energy to assuaging the numerous critics more intent on analyzing her feminine appearance than her athletic prowess.

As will be discussed in more detail later (see "Homonegativism: Ending the Silence" in this section), much of this intense scrutiny and expectations of the accoutrements of femininity derive from the underlying fear that these women are not "real" women, interested in the attractions of men, but, more to the point, may be lesbian. This subversive but dominant fear about women athletes has endured as one of the most crucial features to generate the apologetics of women athletes (Bernard, 1971; Burroughs, Ashburn, & Seeborn, 1995; Boutilier & San Giovanni, 1983; Cahn, 1994; Cayleff, 1996; Del Rey, 1977; Festle, 1996; Galst, 1997; Halbert, 1997; Hargreaves, Knoppers, 1987; Lenskyj, 1986; Nelson, 1994; Wrisberg, 1996; Wughalter, 1978). The apologetic plays out in various forms such as promotion of the heterosexy image (see Definition of Terms), playing down personal achievements, cloaking one's sexual identity, and refraining from complaining about receiving inferior equipment, training, scheduling and

promotion. The following section illustrates some ways by which the media acts as an enforcer of the apologetics in maintaining the image of the appropriate female athlete.

Media: The Enforcer

If the female athlete had any doubt of the importance of maintaining dominant ideological portrayals of "femininity" in her sport, televised and print media offer a reminder. In *Sports Photographs and Sexual Difference: Images of Women and Men in the 1984 and 1988 Games* (Duncan, 1990), the author demonstrates how sports photography and accompanying text are used to reassert conventional patriarchal views of women even as women strive to set new parameters for themselves as successful athletes. The choice of photographic content analysis demonstrates how people perceive photography to be an objective document, a type of "neutral rendering" whereby the camera simply captures an image of that placed before it, therefore, the image portrayed must be an accurate one. Moreover, photography is an "object of consumption." People view and purchase images of others which provide the consumer with a sense of power over the image. Images of women designed to downplay strengths while highlighting vulnerabilities succeeds in the disempowerment of women; a factor of great importance in maintaining patriarchal conventions (Baker & Boyd, 1997; Cole & Hribar, 1995; Creedon, 1994; Daddario, 1994; Davis, 1997; Duncan, 1990; Duncan & Brummett, 1993; Duncan, Messner, Williams, & Jensen, 1994; Hilliard, 1984; Holmlund, 1989; Kane & Greendorfer,

1994; Luebke, 1989; Lumpkin & Williams, 1991; McGregor, 1989; Pollock, 1990; Scott, 1993).

Many of the sport photographs reviewed constructed differences between the male and female athletes by emphasizing their masculinity and femininity, respectively. "Femininity" was exemplified by presenting stereotypes of glamour and by focusing on female physical attributes (i.e. breasts, thighs, fingernails). Female athletes were also more commonly photographed in clothing not of an athletic nature, such as a strapless evening gown or tight blue jeans. The supporting text accompanying such photographs further plays up the emphasis on mainstream constructions of femininity. Captions may refer to the athletic prowess of the women but downplay athletic ability by linking descriptors to appearance. Examples of this are found in *Newsweek's* 1992 Winter Olympic Preview describing figure skater Kristi Yamaguchi as having a "Betty Boop mouth and two beauty marks wonderfully positioned under the left eye and the lips," (Deford, 1992 p. 51) and in the 1988 Canadian *Maclean's* Winter Olympic Preview Issue in which Gold medalist Katarina Witt's ice skating talent was virtually ignored in favor of reference to her skill as a charismatic woman and flirt (Duncan, 1990, p. 29). These various demonstrations of characteristics of mainstream qualities of femininity are used to maintain the status quo of patriarchy. Yes, women are athletes, but they are still different, sexy, demure, provocative, and vulnerable. Thus, the status quo is maintained as well as its conference of power.

Power over women's achievements is also sustained by the media's consistent practice of overlooking the female athlete's achievements by virtually ignoring her existence. Neglecting to include the female athlete

in sports media assists in promoting the maintenance of gender stereotyping. Women are not provided with new role models to identify with and men are not presented with images of women that challenge preexisting notions of femininity or of female achievement (Bryant, 1980, Kane, 1989; Lumpkin & Williams, 1991; Pirinen, 1997; Rintala & Birrell, 1984; Shifflett & Revelle, 1994).

In an analysis of *NCAA News* Shifflett & Revelle (1994) postulated that perhaps a publication "distributed primarily as a benefit to members in an organization" (p. 145) would be less subject to misrepresentation than popular publications guided by market forces and advertising dollars. Looking for evidence to support this hypothesis resulted in a content analysis focusing on gender comparisons with respect to number of articles, length of story, and article/photograph placement. The results compiled by the researcher using statistics provided by Shifflett and Revelle (1994) are presented as follows:

Information Comparison by Gender

	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>
Paragraphs	297	820
Space (square inches)	731	1,788
Space - 1988 (percentage)	27%	73%
Space - 1991 (percentage)	29%	71%
Position placement - prime	16%	65%*

* Remaining % made up by "other" material.

The table reveals a discrepancy in representation by gender per content disproportionately favorable to men in all categories. Similar statistics are represented for comparison by gender for photographic material. Included in this quantitative analysis is a comment of qualitative nature. Photographs of male gymnasts were action shots while the one photograph of the female gymnasts was a team shot of the

women "hugging tearfully when they won the meet" (Shifflett & Revelle, 1994). This kind of media content analysis of both a qualitative and quantitative nature is important because images and representations of women deemed acceptable and desirable are transmitted as much by what we do see as what we don't.

Similar to print and photography with text, the television medium is also used to marginalize the achievements of female athletes at the very moment it is supposedly covering their athletic feats (Daddario, 1994, 1997; Duncan & Brummett, 1989; Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; Duncan, Messner, Williams, & Jensen, 1990). "Fashioning" is a term used to describe how television promotes gender-typing via "editing and oral commentary" (Daddario, 1994). Various footage was analyzed with an eye on fashioning to see how commonplace its use was within commentary and interviewing. Daddario (1994) describes essentially four types of marginalization. "Condescending Descriptors and Imagery" refer to the habit of play-by-play announcers commenting on the beauty and grace of female athletes as opposed to the strength of male athletes. This occurs most often in relation to females engaged in traditional "feminine" type sports and less often about females engaged in "masculine" type sports such as luge and skiing where the uniform and equipment of the athlete make it much more difficult to emphasize the uniqueness of the female form. "Compensatory rhetoric" describes the media's stance on certain athletes for which it exhibits a particular distaste, thus engaging in "the sport of blaming the victim of sport" (Daddario, 1994, p. 280). When male athletes exhibit idiosyncratic behavior the media often refers to it as "hotdogging" or fans loving the "bad boy"; female athletes, on the other hand, are looked down upon for

such behavior and accused of being emotionally weak, unfocused, unstable and full of excuses. The "adolescent ideal" is the marginalization of female athletes of adulthood being referred to in ways that convey adolescence. An example, Cathleen Turner, gold medal speed skater, is said to be "a pixie, a 29-year old Tinkerbell, who, on this night, had found the magic dust of youth and dreams" (Daddario, 1994, p. 282). The final form of media marginalization is that of "cooperative athlete" which maintains that women are not comfortable with competition. Their successes are mostly enjoyed when shared with others or performed as selfless acts.

The marginalizations of women athletes just discussed are pervasive in their various forms but don't encompass one of the greatest fears about the female athlete. Though media is also used to quiet this fear by featuring female athletes in tandem with boyfriends, husbands and children, the underlying fear that women athletes are a "bunch of lesbians" (Pharr, 1988) deserves to be examined in a context highlighting the extent and magnitude of its power to affect the experiences of women athletes.

Homonegativism: Ending the Silence

While homonegativism can be said to be prevalent in the athletic and physical education setting, even experienced educators are ill-equipped to address the problems manifested in its expression. Griffin and Genasci (1990) present some assumptions they believe are characteristic of homonegativism in an attempt to generate professional dialogue. These are:

- Whether we are "straight" or "gay" we are all somewhat homophobic as a result of living in a homophobic society.
- Despite our personal sexual orientation, homophobia negatively effects us all.
- There is no one sexual orientation that is better or more normal than another.
- Many people will disagree with the first three assumptions. (p. 212)

The controversial nature of these assumptions serve to instigate a response in researchers and physical educators (coaches, physical education teachers, trainers, consultants, administrators) who may promulgate homonegativism and related misinformation regarding important issues of racism, sexism and homonegativism that affect the experiences of women athletes. Thankfully, the dialogue has begun and addresses: the many ways in which homonegativism is manifested; the harm experienced by the athlete through overt and covert discrimination and/or violence; how homonegativism may affect women athletes' experience of identity with regard to development and freedom of expression; and calling for an "end to the silence" by offering suggestions for ways to deal with and discourage homonegative behavior and practices.

How It Shows Up

To be named as lesbian threatens all women, not just lesbians, with great loss. And any woman who steps out of role risks being called a lesbian. To understand how this is a threat to all women, one must understand that any woman can be called a lesbian and there is no real way she can defend herself: there is no way to credential one's sexuality. (Pharr, 1988, p. 19)

The link between homonegativism and sexism has long been overlooked and is now gaining attention by feminists, sport sociologists,

sport psychologists and other academicians. This link is evident in the manifestations of homonegativism because it exemplifies the means by which women are kept from stepping "out of role." Griffin (1992) identifies six categories of what she considers to be the primary manifestations of homonegativism in women's sport. They are: silence, denial, apology, promotion of a heterosexy image, male coach preference and attacks on lesbians.

Silence is said to be one of the most pervasive and harmful manifestations of homonegativism that contribute to its strength of discrimination and continuance. As lesbian relationships and athletes become revealed in sport, the response of most professional and college sporting domains is to ignore the issue and hope it will go away. Griffin (1992) hits close to the mark for many female athletes when she says, "Women live in fear that whatever meager gains we have made in sport are always one lesbian scandal away from being wiped out" (p. 253). Lesbian athletes are expected to closet their orientation, and even their closest friends form an alliance of secrecy to protect them from condemnation, public scrutiny and discrimination. Academic and athletic workshops that could address the problem of homonegativism are never instituted utilizing a positive informational format but only emerge in response to allegations of lesbians as athletes, coaches, etc. to allay concerns. Though silence does offer some protection to the "accused" it comes at a cost that requires many to pretend to be something they are not and often the elimination of those not willing to pretend (Cahn, 1994; Cayleff, 1996; Griffin, 1992; Guthrie, 1982; Hall, 1996; Krane, 1996; Lenskyj, 1992; Nelson, 1991, 1994; Pharr, 1988; Rotella & Murray, 1991; Woods, 1992; Wrisberg, 1996; Zwerman, 1994).

In addition to silence, many simply will deny outright the existence of lesbians within sport in order to stop the questioners dead in their tracks so that all can go back to the first response of choice, silence. Denial at its ugliest occurs when athletic administrators use homonegativism to their advantage to maintain a position that no homosexuals are on *their* staff and teams, but then, on the other hand, warn parents and athletes that such people are in high population at other schools and professional teams. Denial and accusation serves some people's recruiting purposes by playing to homonegative fears and prejudices (Griffin, 1992; Krane, 1996; Lederman, 1991; Rotella & Murray, 1991; Woods, 1992; Young, 1995).

Another manifestation of homonegativism is to resort to forms of apology. Usually these are not direct apologies, however, but are masked in less conspicuous forms. Examples would be the encouragement of women to dress in more provocative feminine attire, whether or not the women feel comfortable dressed in this manner, and to be seen with boyfriends and act ladylike when not competing. The apology is "masked" because the athletes are not making a verbal apology but apologize just the same by pretending to behaviors and appearances that do not reflect their usual attire and actions. This charade provides an assumption that the athlete's usual mode of being is, in some way, deviant or unacceptable. To illustrate, an annual dinner of the Women's Sports Foundation (WSF) was preceded by a makeup and hairstyling instructional workshop for the professional and female athlete attendees. Such grooming advice was not offered to the male attendees, mostly sponsors, who contribute a great deal of money to the athletic programs (Griffin, 1992).

The apology is similar to the next manifestation, the heterosexy image, although the former tends to be more covert in its expression. "Heterosexy" is a word that relates to women in sport that indicates an overt attempt to display female athletes in ways that are rife with (hetero)sexual appeal (Griffin, 1992; Krane, 1996; Nelson, 1991). In 1989, female pro golfers were featured in pin-up style swimsuits in a Ladies Professional Golf Association promotional packet (Diaz, 1989). Likewise, a promotional brochure for the women's basketball team of Northwestern State University of Louisiana features a photo of them adorned in *Playboy* bunny outfits. The heterosexy image is also implied in the constant profiling of female athletes and coaches in settings that show them with husbands and children, a profile not stressed to the same degree with men. Showing the women as wives and mothers assures the public of the normalcy of these women despite their competitive tendencies.

An unusual manifestation of homophobia is the preference for hiring male coaches for women's teams that is becoming prevalent in many athletic administrations (Griffin, 1992; Knoppers, 1987; Krane, 1996; Lenskyj, 1990; Mathes, 1982; Nelson, 1984; Theberge & Birrell, 1994); unusual because the preference prevails despite research that indicates a potential for abuse of young female athletes who look upon the male coach as "father figure" and role model (Hahn, 1992; Lenskyj, 1990; Nelson, 1994). Potential abuse at the hands of male coaches is less of a concern, however, than worries that a female coach who could be lesbian might influence or sway the impressionable minds of young female athletes. In order to avoid the issue of suspicion of lesbians among coaching staff entirely, many parents, athletes and

administrators are pushing for accelerated hiring of male coaching staff or, at the least, male assistant coaches to offset the presence of the female head coach. In some instances, women's teams have recruited male coaches for the specific purpose of offsetting a lesbian team image. Thorngren (1991) has labeled this the "cloaking" phenomenon.

The final manifestation identified by Griffin, 1992, "attacks on lesbians in sport" (p. 255) is serious and renders great consequences to persons perceived as or known to be homosexuals and to women in sport and physical education regardless of sexual orientation. These attacks emerge in a number of forms and warrant a separate discussion (provided in the next section.)

Harmful Consequences

Homonegativism should be addressed because of its ability to harm ourselves or others as it is used to discriminate, isolate, reject and emotionally and/or physically damage individuals who either are or are perceived to be homosexual (Blinde & Taub, 1992; Blumenfeld, 1992; Burroughs, Ashburn, & Seebom, 1995; Cahn, 1994; Griffin, 1992; Griffin and Genasci, 1990; Guthrie, 1982; Hall, 1996; Herek, 1984; Hyde, 1996; Killion, 1994; Kolnes, 1995; Krane, 1996; Lenskyj, 1986, 1990, 1991, 1992; Peper, 1994; Pharr, 1988; Rotella & Murray, 1991; Wrisberg, 1996).

While homonegativism is extremely dangerous when it is exhibited as physical violence often perpetrated by insecure young males against gay men and women, homonegativism also promotes gender inequality and sexism against both gay and straight people in their professional, athletic and everyday lives. As long as homonegativism discourages men

and boys from exhibiting feelings and behaviors associated with femininity and also inhibits women from opposing feminine status quos by being competitive, aggressive and athletic, both genders will suffer the disadvantages of curtailing personal desires and activities by bending to meet the requirements of "safe" gender expectations.

Carrying the thread of injustices spread through the homonegative bias, the following statements illustrate the extent to which homonegativism harms athletics (Rotella & Murray, 1991):

I know she is one of the best players in the country but there is no way we are going to recruit her. I hear she is a lesbian and she would just destroy our whole team. Besides, she would kill our recruiting for next year. Other coaches would use it against us." (p. 355)

"As a sport psychologist I will work with homosexual athletes, but I must admit I do believe that there was a traumatic experience or a family or parent-child problem early in life causing the condition. I feel I must help them straighten out their sexual preferences." (p. 356)

That such comments would be made by a coach and sport psychologist indicates the extent to which a person with a *perceived* sexual preference differing from the status quo could be eliminated from contention for an athletic scholarship or counseled in a manner designed to convert sexual orientation. Harmful remarks such as those listed above may be heard from coaches, teammates, fans, teachers, recruiters, athletic administrators and sport psychologists.

Homonegativism in athletics can have dire consequences at many levels. There are participatory issues. Individuals may choose not to participate in sports for fear of being labeled "gay" relative to choice of sport (Blinde & Taub, 1992). Women tend to be labeled accordingly for exhibiting aggressiveness and competitiveness associated with traditional

"masculine" sports such as basketball while men suffer the same consequence in connection with more aesthetic or "feminine" sports such as figure skating (Blumenfeld, 1992; Cahn, 1994; Cayleff, 1996; Lenskyj, 1990; Nelson, 1991; Rotella & Murray, 1991). Parents also may contribute to discouraging their child's sporting involvement fearing the nature of the sport itself or that other participants could sway the child's orientation.

Another issue involves team cohesion. Athletes may choose to alienate others who are perceived as gay by avoiding them or may engage in gay-bashing jokes and comments in order to create distance. Interactions may become stilted and camaraderie precluded. Friendliness exhibited by a homosexual athlete toward a heterosexual is often misinterpreted as an "advance" resulting in disparate groups avoiding one another outside of the athletic necessities (Griffin, 1992; Lenskyj, 1991; Pharr, 1988; Rotella & Murray, 1991).

Another very hostile form of homonegativism is exhibited as direct attacks against those often only suspected of being lesbian based on mannerism or dress (Blumenfeld, 1992; Griffin, 1992; Krane, 1996; Nelson, 1991, 1994; Pharr, 1988). Some athletic organizations are literally broadcasting an anti-lesbian stance as they refuse to hire/recruit women suspected of being gay and bench and ostracize some female players. Griffin (1992) further provides examples of homonegative manifestations in the story of the reported rumor of some male coaches spending time at lesbian establishments during the NCAA basketball championships to spy and "out" some female coaches. Whether or not this happened, it highlights fear tactics that could harm careers. The following is a poignant example of a fear tactic promoted by a religious

organization whose views could carry a great deal of weight with some Christian athletes (Griffin, 1992):

The Fellowship of Christian Athletes, which regularly sponsors meal functions for coaches at these (national championships) events, distributes a free antihomosexual booklet to coaches and athletes. Entitled *Emotional Dependency: A Threat to Close Friendships*, this booklet plays into all of the stereotypes of lesbians (Rentzel, 1987). A drawing of a sad young woman and an older woman on the cover hints at the dangers of close female friendships. Unencumbered by any reasonable factual knowledge about homosexuality, the booklet identifies the symptoms of emotional dependency and how this "leads" to homosexual relationships. Finally, the path out of this "counterfeit" intimacy through prayer and discipline is described. The booklet is published by Exodus, a fundamentalist Christian organization devoted to the "redemption" of homosexuals from their "disorder." (p. 256)

These direct attacks upon persons simply *suspected* of being gay may serve to inhibit the performance of the athlete trying to compete within a homonegative climate. The fear of being "outed" (publicly acknowledged as gay by media or others) may cause athletes to impede their own success. Fan support, endorsement contracts, athletic scholarships, family "embarrassment", partner privacy, and related issues are at stake when a homosexual athlete, who may not wish to make public a sexual preference, garners attention for accomplishment. Coaches too may fear being discovered for fear of job loss or strained relations with administrators and athletes (Hall, 1984; Knoppers, 1987; Nelson, 1984).

Identity - Is She or Is She Not?

With so much attention focused on the "is she or is she not" question regarding lesbianism and the female athlete, some comments need to be made regarding identity issues of women in sport. In light of

this, the quest of sporting women to establish an identity amidst social misgivings prompted an investigation of what Palzkill (1990) termed the "lesbian existence." While gay women are represented in virtually every aspect of social life, the occurrence of a lesbian population perceived to be proportionally higher in sport merited investigation with respect to identity clarification and selection, specifically in sport. In this investigation Palzkill (1990) interviewed 19 elite West German athletes representing various sports utilizing an open-ended, in-depth format. The goal of these interviews was to ascertain the determining factors within sport that may or may not have influenced the development of the lesbian existence. The lesbian existence is defined by Adrienne Rich (1993) as representative of a "comprehensive art of being" as opposed to a definition that implies a choice within sexual relations alone. Palzkill (1990) hypothesized that the lesbian existence is a "mastering strategy" used by the athlete to address the inner struggle of participating in sports that primarily represent and define masculinity.

One of the first important themes identified was that of a *neutral* girl in childhood. Boys decide who is allowed to play *their* games and a primary characteristic of the women of this study was that they were considered to be competent enough and permitted to play with the boys. The women reflected that, as girls, they felt their identity was somewhere between boy and girl, thus, felt themselves to be in a sort of neutral state of childhood.

In adolescence, the girls found that they were unable to maintain the neutrality of childhood and were expected to take up roles of conventional young womanhood. Some women reported feeling at odds with continued participation in sports with boys on the one hand, while

expected to flirt and be coy with them in another social setting. In puberty, participants of the study indicated they suffered from remarks that focused on their less feminine features such as their "muscles," that they "walk like a man," and have a "broad back," etc. recognizing that these remarks were disapproving of them.

Feeling isolated by their differences, the participants furthered their own alienation from conventional society by immersing themselves in the sporting enclave. Sport was a refuge and escape from others but a place of recognition and comfort within a group of like women. In sport, approval is based less on shape and mannerisms associated with the feminine sex role and more on appreciation of the ways a woman uses her shape and movement to achieve and excel. The comfort created by like individuals sharing experiences of achievement and competition allowed the women to further develop and master the criterion of sporting success in an appreciative arena not exhibited outside of sport.

Despite some elements of comfort among women, however, the women were still immersed in a hierarchical system of patriarchy reflecting masculine ideals. These women found themselves in a strange place of alignment with masculine norms while denying femininity and sexuality not permitted to be evidenced by nature of their gender alone. Participants spoke of feeling as though both they and others were unable to view themselves as "true" women but certainly not as men either; reflecting, it seems, that idea of being a neutral being with no gender to call home (Calhoun, 1994; Hale, 1996; Wittig, 1992). The patriarchal athletic domain disallowed the women from expressing their sexuality as women as there is no definable place for it within a masculine setting

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that does not recognize the traditional conditions of the feminine sexual role.

As women try to find the space between being women and reflecting masculine ideals of sport, a choice of autonomy from larger society yet community with one another is often made since the dilemma truly has no solution acceptable within the confines of sport and society (Lenskyj, 1986; Palzkill, 1990; Theberge, 1995). Palzkill (1990) writes:

No one can say at present what such an autonomous definition of being a woman, neither defined through its conformity nor through its contrast to 'masculinity' could be, since women have been dispossessed of their sexuality and self-determination by a patriarchal sovereign system thousands of years old. The reflection of oneself in another woman is at the same time reflection of one's own gender, of being a woman in an autonomous sense. (p. 227)

Women's groups, friendships, and other relationships permit women to enjoy each other's womanhood in ways that are not defined by society's heterosexual relationships. In Palzkill's study (1990), some women explained that when the aspect of sexuality emerged in their female relationships, they were able to experience a new definition of being "woman" that allowed them to exhibit all aspects of their personality, those accepted masculine sporting behaviors, as well as the femininity of their sexuality. Feminine autonomy experienced in sexuality between the women allowed them to reject the patriarchal definition of feminine and respond by creating a new self-concept of being a woman (Palzkill, 1990). While some may argue against implied suggestions that living the "lesbian existence" is a *choice* used to survive within the patriarchal definitions of sport, the point is not lost: that women need to be able to redefine women's sporting experiences in ways that uniquely express their culture within it.

The means by which some women have tried to survive within cultural constraints was examined using a phenomenological qualitative analysis studying the experiences of lesbian physical education educators (Woods, 1992). Because much of the previous research relative to homosexuality started from a base point of homosexuality as deviancy (Blinde & Taube, 1992; Herek, 1991; Peper, 1994), this study was designed from a theoretical framework of oppression that identified lesbian educators as an oppressed minority and the resultant findings as the "catalyst for dialogue and change" (Woods, 1992).

Woods (1992) held three 90-minute interviews with 12 elementary and secondary physical education (PE) instructors who had identified themselves as lesbian. The first interview searched for information of both a personal and professional nature relative to the women's experiences, the second invited a re-creation of day-to-day work experiences, and the third asked the participants to reflect on their perspectives of the meaning of their experiences.

Participants of Woods' (1992) study had developed two primary assumptions about being lesbian PE teachers: the first, that identifying their lesbian sexual orientation would result in termination, and the second, that most female PE teachers are stereotyped as lesbians, whether they actually are such or not. In relation to these assumptions, physical educators found themselves powerless to respond to overheard homonegative jokes and remarks. Participants expressed frustration at not being able to join in conversations with colleagues about personal life experiences. A participant could share weekend plans as others did, but was not at liberty to reveal with whom her plans might be shared. Some participants expressed resentment at not being able to serve as

positive lesbian role models for students who might be similarly oriented. All participants revealed the feeling of living a dual life based on separating the reality of their personal lives from that which was exposed to peers.

In association with the dual roles, another emergent theme of Woods' (1992) study was that of "Lesbian Identity Management Techniques." Participants developed strategies to conceal their lesbian identity as well as occasional, though minor, risk-taking behaviors that could disclose their identity. The first concealment strategy involved such tactics as passing as heterosexual, avoidance of close relationships with peers and students and distancing oneself from homosexuality. Passing might involve emasculating female partner pronouns in conversation and using male names in place of female. Some women used male gay friends as "dates" for various social situations. The avoidance of close work relationships ensured that no one ever knew too much about the participants' personal lives, but also served to alienate them from interacting in close relationships. Distancing oneself from homosexuality meant that participants did not confront homonegative dialogue and avoided contact with students who might also be lesbian.

In risk-taking behavior, occasionally a participant chose to share personal information with a colleague or student she felt she could trust. In very rare instances, a lesbian physical educator might confront homonegativism by questioning students using the term "gay" to query them about what the label meant to them or by responding to harassing behavior rather than ignoring it. Woods (1992) found that every participant of her study had revealed their sexual orientation to at least one close colleague.

The "conditions of oppression" identified in the experiences of lesbian PE teachers kept them "silent, fearful, isolated and powerless" (Woods, 1992). Though minimal, risk-taking behavior required great courage due to the ramifications that could result from overt oppression in school administration. Despite the small sampling of experiences of lesbian educators, Woods (1992) felt that the stories that were told and those within other homosexual research should be used to identify discriminatory practices, institute programs to educate individuals about the harm of homonegativism, and work as a catalyst to address the issues of an oppressive environment.

This invitation and the information provided in this section was an important catalyst for the present study to guide and shape the development of the research, to investigate the experience of the female athlete and to incorporate suggestions in personal endeavors as a sport/exercise psychology consultant.

Accountability

The role that sexism plays in affecting the female athlete's experience must also be acknowledged in consultation, and the relationship between sexism and homonegativism must be understood. Breaking the code of silence and speaking out against homosexual slurs and jokes is encouraged for all physical educators. Also, the assumption that all associates and students are heterosexual until otherwise identified should be set aside. Noticing elements of oppression and speaking out against it coupled with support for the individual suffering discrimination can greatly assist the climate of "tolerance." School

education programs and enforced guidelines can be instituted to check for homonegative bias.

The aspiring or accomplished sport psychologist is asked to consider the ramifications of homonegativism by acting responsibly in counseling and, most importantly, by introspection to determine his or her own prejudices and attitudes with respect to this issue (Gill, 1994; Griffin, 1992; Krane, 1996; Rotella & Murray, 1991). Discrimination and biases need to be recognized and addressed since homonegative biases will not go away by ignorance. Rotella and Murray (1991) prescribe a "philosophy of service delivery" that challenges the sport psychologist to address, not avoid, homonegativism. However, it is suggested that the sport psychologist not pursue the issue of sexual orientation of an athlete in counseling unless it is raised by the athlete. Orientation is a preference, not a deviance (Blinde & Taub, 1992). Problems of sexual orientation are usually more those of the heterosexual who is unable to cope with the alternative orientation and the sport psychologist is encouraged to create a climate of acceptance. The role of the sport psychologist is to enhance performance, cohesion, concentration and confidence; homonegativism can stand in the way of such enhancement.

Summary

The purpose of this review was to gather information and gain insight into the experiences and issues that affect women as they attempt to receive acceptance, support, and merit on their own terms within the patriarchal domain of sports participation. This information guided the development of the present study that investigated the ways

that patriarchal definitions of "feminine" can affect or deter the performance and participation of women in sport from a sport psychology, as opposed to a sport sociology, perspective.

As such, the first section, Research: Challenges and Suggestions for Gender Analysis familiarized readers with the problems facing those attempting to conduct feminist research. Researcher self-awareness was generated through the use of literature suggestions to question personal biases and encultured homonegativism and to look within groups of women's experiences to avoid marginalization of some at the expense of those at the center.

A great deal of literature has been generated with respect to prescribed notions of both behavior and appearance that are communicated to the female athlete regarding what is expected of her as "appropriate" feminine expression in the sporting context. This literature was highlighted in the section "The Femininity Mandate." The literature shows that most athletes are aware of these expectations. Others, more naive, quickly learn and succumb to conformity through self-reinvention of both behavior and appearance allowing for greater acceptance by fans, media, administrators and, sometimes, fellow athletes.

The section "Media: The Enforcer" presented the role of media as the vehicle by which prescriptions of appropriate femininity are transmitted, serving to reinforce patriarchal definitions and stereotypes of women athletes. This is done in a number of ways, such as ignoring athletic achievements in lieu of a presentation of the "softer" or more emotional side of women's sport, portraying the female athlete as a commodity from a voyeuristic perspective and/or allaying the unspoken

fear of the female athlete as lesbian by featuring her as glamorous single woman or devoted wife and mother.

Finally, the section "Homonegativism: Ending the Silence" illustrated the damage that is caused by patriarchal models that enforce homo-negativism and that question women's place within sport, particularly in those who compete in areas deemed appropriate only for men. Because sport is still considered to be a masculine domain, homonegativism is more pervasive in women's sport than men's and creates barriers, opposition and discrimination that affects both heterosexual and homosexual women's experiences of participation in sport. An increased understanding of the ways that homonegativism harms all women in sport should assist the sport psychologist whose goal is to enhance not only the outcome of sporting endeavors, but also, the quality of the experiences of performance for its participants.

It is evident that there is a great deal of crossover and inter-relationship among the afore-mentioned topics. For example, homonegativity is evident in the media's focus as the presentation of "appropriate" femininity is highlighted. Traditional research presents men's experiences as the "norm" so that the "traditional" feminine woman succeeds at being a "true" woman yet inevitably fails when compared to men. The feminist perspective is the means by which these inter-relationships can be examined to more effectively uncover traditional biases and present the participants of this study as unique individuals yet situated within particular societal contexts.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to provide a description of the sport participation experiences of women as they relate to: (a) the participants' perceptions of societal expectations of women and its influences; (b) the participants' definitions of "femininity," "masculinity," and "homophobia" and (c) to understand the ways in which both personal definitions of these terms along with perceptions of society's definitions have affected their sport experiences. Throughout the interviewing process, the traditional term "homophobia" was used in questioning the athlete rather than the term "homonegativism" (see Definition of Terms) which has only recently been coined and is less well understood (Krane, 1996). Since my interest lies in each participant's definition of the concept, I did not want to be put in the position of first defining for her what a term is meant to suggest and then requiring her to offer an alternative interpretation. Consequently for the sake of simplicity, I used the term homophobia in relation to each participant's description of her experience of it and the term homonegativism as it more accurately pertains to the theoretical discussion and conclusions.

The methodology chosen for this study was the qualitative method of interviewing. This refers to the process by which the experiences of each participant are obtained through open-ended, unstructured interviews that focus on the participants' experienced meaning, not descriptions of behavior. One of the most crucial facets of this process is

the building of rapport and trust between the interviewer and participant. As such, the conversational format, referred to as "dialogic" interviewing, was the means chosen to establish this rapport between the interviewer and participant. There were a number of steps that characterized this process.

Rationale

As identified earlier, the research approach adopted in the present study was a consequence of the need to uncover the relationship between gender and power, to perform research that is "woman centered" meaning an analysis that values the experiences of women in their own right while refraining from comparing them as deviations from the experiences of men, to allow the participants to act as the expert witnesses in their own experiences, and to recognize the diversity within experiences relative to race, culture and sexual orientation. This approach is recognized as a "feminist" perspective (see Literature Review).

The dialogic interview was the qualitative procedure chosen to obtain the data for this study. This process begins with a series of open-ended questions that ask the participant to provide a first-person description of her experience. In this way, the participant, not the researcher, determines the focus of the interview based on what she chooses to say about her experience. In turn, the researcher carefully notes material that requires clarification or expansion and generates dialogic interviewing with additional probing questions. This method of interviewing is intended to avoid the imposition of an agenda upon the participant while allowing the participant the freedom of expression as

an expert eye-witness to her own experience. While the procedure is designed to allow the participant to lead the discussion, the conversational approach allows interaction with the participant, using the researcher's personal experiences within sport to generate discussion and share understanding.

The use of a series of open-ended questions as opposed to a single phenomenologically-constructed query was necessitated by the sensitive nature of the topics to be discussed, especially regarding the experiences of "homophobia" within women's sport. However, the initial question, "Tell me about your experience of how you got started participating in sport" was intended to establish a comfort level between researcher and participant, and often served to uncover facets of experience designed to be explored by other interview guide questions. In this way, further inquiry was more of a "picking up on" participants' own concerns relative to issues of "femininity," "masculinity," and "homophobia," rather than a completely researcher-directed approach. This differs from the "structured" interview described by Fontana & Frey (1994) as:

A situation in which an interviewer asks each respondent a series of preestablished questions with a limited set of response categories. There is generally little room for variation in response except where an infrequent open-ended question may be used. (p. 363).

In the present study, the use of a series of open-ended questions paved the way for each participant to determine what she felt was important to tell about her experience. This approach, used in conjunction with researcher probes to assist in clarity and understanding, resulted in both a deep and broad examination of the issues as well as variation between and among participants.

The interpretist framework within which the data were analyzed was chosen because it utilizes an interactionist approach to research emphasizing "contextualized meaning" as opposed to the "primacy of scientific realism" (Greene, 1994, p. 536). *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) pulls together various scholars' views regarding the interpretist paradigm in evaluation. In the chapter "Qualitative Program Evaluation" Greene (1994) describes it as follows:

Rather, in interpretivism, social reality is viewed as significantly socially constructed, "based on a constant process of interpretation and reinterpretation of the intentional, meaningful behavior of people--including researchers" (Smith, 1989, p. 85), and "truth is ultimately a matter of socially and historically conditioned agreement" (p. 73). "'Reality' resides neither with an objective external world nor with the subjective mind of the knower, but within dynamic transactions between the two" (Barone, 1992b, (sic) p. 31). Social inquiry therefore is mind dependent; inquiry descriptions and interpretations are themselves constructions and (re)interpretations; and there can be no separation of the investigator from the investigated (Smith, 1989, chap.4). Interpretivist inquiry is unabashedly and unapologetically subjectivist. It is also dialectic, for the process of meaning construction transforms the constructors. (p. 536)

In accordance with Greene's (1994) description, the present study was not intended to *predict* the behavior of the participants but rather to understand and feel each experience as it was described. The essence of the interpretation is not singular but pluralistic in its analysis of the dominant aspects of phases that emerge within the experience (Reinharz, 1992). Each aspect of the experience is considered to be a valid and essential component in understanding the truth of the participant's perceptions of her experience. While each participant's experience is unique, shared themes were expected to emerge and these are identified and presented as such. However, the purpose of this study was not to

generalize, but to describe the experiences of a small group of individuals in such a way as to increase the knowledge base of women as athletes.

Pilot Testing

An initial pilot study was performed with a former female athlete who had participated competitively and with much success in a variety of sports. The participant was chosen because of the level of excellence she had achieved within her primary sport involvement and also because of experienced constraints, societal restrictions associated with issues of “appropriate” femininity, placed upon her continued ability to compete and excel. Moreover, her knowledge of sport and women’s studies provided a “practice” session that enabled the researcher to obtain suggestions and feedback useful to the actual interview process of the final study.

This pilot interview along with the literature review and insights gained during my program of study, as well as the bracketing interview used to obtain the bias statement (described in the next section), led to a methodology which consisted of utilizing a qualitative dialogic interview to examine the participants’ experiences from a feminist perspective. These experiences provided much-needed groundwork and practice for the development and execution of this study.

Bias Statement

I participated in a bracketing interview with an associate who was educated and experienced in qualitative interviewing and who was not a

participant of the final study. The bracketing interview was intended to uncover personal biases and assumptions that could influence or hinder the process of data collection and analysis. This step was prompted by the feminist perspective as discussed in the extant literature and described by Olesen (1994) who offered her perspective of the stance taken by feminist researchers in stating:

What is required, they would argue, is sufficient reflexivity to uncover what may be a deep-seated but poorly recognized view on issues central to the research and a full account of the researcher's views, thinking, and conduct. (p. 165)

The bracketing interview revealed my own biases regarding the issues of this study which I had developed relative to participation in the sport of bodybuilding as well as personal disappointment experienced from a lack of opportunity for athletic involvement. I graduated from high school in 1978 at a time when very few opportunities existed for women to participate competitively in sport. Most athletic involvement was in a recreational or physical education environment. I discovered that I had a preconceived notion that other women would have "suffered" a similar fate. I also was strongly aware of issues of "appropriate femininity" as I described this experience within bodybuilding as being the "issue that never goes away." Similarly, the social construct of "masculinity" is at the forefront of my experience as I perceive that society still looks upon developed muscles as the privilege of men and that a woman who chooses to develop her physique with muscularity is challenging the notion of "weaker sex." Regarding "homophobia" I had experienced "accusations that women who wanted to look like men must want to be men" regarding choices of behavior, including sexual orientation.

In consideration of these findings, I was determined to let the participants give their own accounts of opportunity, options and choices regarding athletic involvement and alternatives. Consequently, I realized that opportunity varied greatly among participants and depended more upon support of family and the location of their upbringing than pre- or post-Title IX participant age. Additionally, participants were encouraged to detail their own experiences regarding issues of "femininity," "masculinity," and "homophobia" and demonstrated that, in some instances, these issues were mildly manifested while in others, more patent experiences were expressed.

I found the bracketing interview instrumental in making me aware of preconceptions based on my own experience and education, which led me to be careful to use the participant's own language (Opie, 1992) and refrain from jumping to conclusions if a participant began to articulate an experience or belief that mirrored my own. I was also reinforced in my belief that I possessed sufficient knowledge of various sports and the issues of this study to conduct a probing interview. Limitations in my knowledge were diminished by examining the extant literature about the issues of this study (see Review of Literature and References).

A study of this nature will always project some measure of researcher subjectivity and there was no way to completely eliminate researcher bias. However, I feel that all reasonable precautions were taken to acknowledge researcher bias and its effects even as I strived to minimize resultant misinterpretation that could be a consequence of biases.

Participants

The participants in this study were six Caucasian women who had competed in a variety of sports and at different levels both competitively and recreationally. The use of a small number of participants was necessitated by the application of the dialogic interview method designed to present each participant's experience in an in-depth conversational format in order to provide a "thick" description. The participants ranged in age from mid-twenties to late sixties and exhibited the full spectrum of participatory levels, ranging from amateur to elite based upon opportunities and personal preferences for involvement. This age diversity illustrated the historical context within which the participants' perceived experiences existed. Recruitment for the study was done by word of mouth and suggestions emerged from family, friends, and colleagues regarding potential participants. For the purpose of preserving confidentiality, those persons who provided references were not informed as to whether or not the participant suggested was actually interviewed. To determine prospective participants' willingness to participate in the study, each person was contacted personally or via telephone.

Once agreement to participate was determined, each participant was made aware of the research process and provided with a copy of the Informed Consent Statement (see Appendix A). As consensus was finalized, each participant was scheduled for an interview session to be conducted personally or by phone.

Procedure

Each participant was contacted in person or by phone and informed of the proposed study and of my interest in her participation as one of six interview participants. Once I received confirmation of her willingness to participate, I made arrangements to schedule a convenient time and place to conduct the interviews. Because of logistics, four of the women were interviewed in person and two were interviewed over the phone. All follow-up interviews were conducted by phone.

The participants were reminded that all interviews would be audiotaped and were given the opportunity to reconsider their commitment to participate. Each participant was required to sign a consent form (see Appendix A) before the process was initiated. All participants agreed to the interview procedures. Each participant was asked to select a pseudonym with which she would be comfortable. This was done in order to protect her confidentiality for the purposes of the study. Following this, each participant was given a final overview of the intent of the study and then the first interview was commenced.

Information of a demographic nature was obtained from the participant prior to the posing of the initial interview question. The interview began with the open-ended question, "Tell me about your experience of how you got started participating in sport. Keep in mind as you're doing this that whatever you have to say is what I am interested in." Other questions provided in the Interview Guide (see Appendix B) were also used. The pace was set by the participant and probing questions were used for purposes of clarity and understanding rather than to direct/control the participants' information and responses. I anticipated the length of each interview would be approximately one

hour, and most were consistent with this time frame, though some extended approximately one hour longer. The specific time frame of each participant's interview varied, since the interview process ended only when the participant felt she had said all she wanted to say regarding her experience (this was also determined to some extent by me to reflect the point of data saturation per interview). This determination was assisted by the process of "debriefing" (see Appendix B) that included an opportunity for the participant to say more regarding her experience as well as offer comments and suggestions to the researcher.

Each interview was audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Notes reflecting mannerisms and body language were added to the transcriptions of those interviews that had been conducted in person when deemed relevant. Though some participants did forget to refer to themselves by the the chosen pseudonym, all indications of the participants' name and other identifying features were removed from the written transcription. The only written identification of the participants are their signatures on the Informed Consent Statements (see Appendix A), and these were kept in a separate file. Tapes and related information were kept under lock and key. Each tape was erased subsequent to transcription for the purposes of confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Just as there are a number of recommended procedures for data collection, various stages comprise the analysis of data. The first step was to create a verbatim transcript of each interview coupled with the researcher's notes regarding those elements of the interview not captured

by the tape, such as body language and mannerisms (e.g. rolling eyes might denote sarcasm not reflected in the participant's voice). Verbatim quotes used within the data presentation may include some of these observations in parentheses when deemed important. Italics of specific words may be provided when emphasis indicated by timbre and tone heard in the audio tape needs be communicated in the written word.

Following this, individual transcripts were studied in order to become familiar with each as its own entity. In other words, every participant's transcript had its own "flavor" that reflected those aspects most salient within a participant's relayed experience. Despite similarities of issues, the depth and breadth to which these issues were addressed varied among participants. It is imperative to remember and honor the differences of each participant as well as the similarities brought out by the themes. This facet of the study was designed to preserve the integrity of the experience as communicated by the participant. These differences will be discussed in the Data Presentation.

To further assist the preservation of a sense of each participant as an experiencing *person* required the development of individual summaries. The summaries began with pertinent demographic information obtained from each participant at the beginning of each interview. Also included were primary aspects conveyed during the interview with accompanying vignettes as supporting evidence. At times, a thread of aspects could be identified within the experience and a number of quotes were listed to illustrate the extent to which various aspects dominated the experience. At that point in the analysis, these threads were referred to as "aspects" rather than "themes" because they conveyed a sense of the features and characteristics of the participant's

individual experience. These threads were not identified as themes until every transcript had passed through the various stages of analysis listed herein, including agreement of theme identification assisted by individuals participating in thematic analysis.

Participants were given the right to amend any information perceived as inaccurate or a misrepresentation of their experience or, even if accurate, to which they later decided they would prefer not to have included in the portrayal of their experience. Participants were invited to contact me at any time during the research process to ask questions, provide clarification, or add new information considered important in reflecting on their experiences related to the topics of this study. None of the participants initiated contact; however, I initiated general subsequent contacts.

Approved transcripts were then subjected to thematic analysis used to identify the common emergent structures of the experiences. Emerging themes were noted and refined systematically, as previously noted, beginning with the process of transcript as entity, then as summary, followed by thematic coding schemes. To assure cross-validation, the process of theme identification was assisted by other individuals familiar with qualitative research. These individuals were provided with verbatim copies of the transcripts, although identifiers had been deleted to preserve the confidentiality of the participants. I listened to each individual's perception of possible themes before offering my own views; this was done to prevent the influence of my own perceptions and biases. The individuals and I were in agreement regarding themes, however, further discussion resulted in the identification of two different issues within what had been previously identified as one broad issue.

This delineation of the two separate themes provided a clearer description of the issues within the participants' experience. The themes that emerged from the data sometimes consisted with existing theory (see Review of Literature) while others rejected presupposed findings that recognized important differences within experiences unable to be matched among and between participant themes. During this period, triangulation sources were included. Huberman and Miles (1994) describe triangulation:

Triangulation is less a tactic than a mode of inquiry. By self-consciously setting out to collect and double-check findings, using multiple sources and modes of evidence, the researcher will build the triangulation process into ongoing data collection. It will be the way he or she got to the finding in the first place--by seeing or hearing multiple instances of it from different sources, using different methods, and by squaring the findings with others with which it should coincide. (p. 438)

This reveals the dual task of this study: to preserve the integrity of each participant's experience while also using Bakhtin's (1975, 1981) concept of "heteroglossia" (see Definition of Terms) as "multiple instances" that reflect "the incorporation and interweaving of various voices to create a sum far greater and more generative than the parts" (Hohne and Wussow, 1994, p. viii). This does not mean that the sum, the collective themes, are more important than the individual stories; but that they rather represent this study's intent to identify "a plurality of relations, not just a cacophony of different voices" (Holquist, 1990, p. 89). This is further described by Denzin and Lincoln (1994):

This text is then re-created as a working interpretative document that contains the writer's initial attempts to make sense out of what he or she has learned. Finally, the writer produces the public text that comes to the reader. This final tale of the field may assume several forms: confessional, realist, impressionistic, critical, formal, literary, analytic, grounded theory, and so on (see Van Maanen, 1988) (sic).

In the next chapter, the "final tale," the data presentation steps away from the academic discourse used to describe the process and interpretation of the data analysis in favor of the "form" of a more literary understanding and rendering of the data itself. In doing this, the data presentation honors both aspects of singularity and plurality of voice(s) as elements of each experience tie together to form the "threads" of the data or "story."

Chapter IV

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

Introduction

"Spinning a yarn" is a colloquialism referring to a practice of storytelling. The saying originated from the ancient, and in some places, still practiced craft of spinning yarn. A group of women would break the monotony of the task of spinning yarn from cotton or wool by telling stories. These stories passed on a tradition of oral history but also incorporated images of magic and myth. Every image represented something, however, usually of the common experiences of life. These images were so universal that they can be found in storytelling traditions among people and cultures across continents. Though the stories were not always intended to be taken as factual or historical, they did always represent the truth of human nature and life experiences.

(Jonathan Young, storytelling seminar, 1998)

Dr. Young's description is important because it illustrates the essential role that women have played historically in describing the spectrum of human experience, transmitting wisdom and universal truths, even as they themselves existed within a patriarchal society. Interestingly, during a "debriefing" session with the participant known as "Billie Jean," she too reflected an understanding of the importance of women's stories as she compared them to "parables":

I think it's important that stories be gathered, because I think we learn a lot by stories. Parables, if you want to call them, parables. Because they...somebody's story in a nutshell, without being preachy, can tell you a lot about a situation. So I think gathering stories is important. So for that reason I don't mind talking about my story. I don't think my story is that unique. I think some of the things that I've said I've heard other women say...

Even though the terms "parable" and "yarn" have come to imply a story, more imaginary than factual, the "threads" within the story comprise the

symbolism and their underlying meanings representative of commonalities of shared experience. Therefore, because one of the assumptions of this study is that the participants have agreed to share their experiences with truth and honesty, I find that the themes of their stories are similar to the threads of a spool of yarn; not only tying together individual themes but also portraying a collective understanding of the human desire to persist and achieve despite the universal experience of "struggle." As Dr. Young (1996) describes this process:

The tales nourish something in us. We reconnect with universal patterns that move the human heart and soul. In some new way, we see the rich beauty and significance of ordinary life. (p. ix)

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of women who have faced their own struggles with the issues of "femininity," "masculinity," and "homophobia" within their sport participation. Their experiences impart a great contribution to understanding "the rich beauty and significance of ordinary life" as expressed through sport involvement.

The presentation and results of this study are organized in the following manner. First, a description of the participants is presented as an individual summary or "portrait" of each participant in reverse chronological order of their ages. This is followed by a brief overview of myself as "co-participant," honoring the feminist perspective that the researcher's own subjective experience will influence the progression of the interview, especially one that is "dialogic." This is referred to as "the researcher as instrument" and provides some insight into the background and personality that the researcher brings to the study. Following the presentation of the participants are the experiential themes or "threads"

that emerged from the interviews. Each theme is discussed separately. Differences among participants are also noted regarding the extent to which various themes did or did not affect their participatory experiences as well as the unique and individual approaches each used to contend with them.

The Participants - "Heroines"

Every story has a hero(ine) or two and this one has six. A heroine is a girl or woman who has courage and takes risks. The participants of this study demonstrated great courage by sharing their stories. There are times when the depth of emotion of a particular experience is evident but the participant never backed down from allowing me to experience with her the introspection and self-revelation that accompanied each experience. Despite the emotionalism of some of the issues, however, I was also impressed with each participant's ability to convey a sense of humor in the recollection and telling of some trying times. A heroine also takes risks in entering arenas or situations most people would fear to enter. These women, like many others described in the Review of Literature, played "unfeminine" sports, exhibited "inappropriate" behavior, and made demands for equity when others went silent. In describing the participants as heroines, I concur with the opinion expressed by Paul (1993):

Using the term *heroines* (sic) to describe women sports participants is applying a late twentieth-century perspective. More often, when describing women athletes, late nineteenth- and early to mid-twentieth-century writers used such expressions as "inappropriate," "freakish," "manly," "unwomanly," and, at best, "tomboyish" rather than adjectives appropriate for heroines. However, those women who paved the course for the modern

sportswoman were courageous in a way that is partially understood today because the veil of prejudice still shrouds women's sport to some extent. (p. 28)

Lulu

"Lulu" is the oldest of the participants, in her late sixties. She is the first-born of six children in a family of four boys and two girls and was raised in the rural South. Her mother was a caregiver and homemaker, and her father worked at a steel plant. As the oldest of six, Lulu recalls that she "didn't like to babysit"; she would rather be outside playing ball. "I was a great ball handler," Lulu recalls. Lulu has both undergraduate and Master's degrees in physical education and recently retired from teaching physical education with a primary emphasis in the dance curriculum. "I loved modern dance the most," and she says, "loved to choreograph." Though her self-spoken love of choreography tells something of her creative side, Lulu also spoke of the pure enjoyment of learning the science of her field, especially kinesiology.

As a "youngster" Lulu played a lot of ball sports, making the most of her "ball-handling" skills: dodge ball, baseball, softball, but also, horseshoes. During college she continued to play softball and added volleyball, basketball, bocci, tennis and badminton. In her mid-thirties, she shared a studio with a martial arts instructor. She said that he "moved beautifully," and she wanted to "recruit him for dance." Actually, just the opposite happened and she began learning Karate and Tae Kwon Do and became one of the first women in the nation to earn a black belt in the martial arts. Approaching seventy years of age and now retired, Lulu is learning new sports: shotput, discus and javelin; track and field throwing events. The reason? She is currently competing, and winning

medals, in the Senior Olympics. A phrase that might describe Lulu is "lands on her feet." No matter the obstacles in her way regarding participating and competing that came with being a pre-Title IX woman, she always found a way to achieve, perform and compete. As she says, "I was always aware of the restrictions, I just never let it affect me."

Toni

The participant "Toni" is in her early fifties and currently fighting one of her most difficult battles - against cancer. Her feistiness reflects a life filled with many other battles as well that are par for the course for a woman who grew up in the inner-city projects. She is the third oldest of seven children; two boys, five girls. The mother of this large family was a homemaker and the father a truck driver. Toni did not graduate from high school; she dropped out in the eleventh grade. A recovering alcoholic, she speaks candidly of becoming an alcoholic when only seventeen years old and of the part it played in her life, leading to her discontinuance of sport participation.

Considering that Toni was a young girl in the mid to late 1950's and a teenager in the early 1960's, it is significant that most of her sport participation was as the only girl on all-boy teams. She played baseball and hockey primarily and also some football. Her sporting expertise was somewhat embarrassing for her sisters, but she became both role model and teacher in her brothers' sport orientation and instruction.

Though the focus of this study is not about the participant's sexual orientation but, rather, her experiences with "homophobia," Toni felt it important to say, "And, you know I'm gay." A lot of Toni's sport involvement included coming to terms with her attraction to women even

as she separated herself from them through her sporting involvement with boys. Toni often conveys a deep sense of loss as she reflects upon the limited opportunities for women in competition knowing that she could only compete as "one of the boys" for so long. She speaks of being a great fan and supporter of the strides that women have made in being "allowed" to play and compete in "all girls" teams and receiving media attention. To shed some light on her feelings she says, "I can look at those Tigers and there are times I wish... I could feel myself out there. I'd like to get out there just one time and show them."

Elaine

In her mid-forties, "Elaine" is the only participant who would be unlikely to refer to herself as a "jock." She grew up in a "steel town" as one of three sisters, the oldest, however, having died as a child. Both Elaine and her husband have doctoral degrees and met in college.

Elaine did have some marginal participation in sport during grade and high school but confesses that being an athlete at the time and place of her upbringing, even "to be on the swim team," had a "stigma." Her time as an athlete came much later than the other participants. In college, her husband introduced her to weight lifting because she wanted to "improve posture" and drop some "body weight," but she initially "hated it." She became intrigued one day, however, as she noticed another woman at the gym whose strength seemed to exceed her size. Elaine began to wonder about what it would be like to actually be strong and found that her weight lifting now had a bigger purpose, a goal beyond improving physical appearance. In fact, her decision to become a "powerlifter" meant that her physical appearance would change in ways

that would greatly challenge gender stereotypes of "feminine" appearance. Unlike bodybuilding, powerlifting is not about physique development; the goal is to lift as much weight as possible. The effect of power times mass in achieving that goal means that the competitor must intentionally increase her physical body weight to assist in her performance. Elaine was very effective and disciplined in achieving goals.

Elaine received a great deal of media attention regarding her powerlifting career. She appeared in magazines and on television shows including sporting and other venues. Traveling extensively and receiving the amount of attention that she did, Elaine experienced her sport as mostly a "fun" time. As will be discussed further, Elaine was not unaware of the "femininity" issue regarding her participation in an "iron game" usually reserved for men. Of the participants, however, Elaine's experience might win the award for "most positive."

Billie Jean

"Billie Jean" is approaching her late thirties. She grew up in the rural south, her parents "farmers," in a family with three brothers and two sisters. She is the second oldest in the family although she notes a great deal of age disparity between siblings as she is seven years younger than her elder brother and fourteen years older than her youngest sister. Billie Jean, though extremely articulate and academic, projects a great sense of humor which can be found in her description of the process of earning what she likes to call the "near-terminal degree," a doctorate.

Her earliest recollections of sport began with playing catch with her dad. As early as the seventh and eighth grades she became involved in the school girls' sport teams, playing basketball; however, in high

school she discovered there were no girls' teams. She credits Title IX with affording her the opportunity to compete, commenting, "Title IX is the only reason I ever had any opportunity to play sports in school...". She speaks candidly about battles with her high school to institute girls' organized sport and obtain effective coaching. While in high school she competed in both softball and basketball. In college she played softball for only a year, choosing it over basketball, only to find limited opportunities for play due to a new coach's philosophy of the team. Therefore, Billie Jean found sporting expression in summer softball leagues, playing "for years," including some coaching until she experienced some frustrating and serious physical injuries that prohibited further participation.

She has tried not to let the "feminine"/"masculine" issue affect her too much as an adult though she remembers wanting to play basketball instead of jump rope as a young girl and being told "girls don't do this" and her thinking, "you're telling me I can't play because I'm a girl?" Not playing was not an acceptable option so she decided to bring her own basketball to school if they wouldn't give her one to play with during recess. This story epitomizes her "don't tell me what I can and can't do" attitude that could never be squelched until heartbreaking physical pain stood in the way of her participation.

Nelle

"Nelle" has one younger brother, grew up in a small suburban area, and is in her early thirties. Her mother was a homemaker and her father a welder; both parents are deceased. She has a Bachelor's degree with an emphasis in psychology and sociology and has also done some work at

the graduate level. She is involved in politics and is very articulate about her experience and views regarding women's issues. Nelle's sport involvement began with softball in both church and city leagues. After expressing initial reservations regarding Nelle's participation in sport, her parents became very supportive and enthusiastic as they realized how talented their daughter was in many sports. Nelle was a "natural" and became involved with track, volleyball, softball and basketball; the latter is the sport she most misses playing today. Her least favorite sport was track, even though she received college scholarship offers in response to numerous records she set in high school. Despite her achievements in track, Nelle recalls that guys "always wanted to race her" to prove that they were faster just because they were men.

A lot of Nelle's experiences with sport are tied to frustrating relationships with coaches. One she described as an "alcoholic," another as one who "didn't have a clue," and finally, a third was a role model and coach of value, but with this coach she developed a relationship. This relationship led to her estrangement from her parents and rumors within the community that caused Nelle to experience a great deal of psychological trauma and a nervous breakdown. She will tell you that she made the mistake of identifying herself too closely with her athletic experience; that she now knows that she is "not just an athlete." She describes a life of being uncomfortable with "female accoutrements," jokingly referring to being "hair impaired" and to how she always "felt out of step." Nelle's sport experience reflects many deeply personal issues leading eventually to self-acceptance.

Katherine

The youngest of the participants, "Katherine" is in her mid-twenties and pursuing a graduate degree. She has one younger sister and grew up in a "blue-collar" community. It was her father who seemed to be instrumental in her sport involvement as he tells the story of tossing a ball to her when she was still in the walker, and when she threw it back he figured he "had something." Later, he taught her to play baseball but took her to get signed up for softball because "he didn't want to push the little league thing." While still in grade school Katherine continued to play in community leagues but moved into school competition in junior high, expanding her sport talent of softball to include playing on basketball and volleyball teams. Softball, however, continued to be her dominant sport and, in college, she played with championship-winning teams.

Katherine recognized that inequities were occurring but only became aware that they were also "illegal" when she was introduced to the stipulations of Title IX through a university course. Even so, she had taken it upon herself to challenge various inequities between male and female athletes during high school that resulted in some real improvements for women. Katherine also noticed the way women seemed to be concerned about the "femininity" issue playing somewhat gingerly around prom time because they were worried about bruises showing on arms and legs. Regarding the primary issues of this study, Katherine is cognizant of many women's issues and her observations and perceptions within her own experience reflect as much. A notable aspect of her experience is that she is someone who is working to assist in consciousness-raising regarding women, gender and equity.

Co-participant / Researcher as Instrument

As discussed in the Bias Statement (see Methodology), the researcher does bring something of herself to the process of the dialogic interview that enables the conversation to reflect some elements of shared experience as co-participants in roles as women athletes. Therefore, my own "portrait" follows.

I am a 37-year-old, third-year doctoral student in the Cultural Studies in Education unit, specializing in Sport and Exercise Psychology. Both of my parents have college degrees; my father is a retired fireman who also worked as a substitute teacher and my mother is a retired teacher from the Detroit Public Schools Title I program. I am the youngest of four children, with two brothers and a sister.

Like "Elaine" I was not someone who would have been described as a "jock" in my youth and came to one of the iron games, albeit a different venue, as a result of pursuing health and fitness. I grew up in inner-city Detroit and had very few competitive or recreational sport opportunities. I did, however, become involved extensively with dance, including competing and performing, despite minimum training.

I participated in weight-lifting for approximately ten years before I entered a bodybuilding competition, although most people would refer to me as a "bodybuilder" even before competing. While I was very good at the "feminine accoutrements," as "Nelle" describes, related to participating in dance, my involvement in bodybuilding and the accompanying physique development led to many personal issues of "appropriate femininity." The two questions I am asked most often are, "how much can you bench?" and "wanna arm wrestle?" My ability to convey an appearance that both fulfills and yet challenges societal

gender constructs of "femininity" has, perhaps, been most instrumental in my desire to understand how other women athletes experience societal expectations and accompanying constraints.

Threads: Presentation of Themes

In the following sections, the emerging themes of the participant interviews are presented. The findings focus on: (a) "family matters" discussed as the crucial role that the women's families played in the participants' involvement in sport, regarding both support and sometimes expressions of concern and/or disapproval of athletic involvement and "play"; (b) "participatory restrictions" that reflect inaccessibility to a *particular* sport or competitive level as participant; (c) discrimination and/or marginalization reflecting "inequities" of experiences as participants; (d) participant views and personal definitions of "femininity" describing attempts to harmonize personal definitions with societal expectations; (e) understanding of the term "homophobia" and reflections of one's own perceptions of it as well as those of fans, administration and fellow athletes; and (f) participant "determination" that prevailed within their experiences.

Family Matters: Support, Concerns and/or Objections

"Family matters" refers to the crucial role that the participants' families often played in their initial involvement and/or continuance in sport. This familial role can be seen as providing a supportive environment for the participants' sporting expression. As will be seen, however, even families providing support sometimes send mixed signals

regarding the participants' continued involvement at various stages of sport participation. These dual roles become evident as the participants discuss the continuum of their experiences.

For some of the participants, the role that a member or members of their families played in their involvement in sport were reflected in the participants' responses to the initial question:

Tell me about your experience of how you got started participating in sport. Keep in mind as you're doing this that whatever you have to say is what I am interested in.

The youngest participant, Katherine, responded:

OK, really young, I couldn't tell you an age when I was not involved in sports--and my dad tells this story when people ask, like, how he got me into sports, and so I'm pinpointing him in all this, but he said that when I was still in the walker he threw a little Nerf ball at me, and I caught it and he threw it back so he figured he had something going.

As she continues to tell her story, Katherine conveys the importance of spending time with her father that later translated into her own appreciation of sport:

And, he's just a lifelong baseball fan. And, so I remember being little and watching baseball games with him, uh, just to be with him, but then once I got older I watched the games because I liked the games, too.

But the experience of spending time with her father in relation to sport elicited some mixed feelings when Katherine played for a community softball league that her father helped coach:

...my dad, after a year or two, became the assistant coach. and he just, you know, wanted to be around. A very difficult thing to play for a parent...

Overall, however, Katherine speaks fondly of the support she received from both parents:

...Glad I had support, like family support with aggressive support with my father and, teaching me. And I think he did the most traveling when he drove to watch me play softball when I'd be there in the summer for college games. I had that kind of active support, And then my mom, who was just, you know, "this is what you do and I'll wash your uniform or whatever I can do" or send a care package when I come to see your team play somewhere...

The participant, Billie Jean, also answered the initial question with a reference to her father's influence:

I guess the earliest sports kind of memories I have are, you know, from baseball in the backyard with my dad...

...and so he showed me, my dad was gifted physically, so he could show me how to do things. He, I think, enjoyed playing when he had time. I mean, you know, we were farming, didn't have a lot of extra time to play with kids. So I'd say that my dad would show me how to hold the ball if you wanted to throw a curveball, how to throw a knuckleball, and stuff like that.

And growing up in a large family in a farm community she played too with other family members:

Well, my older brother, he was seven years older. He's seven years older than me so we didn't...I don't ever remember just playing ball with him. And my younger siblings, I remem...I played a lot with them.

So, in general, Billie Jean recalled a feeling of great support from her parents regarding her participation in sport:

...my parents were always very supportive of me playing sports. They'd take me around to games, and if I needed a pair of shoes or a glove or socks or whatever it was I needed, they were more than willing to...and they went to my games when they could. I mean they farmed and they had other kids...so they were real supportive.

It would have been difficult, if not impossible, for me to have achieved the things that I did after...and to get the enjoyment from sport, were it not for my parents being so willing to let their daughter be a tomboy.

Because Elaine's primary sporting involvement began when she was an adult, her parents and sister were not the influential persons in her initiation into her sport. In fact, in light of knowing that Elaine eventually became a "muscle-y" powerlifter, it was ironic that her father once objected to her interest in ballet:

One of my favorite Dad stories is the one in which, when I was about 10 years old, I went to him and asked for ballet lessons, and he said no, that he didn't really think that would be good, for... after all, you had to remember that those ballet dancers had big muscle-y legs.

But it was because of Elaine's relationship with her future husband (as well as a desire to improve her appearance) that she started to lift weights. Her husband's continued influence and support can be seen by following Elaine's progression in her commitment to her sport:

And so when we started going out together, he would go to the gym. And I was just sort of curious about it. And like you do when you're young and in love, you feel like you have to go everywhere together, and so I started tagging along with him.

...I did very light weights, and initially just trying to do things to improve my posture, because I had quite round shoulders at the time. And it was something I was very self-conscious about.

And so that was sort of the angle on which I started. And I trained for, oh, I don't know, five or six months, doing just real light things, just bench pressing the bar, very very light things. Nothing at all heavy. Having no concept of any kind of interest in strength at all. And actually, hating the entire process.

Her husband provided the supportive environment for Elaine's entry and continuance in powerlifting once Elaine decided to take her weightlifting beyond appearance enhancement into the competitive venue. Elaine had seen a woman in the gym who was not a particularly large woman, yet, this woman was lifting what Elaine perceived to be very heavy weight. Elaine became intrigued with the idea of getting

stronger, not necessarily to compete, just really to test herself. She describes talking over the goal of strength development with her husband:

...we went home, we were looking around through some stuff, and (husband) had a copy of a *Guinness Book of World Records* at his house, and we were looking at it. And they actually listed a record in there for women in the two-hands dead lift which was 392 pounds. And so that sort of started us thinking that that (sic) would be kind of a neat thing. And (husband) said, "You know, I really think you could train. You could probably do that." He said, "You know, you're real strong." And all of that. And so that became sort of my...that then became sort of my training goal.

This support is not to be underestimated in consideration of the extreme physique development Elaine had to make to effectively compete in her sport, especially at the time that she finally identified herself as "a powerlifter":

...there was probably somewhere in that goal, where I'd say, "OK, I'm a powerlifter." This is not something I do because it's kind of fun and kinky this is...I'm really doing this seriously now. And it was also then that I decided that if I was going to try to get the 1,000 pound total, that I was going to have to be bigger. And so I went up sort of on purpose, with (husband's) blessing began eating to try to gain weight, and went from about 165, 170, which is what I normally weighed, came to the meet weighing about 198 pounds. And didn't quite total 1,000, totaled like...what did I total?...like 998 or 978, I mean, but it wasn't 1,000.

I think that for me what made a lot of this work was the relationship that I had with my husband when I entered into this sort of sport career. In other words, had I begun all this before I married (husband), I'm not sure that I would have felt the same about it. But because we had such a good relationship, because he was so accepting of it, so supportive of it, encouraging of it...

Unlike Katherine, Billie Jean and Elaine, family support experienced by Toni, Nelle and Lulu was less direct and seemed a mixed bag of both support and objection. For Toni, her initial involvement was supported, not by her family, but by the Director of a recreation center:

The recreation we went to. Now, he (the Director) got me on the boys' team, for the baseball...and he really fought for me. And finally, they (the boys) let me play.

As for Toni's family, her sisters were embarrassed by her athleticism, her brothers grateful for her instruction, and her parents, perhaps, conflicted:

When I was in the same age, twelve, thirteen, we went over and played football. I had the same guys come and get me. My sisters were so embarrassed because they were their friends.

I asked how her sisters expressed their embarrassment:

They barely talked to me; they acted like they didn't even know me.

If Toni's brothers' were embarrassed, it may have only been because their sister was the better athlete:

My brothers would always come up to me and ask me to show them. (Older brother) was sporting, but (younger brother), no. He wasn't nothing.

Toni's parents seemed somewhat perplexed by her devotion:

...they (all-boy opponents) tackled me just like the others. My mother and my dad said, "What's wrong with that girl?"

"So your parents expressed some concern?" I asked.

Well, my dad--he worried, and so did my mother. And she would say, "Come back!" And he said, "You better watch your son! Don't worry about (Toni). She's fine out there...worry about (brother). Not (Toni). She's doing terrific.

Nelle's parents expressed some misgivings regarding her desire to join an organized church softball league but were, eventually, won over:

And I begged and pleaded with my parents to let me join. So it was mostly a fun thing, you know, pure social thing, the entry into organized sports. And they finally relented, and then it became quite clear early on that I was one of the better kids on the team. It was all girls. My parents interest kind of increased at that point, when they realized that I was physically inclined and gifted that way.

In later years, after Nelle had become "bored with the sport" and quit, she decided to play again. Nelle had become alienated from her parents because of a previous relationship with her coach and sport became a way to possibly renew a relationship and "connection" with her father:

And I probably left...let's see, my mother died in 1988, and I may have played the following year, 1989...and quit. I moved out of state a little bit. When I moved back, I think I tried to play again, mostly for my dad. My dad was ill, and I thought this would be one way we could have some sort of connection to each other.

The oldest of the participants, Lulu, did not say a lot about her family during the interview. However, while talking about her anger at societal restrictions of women, she mentioned that she and her sister received some mixed signals about what women could and could not do from their father:

It just made me mad. Because I grew up in a society where women weren't given very much credit for anything. My dad, who is kind of a...of the old school. He didn't think that women could do much but bear children and do housework and stuff like that--except for me and my sister. He just thought we were different, that that (sic) didn't apply to us. Isn't that strange?

It appears from their comments that most participants primarily experienced family support, along with a few instances of mixed messages and, rarely, outright objection. It is interesting, though, that male family members were mentioned more often regarding support and instruction. The importance of these male figures in the women's lives, especially as they relate to the transmission of "appropriate" activity for girls and women, are discussed further in the next chapter (see Discussion and Conclusions).

"Put Me in Coach": Participatory Restrictions

Every participant spoke about the frustrations experienced regarding opportunities in sport. These frustrations emerged in two forms: (a) restricting entry into particular sports and various competitive levels, and (b) marginalization of female athletes during involvement. In this section the former concern is targeted.

Clearly, the younger participants had more opportunities for participation in sport than did the pre-Title IX women. Even so, restrictions were evident in the forms of play, choice of sport, competition, and continued opportunities for all participants.

The youngest participant, Katherine, found it interesting that she was signed up for an organized softball team rather than a baseball team despite having learned to play ball with a baseball from her father:

As soon as I was old enough, my dad took me to sign me up for softball. It was funny, I grew up--he taught me baseball in the back yard. I had a baseball glove and we used to play catch with a baseball. But once it was time to sign me up for a league, he didn't want to push the little league thing, trying to get a girl into the league, so he just went straight to softball, and I thought that was interesting that you know, he made...all of the sudden it was, "This is what you do because you're a girl."

To understand why the restriction of having to play softball rather than baseball is an issue relates to Katherine's perception of "credibility" (and to issues of "marginalization") regarding the two sports:

...I always wanted equal credibility. For somebody to watch me play softball and see that I was good, and that if I had decided to play baseball that I'd be right there with the guys and, you know, even though we were playing a different sport...I think where the fans or other students or peers would think, "Oh, you just play softball," and would kind of belittle us for that...you know I'd want credibility that...well, it's not baseball, but it doesn't...there's not superiority or inferiority attached to that. It's just different.

Billie Jean recalled an experience from grade school in which she learned a painful lesson about what was and was not "appropriate" for girls to play. That restricted her ability to express herself in a way she desperately wanted:

And on the playground we had one blacktop, we had goals for either end, and the rest of the playground was open. And the girls typically played jump rope and the boys played basketball. Well, I didn't want to jump rope, I *hate* jump rope...I didn't want to jump rope, I didn't see any point in it. Basketball, you can take and throw through the hoop and you can score--you had a point. Plus you didn't have to sing silly songs while you did it.

...so I would take my basketball and I had one of those that was from the ABA...so I would take that to school everyday so that I could play basketball. Well, not *I*, but just so that our...nobody could deny me playing in the game, because if it's my ball, I'm gonna play. And one of the teachers told me one day, "Billie Jean, girls don't do this," or something along those lines, "You should be playing with girls and let the boys play together." And that day she would not...she denied me, she would not let me physically play. "You're going to go over there with the girls." And I remember, I didn't cry. You know, not showing emotion, no softness, started early, but I remember..you're telling me I can't play because I'm a girl? You know...and this was a teacher I loved dearly. I still think she's a wonderful lady, but she had no conception of what she was doing to me by denying me the opportunity to do something I loved so much. She had no idea.

...the fact that I don't remember very many things about fifth grade, but the fact that I remember that very clearly again emphasizes what a deep...wound?...wound's an OK word...what a deep wound that made.

As pointed out in the previous section (see Family Matters), Billie Jean's family was supportive of her participation in sport so she was able to prevail in her desire to play. With the support of her family, Billie Jean talked about fighting for the inclusion of girls' sport opportunities in high school:

...And then when I got to high school they didn't have any sports for girls, I mean *none*. And in the fall of that year we got organized. It was kind of funny, I found a journal I kept when I

was in ninth grade. In there I'd talk about the fact that parents are getting together and we're going to have this meeting, and we're going to go to the principal and make them let us have a team. We deserve to have a team--and they buckled under the pressure, I mean, because it was law by that point.

For Toni, there was no "law" to mandate allowance of her desire to play. Initially, her participation was met with stiff resistance from the boys with whom she would play, although, as Toni related, they changed their tune when they realized she was good:

They--yelling, calling me names, saying that I should be home, you know, I shouldn't be playing baseball. A lot of them were jealous, too, after awhile when we all got to really...well, that's what it was all about. And we all became good friends; they were always at my door. I played with them till I left (name of area)...

Opponents, also, let Toni and her team know they didn't like playing with a girl:

The fellows on the other team. There was a couple I remember that didn't even want to play, but they OK'd it and played. But they still didn't like it. It was kind of uh...in fact, one team chased us (laughing). I dropped my glove and I looked up and I thought, "Should I go back and get it?" and I said, "Nope."

And I dropped it and I did not go back because they would have all been on top of me. So we all ran to the recreation (center) and we all got called sissies and everything else and had to...listen...I'm just a little thing; these guys were big. They left and I went back and my glove was still there. They never let us live it down. They got in big trouble for it, though. Because we *won*! They were bad sports, that's what it was. But still, I didn't know that's what was gonna happen. I thought these guys would protect me but they didn't.

Despite the troubles surrounding Toni's sport participation with the boys she continued to play football, hockey, and baseball with them from grade school through high school. Opposition did, however, prevent her from playing when she tried to join another organized team:

My brother got me in with a few of the guys. and nothing could come of it because a lot of the guys--they didn't want me playing

and so they had to let me go, because it was too much friction. People saying, "you should be home doing girl's things."

Even though Toni played with boys, she spoke a number of times about wishing there were more opportunities for girls and women:

I used to say, "It's not fair, why can't we?" And they'd laugh. It was just something they'd listen to and walk away. It was nothing you could do about it. There was nothing. You just let it go.

...it felt bad, especially when they teased you. I got teased a lot, even from the girls, and I'd go in my room sometimes and just sit and cry...

I always wanted to be on a team, all my life. But you see, at that time, you just couldn't do it. Now, today, look at them on TV--I just love it! I wish I could go out and tell those girls, "Keep it up" or just give them support...because it's something they should be proud of. I can look at those Tigers and there are times--I wish--I could feel myself out there. I'd like to go out there just one time and show them. But then I think, "Are you crazy? There's no way," I think. If I could have just one chance, I'd show you. You know men, their ego. But there are some terrific women out there that can play.

Although Lulu did not view dance as a "lesser" activity than competitive sport (see Marginalization), because she was able to participate in dance, Lulu's descriptions of participatory restrictions reflected the lack of sport opportunities other than dance. In the following statement Lulu describes attempts to play sport despite a lack of instruction:

We didn't have any coaches, we didn't have any instruction. We just made it up...a lot of time somebody would bring a rule that they had learned somewhere else, and we'd get into fights about, this is not fair, and everything. But mostly, I played with boys. And I never had any trouble being selected to a team or anything.

In light of this, the lack of competitive sports for women led to Lulu's primary involvement with teaching dance in physical education

at a university. In designing this physical education program for women, Lulu referred to putting her previous sport participation "on hold":

Well, actually, I was involved in just about anything anybody suggested. But when I came to teach at (university), I kind of put that on hold because it was very, very beginning. I mean, they didn't...they had a little bit of background, but they didn't have much of a program. And we just worked like fools. I mean, not thinking about anything else much for a number of years, and got the program started. And so for about 30 years, I didn't participate in sports except just periodically. Maybe I'd play golf a couple times a summer.

Because of dance, though, Lulu met someone who would teach her a non-traditional sport which made her a woman pioneer in the discipline. She tells the interesting story:

...and I saw a demonstration...a Korean...and I had a dance group, so my immediate thought was, "Hmm...I'm going to recruit this male, who moves beautifully, to be in my dance group." And so I did approach him...So he said to me, since I had a studio, how about using the studio to teach karate classes...tae kwan do...so I had to be there for him to use the studio, so I started to take the classes, I was, of course, the only female.

So one day he said to me, because I was always standing on my hands, "Oh, I think if god meant woman to stand on hands, make arms as big as legs." Which I thought was so cute, you know, because that was his way of telling me to get on my feet instead of standing on my hands. So he and I got to be very good friends. And I took classes with him...lots of days a week, and on weekends I would go with him to other parts of the state, and we would have classes. When it came time for me to be tested for my black belt, he was very nervous about doing this because I was the only female, and I was the first one in the country that was known to be interested in this kind of thing. So he got a general from the army in Korea to come and give me my test--and so I got my black belt.

Other than dance and martial arts, Lulu did not participate in the more traditional forms of competitive sport until her retirement. Finally, in her late sixties, Lulu has found the opportunities to demonstrate her other sport skills:

...but when I retired, I decided that I was going to do something that I loved to do, really physical--and so with fear and trembling I went to a sports club. I didn't have any of the equipment; I didn't have any of the outfits.

Lulu started playing tennis but switched to badminton and then learned new sports as she began to compete in the Senior Olympics:

...I've been doing some things that I hadn't done as a youngster, because they weren't offered to me...and that is that I have done the throwing events: shot-put, discus, and javelin. And so I've participated, you know, nationally, with those also. I have some ribbons and I also have some medals.

Lulu's enthusiasm for her recent competitive expression is clear and (she even tried to recruit my mother when I mentioned that she had been a PE teacher and quite an athlete):

Oh, I love it, I wish I could get more people interested! I'm not a spokesperson for them or a recruiter but we have so much fun. I just like everybody to have fun. I always felt my dance teaching was evangelical, because it had been so wonderful for me that I wanted everybody to experience the same kind of thrill.

Finally, Lulu reflected on the changes that have taken place regarding restrictions within her experiences and ability to participate in sport as well as the lack of awareness that post-Title IX girls/women have regarding opportunities:

In high school we didn't have any inter-scholastic, or inter-collegiates. I mean, that's how old I am. And there certainly was no such thing as a scholarship.

Well, see, when you're talking to me, you're almost talking to history...because I have kind of come from nothing to a big deal, you know what I'm talking about? So...kids that have only known this one thing, they just think that's the way it is, and it always has been. In fact, someone mentioned Title IX to these kids in class, and they're like, "Title IX, why is everyone talking about this Title IX? What is Title IX?"...all the goodies from Title IX. They just assumed it had always been that way. Well it hasn't!

Elaine, though about 10 and 20 years younger than Toni and Lulu, respectively, also mentioned the dearth of opportunities for girls to play sport, having been "a pre-Title IX baby," and also the "stigma...in terms of just being an athlete." Elaine admitted to not having a great passion for sport when she was younger, but she played a year of softball in grade school and swam on the high school swim team for a couple of years anyway. Powerlifting was a different matter altogether, and Elaine sought out opportunities to compete, which led to involvement in the administrative aspects of the sport. In the early 1970's women's amateur powerlifting events were just beginning to be organized:

And so Zerella, who was at that time the president of the U. S. Powerlifting Federation, decided that he was just going to go ahead and hold a meet exclusively for women...because by '76, '77, there *were* women we were hearing about...And so Zerella decided to hold this meet, which he called the *All American Girls' Championships*. I think that's what it was called...not women's--but *girls*!

I mean they were very, very interesting times for me. Because I was sort of the first big figure there to get publicity and all that, it really made for us...we had an interesting life. I got to go to Japan. I was invited to come over by Fuji Television and do stuff in Japan and I got a trip to England to appear on the *Guinness Book of World Record Setters* television show. Did a couple of things in Vegas...*That's Incredible*...

...And then I got involved with the administration of women's powerlifting...actually drafted the first official rules for women, and did stuff about women's uniforms and all that. And then got involved through the organization with doing administration internationally so that I was Women's International Chairperson for about five years in the early going.

Elaine's sport participation status was not "professional," yet her experience certainly differed from that of the other participants because she was able to have an experience of success within her sport that generated publicity, not just nationally, but internationally. In light of

this, Elaine is viewed as the only participant of this study who was able to take her range of opportunity into a realm that the other participants did not have available within their experiences.

Nelle had many opportunities to compete and experienced very few restrictions during grade school and high school and achieved the rare feat of being a "four-letter" athlete. Some restrictions did occur as she entered college but these are difficult to sort out because of problems she experienced as a result of a relationship with her coach as well as of various injuries that would later prohibit play. She did express many concerns regarding issues of marginalization within her experience and these are identified in the next section.

Inequities Abound

The other aspect related to issues of opportunity is marginalization and/or discrimination and refers to various inequities experienced by the participants within play and sport. It encompasses such things as inferior coaching, equipment, practice and play times, views that women's style of play is just not as exciting as men's or that their competitive achievements are not as notable. These various issues were discussed at great length by the participants to the extent that only a sampling of their comments can be included herein. Their perceptions were based on their own experiences as well as views of other women athletes. As Nelle referred to marginalization, "It's those things that affected the quality of the experience."

While the younger participants of this study had more opportunities to enter sport competitively, they seemed to indicate no fewer problems than the older participants regarding perceptions that

integral aspects of their training and competition were not valued in the ways that boys and men's sport involvement are valued. The data contained many comments regarding coaching, such as the following from Billie Jean, which indicates a continuing problem with effective coaching throughout her experience:

They were forced to have girl's basketball when I was in seventh grade. The men who coached our team were the two men that coached the boys team, and it was apparent they didn't want to coach us, they didn't take us seriously, they just didn't care.

...And the next year they refused to coach the girls' team...

...my senior year the woman who had coached us my sophomore year, she said she wouldn't do it anymore, she quit. So senior year, here I am, all-conference, MVP, all my years, and here we are coming into my senior season, and we don't have a coach, and they hired an English teacher. And she had never played in sports, didn't have an athletic bone in her body, but they told her, "If we hire you, you gotta coach girls basketball." So...the athletic director called in me, and another one of the girls, and we had played all three years and we were, you know, we'd be the backbone of the team, and probably be co-captains, he said, "Between now and when basketball season starts, you two need to teach her how to play basketball and how to coach basketball." So we as the seniors had to teach our coach something about basketball. She didn't know offense, defense, double dribble, nothing. Nothing!

Katherine explains how the hiring of a former track athlete to coach basketball precluded her ability to get "into" this sport:

If I had had a better coach, I might have been a little more into it in high school. But, a distance runner, who ran distance at Chapel Hill in college, became the basketball coach. And it wasn't a fit at all. She didn't know the game. They thought because she went to the school Jordan went to and sat on athletic courts with him that somehow it qualified her and it didn't.

Nelle didn't fair much better in obtaining effective coaching:

And unfortunately the coach was really...the guy was sort of an alcoholic, he didn't teach at the school, he ended up being my coach for ninth grade, and then in tenth grade when I moved to high school, there was another guy, but he wasn't that great. And

then I ended up getting kicked up to varsity and then playing for that same...the original guy through my high school career. So, um...it was frustrating.

I mean there was a sense of...I didn't really understand the sport that well enough, or had played enough pickup or any of that to really have figured out what was going on, and he really...he was basically the kind of guy who threw the ball on the floor and said, "Go ahead. Play."

Nelle says that most of her coaches were men and remembers a dynamic of sexual tension between coaches and athletes:

... and these two guys that I'm thinking of in particular that did basketball and volleyball, there was sort of these sexual tensions running, and they would play off of it. They would make comments about, you know, if there was this particularly chesty girl...they would make side comments.

And now that I'm older, I realize how that...was really bad of them to do that...I knew enough to never...there was a sense of, well, I'd never tell Mom and Dad about them saying stuff like that. But I remember feeling inadequate in that way, that I wasn't this cutie little breasted woman, I was just...tomboyish...and they would make comments here and there. And there was almost a sense of trying to win their attention in a way other than...than on the athletic field. I don't want to say outwardly, directly vying for their approval, as in a male to female thing. But I think that functioned that way. Throughout this whole run there had been very few women role models in sports...

Eventually, Nelle did have a woman softball coach that she felt to be the only truly valuable coach of her athletic career. However, because she developed a sexual relationship with this coach, it will be discussed in more detail in the section regarding "homophobia."

Having to make do with inferior equipment and uniforms also contributed to the participants' perceptions that their needs weren't really important. With a lot of humor, Katherine talks about their attempts to make some old uniforms more accommodating:

...the girl's basketball team have these rituals and it's really tight mesh shorts and then these jerseys. And just cause they were so

old and had been shrunk so much, that we would come up with the most creative ways to stretch out the shorts.

...put two chairs together and put one leg of the shorts in and try to stretch them out. Put the uniform tops over the back of like, a chair, so that it would stretch out, overnight...

Billie Jean also had to make do with second-hand uniforms:

...in all these years we had the leftover jerseys from the JV boys from ten years before and that kind of thing. It's the same kind of stories you hear from other women who played in the 70's.

To fight for improvements for the women athletes to get better equipment, uniforms, etc. Katherine threatened to write an editorial for the school newspaper. At a teacher's suggestion, she first showed the letter to the Athletic Director. He then passed it on to the Business Administrator, who agreed to make some changes:

So it did some good. I didn't have it printed, but we got...I can remember him calling me in to get me catcher's equipment. I thought--the equipment we had was pitiful--so it was a big deal that I went in and he had like all these different masks and skullcaps for me to try...

...Then the next year after I graduated, I came back maybe over the next winter when I was on college break, and I saw the basketball team, and they said, "Hey, did you see the backstop out there?" so they put in a new backstop and some of the girls thought, "Hey, that was your letter." You know that was really nice of them to say that, I don't know, if it was or not...

Other problems and inequities expressed by the participants:

...the poor media coverage we always got in high school. You would be so excited after a basketball game or a softball game to see the box scores in the paper the next day, to catch your name. So...you're looking through the pages and, of course, you see the boys high school scores that they run, and the girls minuscule, like "get out your magnifying glass" box score in the back... (Katherine)

...and it was frustrating not to get the press the boys got...(Billie Jean)

I guess a bad part about a lot of the rec for women, if you're using gym time, is that they give you, like these incredibly bad hours...I would have liked to play more women's...but, who wants to be driving around, you know, playing at ten o'clock at night? (Nelle)

(regarding game attendance) Some people came a few minutes early, before the boys' game started. Our parents would come..they'd *force* the JV cheerleaders to be there. (Billie Jean)

I finally decided on a scholarship to (university) because they were going to let me do two sports. And wouldn't you know it, as fate has it, the woman who signed me turns out to be a total shyster...I can't get a hold of her. The upshot of all of this is that there's no record of my scholarship. (Nelle)

I can remember when we first started giving out scholarships in the dance...It'd probably be about 1985. (Lulu)

...and I think that the thing that has been more of a concern to me than the fact that I was being kept out of stuff was the fact that I wasn't getting paid as much as men for the work that I did. (Lulu)

Participants also expressed a variety of concerns about attitudes toward women athletes and dancers that showed that many people still were not willing to take them seriously. Touched on in the previous section (see Put Me in Coach:...) Toni had to work hard to win the acceptance of her male teammates:

I was the only girl when I played with any of them. Even the other teams,...they'd laugh until I got out there. Then they'd quit laughing, because I was out there to play. And a lot of them came up, shook my hand, and said, "Hey, you're great!"

Nelle, a four-letter athlete, was insulted by the constant challenges from men who assumed they would be athletically superior to her:

...especially when it's co-ed, the guys always assumed that any guy that's out on the playground was going to be better than any woman who showed up.

...I was fast, I held several records at the high school, I had scholarship offers and did well in the states and that other stuff. But it was like...I was bored with it. But I even had guys years later wanting to race me. I'm not going to do that.

Speaking of challenges, Billie Jean talks about how important the Billie Jean King/Bobby Riggs match-up was to her because it showed that a woman *could* be as good as a man:

I remember when we had the big battle of the sexes and Billie Jean King...and the whole deal. And that tennis match got so much press, and you know...I was in junior high, and people like, bet, at junior high, who was going to win. And, when Bobby Riggs took his blows, I felt very happy about it. I remember watching it on television, I mean, that was a big deal for me. That was not just some little insignificant tennis match, this was a big deal.

Although Lulu refers to dance and sport as different types of physical expression, she explains that opinions of dance as not being challenging are rooted in a lack of understanding of its difficulty:

...I never taught a sissy class...I always felt that any physical activity was good, and the dance to me was not a frou-frou activity. Anybody who thinks it is, is not understanding the spectrum of expression, you know, it's...you go from dynamic to delicate. And if everything is just going to be (thumping sound as she pounds the table) dynamic, you've got no variety.

...And a lot of things that we look at if we haven't experienced it, we're not able to make a judgment. And a lot of people are very apt to make a judgment, and know absolutely nothing about it. "Well, I don't like that!" "Well, why don't you like it?" Well, I just don't like it." It's like food you know, "I don't like that," "You never tasted it"...if you taste it, it might be wonderful!

So...I never differentiated much between sports and dance except in the dance, usually you weren't handling something.

I taught classes to male athletes. And they would call it "meat for lunch" because I'd have it at twelve o'clock, and they were all so blown up with steroids and everything, and they didn't care a bit about doing it, but it was a requirement of theirs, and it was an absolute miserable situation for me.

Toni talked about her anger because of the enforcement of a rule from boys' sport that was used to force an adolescent girl playing on a boys team to comply with the mandate to wear a "cup":

It's in the book...you gotta wear a cup. The poor girl was humili...I mean that was awful.

These types of ridiculous and demeaning attitudes affected these women's sport experiences. Katherine says it well:

Attitudes, that's the real key is the attitude because...(people) will talk about women's basketball, "Oh, it's just not as good, it's not as exciting." Well, OK. you can tell me that you don't have an interest in it and I'll respect that. I don't have an interest in NASCAR, but, or wrestling, but that doesn't mean I think they're inferior...and I think that's still what's happening with women's sports...

Defining Moments: "Femininity"

The participants provided a spectrum of interpretations of the term "femininity." Very often, their experiences of how society's notion of "appropriate" femininity influenced their experiences came through without having to directly question them about such expectations. Some of these expectations and how they affected their sport participation were evident in the previous sections as the participants provided examples that usually included their expressions of discovering what one could or could not do because of one's gender. Such remarks as Katherine's, "This is what you do because you're a girl," and Billie Jean's, "You're telling me I can't play because I'm a girl?" reflect this understanding.

At various times the participants were asked to provide a direct response to the query:

Tell me about your interpretation of the terms "femininity"/"masculinity" and any experiences that relate to your perceptions of these terms.

The participants tended to avert their attention from the definition of "masculinity" by primarily focusing on, what appeared to be, the

complicated process of offering their perceptions of the definition of "femininity." The overwhelming feature of the attempts to define and describe concepts of femininity, especially when trying to harmonize personal definitions with those perceived to be society's, can be summarized by the word "confusion." This section presents the participants' discussion of concepts of femininity as well as examples of their perceptions of attempts by society to reinforce traditional gender constructions of the term.

Elaine had not experienced too many difficulties with issues of restriction and marginalization related to her sport participation, but recalls attempts to present her "feminine side" for the notable media attention she was getting. Having once been the recipient of the "Betty Crocker Homemaker of Tomorrow Award" provided ample material for those orchestrating her media exposure:

There were incidents in which I really felt that the media's obsession of trying to portray me as still feminine went beyond what it should. To the point that I remember...there was a television crew who..we had a little farm at that point...and they came to the farm and they were wanting to show me cooking, which I do, I mean, I am domestic.

They would show me sitting and doing some sort of handwork, and I don't do any kind of handwork. So they went out and bought me a needlepoint kit. And I have to admit that I sat there and pretended to be doing needlepoint, which I actually did do in high school for a project one time, you know, crafts for something. But it was a facade that they were trying to...and, of course, being 21 or whatever I was at the time, I said, "OK, sure."

For Lulu, femininity and masculinity were all about biology:

To me it was a matter of anatomy. All this other stuff is like stereotypical hogwash.

...I just think that femininity and masculinity have to do with what you were born with. I think it's a person who's a female and

you can tell it because they've got bulges on their chest and nothing hanging between their legs...

But she recalls, at a very young age, being perplexed by the media's portrayal of the feminine image that still bothers her today:

I can remember as a young kid, I mean, I was just nothing, my grandfather took a magazine called *Progressive Farmer*. And there was an advertisement for a tractor, and it showed a woman in a bathing suit sitting on the tractor. Now honey, this is the dark ages, you know, and I said to my grandfather, "Why is this woman in a bathing suit sitting on the tractor? Is she going swimming?" Or...I mean, it was,...it didn't make sense to me. It still doesn't make sense to me. Is that the only thing that sells items?

Some participants, like Nelle, felt that society gave them signals that "femininity" was whatever they weren't:

I played dolls and that sort of thing, but I always wanted something more active..and there was this sense that that's not quite the way it was supposed to be. But I never let it really stop me from doing that, but there was always that sense that I wasn't quite following the guidelines that I was supposed to be...

The fact that I wasn't comfortable with high heels and the other pieces that go along with being female, you know, the role, did make it difficult. I didn't like to wear makeup and the time when I tried, like in high school, to...OK, I need to do this...I had really oily skin...I would come off looking like a raccoon or something, or I invariably couldn't do it right, or I was hair impaired.

Billie Jean, with her usual humor, voiced similar sentiments:

...but then in high school, if we ever had a game, well, in junior high too, if we had a game, and we had to play away, then the girls had to wear dresses, which I always thought was a really stupid thing, because they wanted the girls to look nice...

...and I didn't like it, and we always would...kids would...they knew how uncomfortable we were (laughs) I said to a friend of mine, I was dressed up a few months ago, and I said, "A dyke in heels is always a dyke in heels. You can't hide it, it just looks that way--everybody knows it, they know you're uncomfortable--they're uncomfortable looking at you that way!"

On the other hand, Katherine said she liked to dress up for game day, but said she has experienced opposition to her appearance:

...I think people look at me strangely because I have short hair, and I'm a woman, and I think that's still...kind of abnormal...I can't tell you how many times I've been called "sir" in public. Just, like, in line at a bank and the teller is saying, "Can I help you sir?" And I'm like...are you talking to me?

Many participants were aware of more academic descriptions of gender constructs and vacillated between intellectual definitions and traditional views. Confusion was most evident in these discussions.

Nelle acknowledged the difficulty of trying to articulate a definition:

...society has a social construct called femininity, and I'm not sure I know beyond the social construct what we...in our culture...if I knew beyond that what it means, exactly, that...Well, my gut reaction is to react...what society says it is...the sexy woman in the guy's arms, she's all dolled up or giggly, or sparkly or whatever, and I don't seem to...if I look at myself I don't see myself fitting anywhere there. So in a way, it's been hard to really even fashion for myself what does it mean to be a woman.

...reading has helped to affirm that I'm not alone in this. And it's certainly been a resource to help me fashion my own. I'm not totally convinced I'm...well, I'm not free from reaction with what the social construct is...to be female, I...you know, what does it mean to be female...femininity, masculinity...I guess what I tended to do is to look at it as, men and women have, that we're in many ways alike. Boy, this is hard to articulate...

Billie Jean saw the definition as "culturally determined," but had trouble with various activities as either/or:

Well, you know, masculinity and femininity, I think are two, I mean they're culturally determined words, and what is feminine and what is masculine is whatever society defines them as. I mean...when I'm cooking dinner..I don't consider what I'm doing feminine. When I'm mowing the yard, I don't consider what I'm doing masculine. So I don't think of myself in those terms, masculine and feminine. I think our society does, and I think when I'm...when I was playing sports, and somebody saw females participating in sports, I think they did see that as masculine. Certainly not feminine. In no way.

Katherine, usually good with words, struggled to define femininity:

...my first response is to go right to the definitions...I have to think back...femininity, I guess what that has come to mean in our society is, so therefore, what I think of when I hear it is, all these characteristics. Like if you're feminine you're a bit passive, and you're not, um...(long pause)...really aggressive and, um, I want to keep using those same words over again.

Finally, Elaine relayed a progression of changing views:

In the old days I could probably answer that pretty straightforwardly, and say masculine are things that pertain to men, and feminine are things that pertain to women, but I really don't believe that anymore.

They're really words I have trouble using with any degree of confidence, because it just seems to me that these days...I mean, there's very little that...there are very few things that I think I can sort of categorize and put in that camp, that this is a totally masculine activity or event or item, or this is a feminine event or item, because, I mean, we both know that that's just not what's happening...I really don't know, Maria...I'm pretty confused on that in my own work, I mean, really...

...in many ways I think those of us who came to maturity at the end of the 60's and the early 70's were...I mean, I really felt deeply conflicted throughout a lot of my adolescence about what I should be doing, I mean, on the one hand, I thought that what I heard people saying within the women's movement was absolutely correct and right, but on the other hand, I still like ruffles and you know...

... I was not a girl who was raised to think much about bodily strength as something that would be desirable.

...and it actually took me a little bit of time to sort of work through both on an emotional level and on an intellectual level, that...hey...strength is OK! And it's hard to know exactly what was the trigger that allowed all that to become more acceptable to me, but finally did.

The participants made other comments about femininity that gave the impression that they felt their style of play didn't fit with traditional ideas of femininity. Katherine became annoyed with how teammates' concerns with "feminine" appearance interfered with playing sport:

I remember in high school, our coach would...around prom time, in the spring, that's when..there are always girls on the team that would not want to get bruises before the prom because they had these short prom dresses or (laughing)...so you could see them try to field the ground ball and do it with an ol' leg, the glove to the side and the leg to the other side, and our coach used to give them grief about it, "Watch those prom legs!"...

So I remember things like that and thinking, "My god, we're going to play games with girls who are concerned with these things instead of turning a double play." So there's definitely an incongruence there. Yeah, it always bothered me because I would see some of the players on my college team that didn't seem to be as confident or a little more passive about even...not rushing up to the ball or making that hard-nosed dive into the dirt.

Billie Jean, who referred to herself as "a jock," couldn't conceive of holding back:

...I'm just playing ball. And I was extremely competitive. There was no halfway. I never knew how to play halfway.

I remember when I was in high school. My senior year I dated this guy, and he was a nice guy, he was a couple of years older than me. We were out playing one-on-one in the backyard, and he was guarding me, and I wanted to go try for a lay-up and he got in the way of my shoulder with his nose. Oh...my mom was so mad at me.

Toni got into trouble for thinking her sister could be recruited to play "like me" and didn't even let puberty stall her own game:

I got her (sister) to play and she got her nose broken. She was talking to the guy instead of watching the ball come, and she turned, and got it right in the nose. I had to run home and tell my mother she broke her nose, and my mother almost broke mine, because I took her out there...but she wasn't like me.

The only time I ever hurt myself was when I was playing hockey and I got tripped and I went down, and that was when I had started getting bigger (points to chest). Oh my god! They said they could see the look on my face because I went *down*, and I thought, "Is it time to quit?" And I said, "Naah." I kept playing.

Lulu, "in love with the ball" confounded her mother:

...it didn't matter much to me what we were playing, but I was in love with the ball. And I used to bang it against the side of the house, and my mother would really be mad at me for doing that, and try to keep me from doing it. But I could do all these fancy between the legs, around the back, and all this...my mother thought I spent too much time doing it. She thought I should have been babysitting.

Nelle sensed, early on, that what she liked were "boys' things":

Because I do recall feeling even at a young age that my activities, the things that I wanted to do, to play with my type of play, and this was never, like, directly admonished by my parents or anyone else in the family that I can recall, but there was this sense that these were boys' things.

Elaine was comfortable with herself but recalled other's concern:

...there were certainly women friends who spoke to me in confidence in early years about their concerns about my reproduction in the future, and, you know, did I really...was I really sure that this was what I wanted to do? And I remember (sister-in-law) one time said, "Well, you know, (Elaine), you start doing those deadlifts and you'll never have a waistline again." And these kinds of comments were not uncommon.

Some of the participants discussed issues of femininity that implied fears and/or suspicions related to homonegativism. These and other issues related to the participants' perceptions of "homophobia" are included in the next section.

Perceptions of "Homophobia"

Descriptions of experiences with homophobia were sometimes hinted around at various times during the interviews but usually were not expressly discussed. The primary exception to this was in the interview with Nelle, who had a relationship with her female coach, and initiated a discussion about the effects this relationship had on her life.

It was because of the hesitancy with which most participants broached the subject of "homophobia" that I directly asked for the participants' perceptions related to this issue. Perceptions discussed varied greatly and so comments did not reflect as many sub-issues as found in previous sections; therefore, the participants' perceptions are presented individually, in reverse chronological order of their ages.

The purpose of this study was not to inquire about the participants' sexual orientation, only their perceptions of homophobia and/or perceived assumptions of women athletes' sexual orientation as it affected their athletic experiences. However, if a participant divulged information related to sexual orientation or personal experiences of this type, it was included in the comments. If the participant did not choose to make references to her sexual orientation, I did not make speculative references based on personal knowledge of the participant.

Lulu:

Lulu, being a dancer, initially referred to assumptions that all male dancers are gay, but also seemed to be aware that her personal appearance might challenge conventions:

...I was in the arts. And the thing that I was disgusted at is anyone who is sensitive was considered to be a little strange by certain aspects of society you know. And somebody said to me...any male who was in the dance is definitely going to be a queer, and I was definitely offended by this.

Because some of your better athletes are dancers. It just so happens that a lot of them are homosexual or bisexuals or whatever. A lot of creative people, tender people, sensitive people or whatever, yet...I just think it's ridiculous. But I've had a lot of friends who were, and had problems with society. And they didn't have any...I mean, even with their parents, not just...

But I never have had any personal problems of that nature. I mean, nobody ever said, "Well, you're a great big old dyke" because I had muscles (laughing).

Her awareness of the assumptions about women and muscles demonstrates the interactive nature of the dialogic interview as she became the interviewer and I the interviewee when she asked:

Do...do people, the general public think that females in bodybuilding are dykes?

She noticed that:

A lot of the women though, that are showing...are very made-up, you know, facial make-up...and hair and everything, so it's probably to counter...

I responded that my perception was that there were some people who made assumptions about women in bodybuilding, especially those who "got as big as they could" and that this led many of the women to work hard to project a "traditional" feminine image with hair and makeup. Lulu became somewhat indignant as she recalled:

...that whole business with the testing for gender in the Olympics and everything, I mean, that shows you how some people can't take anything other than a stereotypical form. You may see somebody who comes out there and there's not...a femme fatale and then they want to look in your britches to see if you got something there.

And if she's really, really good...she's definitely...(laughing)

Lulu also reflected on the university setting for gays:

Well, see, in the university situation, it's against policies to have any kind of discrimination against...uh...people who have different tastes, and people felt, I think fairly free to operate...

...in the last two years I was teaching, it was just something that everybody felt that they, uh, wanted to be out, because in that way they wouldn't be having to hide all this stuff and everything, and there was nothing going to happen to them as far as the job was concerned.

But I think, you know, down through the years people were mortified at having certain things about them revealed, because you were definitely in danger of losing your job.

Toni:

Toni was one of the participants who spoke of coming to terms with her sexual orientation as a gay woman. At the beginning of the interview I had reminded her that her personal sexual identity was not the issue of the study. Her response to the question about her definition of the term "homophobia" began with no response at all; just her mouth sort of moving but nothing coming out until she eventually kept repeating, "That's a big one...I don't know." I tried to be reassuring, that I was just looking for a general definition when she said:

...I had a bad habit, I was carrying everybody's books (giggles)...all the women's anyway. And, you know, I'm gay...(leans forward and whispers even though we're the only two people in the room)

...when I was young, well, I didn't think nothing of it, just that I always tried to get all these women, I'd carry their stuff home for 'em, "Oh, that's so nice of you"...and my mind was thinking the other way...and I was young, not trying to, you know...It's just that I liked women. Then they'd say, well, "You're a tomboy"...yeah, you're not...you're just a tomboy. But then I was thinking, "I'm not!" And then I used to have a friend in school, she'd...every time I'd walk down the hall she'd come by and kiss me on the cheek and run, and I never could understand, you know..now I wish I could find her! (laughs)

...and then my teacher, my gym teacher, now she was that way...

Toni mentioned her gym teacher because it had been this teacher and the teacher's partner who were the only two people Toni, at 16 years of age, felt she could talk to about trying to come to terms with her attraction to women because:

...I didn't talk to my family about it...They didn't talk about it. They still don't. They said they don't care. Now my one sister has said to me, "You're sick." Because...and I'm looking at her, and she said, "I don't...it just doesn't"...

So the best thing...we just don't say nothing about it...and they do what they want, and I do what I want. But they still love me, it

doesn't matter. But like I said, the women are very lucky today. I give 'em credit getting out there, the girls, you know.

Because it was in conjunction with the discussion about homophobia that Toni talked about her drinking problem, that this facet of her life is included in this section. She explained that she began drinking when she was seventeen years old and obtained a fake ID to get into bars.

And that's what I did, and that was it. That was the end of my... everything. Because all I did was drink. It was the worst thing in my life. I had some good times, some bad times.

...especially when I was going to join the Fillies, and that was all football. They were all gay.... and I think that's why it didn't make it.

And they were big women. They could play too--I wouldn't want to get hit by 'em! They were bigger than the ones I played with--the men. They can be strong. And it wasn't fair really, I mean, if they can do it, let them go out and enjoy it, what the heck. Now if I wouldn't have drank so much, and thought the way I do today, I would have tried to get something going, and...let 'em talk! But I didn't. I needed to get into the AA, and you can't do both. You can't do sports and drink. There's no way--you know what I'm saying?...out there, playing hockey, pick up the puck and throw it at somebody, with the drinking...I'd shoot pool...they'd tease me because I was good...and I guess I got drunk one day and I just picked the balls up and I threw 'em in the hole. Every time I walked in they all ducked, "You going to throw 'em this time?" "Naah." But I was mean, not to everybody. Depended on what I drank. I was mad at myself...

Now everything's different. There are probably a lot of things out there, but it wasn't said, about being gay or anything else. And it was hard being gay...

Elaine:

Elaine was honest as she expressed her personal concern with perceptions about women in powerlifting; her primary concern was that the blossoming women's sport be able to thrive:

I had never met anyone that I knew was a gay woman. When lifting first started, there was a group of women who came to the meet from (city)...and it was basically a gay women's gym. And they had a team that entered the contest that year. And I remember that there was a lot of discussion about this group of women who were pretty overt about their sexuality and their relationships...

...a couple of the women who were there from this gym won, and one of them was elected to a committee that I was chairing and so we then got involved working on administrative stuff, and came to be very, very good friends. So it was around...and it was something that I was kind of concerned with. And I guess that, like a lot of people of my era, I was real concerned at first that everybody not misconstrue that all the women powerlifters there were somehow gay women because that was not a message that we necessarily wanted to send, because we...I think partly because we were trying to get the sport established.

Once again, however, Elaine's exceptional experience with the media showed its important role in disseminating an "appropriate" image:

Of course, the press that we got for powerlifting in the early days was really so positive because most of the women who were winning were perceived as sort of traditional women. And I think that the newspaper reports, the SI, even the stuff in the muscle magazines was also generally supportive, that...the stigma, say, of being a women's shot-putter, or some of the other kinds of track and field athletes, where you sort of have that sort of image in your head, well...you know, that didn't seem to get tagged on powerlifting in the early days. And it certainly didn't get tagged on women's bodybuilding in the early days.

Later, however, women's bodybuilding was perceived as challenging conventions of "femininity" as questioned by the title of the following *Sports Illustrated* article that Elaine remembered:

...Although there was that one SI piece that was kind of catty. I don't know if you ever saw that. It came out in about '79, and the title of it is *Here She Is...Miss What?*

Billie Jean:

Billie Jean recalled that her earlier recollections of homophobia were that it was something that was discussed in "hushed terms" by people who seemed to be "saying something bad about somebody." She said that she assumed that "eventually boys and girls got together" and didn't think much about homosexuality until college and that she was as "homophobic as anybody who grew up in my area":

...and somebody makes an innuendo about the coach and something like that, and I'm just, like, appalled. "No way, that's so gross..." you know...and I'm just, like, spouting off all these words that I've heard all my life, and there's all these negative things, without even thinking about what I'm saying, or how it might be affecting the people that I'm with or even if they're my words or just words I've heard. Of course, years down the road, I find out that all the...teammates in the car were lesbians, and you know, and they were just trying to...where my stand is on everything. They found out, and it was really not until I really allowed myself to start thinking about what it was that I wanted out of my life rather than just accepting what other people, what society puts as sexual orientation, what it should be. And it was down the road before I allowed myself to explore my own preferences rather than just accept society's preference.

Billie Jean did, eventually, think more about her internalized homophobia because she was beginning to consider that there was more than one option for sexuality:

...the older I got the more aware I was that there were a lot of lesbians in softball. And, it took a real...(pause)...I don't know, I'm trying to think how it affected me. I don't think...once I realized it was there, I was curious, because now there was an option to just accepting what I was supposed to do or feel or think or be.

Billie Jean was curious, but also increasingly aware of external expressions of homophobia:

So, I remember being curious...and the summer league coach I had through college, he had negative feelings towards homosexuality.

...he didn't want anything to interfere with how our team functioned as a unit. So if there's some stuff going on with relationships that might interfere with that, you know, he would automatically...not gonna like that too much, which I understand. But I think it...this was more deep-seated than team conflict. It was more just societal kind of homophobia stuff. But...anyway. I didn't...since I wasn't at that point of exploring options it didn't matter.

Later, Billie Jean had the opportunity to see how intra-team relationships might affect team cohesion:

...later down the road when I was..on a different team in a different set of circumstances, there was some stuff going on with them that did affect things. They were mad at each other, or whatever, but...either getting over a relationship or getting into one or whatever. So, I mean, I know that it...relationships within a team unit can affect the team as a whole. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that that can happen.

...I mean teams can fight over who gets the window seat on the bus, for crying out loud, they can get mad over anything.

Beyond Billie Jean's personal contact with homophobia, she thought that society did make assumptions about women in athletics and physical education:

I think a lot of people have this perception of the lesbian PE teacher and the lesbian ball players...our society has that perception...The thing that we have to acknowledge is that there *are* a lot of lesbians in sport, and a lot of lesbians in physical education, of course, there are also a lot of lesbians in social work, and nursing, and farming...

She also seemed to be aware of various "cloaking" phenomena practiced not only by homosexual athletes, but also by heterosexual athletes, trying to quash perceptions that they might be "you know":

...the fact that people think that, I really don't care anymore. And I don't know if I ever did. I was a PE major in college...there were those girls who did everything they could to make sure that no one thought they were gay, whether it was dressing in a more quote/unquote feminine way, or making sure that the boyfriend was ever apparent. Or, you know, make up or...who made a very

strong statement. Those people, the straight people seem much more concerned with it than the lesbians because they simply, in a lot of ways, didn't want to talk about it at all, and would much rather stay in the closet and not ever bring it up.

Finally, Billie Jean coached and played with a team that was openly lesbian and noted that, at that time, the team seemed to be able to relax and have fun:

...by the time that I started dealing with my own sexual preference...I was not playing a lot of sports anymore. I still am some ways in that arena, but not playing competitively anymore...although a couple years ago, I did coach a lesbian team. Boy, that was fun...it was fun! I played some too, but...it was great. I mean, it was just...that was the team, everybody knew it, we just went out and played and it didn't matter.

Nelle:

Nelle's experience with homophobia was very personal. As she explored her sexual identity and embarked on a relationship with her female coach, she found herself encountering a loss of community support, alienation from her parents, and personal confusion and awareness. Nelle spoke extensively about this relationship and how it affected her. It was difficult to condense the data; therefore, only a portion of the particulars of the development of the relationship are included and provide the framework of the ensuing experience. The poignant effects that this relationship and related homonegative manifestations had on Nelle's experience are dramatic:

When I was a senior, I had one of the only female coaches of any value...[who] coached my high school softball team. This was a person that functioned as sort of a role model for me.

As it turned out, I ended up having a homosexual experience with this coach...I was kind of clueless that this was developing...

We seemed to have a lot in common, she was ten years older than I was. And I was pretty oblivious to what was going on. I was just looking at getting out of...I'm trying to decide where I'm going to go

to college. I'm really eager to get out of here, everything in my life is going great. And so she's hanging out a lot, and we're having these deep conversations. I *now* recognize it as sexual tension, and other things going on, but I didn't know what it was at the time. And so she's closer and closer, and pretty soon we're physically involved. And of course, I freaked, right? Where did this...woman? And I chose to dismiss that time as always just...one of those things I'm not going to make into much. I'm going away anyway. I don't know what this means, I'm not going to say that I'm gay, or that I'm not gay. Growing up I had crushes on both men and women...

Nelle continued in the relationship with her coach. During this time, her parents were not aware of how deep the relationship had become and continued to invite the coach over for dinner which, Nelle indicates, made things more confusing:

Although I noticed there were signs earlier that there was something she was...a little too possessive. And unfortunately, my parents, they don't know what..."Oh, she's taking an interest in our daughter, this is great!"

...By then what had happened as the summer went on, is my parents are going, "Wait a second. Something's not right here. This...what's going on?"

...Now they're getting a clue. This is not too cool. And I'm trying to play mediator on both sides. Between her, between my parents.

Complications continued for Nelle with her parents and then with her coach, who threatened suicide when Nelle tried to end the relationship. Other confusion ensued: Nelle met her future husband and became involved with him; continued in the previous relationship for awhile and finally was able to end it; but then became involved with another woman:

...attraction for a person for me has always been more holistic than anything defined by masculinity or femininity. It's the essence of who the person is, and that makes them attractive on both emotional and physical levels for me.

...because I have had relationships both ways. I am attracted to the person...I know no other way, I mean, I've come to the conclusion that sexuality is a spectrum...

Nelle seemed to be gaining an understanding of herself as she accepted her ability to be attracted to a person rather than a gender. She discovered, however, that her community was not nearly as understanding. Nelle felt that she paid a high cost in loss of both support and job opportunities because of her relationship with her coach:

When that whole relationship became quite obvious to everyone, I think, as to what was going on, despite the fact that she was tailing me everywhere...I learned a significant lesson, and that's...prior to that I had been sort of well known in the community, as much as someone that age can be. But by virtue of the sport, I probably had gained status that say, a male athlete, an accomplished male athlete would have in a blue collar suburban area. I thought things were great. Everybody loved me.

And with the advent of the rumors surrounding what was going on, I had remarkably few friends. How about none?

People just dropped off, people just didn't want to deal with me. And I actually had the experience of...I was desperate at that point to prove I was a good person. No matter what was going on, if any. it's not like I would have admitted to anything at that point...I coached at my high school, Like, bad move, you know?...the varsity coach that was coaching, sort of a substitute teacher in the school, she happened to be gay, and happened to be fairly aggressive in trying to track me down. But ironically, the principal who had written me letters of recommendation for college and all that stuff had pulled her into the office to question her about my sexuality. Because he was concerned about the kids.

I never confronted him on that. I never coached there after that. That was pretty much the last straw for me, and it made me realize what gay people, you know, really have to go through.

Nelle worked through a lot of anger, resentment and confusion and had to fight through depression to finally accept herself:

....and I've really railed against the unfairness of it all. So what...if I am gay or if I'm not, I don't know, everyone's passed judgement. And I'm still who I am. And it doesn't matter. I...kind of at that point...so much of my energies were just trying to just live without killing myself, and also trying to get out of that relationship with her, that it move from that defining moment to how people react about that kind of thing, to just trying to...self survival...

I think by the time I had entered into the other relationship I was pretty resigned to the way that people react to gay people, and that I was going to...I didn't want to be totally out of the closet or anything, because I didn't want to...my parents could have never handled it. But I wasn't, you know, people couldn't handle it, if they were going to talk about it, I'd reached a point where it's like, "what can I do about that?" There are people in my life that can deal with it and people that aren't able to.

Katherine:

When Katherine talked about her definition of homophobia she perceived it to be a fear directed both at others, externally, and at oneself, inwardly:

...what stands out most for me when I hear that word...I immediately think fear and/or hatred of gays and lesbians. That's what I think of as homophobia, generally. And I think other parts of the definition most commonly used, certainly come into play. I think, people who are homophobic are partially afflicted by a fear that they might be perceived as being gay or lesbian, fear that maybe they have some kind of attraction, same sex attraction, not realizing that any platonic friendship is going to have some level of attraction...

She recalled an incident when the external manifestation of homophobia was directed toward her and her teammates. Within this description were also her own perceptions about a teammate who was "out" and her coach's bias toward projecting a "feminine" image:

...and knowing that there certainly are gay people playing, or there must be, and that's just a given. I didn't think too much of that. In college...this one incident sticks out from my freshman year. Actually it was during the state championship tournament and we were warming up...It's an away game and we were warming up on a

practice field somewhere, and I had one teammate who I knew was gay, and she was the only...I knew there were other gay players on the team, but she was the only one who was out at the time, and I always felt just a little uncomfortable, because I'd never been with someone who was so out and open, but nobody really talked about it at the same time, and our coach certainly did not..that's not something that she needed to know about! The one that said I must be dressed femininely!

We had to wear visors because we couldn't wear caps, because caps were still with the masculine softball players. But we were out there warming up and practicing, and a car of students at that college drove by, and I think it was all guys, and watched us warm up and started yelling out the window something like, "Hey, you dykes!" or "Hey, look at you!" or something to that effect, and I remember feeling really uncomfortable for my teammate, like, "Oh, god, that's just..." and nobody...everybody pretended they didn't hear it. So that stuck out, as just, OK, so there's this perception out there that, you know, female athletes...

Katherine made another reference to the coach's homophobic attitude:

Players who were gay talking about how she could never know, and how she found out about one player, who played four years maybe before my freshman year, she found out that she was gay and kicked her off, not just because of that, but because of some other things she did, but that was also part of her reasoning...so I knew she had this antagonism with players who were going to be out, or be..I guess this player...I don't know if there were other personality clashes with her but I know this was part of it...There's more...because I was younger, more scared of, gosh, she has this terrible attitude, and everybody better be careful. And now I look back and I'm much more appalled by that.

The funny thing is, she was so afraid of us projecting a masculine image, and she really had one herself. She had military background, and was very...and that was why she was such an autocratic leader when...you know, the polyester coaching shorts the guys wear...you know, you just hate to see, because nobody looks good in them, I don't care who you are, well she wore those at practice.

Katherine said that despite this coach's views about homosexuality and the presence of gay players on the team, her opinions

didn't affect them too much, that they felt that the coach "really cared about her players" and that if they just stuck together "whenever she said something totally unreasonable" they could "just let it go."

The last sentiment expressed by Katherine reflected an aspect common to the participants' experiences; namely, determination. When the chance to play presented itself just stick together and find the way to participate despite obstacles. This determination to play in the face of opposition of various types is presented in the next section.

The Faces of Determination

A theme that is woven throughout the participants' experiences is that of determination: Lulu and Toni would play with the boys if there were no girls teams; Billie Jean would bring her own basketball to school to get to play with it and would fight along with parents to have girls teams instituted in school; Elaine would become one of the first administrators of women's powerlifting to help it develop into a professional organization; Nelle went out and recruited a coach when she got tired of dealing with ineffective coaches; and Katherine wrote a letter that helped improve equipment and playing conditions for fellow athletes. These are only a few examples of the many ways that the participants worked either against or within the system to get to play in the first place, improve the quality of their experience once admitted and prove to objecters that all they wanted was the chance to be there to show how good they really could be. The following statements illustrate the participants' determination:

Lulu getting to play, as a "youngster" and a retiree:

Nobody was teaching. No, nobody was teaching; we were just doing it.

I always could hold my own and I just never wanted anybody telling me what to do...

And I never had any guff from anybody, really, I was just...didn't have the outlook that I was expecting it, and maybe that's the reason I didn't get it.

...I just made my opportunities. I mean there were no freebies, handouts, hardly any slaps on the back.

And the funniest thing, at this age, it's hard to find anybody to play with. So I play with three old men. And that's where I get my practice. Three old men! Lulu and three old guys.

So I'm kind of a real advocate of this Senior Olympics thing. I try to get anybody who can still move interested...

Toni's tough exterior:

I loved sports, so when I went to school I was in them, and I played hockey, football, you name it; I played it. And I was on an all-boys team, which was pretty hard, because there was a lot of...boys that did not like it--you know how boys are.

...and honest to god, when it came around to playing hardball, he came and got me. This guy was big. All the guys were big, but I had an arm. I could hit. It didn't matter. I was out there to play, I didn't care.

I was the only girl when I played with any of them. Even the other teams, you know they'd laugh until I got out there. Then they'd quit laughing, because I was out there to *play*.

...I went *down*, and I thought, "Is it time to quit?" And I said, "Naah." I kept playing.

Elaine's defining moments as a professional athlete:

I was the first woman to total 1,000, the first to total 1,100, the first to total 1,200. And, see.. I squatted 545 by the end of all this.

And from that point on, for about 10 years, then, I sort of regarded myself as an athlete. And, didn't do certain things, that I thought would interfere with my training, and was real careful not to, you know, go downhill skiing or horseback riding or do things that might cause me to get injured, so that I could really focus on seeing how strong I could become. And became very, very interested in that, in that whole process of, you know, setting a

goal, reaching the goal, seeing what that felt like, and also sort of pushing...sort of pushing my sense of what was possible.

...And then got involved through the organization with doing administration internationally so that I was Women's International Chairperson for about five years in the early going.

Billie Jean, fighting for opportunities and loving every minute when she got them:

...And then when I got to high school they didn't have any sports for girls...we got organized--and they buckled under the pressure...

I was a jock, I was a girl jock, I just...I don't know...I came out of the womb knowing how to throw a ball...I had a great time. Great.

...so I would take my basketball and I had one of those that was from the ABA...so I would take that to school everyday so that I could play basketball. Well, not I, but just so that our...nobody could deny me playing in the game, because if it's my ball, I'm gonna play.

...but I wouldn't trade the opportunity to play, even with all that stuff, Yeah, I wouldn't trade it. It was great.

Nelle, identifying so closely with being an athlete and also fighting for opportunities to play, but learning that she had value beyond her athletic accomplishments:

And I begged and pleaded with my parents to let me join...And they finally relented, and then it became quite clear early on that I was one of the better kids on the team.

And we took a team that was OK, see first year's tenth (place)...by the senior year just based on...I'll give credit to the athletes, we won the school league...I think we ran up a record of like 22 and 1 or something. And that's without much assistance from anyone.

I knew there was one woman in the system who knew what she was talking about. I could tell that she was a good coach. And the woman slated to coach our softball team was this former cheerleader who was a total...just did not know what was going on...and it just so happened that another friend, her dad had died, and she was really close to this other coach that had coached at the middle school, and I gained contact through this coach

through this crisis, and kind of talked the woman into taking our team.

I'd like to think that at (age) that I've come to a point where I feel much more secure about the things in life that move me, the things that I do well, the things that I can contribute to our community...that I'm more secure about standing up for things that don't make sense and not buying into, not being swayed by what society says...

Katherine instigated important changes in equitable treatment and, despite being aware of inequities, didn't let it affect her ability to focus on her game:

...it wasn't until, I think, maybe my senior year...where I was increasingly fed up with some of the facility discrepancies...So I decided I would write an editorial to the paper...

...the yearbook advisor suggested that I show it to the Athletic Director before I had it put in the paper...So I went right in and I talked to him, and I showed it to him and he got really upset and it really struck a nerve.

I couldn't say that anything like that carried over onto the field...stuff that was a little annoying because you knew that you deserved better, but it didn't carry over...

...Yeah, we were discriminated against and, you know, we deserved better, but basically, we overcame it because we had to.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to provide a description of the sport participation experiences of women. Of particular interest was the participants' perceptions of societal expectations of women and their definitions of "femininity," "masculinity," and "homophobia," as they impacted on their sport experiences.

Six women who had participated in sport competitively and recreationally at various levels within a variety of sports participated in the study. Their ages ranged from the mid-twenties to the late sixties. A qualitative methodology of dialogic interviewing was used within a feminist perspective and an interpretist framework was employed for data analysis. In this way, interviews were conducted conversationally, which allowed both participants and interviewer to interact with the commonality of shared backgrounds. The participant in each interview was free to lead the discussion. This enabled her to share those experiences and reflections she deemed most important and, therefore, each participant's experience was examined as a unique account. Gender comparisons were de-emphasized and were only presented if initiated by the participant relative to parity issues within sport.

The themes that emerged from the participants' experiences were: (a) "family matters," which refers to the crucial role that the women's families played in the participants' involvement in sport regarding both support and sometimes expressions of concern and/or disapproval of

athletic involvement and “play”; (b) “participatory restrictions” that made inaccessible a *particular* sport or competitive level to the participant; (c) “inequities” that included recollections of discrimination and/or marginalization within the experiences of the participants; (d) “femininity,” expressed as a contrast between personal definitions and perceptions of societal expectations; (e) understanding of the term “homophobia” and reflections of the participants’ own perceptions of it as well as those of fans, administrators and fellow athletes; and (f) participant “determination” that characterized the experiences of all of the women.

These themes represent the overriding concerns of the participants that were experienced as impediments to full sporting participation and that were perceived to be tied to societal expectations of women. However, the data also showed that even though the participants’ experiences were dominated by frustration, they were also characterized by two important positive factors. Determination and familial support helped the participants to question conventional prescriptions of “appropriate” behavior for women as they responded through their own articulations of physical expression.

The women of this study were able to participate in sport and recreation despite their experiences of restriction, inequity and conflicting messages regarding appropriate behavior for women by directly opposing or challenging these issues. However, prevailing constraints were often so strong that the participants still had to modify their desires to achieve certain sporting goals. Despite the participants’ resiliency, however, opportunities for continued competition eventually were no longer available; this curtailment was most profound as it

related to professional options for continuation in competitive sport. Only one participant, albeit not a "professional," had the experience of elite-level amateur competition that resulted in international acclaim and paid exhibitions. For the others, the erosion of opportunities varied, with some having no competitive opportunities outside of recreation and physical education and others having opportunities for organized play through college. The age differences of the participants revealed changing perceptions about "appropriate" activity for girls and women that accompanied the expansion of opportunities for them to engage in sport and physical activity. Because of such changes, one participant, now retired, is presently able to have the experience of national competition that had been nonexistent in her youth. All participants demonstrated incomparable fortitude to enjoy and persevere in their sport and recreation endeavors, and, as seen in the example just given, this perseverance continues within the participants' current life experiences,

Discussion

If it is true that one person's experience cannot be generalized to the larger population of women athletes, then what can be learned from the experiences of six women regarding sport participation? A clue might be found in an essay by Braendlin (Brady, 1995), who constructs a dramatic scenario of various feminist voices:

I have constructed this dialogue in the spirit of Mikhail Bakhtin's heteroglossia, a textual dialogization permitting "a variety of individual voices" (Bakhtin, 1981) linked and interrelated, but multiple and diverse in point of view and viewpoints. (p. 43)

Each participant of this study had a unique perspective upon her experience. Even so, within the diversity of "point of view and viewpoints" are those "linked and interrelated" threads that represent the commonality of experience among the women. Individual perceptions of expectations of "appropriate" feminine behavior and homonegativism, along with individual coping methods alter the degree to which these issues influenced the participants' sport and recreation experiences. In the following sections, similarities and differences between the participants' experiences are discussed for each of the themes.

Family Matters: Support, Concerns and/or Objections

The role that the family played in the participants' introduction to sport often became evident as the women talked about how they "got started participating in sport." Two of the women, Billie Jean and Katherine, recalled being taught, as children, by their fathers. Elaine was introduced to her sport and coached by her husband. For these participants, the general family support continued as they pursued athletic involvement in community and school leagues and, for one at least, amateur-level elite competition. While the other three participants, Lulu, Toni and Nelle, did not indicate direct family involvement in their introduction to athletic play and sport, they did convey a sense that the family provided them with the freedom they needed to be able to express themselves in this way.

Those who experienced family support at a young age, may have derived a particular benefit because the family is the primary unit from which an individual learns what is or is not "appropriate" behavior. Conflicting messages, of course, may come from the larger society, but

the strength of these outside messages can often be minimized in the face of the perceived acceptance and support of the family. Even Elaine, who began her primary sport involvement as an adult, spoke about how her husband's support "Made a lot of this work." The impact of family on the participants (Table 2) revealed the depth to which perceptions of family support had influenced participation in sport. Less obvious but evident nonetheless was support found in the remarks of the oldest participant, Lulu, who observed that, despite what her father believed about the capabilities of *most* women, he felt that she and her sister were "different," and she pondered, "Isn't that strange?"

Lulu's perplexity illustrates the way that family members can convey mixed-messages within support. Toni's father told her mother not to worry--"She's fine out there," but also wondered with her mother, "What's wrong with that girl?," when Toni got tackled by her male opponents. Billie Jean's usually very supportive mother revealed bewilderment when she exclaimed, "Can't you ever just relax!" when Billie Jean bloodied a boyfriend's nose during a game of recreational one-on-one. The support of Elaine's husband was contradicted by her sister-in-law who was concerned about Elaine's waistline. Even Katherine's helpful father conceded to societal restrictions for girls when he signed her up, not for a baseball team, but for a softball league.

Contrasting these two facets of the family's role in the participants' experience, it seems that: (a) their families, overall, provided a supportive environment that freed the women to demonstrate their physicality and participate in sport and reinforced the participants' feelings that their desires to express themselves in this way were *appropriate*; but (b) the family, at times, also expressed disapproval,

Table 2. FAMILY MATTERS: SUPPORT AND CONCERNS

Participant	Comments
Lulu	He didn't think that women could do much....except for me and my sister. He just thought we were different, that that (sic) didn't apply to us. And I used to bang it (ball) against the side of the house, and my mother would really be mad at me for doing that, and try to keep me from doing it...my mother thought I spent too much time doing it. She thought I should have been babysitting.
Toni	Don't worry about (Toni). She's fine out there...She's doing terrific. My sisters were so embarrassed... My mother and my dad said, "What's wrong with that girl?"
Elaine	I think that for me what made a lot of this work was the relationship that I had with my husband...because we had such a good relationship, because he was so accepting of it, so supportive of it, encouraging of it... One of my favorite Dad stories...I went to him and asked for ballet lessons, and he said no...after all, you had to remember that those ballet dancers had big muscle-y legs. And I remember (sister-in-law) one time said, "Well, you know, (Elaine), you start doing those deadlifts and you'll never have a waistline again." And these kinds of comments were not uncommon.
Billie Jean	It would have been difficult, if not impossible, for me to have achieved the things that I did after...and to get the enjoyment from sport, were it not for my parents. ...and so he showed me, my dad was gifted physically, so he could show me how to do things. Oh, my mom was so mad at me...she was, "Can't you ever just....relax! Do you have to always..."
Nelle	My parents interest kind of increased at that point.
Katherine	...Glad I had support, like family support with aggressive support with my father and, teaching me...and then my mom, who was just, you know, "this is what you do and I'll wash your uniform or whatever I can do."

concern, or made choices regarding the participants' sport involvement that created restrictions and reflected the views of the larger society that certain forms of physical expression were *inappropriate* for girls and women. As noted in the literature, "sport behavior does not occur in a value-free vacuum" (Krane, 1994, p. 395). The participants of this study had to contend not only with conflicting messages received from *society* that were at odds with those they received from their family, but also with conflicting messages from the *families* themselves. That the participants' experience of family support outweighed their experience of disapproval was clear through-out the interviews as the participants indicated that family was instrumental in their sport participation, varying degrees, despite an awareness of constraining expectations.

The crucial role that the family played in many positive aspects of the participants' experiences was surprising considering that the participants were not directly asked about their relationship with their family regarding their sport involvement. Notable also was the fact that the participants spoke most often about the support of a male figure in cultivating their participation. At first glance, one might question the participants' tendency to comment on the male, but not the female, presence in their experiences. It may have been difficult for mothers, sisters, and other women to transmit sporting skill and knowledge unless they themselves had opportunities in sport. In this study then, men were found to be an important factor in imparting instruction, support and non-traditional views about what girls/women can and can't do, thus helping to create a new generation of women athletes and role models. The female family members also contributed support in several ways, such as attending games, washing uniforms, saving media

clippings, etc. The role that both male and female family members of female athletes can play to fortify or counteract traditional views of "appropriate" femininity has been neglected in women's sport research and should be examined in the future in order to determine the degree to which it can enlarge women's sport experiences.

"Put Me In, Coach" : Participatory Restrictions

For every man with a baseball story--a memory of a moment at the plate or in the field--there is a woman with a couldn't-play-baseball story. (Nelson, 1991, p. 11)

In *Are We Winning Yet?* (1991) Nelson discloses that tennis star Billie Jean King was in love with baseball but took up tennis because she understood that there was "no place" for women in the sport of baseball. Participants Katherine and Billie Jean learned to play baseball from their fathers but had access only to softball leagues. There were no girls' baseball leagues; therefore, parents would have had to challenge such organizations if they wanted their daughters admitted to them. This could be a daunting task, and as Katherine said about her father, "he didn't want to push the Little League thing, trying to get a girl into the league."

Switching from baseball to softball requires learning new ways of playing a sport that could interrupt skill development and confidence as the young athlete accommodated to the new style of play. Moreover, baseball is part of "the Holy Trinity" (the other two being football and basketball), a man's game and viewed as superior Katherine thought, "...the fans and other students or peers think, 'Oh, you *just* play softball,' and would kind of belittle us for that..." However, neither Katherine nor

Billie Jean complained much about *having* to play softball. They mentioned the change as something they were aware of but said they felt grateful to be able to play, period. The younger participants found more opportunities to play various sports in competitive community and school leagues than did the older participants; Lulu and Toni were only able to compete recreationally "with boys" during their school-age years, and Elaine also had minimal opportunities at that time. However, both Elaine and Lulu took advantage of newly available opportunities for sport participation that emerged when they were adults. Lulu earned a black belt in the martial arts while in her thirties and later competed in the Senior Olympics upon retirement and Elaine became a powerlifter while in college. It is important to note the adult sport participation of these women because it shows, once again, the desire to be *able* to play, even if it means taking advantage of opportunities that don't avail themselves until adulthood.

The frustrations expressed by the participants regarding opportunities for competitive sport involvement were frequently voiced. Lulu found even the Physical Education program in the university lacking. Toni envied the emerging women's sports teams saying that she "watches 'em on TV" and "wishes she could have done something" herself. Billie Jean and Katherine fantasized about what it would have been like to have had opportunities to be paid to play and commented, respectively, "If somebody would ever pay me to play ball..." and "To be paid to play softball! I can't even imagine." Nelle also complained about the lack of basketball opportunities for women after college, saying that after a certain point, "there's nowhere else to go unless you go to Europe."

Lenskyj (1990) deplores the dearth of opportunities open to women to compete at elite levels. She remarks that some women feel there is no other alternative but to enter the arena of the male which has "concrete barriers facing qualified female players who contemplate trying out for men's team sports" (p. 239). The participants of this study, especially Toni, experienced such "concrete barriers" when trying to play on boys' teams. However, both Lulu and Toni, who played only with boys, never indicated that they would *rather* play with boys, but that they wanted to be *able* to play and that opportunities to play with girls were not available. Toni said, "It's not fair, why can't we?" when she complained about nonexistent girls' sports and offered this comment as part of her wish list (see Interview Guide), "Just like the Tigers, have all girls, against another all girls...whatever sport." Lulu commented, "I *love* this game, women's volleyball, now." Restricting women's sport opportunities may result in women trying to join men's teams, not because they prefer to play *with men*, but because they prefer to *be able to play*. Whether women would rather play with men or with women is difficult to ascertain. Even in post-Title IX times, many sports are still not offered for women's only competition, thus, in order to be able to play, girls and women continue to find themselves battling to join boys' and men's teams. At this point, then, all one can safely argue is that women seem to want to participate in sport; whether they would choose to participate with women rather than with men will not be clear until similar sports opportunities for both types of competition exist.

The overwhelming desire of these women to be able to play is evident in Billie Jean's recollection of how female students and families had to "make" her high school let them have a team because "it was the

law by that point." Lulu lamented the lack of opportunities available to her before Title IX that prohibited her from participating. She expressed disappointment that young women didn't have a sense of appreciation for their current opportunities when she said, "...all the goodies from Title IX. They just assumed it had always been that way. Well it hasn't." Sadly, despite some of the "goodies" that accompanied the passage of Title IX, even the youngest of the participants of this study have had to accomodate restrictions from participation by finding ways around it. However, the sense of loss experienced by the participants regarding particular sports they were not permitted to play and various levels that were not open to them was apparent. This is not to say that these participants did not enjoy or make the most of the opportunities they did have, just that they had to make choices that obstructed their ability to express themselves in certain sports and abbreviated a progression of excellence at various levels within the sports they were able to play.

As previously indicated, Elaine was the only participant who was able to experience her competitive sport involvement as an amateur-elite in a way that led to enormous publicity because of her record-breaking achievements. This experience was possible for Elaine because of uncommon developments in the sport of powerlifting for women. It is perplexing that Joe Zerella, President of the U. S. Powerlifting Federation, took it upon himself to organize an all women's meet (even if it was called the All American Girls' Championships) during the late 70's at a time when people weren't, as Billie Jean said, "coming out of doors to offer assistance and help to the girls who were trying to participate in sport..." One can only speculate that Elaine was on-target when she

said that the women who were competing "in the early days" were perceived as "traditional" women and were not considered threatening to the image of the sport. The story she told of the media "going a bit overboard" to present her as "feminine" lends credence to this postulate. Credit, also should be given to Elaine herself who was able to become involved with and act as Chair in an organization that was instrumental in opening doors for women to compete in the sport of powerlifting. Elaine's husband also wielded a great deal of influence because of his own achievements as a powerlifter; together, they were a formidable team.

Closely related to the participants' experiences of restrictions on participation were their perceptions that people "didn't think what we were doing was as important as the boys' program," as stated by Billie Jean, and their experiences of inequity,

Inequities Abound

The participants' perceptions that they just weren't being taken seriously, and consequently, didn't merit adequate instruction, equipment, or attention were frequently stated. Moreover, participants felt that prevailing attitudes towards women's abilities and competitive sport achievements were that they didn't begin to compare to men's.

Elaine, who seemed to express the most positive sentiments overall, relative to her ability to compete at an elite level, was still subjected to a form of marginalization of her record-breaking achievements through the media's overt concern with showing her "domestic" side. This concern, however, was perceived by Elaine to be directly related to issues of "appropriate" femininity, therefore, it is given more

attention in the next section. Still, the example shows that, even though this participant had set world records, her athletic achievements were not left to stand on their own. The media's "feminine" focus duly noted, most of Elaine's publicity was very favorable and she did not suffer the same degree of marginalization as did most of the other participants.

Another form of marginalization perceived by many of these women was that of inferior coaching. However, this is yet another frustrating issue with which Elaine did not have to contend. She received exceptional coaching since her husband had been a world class athlete himself who not only provided instruction, but also endorsed the transformation of her physique in a way that challenged "conventional" standards required to meet her goals.

Elaine seemed to be lucky. The other participants griped extensively about their experiences with coaches during much of their sport participation. Many of the participants' coaches were men and were perceived as not caring about their athletes. This was Billie Jean's view when she said, "The men who coached our team were the two men that coached the boys' team, and it was apparent that they didn't want to coach us, they didn't take us seriously, they just didn't care." Nelle was troubled by the interaction between coaches and athletes, "...and these two guys that I'm thinking of in particular that did basketball and volleyball, there was sort of these sexual tensions running, and they would play off of it. They would make comments about, you know, if there was this particularly chesty girl, they would make side comments." Katherine and Nelle both had the experience of good and bad coaches. Nelle's "only coach of value" crossed the line of trust (discussed elsewhere). Katherine recalled a male assistant coach who had been a

"world class fast pitch pitcher" and who "you could just sit and talk to for half an hour about your hitting." On the other hand her female coach who "cared about" her players demonstrated overt homonegativism leading to Katherine's perception that "she has this terrible attitude and everybody better be careful." That this same coach had also been supportive still made a significant difference to Katherine:

...our coach did neat little things for us, like she had our team picture taken right before the championship game and then she had it put on a baseball card. So this baseball card has our team photo on it, and on the back it has our names and I think our record for the season.

However, examples like this within the participants' experiences were rare.

The lack of positive role models and competent coaches in women's sport is prevalent in the literature (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1994; Griffin, 1992; Knoppers, 1987; Krane, 1996; Lenskyj, 1990; Mathes, 1982; Nelson, 1984; Theberge & Birrell, 1994). The passing of Title IX has meant fewer, not more, women coaches, as women's sport programs attract more funding and command better salaries that are attractive to male coaches. One might argue that attracting more male coaches to women's sport could result in the provision of more experienced coaches, but as Knoppers (1987) points out:

...the decline in the number of women coaches means there are fewer visible role models for women in sport and this could have a detrimental effect on female athletes. (p. 10)

The absence of women from such positions may reinforce the gender stereotyping traditionally associated with the sports world and women in general. This absence may mean not only that fewer women than men will consider coaching as a career, but also that fewer women will be able to continue their sport involvement once their own college athletic participation is over. (p. 10)

The absence of women coaches then may be said to contribute to problems with gender stereotyping including the transfer of messages of "appropriate" feminine behavior for female athletes (see next section). Moreover, this absence could lead women athletes to perceive a loss of opportunity for women to continue sport involvement which was previously discussed (see Put Me In, Coach: Participatory Restrictions).

Receiving inferior coaching was only one demonstration of marginalization for these women. Other complaints included: that equipment was falling apart, that uniforms were second-hand and didn't fit properly, schools and community papers that didn't devote as much coverage to the girls' teams as they did to the boys' teams, and practices and games that were held at the least desirable times of those available. Even the JV cheerleaders were "forced" to be at games, according to Billie Jean's experience. Their comments raise questions about the effects that these various types of marginalization can have on the quality of the women's sport experiences. In terms of a mental focus, it could be difficult to concentrate while attempting to use equipment that doesn't fit properly or is outdated. Playing in old uniforms can be embarrassing and/or uncomfortable. Playing at poorly scheduled times and days could mean a showing of a moderate level of support by fans who don't wish to be inconvenienced. Participants may feel that their needs don't matter and their achievements don't merit attention. Aside from the potential to disrupt the mental aspects of competition, physical issues of safety can occur when equipment is faulty and practice sessions or available recreation hours are held late at night, which Elaine expressed as a contributing factor "to play or not."

Inferior coaching and other forms of marginalization were perceived by the participants to be manifestations of a continuous current of condescending "attitudes" towards women in general and women athletes in particular. When administrators of sport and recreational programs don't take women seriously, they don't feel obligated to expend much energy, or money, on their concerns. The section on "Determination" in Chapter 4 listed various opportunities for which the participants had to fight to obtain. Billie Jean's experience of having to fight for the inclusion of girls teams seems to demonstrate a careless attitude by the school and its administrators toward their female students. Her experience showed that even a Title IX mandate for the inclusion of girls' sport programs was not enough; the school's hand still had to be forced. Billie Jean, an MVP athlete, had to teach an English teacher the rules of basketball so that the teacher, who "didn't have an athletic bone in her body," could be the coach. Male coaches, who had been "forced" to coach a team, "refused to do it the next year."

Perhaps administrators and coaches are not aware of the messages they are sending to aspiring female athletes, but the participants of this study perceived such negligence as evidence of a belief that women athletes are inferior. This attitude was perceived by the participants to be exhibited in other subtle ways. Women's ways of doing things were often viewed as "less than" boys' activities. Lulu spent a lot of time arguing that dance was not a "sissy" or "frou-frou" activity as she defended its physicality. Nelle broke school records in track and was still "challenged" by boys who were not even track athletes. Toni was teased and chased by opponents. These various forms of ridicule and derision are often aimed at female athletes who try to gain acceptance in sport.

While attitudes towards female athletes and the inequities they suffer are discussed at length in the sport literature (Bryson, 1987; Cahn, 1994; Chandler & Kelley, 1997; Halbert, 1997; Hall, 1984, 1996; Krane, 1994; Lensky, 1990; Nelson, 1991; Sherrington, 1996; Shifflett & Revelle, 1994; Theberge, & Birrell, 1994), Krane (1994) emphasizes that "currently, these differences are not adequately considered in sport psychology research; the context of sport and exercise behavior largely has been ignored in sport psychology (p. 395). Examining these participants' sport and play experiences within the "context" of their perceptions yielded an interesting result. Most of the participants experienced the consequences of inequities. While Nelle gave credit to her teammates for taking a "poorly coached" team into tournament play, she also commented, "We finally lost out to a team that was well-coached," and Katherine never really could "get into" basketball because of poor instruction. However, the overriding sentiment expressed by the participants, who all made the most of whatever opportunities that were available, was echoed by Katherine who said, "We overcame it, 'cause we had to."

Defining Moments: "Femininity"

Sprinter Florence Griffith-Joyner once said of her technique, "I run more like a guy than a girl." As in, "I don't throw like a girl"? Just how does a woman run? To paraphrase Sojourner Truth, Ain't she a woman? (Nelson, 1991, p. 6)

I don't mind if someone tells me I'm not good enough, but don't you dare tell me I can't play because I'm a girl (Sherrington, 1996, p. 27B, quoting Dot Richardson)

Dot Richardson is an Olympic gold-medal winning softball shortstop who says that she is willing to accept criticism about her

ability but not exclusion based solely on her gender--"because I'm a girl." Conversely, Olympic track star Florence Griffith Joyner seems to diminish a woman's ability by aligning her success with the opposite gender--"more like a guy." As discussed earlier (see Review of Literature) being "a girl" is often the only explanation girls and women receive for their exclusion from certain types of play and sport. Exclusion on the one hand, just because they're born female; exclusion on the other hand, because they play like girls. Table 3 lists similar comments made by the participants of this study that demonstrate their awareness that there were certain perceptions about what girls should or shouldn't do simply by nature of being "a girl." All of the participants were aware of these messages but didn't allow them to completely impede their physical expression. Elaine had not been "raised to think much about bodily strength" but went on to become a world-class powerlifter. Toni did not get to play with one team she tried to join, but did play with other boys teams even though she still had to convince these other teams to let her play. Billie Jean was told by a teacher she "loved" not to play basketball because the teacher told her, "girls don't do this," but went on to play in organized leagues for much of her life. Therefore, the participants of this study were aware of the messages of "appropriate" activity for girls but continued their physical activities even if it was different from that they would have chosen if the opportunities had been available.

How did the participants of this study become aware of these messages about "femininity?" As discussed earlier, family played a role that contradicted societal explanations but that also affirmed them. Billie Jean's teacher wanted her to play jump rope with the girls and not basketball with the boys, but her family was very supportive of her sport

Table 3.**BECAUSE YOU'RE A GIRL**

Participant	Comments
Lulu	...in the place where I grew up, unless you were pretty, and worked at it...that was the only thing that was considered of importance. It didn't matter too much to me what we were playing, because I was in love with the ball...my mother thought I spent too much time doing it. She thought I should have been babysitting.
Toni	...a lot of the guys didn't want me playing, and so they had to let me go, because it was too much friction. People saying, "You should be home doing girls things."
Elaine	I really was not a girl who was raised to think much about bodily strength as something that would be desirable.
Billie Jean	And that day she would not...she denied me, she would not let me physically play. "You're going to go over there with the girls."...I remember.."you're telling me I can't play because I'm a girl?"
Nelle	I played dolls and that sort of thing, but I always wanted something more active..and there was this sense that that's (sic) not quite the way it was supposed to be. But I never let it really stop me from doing that, but there was always that sense that I wasn't quite following the guidelines that I was supposed to...
Katherine	...he taught me baseball in the back yard. I had a baseball glove and we used to play catch with a baseball. But once it was time to sign me up for a league, he didn't want to push the Little League thing, trying to get a girl into the league, so he just went straight to softball, and I thought that was interesting that you know, he made...all of the sudden it was, "This is what you do because you're a girl."

involvement, going so far as to fight for the implementation of girls' teams in high school. However, Billie Jean's mother didn't like it when Billie Jean played all out with her boyfriend. This may have been a result of the common fear that women's athletic prowess will diminish the interest of men ((Cahn, 1994; Costa & Guthrie, 1994; Del Rey, 1978; Festle, 1996; Mangan & Park, 1987; Mrozek, 1987; Stanley, 1996; Willis, 1982).

In the next section (see Perceptions of "Homophobia") the participants talked about people's perceptions of female athletes as lesbians which leads them to fear that they might be perceived as such regardless of their sexual orientation. As discussed in the literature, fear of recrimination as a result of sexual orientation can lead women athletes to project a heterosexy image to allay concerns (Bernard, 1971; Burroughs, Ashburn, & Seeborn, 1995; Boutilier & San Giovanni, 1983; Cahn, 1994; Cayleff, 1996; Del Rey, 1977; Festle, 1996; Galst, 1997; Griffin; 1992; Halbert, 1997; Hargreaves, 1982, 1985; Holmlund; 1989; Knoppers, 1987; Krane, 1996; Lenskyj, 1986; Nelson, 1991, 1994; Wrisberg, 1996; Wughalter, 1978). The participants provided examples of some athletes' who were concerned with show-casing "the ever-present boyfriend" (as noted by Billie Jean) as well as coaches who mandated that "you must be dressed femininely" (as Katherine recalled). The concern with presenting the heterosexy images supports the perception that the more "feminine" you are, the less gay you must be. This perception is acknowledged by Lenskyj (1994):

The social construction of the boundary between masculine and feminine involves a deliberate blurring of the distinctions between gender and sexual orientation as well as a blatantly circular way of arguing. In this line of thought, feminine women are assumed to be heterosexual because they behave and present themselves in a

way that men judge to be conventionally attractive and appropriate for heterosexual women. Unfeminine (or masculine or "mannish") women must be lesbian, so the argument goes, because they behave and present themselves in a way that men judge to be inappropriate and unattractive. Thus the characteristics of femininity are socially constructed from a White, middle-class stereotype of female heterosexual attractiveness. (p. 362)

The Literature Review (see Media: The Enforcer) presented an overview of the ways that the media enforces and imparts the image of "femininity" ((Baker & Boyd, 1997; Cole & Hribar, 1995; Creedon, 1994; Daddario, 1994; Davis, 1997; Duncan, 1990; Duncan & Brummett, 1993; Duncan, Messner, Williams, & Jensen, 1994; Hilliard, 1984; Holmlund, 1989; Kane & Greendorfer, 1994; Luebke, 1989; Lumpkin & Williams, 1991; McGregor, 1989; Pollock, 1990; Scott, 1993). Elaine's experience provides an outstanding example of the role media play in promoting sports women as "traditional" women in spite of, in her case, the ability to surpass world strength records for women. On the whole, Elaine was very satisfied with the positive publicity she received but also stated, "There were incidents in which I really felt that the media's obsession of trying to portray me as *still* feminine went beyond what it should." How did it go beyond? Elaine remembered, "They were wanting to show me cooking" and "I sat there and pretended to be doing needlepoint." Elaine's experience mirrors the examples within the literature that show the media's emphasis on disseminating an "appropriate" feminine image.

Although these women persisted in engaging in sport and recreation in spite of the messages they received, the effects that their perceptions of "appropriate" femininity had on the participants' experiences should not be minimized. The depth to which the

participants experienced internal conflict as they challenged the traditional views of femininity cannot be underestimated. When women use a term like "wound" or muse that there is "something inherently wrong with me" to explain the feelings caused by these gender conflicts, that should send warning signals to those concerned about the effect of sport participation on the development of women's athletes' concept of identity (see Table 4).

Girls and women who are told not to do something because they are a girl or that their choices regarding personal appearance and behavior are not "feminine" may have feelings of self-rejection. Nelle said, "Most of my life I've felt out of step in all areas of my life..." and "...there's something inherently wrong with me for not fitting into that role." If a young girl is told not to do something because it isn't what girls do, with no further explanation, and the girl really wants to exhibit this behavior, then she may, in fact, get the message that there is something "inherently" different about her. If she is not permitted to do something only by nature of her biology, her sex, then how is she supposed to feel about "being" a girl, since an overriding perception of her being is that it prohibits her natural expression. Billie Jean remembered being told, "Girls don't do this," but "this" was exactly what she wanted to do. Her question, "You're telling me I can't play because I'm a girl?," was not expressed aloud but directed inwardly, demonstrating a 10-year old's confusion at being denied personal expression by nature of her sex. The identity conflict of these women becomes more apparent when, now as adults, they vacillate between their perceptions of society's ideas of femininity as opposed to their own.

Table 4.

FEMININITY FALL-OUT

Participant	Comments
Lulu	It just made me mad. Because I grew up in a society where women weren't given very much credit for anything.
Toni	...it felt bad, especially when they teased you. I got teased a lot, even from the girls, and I'd go in my room sometimes and just sit and cry.
Elaine	There were incidents in which I really felt that the media's obsession of trying to portray me as <i>still</i> feminine went beyond what it should.
Billie Jean	...the fact that I don't remember very many things about fifth grade, but the fact that I remember that very clearly again emphasizes what a deep...wound?...wound's an OK word...what a deep wound that made.
Nelle	There was always the sense that "this isn't quite right"...that there's something inherently wrong with me for not fitting into that role.
Katherine	...I think people look at me strangely because I have short hair, and I'm a woman, and I think that's still...kind of abnormal...I can't tell you how many times I've been called "sir" in public. Just, like, in line at a bank and the teller is saying, "Can I help you sir?" And I'm like...are you talking to me? ...there are always girls on the team that would not want to get bruises before the prom...So I remember things like that and thinking, "My god, we're going to play games with girls who are concerned with these things instead of turning a double play."

Palzkill (1990) referred to the development of a "neutral" gender identity on the part of girls in order to accommodate their desires, not seeing themselves as like "other" girls, but not like boys either. It cannot be assumed that the women of this study developed a "neutral" gender identity, although they did seem to eventually accept that both masculine and feminine traits could inhabit the same body and in this way, perhaps, reconcile the opposing views. Katherine felt that "sex doesn't inherently have a gender; just because you're male doesn't mean you have to be masculine." She further related her perception that having both traits is better: "That whether you're male or female, you need to have what we've come to define as both qualities of masculine and feminine."

Therefore, it seems, the participants found ways of accepting that they could be girls and still want to do "boys' things." Even Elaine, the former "Betty Crocker Homemaker of Tomorrow" recipient, said that she had "never thought of bodily strength as desirable" but later made becoming one of the strongest women in the world her goal. She admitted, "It's hard to know exactly what was the trigger that allowed all that to become acceptable" but surmised that it probably had a lot to do with her husband's support and the media's approval. It would be difficult to "know exactly" what made any of the choices of expressions of physicality acceptable for the participants of this study. The support of family and community was counted as valuable. The absence of the media's stamp of approval that Elaine received was noticed by the other participants and gives some indication that acknowledge is welcomed but not necessary.

Perceptions of "Homophobia"

The complications of reconciling societal expectations of "femininity" with the participants' definitions of the term were exacerbated for those women of this study who openly identified themselves as gay/lesbian. This is not to say that perceptions of homophobia were non-existent for those who either were heterosexual or who chose not to discuss their sexual orientation. Participants were asked for their own interpretations of the term "homophobia" and their perceptions of it in relation to their sport and physical activity experience. All participants expressed both their own views and those they perceived to be evident in the larger context of societal manifestations experienced through family, coaches, community, administrators, fans and other athletes.

Dewar (1993) stated that "many successful women are not 'unjustly' suspected of being lesbians--they are lesbians" and every participant's experience showed agreement, in one way or another, with Dewar's declaration (Table 5). And so what of the lesbian presence in sport? As discussed in the Literature Review (see *Homonegativism: Ending the Silence*), Griffin (1992) and other scholars have indicated that silence is one of the most pervasive and harmful manifestations of homonegativism and that it contributes to its continuation. Silence within women's sport leads to fear and cloaking behavior as women get the message that disclosure of their sexual identity can result in discriminatory behaviors towards them (Cahn, 1994; Cayleff, 1996; Griffin, 1992; Guthrie, 1982; Hall, 1996; Krane, 1996; Lenskyj, 1992; Nelson, 1991, 1994; Pharr, 1988; Rotella & Murray, 1991; Woods, 1992; Wrisberg, 1996; Zwerman, 1994). Table 6 provides examples of

Table 5. SAY IT AIN'T SO - LESBIANS IN SPORT

Participant	Comments
Lulu	...in the last two years I was teaching, it was just something that everybody felt that they, uh, wanted to be "out," because in that way they wouldn't be having to hide all this stuff and everything, and there was nothing going to happen to them as far as the job was concerned.
Toni	You can almost tell when you meet somebody...especially when I was going to join the Fillies, and that was all football. They were all gay.
Elaine	When lifting first started, there was a group of women who came to the meet from (city)...and it was basically a gay women's gym. And they had a team that entered the contest that year. And I remember that there was a lot of discussion about this group of women who were pretty overt about their sexuality and their relationships...
Billie Jean	I think a lot of people have this perception of the lesbian PE teacher and the lesbian ball players...our society has that perception...The thing that we have to acknowledge is that there <i>are</i> a lot of lesbians in sport, and a lot of lesbians in physical education, of course, there are also a lot of lesbians in social work, and nursing, and farming...
Nelle	There's certainly...there certainly seemed to be a lot of lesbians in...the whole realm of athletics. I had no idea.
Katherine	I had one teammate who I knew was gay, and she was the only...I knew there were other gay players on the team, but she was the only one who was out at the time, and I always felt just a little uncomfortable, because I'd never been with someone who was so out and open, but nobody really talked about it at the same time, and our coach certainly did not..that's not something that she needed to know about! ...I think gradually becoming more aware through college that there was this stereotype that all female athletes must be gay...

Table 6.**WHY HIDE?**

Participant	Comments
Lulu	But I think, you know, down through the years people were mortified at having certain things about them revealed, because you were definitely in danger of losing your job.
Toni	So the best thing...we just don't say nothing about it...and they do what they want, and I do what I want. But they still love me, it doesn't matter...
Elaine	And I guess that, like a lot of people of my era, I was real concerned at first that everybody not misconstrue that all the women powerlifters there were somehow gay women because that was not a message that we necessarily wanted to send, because we...I think partly because we were trying to get the sport established.
Billie Jean	...there were those girls who did everything they could to make sure that no one thought they were gay, whether it was dressing in a more quote/unquote feminine way, or making sure that the boyfriend was ever apparent. Or, you know, make up or...who made a very strong statement. Those people, the straight people seem much more concerned with it than the lesbians because they simply, in a lot of ways, didn't want to talk about it at all, and would much rather stay in the closet and not ever bring it up.
Nelle	And with the advent of the rumors surrounding what was going on, I had remarkably few friends. How about none?...People just dropped off, people just didn't want to deal with me. And I actually had the experience of...I was desperate at that point to prove I was a good person. No matter what was going on, if any...it's not like I would have admitted to anything at that point...
Katherine	Players who were gay talking about how she could never know, and how she found out about one player, who played four years maybe before my freshman year, she found out that she was gay and kicked her off, not just because of that, but because of some other things she did, but that was also part of her reasoning...so I knew she had this antagonism with players who were going to be out, or be..I guess this player...I don't know if there were other personality clashes with her but I know this was part of it.

observations made by the participants of this study on the importance of “closeting” sexual identity. Some of their comments refer to the participants themselves and others are their perceptions of the cloaking behavior of friends and teammates.

Within the comments are evidence of apologetics and concern for presenting the “heterosexy” image (Bernard, 1971; Burroughs, Ashburn, & Seebom, 1995; Boutilier & San Giovanni, 1983; Cahn, 1994; Cayleff, 1996; Del Rey, 1977; Festle, 1996; Galst, 1997; Griffin, 1992; Halbert, 1997; Hargreaves, 1982, 1985; Holmlund, 1989; Knoppers, 1987; Krane, 1996; Lenskyj, 1986; Nelson, 1991, 1994; Wrisberg, 1996; Wughalter, 1978). Katherine’s coach whom she described as “very homophobic” made the team members wear visors instead of ball caps and made players dress “femininely.” Billie Jean recalled mostly the “straight” girls being overly concerned about being perceived as gay and so, overdid the display of “feminine” accoutrements. Nelle, who had been frustrated because she was “hair impaired,” remembered, “And there was this rival within the school, another really good athlete, and she did happen to have the full-bodied blonde hair, real cute...that was dreadful for me, that I had to compete with that.” Therefore, it seems that Nelle not only had to compete with her rival athletically but felt she lost in the contest of “femininity.” Apologetics and presenting the heterosexy image were important means of assuaging even the perception of homosexuality among these women athletes and were used as a response to fears of recrimination.

The preference for hiring male coaches is one example of how recrimination against women athletes has been manifested (Griffin, 1992; Knoppers, 1987; Krane, 1996; Lenskyj, 1990; Mathes, 1982;

Nelson, 1984; Theberge & Birrell, 1994). The lack of female coaches has already been discussed (see *Inequities Abound*) as viewed by the participants as one example of their perceptions of marginalization. It also relates, however, to homonegativism because male coach preference is a response to the fear that lesbian coaches might recruit young girls that will then be influenced to adopt the coach's sexual orientation.

This issue is problematic as it relates to this study because of various experiences reported by the participants themselves. Most notable was Nelle's experience with her female coach when she was still a Senior in high school. Additionally, Toni told of disclosing her sexual identity to her PE teacher because she was also "that way" and Billie Jean, initially self-described as "homophobic," eventually considered that there were other "options" for her sexual identity. Is this evidence that impressionable young women can be "converted?" A brief examination of the experiences of Toni and Billie Jean with more discussion devoted to Nelle's experience is offered in the following paragraphs.

Toni grew up playing with boys because there were no girls' teams available to her; all of her coaches were men. She told stories of carrying girl schoolmates' books in grade school and slowly began to understand that her emotional/sexual attraction was to girls, not boys. At sixteen, she disclosed her sexual preference to her Physical Education teacher because she had no one else to talk to about it. Woods (1992) calls this "risk-taking" behavior when someone chooses to share her "secret" with someone else and that someone is usually a person who is perceived to be of the same sexual identity. Toni's teacher did not approach Toni regarding this issue, Toni approached the teacher. Therefore, it seems

that Toni had already recognized her attraction to girls prior to approaching her PE teacher.

Billie Jean had both female and male coaches during her sport career and wasn't very happy about the competency level of either gender. She admits that growing up in a small, rural community meant she adopted most of whatever prejudices were there and that she was somewhat "homophobic" as a result. She dated boys and assumed that "eventually boys and girls got together." Billie Jean not only heard "homophobic" comments from a male coach conveying an opinion against homosexuality but had herself made negative comments such as, "No way, that's so gross..." in response to innuendos made about the sexual orientation of a female coach. If this coach did happen to be gay, Billie Jean didn't believe it, was appalled by the suggestion of it, and gave no description of having been "recruited" by this coach. In fact, Billie Jean said, "And it was down the road before I allowed myself to explore my own preferences rather than just accept society's preference."

For Toni and Billie Jean, their exploration of sexual identity options seemed to be a result of self-exploration of their developing awareness of personal desires rather than of predatory behavior at the hands of blatantly "misbehaving" lesbian coaches. Nelle, was the only participant who had a relationship with a female coach that might be accused of overstepping boundaries. This may leave the door open for some to affirm that Nelle's experience is the proof of lesbian predators. Nelle had played for both female and male coaches and, like Billie Jean, didn't feel many of them were of any value. Frustrated with inferior coaching, Nelle convinced a female coach "of value" to coach her softball team and, as Nelle said, "inadvertently orchestrated my own trauma"

because it was this coach with whom Nelle had her affair. Interestingly, Nelle seemed to try to take some of the responsibility for the ensuing relationship.

Did this coach influence or impose her own sexual identity upon Nelle because of her influential position? My position is no. Nelle stated, "Growing up I had crushes on both men and women..." In response to this, some might argue that many young children have "crushes" on both men and women but don't grow up to become gay. Nelle's difference was that she continued to be attracted to people of both genders as an adult. Nelle had other relationships with women but is now married, obviously (since our nation has not approved same-sex marriages), to a man. Nelle said that even today, despite being married, she is aware that her attraction for a person "has always been more holistic than anything defined by masculinity or femininity. It's the essence of who the person is that makes them attractive on a both emotional and physical level for me."

Did Nelle's coach take advantage of her "role model" status and overstep her bounds as a coach by having this relationship? My position is yes. Some will point to Nelle's relationship with her coach and "blame" the coach for Nelle's bisexuality. I think, however, that what is more evident is that sexuality lies on a continuum and the participants of this study cover the full range of it. The real issue of Nelle's relationship is that the coach went beyond appropriate levels of intimacy between a coach and an athlete. Mariah Burton-Nelson (1994) reveals her own relationship with a male coach and devotes an entire chapter to the problems inherent in coach/athlete and student/teacher relationships. Her discussion is primarily about male/female

relationships. The real issue is not whether or not the coach or teacher is gay, but whether or not the relationship should be occurring irrespective of its sexual orientation.

Elaine disclosed that she had met her husband in college, that he was a "member of the faculty." This relationship is only presented at this point because of its relevance to this discussion. Elaine's story is different, however, not because she and a professor she met subsequently married and have stayed married for twenty-some years, but because she was over age eighteen at the time the relationship developed. Yet, Elaine said that the relationship was considered to be "kind of a scandal at the time" though neither of the parties was married to another person at the time of the relationship. To honor the feminist perspective as described by Olesen (1994) that asks for a "full account of the researchers's views, thinking and conduct" (p. 165), I must say that I also had a relationship as a senior in high school with a teacher, which may be considered an example similar to Nelle's of the prevalence of sexual exploitation that can occur as an abuse of trust by people of either gender.

Elaine's relationship with a faculty member occurred between consenting adults. However, my relationship, and those discussed by Nelson (1994), which includes Nelson's personal experience of a liaison with her coach, that occur between males and females, tended to be more acceptable because society accepts the possibility that it may lead to a "real" relationship and marriage. Another example would be that of the Olympic track athlete Jackie-Joyner Kersee who dated and then married her coach. As Nelson (1994) states, "marriage seems to legitimize coach-athlete sex" (p. 173). What this suggests is that a same-sex relationship

between a coach and an athlete cannot be "legitimized" by marriage--same-sex marriages are not recognized or legal. Therefore, it seems that for same-sex relationships the focus is always on the relationship itself as "abnormal," not on the issue of sexual exploitation. If the focus remains on the real issue of sexual exploitation, then measures can be taken to ensure the emotional safety of athletes and students to prevent the occurrence of sexual exploitation whether it results in a heterosexual or homosexual relationship. Nelson (1994) states that "about 96% of sexual exploitation occurs between a man in power and a woman under his guidance" (p. 189). Despite this, Nelson (1994) notes that stereotypes of lesbians as predators continues to be used to harm women's athletics:

Men also use lesbian accusations as a negative recruiting tool, scaring parents away from lesbian "predators." "You wouldn't want your daughter to play for that team," they caution. Meanwhile, all indications are that if you want your daughter not to succumb to sexual abuse, she'll be safer with a female coach. (p. 189)

A great deal of discussion has been devoted to this issue of sexual exploitation, especially regarding Nelle's relationship, because it lies at the heart of this study. The participants' experiences were laden with messages regarding "appropriate" femininity and perceptions of "homophobia" from fans, coaches, administrators and even family. The link between "femininity" and "homophobia" occurs because a conventionally "feminine" athlete is more likely to be assumed to be straight. Being perceived as gay is undesirable because it can have consequences for athletes and coaches that further contribute to the various restrictions, discrimination and marginalization indicated in this study. The lack of female coaches and role models is in part due to the fear that hiring women who *might* be lesbian will result in more athletes

who can be converted to lesbianism who will then become coaches who will then become predators and the cycle goes on and on. Fear of negative consequences is translated into silence and repression.

Katherine expressed fear for her teammates when she realized that her coach's homonegative views could harm them and remembered thinking, "Gosh, she has this terrible attitude, and everybody better be careful." Elaine feared that if people had the perception that "all the women powerlifters there were somehow gay women" it would hurt the development of the sport in its early stages. Nelle experienced so many repercussions as a result of her affair that they are hard to summarize. Most importantly, Nelle, a woman who always felt "out of step" and who was able to gain acceptance and approval through sport, lost all community support and became alienated from many people including her family. If Nelle's coach had been male, would her family and the community rallied around her in recognition that the coach was guilty of sexual exploitation and that Nelle should not be blamed? Would they have just ignored the affair completely? These are questions with no definitive answer but one wonders. What becomes much more clear regarding these women's perceptions of "homophobia" is that their fears of its consequences appeared to be well-grounded. This pervasive fear that homonegativism generates can have devastating consequences for women in sport and recreation, whether or not these women are heterosexual or homosexual. Therefore, this issue rightfully needs to be addressed by persons at all levels of women's sport.

The Faces of Determination

Determination is the theme that runs like a current throughout all of the participants' experiences because it is the mental response that they used to directly challenge or circumvent their frustrations. The participants consistently demonstrated a willingness to persist in their attempts to be included, to fight discrimination and marginalization, to define for themselves what is or is not "feminine," and to prevail despite a system that they perceived to be homophobic as they recognized its potential to cause harm to women athletes regardless of their own sexual orientation.

Lulu and her fellow colleagues worked to implement a "better" physical education program. When an opportunity presented itself to learn a discipline in which she could participate, Lulu didn't hesitate but became a pioneer when she earned her black belt, one of the first women to do so in the nation. Toni had no opportunities to play on girls' teams so she fought, and was finally accepted, onto the boys' teams. The boys laughed at her until they saw her play, and then they knocked on her door to ask her to join them, calling "Toni" in the sing-song way that kids do, because she had gained their respect. Elaine set goals to break strength records and succeeded and then became prominent in the organization of women's powerlifting. Billie Jean, her fellow students, and their parents fought for the organization of girls' school teams. As a result of winning this battle, Billie Jean, a self-admitted "jock," was able to earn MVP status during her athletic career in high school. Nelle was a four-letter athlete in high school who was recruited to play on a city-wide, all-star team and who, despite the unforeseen consequences, took it upon herself to recruit a valuable coach. Katherine used the threat of

an unpublished editorial, shown to administrators, to get better equipment for women athletes and, consequently, the team was able to focus on excelling at the game which helped lead them to championship tournaments. These and other accomplishments are important because they show that the participants were not willing to sit back and accept the status quo; they took ownership of their experiences. Perhaps, they shouldn't have had to contend with restrictions and discrimination, as Katherine had stated, but the participants' efforts helped to make changes and open doors for other women so that they, in turn, would possibly have less to contend with in their own sport experiences. "Attitudes is the key" was Katherine's perception of the primary impediment to women's sport being taken seriously; she thought that views of women's sport and ways of playing as inferior must be changed for progress to occur. Though the actions of the participants were instrumental to the transformation of their experiences in numerous ways, it was truly their own attitudes, their love of being *able* to play and their determination to have at least some opportunities that stood out in their experiences (Table 7).

The attitude of determination continues in these participants' experiences today. Lulu is making the most of the opportunities that exist today that had not been present during her youth by learning new sports and competing in the Senior Olympics. Toni has beaten her alcohol abuse problem though she concedes that it is a battle won "one day at a time." She also suffers from cancer but never conveys a "poor me" attitude when talking about it. Nelle holds a public seat and has the ability to make political changes that reflect her personal views

Table 7.

ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING

Participant	Comments
Lulu	I always could hold my own and I just never wanted anyone telling me what I could do. And I never had any guff from anybody, really. I was just...didn't have the outlook that I was expecting it, and maybe that's the reason I didn't get it.
Toni	I was the only girl when I played with any of them. Even the other teams, you know, they'd laugh until I got out there. Then they'd quit laughing, because I was out there to <i>play</i>.
Elaine	And became very, very interested in that, in that whole process of, you know, setting a goal, reaching the goal, seeing what that felt like, and also sort of pushing...sort of pushing my sense of what was possible.
Billie Jean	...but I wouldn't trade the opportunity to play, even <i>with</i> all that stuff. Yeah, I wouldn't trade it. It was great.
Nelle	I've come to a point where I feel much more secure about the things in life that move me, the things that I do well, the things that I can contribute to our community...that I'm more secure about standing up for things that don't make sense and not buying into, not being swayed by what society says...
Katherine	I couldn't say that anything like that carried over onto the field...stuff that was a little annoying because you knew that you deserved better, but it didn't carry over... ...Yeah, we were discriminated against and, you know, we deserved better, but basically, we overcame it because we had to.

against prejudice and bigotry. Billie Jean, Elaine and Katherine participate in sport education, so they have found their own way to continue their involvement in sport.

Summary

The findings of this study suggest that there are similarities within the experiences of the participants of this study as well as differences. Moreover, the issues that emerged within their experiences often corresponded with those identified in the extant literature. Despite these threads, however, the dearth of information relative to personal experiences of women sport participants needs to be addressed. Additionally, the link between women's sport experiences within the context of larger society has implications for sport and exercise psychology and are presented in the next section.

Recommendations and Conclusions

As indicated throughout this study, the perceptions and experiences of the participants of this study were not intended to be generalized to all women who participate in sport and recreational activities. However, the concerns within and descriptions of the experiences of these six participants open doors for future research to examine the ways that women's expressions of physicality are shaped by the context in which they are performed. As suggested by Krane (1994):

While some may argue that this is the domain of sport sociology, not sport psychology, context seems essential to understanding the different experiences of athletes when attempting to understand their psychological states, especially in applied sport psychology. (p. 395)

The findings of this study concur with this statement which suggests many implications for individuals concerned with enhancing both the female athlete's general experience of physical activity and her ability to maximize her performance in particular. To illustrate, suppose a female athlete with a great deal of technical skill in her sport is having trouble with her performance. The coach and sport psychology consultant may attempt to devise strategies and suggest performance enhancement techniques for her to practice. In this example, what they are unaware of, however, is that the athlete's primary impediment to performance is that she has been receiving external messages from family and friends that her all-out style of play is going to alienate her from the attention of boys, and peers even tease her when they ask if she's trying to be like those "other" serious women athletes, you know, "the dykes." Ignorance of the athlete's deeper concerns could result in the coach's and consultant's continued focus on trying to enhance aspects of the athlete's mental focus that have nothing to do with the contextual influences that are affecting her mental state. In other words, if a sport psychology consultant does not get to the heart of the athlete's experience, namely, possible fears and self-doubts related to society's expectations, then the attempts to implement a performance intervention program will not be very effective, no matter how elegantly it is constructed.

The participants of this study perceived countless messages of "femininity" that opposed their desires to play certain sports, questioned the intensity with which they played, and even created doubts regarding their personal appearance. They also reported their perceptions of overt homonegativism that generated a climate of fear either for themselves or

their fellow athletes. The possibility that other women might be experiencing similar issues that could impact their sport opportunities and experiences needs to be further examined from the sport and exercise psychology perspective.

The use of the feminist perspective in research that examines the sport experiences of women is one way of doing this. The reasons for this have been examined in this study (see Literature Review) and include valuing women's experiences in their own right without comparing them to those of men's as the "norm", eliminating sex-related biases in research, examining the relationship between gender and power, and considering the researcher's own beliefs and values and their effects on the research process. The feminist perspective also calls for action-related efforts such as the development programs and workshops designed to increase awareness of women athletes' issues and ways to enhance their experiences. Some suggestions for ways of doing this, particularly as they relate to issues of homonegativism, have been provided in this study (see Review of Literature).

While it is important to consider what is being done wrong in both applied sport and exercise psychology and its research in order to make corrective amendments, it is also time to develop research that looks at what is being done to encourage or enhance women's sport experiences. This study showed that family members played a crucial role in both instruction and support of their athletic involvement, yet very little attention has been paid to this influential factor in the research literature. Much attention is given to the need for parent involvement in children's academic success and various strategies have been designed to harness this support. With regard to girls' sport, however, the need to

generate family support becomes more complicated. If sport is considered to be primarily the domain of masculine expression, how will anyone learn to take seriously the desires of girls and women to expressive their physicality?

All of the women of this study expressed the pure joy they experienced by participating in sport and recreation. Remarks such as "I was in love with the ball" and "I came out of the womb knowing how to throw a ball," as well as the expressions of their disappointment when they were denied opportunities demonstrate that the ability to express themselves physically can mean just as much to females as to males. The participants of this study experienced primarily a climate of family support. For some of the participants this support was overt family involvement. At times, some of the participants' family members expressed concerns related to the seriousness of sporting involvement. However, most of the participants did not experience direct family interference in their sport and play. Why do some women experience family support and instruction while others experience complete opposition? Unless studies are performed to examine the role of family members, no answers will be provided. It is suggested that the why and how of family transmission of evolving views of "femininity" be examined to determine ways of encouraging family support for women's sport involvement for future generations of young girls and women.

The implications of this study have so many layers that it is difficult to uncover them all. The depth to which the participants experienced various issues suggests that many of these issues should be examined individually with research designed to explore women's sport experiences as they relate to the field of sport and exercise psychology.

Differences within experiences regarding race and ethnicity also need to be explored individually. Not one African-American woman invited to participate in this study was willing to share her experience. Those asked indicated that queries regarding "homophobia" made them uncomfortable since they perceived it to be a topic that was "taboo" or "off-limits" for discussion in their community or just not relevant to their experience. Perceptions of homosexuality and manifestations of homonegativism vary between ethnic groups and these differences should be acknowledged. Currently, studies are emerging regarding the lesbian experience in sport (see Review of Literature). Heterosexual women also experience consequences of homonegativism as evidenced in this study and, perhaps, straight women's experiences of the phenomenon should also be looked at more closely. Possible questions that need to be raised include those such as: how does "negative" recruiting (practice of "accusing" other teams and coaches of being lesbian) influence heterosexual women's choices for collegiate play (or does it)?; how is team cohesion affected when straight and gay athletes play together?; do young women who have already made the self-identification as "straight" avoid *certain* sports because they are afraid of alienating the attention of men?; is the opposite true for young women who are lesbian or who are uninterested in the attention of men? These are only some possible areas of inquiry.

An unexpected outcome of this study was the issue of possible sexual exploitation by the coach. Information continues to emerge regarding the extent to which these relationships occur, whether they be same- or opposite-sex. The question still unanswered is, "Why are these relationships reported so often and what can be done to prevent them?"

Prevention research must focus not only on the role of the organizational structure of athletics but also on the mental states of the athletes who are experiencing the abuse.

To summarize, the participants of this study perceived that they were restricted, marginalized, and harassed, suffered from homonegativism, and experienced the adverse effects of all this on their self-image. The participants also received support and expressed great joy and determination for their involvement in sport and recreation activity. These perceptions were reported by all the participants although they were experienced to varying degrees. The purpose of the field of sport and exercise psychology is to maximize the sport participation experiences of athletes whether it relates to the overall quality of experience or to specific mental strategies that affect performance results. This purpose cannot be fulfilled unless more attention, awareness, research and education is devoted to the particular issues that might affect the sport experiences of women which occur within a social context that can have either a positive or negative influence on both process and outcome.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE CULTURAL STUDIES IN EDUCATION

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of the competitive female athlete and to provide a description of the sport participation experiences of women as they relate to the participants' own definitions of "masculine" and "feminine." Additionally, the study is designed to explore the participants' personal definitions of "homophobia" and to determine whether or not they perceive homophobia to be evident within their past or present athletic participation. This study will be used as part of a doctoral dissertation and will be submitted to a scholarly journal for publication.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be required to respond to a number of conversational, open-ended questions; only you and I will be present. The interview will be conducted in your home, by phone, or at another location mutually agreed upon by you and I. The length of the interview is up to you, but is anticipated to be approximately 2 hours in length. A tape recorder will be used to allow a word-for-word transcription. All transcription will be immediately erased upon completion of transcription. You will be provided with a copy of the completed transcription to allow you to make corrections or delete material you do not want to be included in the study. You may be contacted, by phone, after the initial study to allow me to ask additional questions or request clarification of some material.

I anticipate no risks to you as a result of your participation in the study. I hope that you will benefit from the interview process as you reflect and respond to the questions. A final report will be made available to you once the study is completed. All information related to this study will be kept in a locked file cabinet. Additionally, all signed consent forms will be stored for 3 years past the completion of this study in a locked file cabinet at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Your identity will be kept confidential. A pseudonym will be used to identify your interview. Your name will not be used in any published documents without your approval.

You may ask questions at any time and may withdraw from this study at any time for any reason without penalty or prejudice toward you.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the explanation of this study and agree to participate.

For further information about this study
or your role in it contact:

Signature _____
Print Name _____
Date _____

Maria Kwiatkowski
or Dr. Craig Wrisberg
University of Tennessee
Cultural Studies Unit
1914 Andy Holt Avenue
Knoxville, TN 37996-2700
Phone: (423) 974-5111

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me about your experience of how you got started participating in sport. Keep in mind as you're doing this that whatever you have to say is what I am interested in.
2. Have society's expectations of women influenced your sports participation?
3. If so, how have you tried to respond to these influences?
4. Tell me about your interpretation of the terms "femininity"/"masculinity" and any experiences that relate to your perceptions of these terms.
5. Tell me about your interpretation of the term "homophobia" and any experiences that relate to your perceptions of this term.
6. If you had a wish list, what would you like to see done in women's sports that would make it more enjoyable for you to participate related to the issues we have discussed?

DEBRIEFING:

Participant asked if there is anything she would like to add that has not already been discussed. She is also asked about her impressions of the interview process and may ask questions and offer insights that could assist the interviewer in continuing development of her interviewing skills.

VITA

Maria Kwiatkowski was born in Detroit, Michigan, on August 10, 1960. She attended St. Andrew High School and graduated in 1978. Maria spent two years in the Liberal Arts program at Wayne State University but later transferred to the Detroit College of Business where she received her bachelor's degree in Business Administration in 1986.

From 1983 to 1991, Maria was employed by the City of Detroit Government culminating with the title of Senior Budget Analyst. In 1992, Maria moved to Las Vegas, Nevada and worked for the municipal government there as a Financial Analyst. During this time, Maria turned her weight training hobby into a profession and began entering professional bodybuilding competitions. This background in physical fitness as well as dance instigated her interest in the field of Human Performance and Sports Studies, leading to her move to East Tennessee to study in the field of Sport and Exercise Psychology.

As this field is now located within the area of Cultural Studies in Education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Maria began to focus on women's issues in sport and exercise based on personal experience and issues expressed to her by the clients of her personal training business and by other women athletes.

Maria received her Master's degree in Sport and Exercise Psychology in August, 1995. She is a member of the honor societies of Phi Kappa Phi and Pi Lambda Theta. She received her Doctor of Philosophy degree, graduating summa cum laude, with a major emphasis in Sport and Exercise Psychology in May, 1998.