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The Post Title IX Portrayal of Female Athletes in the Media

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Abstract

This thesis looks to elaborate on recent studies done by Michael Messner, Cheryl Cooky, Robin H. Hextrum and other scholars regarding the exclusion and misrepresentation of female athletes and women's sport in the media since the enactment of Title IX in 1972. This thesis provides an overview of the history of Title IX, a detailed analysis of the ways which female athletes are portrayed in the media and trends that have occurred based on the coverage women's sports have received since 1972. The research included and data collected for this thesis are based on ESPN's SportsCenter and the headlines on the NY Times sports website. This thesis uses the method of coding to properly evaluate qualitative and quantitative data collected from both mediums, to allow for further discussion and possible suggestions, regarding the hope for an increase in airtime and a more accurate portrayal of women's sports in the future of the media.

Introduction

This thesis looks directly at the post-Title IX representations of female athletes in the media. Since the enactment of Title IX in 1972, the number of girls competing in sport has skyrocketed along with the popularity of female sport. Despite the progress of women's sport in terms of numbers, the media representations and air time of women's sport has seen substantially less change. Patricia Hill Collins built on the already established hegemony framework by arguing that "dominant groups control social institutions in society, such as schools, the media and popular culture, which produce controlling images that are filled with stereotypes about subordinate groups" (Collins in Cooky et al., 144). That is exactly what has happened through the decline in women's representation within sports in the media. Throughout my thesis I will discuss the question of whether women's sport will truly ever reach the magnitude that men's sport has accomplished in regards to media coverage. Female athletes are largely ignored throughout all media outlets and when they are pictured it is often at the expense of their athletic talent. Their representations range from statistical analysis of various ESPN television shows, sports newspaper

columns, and collegiate sport websites to the stereotypical portrayals of female athletes as sexualized, motherly, feminine figures separated from their sport.

Title IX opened the floodgates for female athletes of all ages to receive the same chance as men to compete in the sports they love. They have not achieved equality, however, the purpose of this thesis is to address the issues of women's sport in the media since the creation of Title IX and to propose changes that will dispel the stereotypical notions of women's sport conveyed by the media, to match up to the numbers of women competing. My thesis has analyzed previous studies done by Cooky, Messner and Hextrum (2009, 2013) on the amount of media coverage given to women's sport, as well as conducting my own media analysis over a 20 day period of ESPN's Sports Center and 10 day period of NY TIMES headlines. As the sociologists studying this topic before me have discovered, I have found that despite the numbers of women competing in athletics today, the media continues to convey a message to audiences that the sport is solely to be by, for, and about men (Cooky, 1). The portrayals of female athletes in sport or the lack thereof need to be dismantled and contested as they contribute to a reestablishment of narrow cultural codes of heterosexual femininity that for generations has been restrictive for all females (Messner, 2002: 102).

Chapter I Literature Review

The History of Title IX

It has been argued by many reputable sociologists that dominant groups control social institutions in our society, including but not limited to schools, the media and popular culture. Patricia Hill Collins delved deeper into this framework known as hegemonic theory to note that these dominant groups who control the media and popular culture use these outlets to reproduce and stabilize controlling images that assert stereotypes about subordinated groups (Cooky et al. 2010). The representation of female athletes is no exception to the hegemonic theory, particularly when it comes to how the media excludes or chooses to portray them. This thesis will first journey back in time to 1972 with the enactment of Title IX, a law, which if never introduced, would not allow for the discussion about women's sports coverage in the media today.

Before mentioning the topic of women's sports being underrepresented in the media, it is crucial to provide a brief historical overview of Title IX, the law which led to the tremendous increase in females of all ages taking to the sites of competition. Just one year before Title IX was passed, less than 295,000 girls participated in high school athletics, totaling 7 percent of high school athletes. Collegiate sports showed similar statistics as roughly 30,000 women competed and received less than 2 percent of funding from their school athletic departments. A study completed thirty years later in 2001 shows that 2.8 million girls participated in high school athletics, and girls represented 41.5 percent of high

school athletes. The number of female athletes in college escalated substantially to 150,000 female athletes, accounting for 43 percent of all males and females competing in intercollegiate athletics (Ware 2007:1). Sticking to the theme of numbers, the dramatic influx of women competing in sports can be attributed to thirty seven words that have changed the world of sports forever.

In 1972 Title IX of the Education Amendments Act read as follows:

“No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” (Ware, 2007: 3)

The reasoning for this alteration to legislation was the widespread discrimination that women faced across all spectrums of the educational experience, from students to administrators to professors. In the first few years following the passage of Title IX, there was a large amount of discussion surrounding whether sports teams should be coeducational based on skill (the model in high school physical education classes) and whether females should be considered to compete on men’s teams. A decision soon surfaced that at both the high school and intercollegiate level, sex segregated but comparable sports teams were the most appropriate model for athletics (Ware, 2007: 6). In 1979, regulations of Title IX mandated that athletic programs within schools pass a three prong test. The first prong of this test demanded that participation opportunities for males and females would be proportional to the general enrollment of the institution. For example, if males made up 65 percent of the student body, athletics would be comprised 65 percent of male athletes. The second prong required that each institution demonstrate a history and future plans to expand women’s programs and meet the interest of female

athletes. The final prong insisted that institutions demonstrate that their athletic programs “fully and effectively accommodate” the abilities and interests of the underrepresented sex (Ware, 2007). This three prong system was critical in achieving equal opportunities for women in the sports world; however, the system did not go uncontested.

Following the enactment of Title IX, a majority of athletic administrators and prominent figures in the NCAA argued that inequalities between men’s and women’s programs weren’t simply the result of long term discrimination; rather they were the result of longstanding societal factors that characterized women as being less intrigued by sports when compared to their male counterparts. In response to these inaccurate statements, Donna Lopiano (1989) of the Women’s Sports Foundation said, “I’m asked all the time whether the interests and abilities of women are met. There’s never been a question of enough interest. If you build it they will come” (Ware, 2007: 7). The lack of apparent interest in women’s sports was a result of the lack of opportunities presented to women, not to be confused with a lack of desire to play. Females wanted to compete: however, long standing societal traditions rooted in femininity pushed them towards the sideline. Women continued to battle this tension between athletic competition and femininity associated with negative stereotypes of females in sport. The phrase, “nice girls don’t sweat” carried the connotation that to conform to the ideals of femininity, women needed to stay away from the playing fields and uphold the dominant cultural standards of beauty, behavior and grooming (Ware, 2007:10). Despite these societal constraints present in the late part of the 20th century, Title IX continued to allow women’s sports to prosper.

In 1993 the NCAA defined gender equity in sports as follows,

At an institutional level, gender equity in intercollegiate athletics describes an environment in which fair and equitable distribution of overall athletics opportunities, benefits and resources are available to women and men and in which student athletes, coaches and athletic administrators are not subject to gender-based discrimination. An athletics program can be considered gender equitable when the participants in both the men's and women's sports programs would accept as fair and equitable the overall program of the other gender. (Ware, 2007:18)

This general concept of gender equity in sports expanded immensely after 1972 so much so that a poll done by *Wall Street Journal* in 2000 found that 79 percent approved of Title IX and a surprisingly high 76 percent approved cutting back on men's athletics funds to ensure equal opportunities for women. However, this presentation of a zero sum game- women winning and men losing is not an accurate representation of the expansion of intercollegiate athletics. For the past three decades that Title IX has been in existence, both men and women have increased their participation in intercollegiate athletics. Several studies have supported the assertion that institutions have been able to accommodate the interests and needs of an expanding pool of female athletes, while consequently maintaining participation and opportunities for men. According to a study done by the General Accounting Office in 2001, the number of women's teams increased from 5,695 in 1982 to 9,479 in 1999 while during the same time period men's teams rose from 9,113 to 9,149. Also, in 1982, 90,000 women competed in intercollegiate sports while in 1999 the number rose to 163,000. At the same time, men's participation grew from 220,000 to 232,000 across the same time period (Ware, 2007:19). Despite the validity of these facts and figures, women are often blamed for unfavorable outcomes with men's programs. Regardless of all the positive changes in women's athletics in the past thirty years, there has continued to be lingering resentment and unease about the popularity of female athletics (Ware, 2007:20).

The passage of Title IX has led to several monumental, however unintentional, consequences. The first is that the lawmakers originally framed Title IX as a general tool to challenge sex discrimination in schools, without ever expecting it would lead to a revolutionary and controversial future on the world of sports. A second unpredictable consequence of Title IX is the accessibility of sports for women, including the creation of professional leagues in basketball, tennis and volleyball. Girls entering the sports world today have far more opportunities when it comes to gym space, leagues to play in and a choice of which sports to participate in (Ware, 2007:26). As noted by the infamous 1999 US World Cup Women's Soccer team (99ers), superstars Mia Hamm, Julie Foudy and Christine Lilly grew up with no female role models. Being raised in the earlier years of Title IX meant the expansion of women's sports and opportunities for young women had not even begun to peak. These women had to fight to join boy's teams and prove that they were talented enough to play. The 99ers credited the enactment and enforcement of Title IX after playing in front of the largest sold out crowd (74,000 people) ever to attend a women's sports game in the summer of 1999. In an interview with ESPN reporters, these legendary female athletes assert that if it wasn't for Title IX they would never have been blessed with the chance to become role models or make history. The 99ers recall the progression Title IX has made from when they were children compared with the opportunities Title IX has granted their children today (Nine for IX, 99ers).

Title IX has been deemed, "the biggest thing to happen to sports since the invention of the whistle" (Ware, 2007: 19). Title IX has been a law for the past forty plus years and will probably never cease to exist. It is also safe to assume that the changes that have occurred because of Title IX, such as the participation opportunities for women in sport,

will continue to multiply. Sports have grown to become too important, even crucial and necessary to individual girls and women, as sports have become not just a privilege but a staple in their lives. Without the enactment of Title IX, it would be nearly impossible and very likely unthinkable to even question the media's portrayal of females in sport, the coverage of women's athletics and what it means for women in today's society. Title IX has granted women's sports the ability to grow, giving young girls everywhere in the United States the opportunity to compete and play the game they love.

The Root of the Problem: The Notion that Sports are for Boys

One of the most crucial elements to recognize about Title IX is that in the realm of sports, Title IX goes against and tests a notion that has been rooted deep in our society for centuries. This notion is of the appropriate traits of femininity versus masculinity, the behavior expected of women versus the behavior expected from men. Historically, the importance of sport is to socialize males into traditional roles while simultaneously displacing women from the field of competition. Traditionally sport coincides naturally with masculinity, creating a disconcerting vibe for women that they are trespassing as female athletes on male territory (Griffin, 1998: 16). Based on women's infringement of male territory, the female presence in sport minimizes the importance and exclusivity of sport as a male domain. Women in sport cross the boundaries of traditional gender roles. Consequently, women's participation and success in sport is often times trivialized by the media and sidelined as unworthy of acknowledgment (Griffin, 1998:17).

The media is no stranger to maintaining a streamline of sexism within its context and content. Sexism is a system of male privilege and female subordination that builds on

the favoring of particular definitions of gender (what constitutes a man or woman) and gender roles (what qualities, talents, and characteristics women and men are supposed to have). Women's avid participation in competition challenges the "natural" and exclusive nature of gender and gender roles. The fact that women have grown to be, with their involvement in sport, tough minded, fearless and strong competitors, dismantles the importance of sport in defining masculinity. Since the enactment of Title IX, female athletes have worked to expand the notions of femininity to include the concept of "a female athlete" beyond the very rigid creation of sexism in our society (Griffin, 1998: 17). Unfortunately, as the numbers of women competing in a variety of sports have expanded in the past forty years, it has not been easy to dismantle the original notions that women are overstaying their welcome in a man's world. Women have struggled with negative stereotypes and connotations of being a female athlete, particularly presented to them in the early years following the passage of Title IX, although different problems still remain potent today.

The stereotypes, negative connotations and unsettling comments made towards or about female athletes stem from the insecurities of a society centered on male dominance and female inferiority. One of ways society has belittled the accomplishments of top notch female athletes is to question their sex based on the success they find in competition. To say, "she plays like a man" is a back handed compliment to a female athlete. On one hand, it is a compliment to a woman's talent level; however, the statement proclaims that she is so skilled she cannot be an actual woman. An outstanding female athlete constantly focused on, portrayed, and mentioned by the media is seen as the exception that further proves the rule. Allowing for a few exceptional female athletes plays into the notions of traditional

femininity that sports are not a place for women to be successful, therefore there are few female athletes who do so (Messner, 2007:41). Ultimately, defining masculinity is as concerned with rejecting feminine characteristics as it is embracing the masculine ones. For example, males in sport have always sent negative messages about the need for men to avoid playing with feminine qualities, signaling that playing similar to a female confirms poor performance. If a boy is told he “throws like a girl”, it is a devastating insult to his athletic ability (Griffin, 1998:22). Women in the world of sport struggle between being the uncelebrated exception and the punching bags used to demean male athletes.

Another issue women looking to compete in predominantly male sports have continued to face is the struggle of breaking free from the grasp of hegemonic power, rather than reproducing it. As women made headway by breaking into the arena of female body building, as well as soccer and rugby in the 1980's, they faced the daunting task of self-definition and separation from hegemonic definitions of femininity that still linger today. Women competing in body building were often more muscular and extremely toned, which opposed previously conceived notions about the nature of femininity. The problem female body builders faced was that judges chose to pick the winner of the competition based on how well females paired muscularity with the female aesthetic, not simply how well muscled women were. However, while magazines such as the 1986 *Muscle and Beauty* discussed the feminine body builder as a focused athlete practicing individual choice and rigorous training. *Muscle and Beauty* also mentioned that even if these women were untraditionally muscular they could indeed be beautiful and “make babies” (Messner, 2007: 39). Women were still being highlighted by the media in ways that connected back to feminine ideals, rather than being viewed as serious competitors. Although women were

participating in the “self-definition” of body building, they were reshaping their bodies in an unhealthy manner through fat reduction pills, muscle supplements and unsafe tanning treatments. As Michael Messner said, “Instead of a redefinition of masculinity occurring, this trend highlights the complex ways male hegemony works in sports and ways in which women actively collude in its reproduction” (Messner, 2007:40). Women body builders believed they were not only competing as athletes, but they were redefining and negating the feminine stereotypes. In actuality, the judges were the ones defining the ideals of femininity based on the winners, who were typically chosen based on notions rooted in hegemonic power.

The challenges women face with escaping labels in sport are never ending, particularly when it comes to the power of the lesbian label and using homophobia as a tactic to control female athletes. When a female athlete is referred to as “masculine”, “dyke” or “lesbian”, she becomes aware that she has crossed a gender boundary. Homophobia is used as a tactic to keep control traditional gender role expectations in place. The lesbian label is effective because women, especially during the immediate years following Title IX, were afraid to have their femininity and sexuality questioned, allowing them to be easily intimidated by the opinions of others. Calling a woman a lesbian was a way of making a woman become defensive about her athletic ability, therefore hindering her experience within sport. Unfortunately, lesbians are the targets of these prejudiced comments; however, the lesbian label has historically had a negative effect on the cohesion of all women’s sports teams and the unity of the team experience. The lesbian label was used as a method of discouraging the communal bond that is supposed to occur among women in athletics, as a way to prevent females from acknowledging their conjoined power. As long

as lesbians are seen as social deviants and they are associated with women's sport, the lesbian label will serve as a social control function that men will receive more physical and psychological empowerment available in sport (Griffin, 1998:20).

Prior to discussing the current representations of female athletes in the media, it is necessary to discuss the background of financial and promotional challenges women's sports face in the media based on the longstanding struggle of gender inequalities. On the financial side, there was a question of women's sports raising enough revenue. Because women sports had long been viewed as second best, there was always a question of if they would maintain sponsorship revenue and promote income. The income was essential to the development of the sport with regards to individual rewards for athletes and maintenance of facilities. On the promotional side, women's sports faced the question of quantity and nature of coverage. It was presumed that identification with role models shown through the media leads to active participation from a younger generation. Therefore, it was inferred that girls would be less likely to feel compelled to compete because they would not watch as many role models. This continuous overexposure of sportsmen and underexposure of sportswomen only mirrored the earlier images that women in sport are rare (Brookes, 2002: 126). Although these financial and revenue aspects of sport may not remain as accurate today, it is important to understand how the gendered notions of sport have affected the media in the past to better understand the place of women's sports in the present market.

All of these notions, stereotypes and labels are still present in today's society and continue to haunt female athletes, particularly when it comes to their portrayal or invisibility within the media. Although women's increased participation in sport has played

a major part in disrupting the traditional representations of masculinity as the elite form of physical prowess, women's contribution is still marginalized today through the media (Brookes, 2002: 125). There will be a more in depth discussion about the manner in which women are excluded or inaccurately represented by the media later on, but it is important to acknowledge how the notions of the past, geared to masculine superiority, have influenced the marginalization of female athletes.

The "Progress" of Title IX and the Media

To simply reiterate the point, in the past dominant ideas and values regarding sport revolved around traditional conceptions of gender; males were athletes and females were not. Following Title IX, the female athlete stood as a direct threat to these gender notions. A quote from Mary Jo Kane's, "Media Coverage of the Post Title IX Female Athlete" explains why female athletes are feared and perhaps marginalized,

Increasing female athleticism represents a genuine quest by women for equality, control of their own bodies, and self-definition, and as such represents an ideological basis of male domination... In short, the female athlete-and her body- has become a contested ideological terrain. (Kane, 1996: 100)

In today's world much of the emergence of women's sport is downgraded to the margins of the mass media, thus disempowering female athletes while leaving males at the center of the sports universe (Messner, 2000: 93). Although women athletes are no longer entirely ignored by the mass media, including an increase and variety of images and commentary on women's sports, "respectful" coverage of women's sports, has primarily been restricted to the local cable channels. The always expanding cable networks, the internet, specialized sports magazines and sports radio talk shows have little to say about women's sports. This relegation of women's sports to second rate cable television networks may serve its

purpose for a few fans; it leaves largely intact the masculine cultural center of sports media. For example, in 1997, the magazine *Sports Illustrated for Women* was created. In 2000, Venus Williams won the Sports Woman of the Year award. The very existence of this magazine and the yearly celebration of dominant and exceptional female athletes is a new positive source of media representation for women and young girls. However, the publication of *Sports Illustrated for Women* (which produces bimonthly issues to 400,000 subscribers) leaves the father magazine, *Sports Illustrated* (produced weekly with 3.15 million subscribers), free from the obligation of printing articles discussing female athletes and women's sport (Messner, 2000, 93). Because sport has always been a central arena for the ideological production and legitimization of male supremacy, it is imperative to analyze the frameworks within the media that portray female athletes as sexualized, marginalized or altogether forgotten (Kane, 1997, 101).

The Media Portrayal of the Female Athlete

It is important to mention when discussing the media representations of the post Title IX female athlete that there is a plethora of evidence concerning the difference in patterns of media coverage between male and female athletes. Two primary observations have been made by sociologists studying this topic. The first observation is that despite their enormous increase in participation, sportswomen have been grossly underrepresented in terms of overall coverage. The second observation is that men are consistently presented in ways that focus on their athletic strength and competitive drive, whereas females are highlighted in ways that emphasize their physical attractiveness and femininity (Kane, 1997: 102). According to Michael Messner there are four patterned ways

that the dominant media deal with women's sports: silence (underrepresentation), humorous sexualization, backlash and the selective incorporation of standout female athletes (Messner, 2000: 93). A fifth and additional pattern discussed by sociologists is the misrepresentation of the female athlete can also be incorporated into the lenses in which female athletes are portrayed through the media. Looking individually at each of these five sub categories of the ways in which female athletes are portrayed by the media will help better illustrate the marginalization of women's sport, as well as the proliferation of masculinity at the helm of sports culture.

1. Silence (Underrepresentation)

One of the most persistent and universal findings about women's sports is that most accomplishments and activities of female athletes are terribly underrepresented in mass media sport coverage. For example, a 1991 study done examining the portrayal of female athletes in *Sports Illustrated* found that the accomplishments of female athletes accounted for a mere 9 percent of the total coverage. Television coverage was not any better in Messner's 2000 study of the period of 1989-1994. ESPN's well known sports highlights show *SportsCenter*, designated only 2.2 percent of its airtime to women's sport coverage (Messner, 2000, 95). In a different study conducted by the Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles in the early 1990's, researchers concluded that in terms of newspaper coverage in four popular papers in different regions of the country (*USA Today*, *the Boston Globe*, *the Orange County Register* and *the Dallas Morning News*) there were 28.8 times as many column inches devoted to men-only sports as compared to women-only sports in sports sections (Kane, 1997, 104). (INSERT POWER PLAY INFO HERE)

2. Humorous Sexualization

As if it wasn't bad enough that women received minimal coverage when compared to male athletes, the small dose of coverage being doted on women is often based on the humorous sexualization of both athletic and non-athletic women (Messner, 2000:97) Martin and McDonald found that in the few cases where women are pictured, they are frequently framed within the constraints of dominant patriarchal images that only distort, marginalize, trivialize and heterosexualize female athletes (Martin & McDonald, 2012: 83). The traditional sports news humor on scantily clad women spectators, cheerleaders, and nearly nude women in psuedosports makes the absolutely outrageous and sexist claim regarding women's "place" being on the sidelines of sport. These images of females supporting, chanting and modeling on the sidelines of play do little to negate the cultural definition of sport as a man's world. However, it is the humorous sexualization of actual female athletes that brings to the forefront the current paradoxes of gender and sexuality that occur in women's sports. One unforgettable example took place following the 1999 World Cup soccer championship victory by the US women, in which Brandi Chastain ripped her jersey off and swirled it in the air, signaling jubilation and excitement after the game winning penalty kick. One commentator in particular couldn't resist the constant mention of Chastain in her sports bra. Three days in a row the commentator mocked Chastain's victory celebration, disregarding the accomplishment of the team by saying, "Today the pony tail express appeared in a gold tournament and Chastain managed to keep her shirt on, but took her sweatshirt off during warm ups" (in Messner, 2000, 98). The following day in a humorous spoof titled "Eyes Wide Shut" the sports news inserted a clip of Chastain in her sports bra as a collage of half-naked people. The commentator then joked, "It seems like Hollywood is really influencing the sports world. Everybody's getting naked. I'm not

complaining about it. That's just the way it is" (Messner, 2000, 98). This is just one example of how female athletes aren't properly recognized and credited with the media coverage they deserve for reaching unmarked heights in the sports world.

Another factor of the sexualization of the female athlete comes through the media in its portrayal of the female body and the beauty of certain female athletes. One of the best examples of the portrayal of the sexualized, erotic and athletic female body is tennis star Anna Kournikova. Anna Kournikova was a major pop culture icon in the early 2000's, and the popular presence of the image through the camera lens was based more on physical appearance than her on the tennis court accolades. In the June 2000 issue of *Sports Illustrated* there was a cover story on Kournikova that made no attempt to focus on her tennis playing ability, but rather on her sex appeal. As of 2001, Kournikova had not won a major tennis tournament. However, she raked in nearly ten million dollars in endorsement deals (fifty eighth on the Forbes worldwide celebrity power list), appeared on the covers of *Forbes* and *Vogue*, and has numerous websites devoted to her (Messner, 2000: 100).

Present day former Notre Dame standout Skylar Diggins receives the same attention from the media. The 22 year old graduate of Notre Dame never won a national title, wasn't nominated for the WNBA's rookie of the year or All Star game, and doesn't hold a starting spot on the Indiana Fever's roster. She was picked third overall in the WNBA draft, filling out the impressively talented trio of Britney Griner and Elena DelleDane. However, the image perfect Diggins is the newest and only female addition to the ROC Nation Sports clientele list. As noted in an article by Eric Murtaugh from *One Foot Down Magazine*, "she has more off-the-court potential than maybe any player ever but 2 members of her own draft class have more on-the-court potential, and maybe a lot more." Diggins has also

recently signed a Nike AirForce 1 deal, while the other two members of the fearsome threesome have received few endorsements despite their greater impact on the court during the 2013 season (Murtaugh, 2013: 1). This example can be explained by the statement by Sports Media Scholar Pamela Creedon, “Promoters now that little girls and sweethearts sell” (Murtaugh, 2013:1).

3. *Backlash Against Women’s Sport*

The third subcategory that defines how women athletes are pictured in the media occurs through the attacks of backlash through outsiders, typically reporters or commentators, against female athletes. The reasoning behind outlandish attacks on female athletes can be connected back to the gender roles deeply embedded in our society. The notions of femininity versus masculinity reaffirm that sports are something men do. Women are not supposed to play and compete like men. Therefore, when women do participate in sports and exude talent, then they are not real women. Generally speaking, women athletes should be too soft and feminine to be grouped as serious athletes, or they are thought to be butch lesbians who are mocked and taunted (Messner, 2000: 108). One of the more recent and utterly horrifying displays of backlash against women’s sport occurred during the 2007 NCAA Women’s Basketball Tournament following Rutgers defeat of the powerful Tennessee Lady Volunteers. Don Imus, lead anchor on *Imus in the Morning*, referred to the Rutgers Women’s Basketball team as “nappy headed hoes.” (Cooty et. Al, 2007: 140) The commentary was flagged due to the blatant sexism and racism expressed by Imus. His insult of the Rutgers Women’s Program with racial slurs and derogatory terms suggested that these young women athletes lacked class and the ability to conform or adopt white middle class standards of femininity. The context of which he spoke about the game had

nothing to do with the competitive atmosphere, the great performances by the athletes or the roar of the crowd. The comments Don Imus made were personal attacks on these female athletes that were undoubtedly unwarranted. With that being said, in the sport of basketball where successful performances are far detached from physical prowess, Imus' commentary pointing at the "cuteness" of the Tennessee players also served to mark the athletes by both race and gender. This dialogue Imus created with his producers replicated the gendered ideologies female athletes historically have had to negotiate in their identities as both women and athletes. In short, the Imus dialogue on these female teams featured the ways in which female athletes face a reoccurring struggle to receive respectful quality coverage of their sport in the mainstream media (Cooky et al. 2007: 151). Backlash is just another mechanism used by the media to ensure male dominance and female insignificance in the world of sport.

4. Selective Incorporation

On the rare occasion sports media and commercial interests decide to place a female athlete at the forefront of their promotional campaign, they seem most likely to do so when there is high profit potential and nationalistic ideals can be evoked. Typically, this means that the individual woman can be packaged as heterosexually attractive. Although this isn't the worst case scenario of female athletes being represented in the media, it often lasts for only a fleeting moment before these women are forgotten or suffer from the negative effects of the unforgiving spotlight of the media. One example of a woman who for a brief period in time reveled under the media spotlight was USA track star and Olympian Marion Jones. Marion Jones arrived center stage in the 2000 Olympic Games wearing the Nike swoosh and hugging the American flag, as a track and field star who became the newest

icon of the sport-media-commercial complex. Jones was pulled to the forefront of sport symbolism under two conditions: she was viewed as conventionally attractive, as well as athletically gifted, and she evoked patriotism as “our hope for a gold medal” in international competition. Despite the media boosting the image and popularity of Marion Jones as America’s “girl next door”, Jones’ name became tarnished during the 2000 games when a leak spilled that her husband, USA shot-putter C.J. Hunter had tested positive for illegal anabolic steroids. Cameras broke away from coverage of Marion Jones and her accomplishments to focus on the scandalous mishap of her husband, as media showed concern for their profit potential (Messner, 2000: 111). The unfortunate truth about selective incorporation of female athletes is that the fame is a result of the ability for companies and media outlets to turn a profit for a brief time period, sometimes at the expense of the athlete’s reputation.

5. Misrepresentation

As scholars have repeatedly acknowledged, women’s participation in sport, particularly team sport, is frequently associated with the questioning of the sexuality of teammates. Female participation in contact sports, especially basketball, is viewed in the United States as a “masculine” endeavor. These cultural assumptions lead athletes as well as media broadcasters, commentators and reporters to control and “feminize” the images and representations of female athletes (Cooky et. al, 2007: 142). This means extensive coverage and articles about female athletes roles in the home, feelings about motherhood and insertion of images in the media away from the playing field. For example,

The WNBA’s marketing strategy in 2000 revolved around highlighting the heterosexual, emphasized femininity or WNBA players as models, mothers or the girl-next door. In her analysis of the WNBA web site, McPherson found that the

players' familial relationships, ties and responsibilities were highlighter. (Cooky et. al, 2007: 143)

In this way, women are confined within the controlling images of the media, based on their roles regulated by the standards of femininity. In another study sociologists Fink and Kensicki (2002) found misrepresentations of females existed frequently. In this case, the misrepresentation of female athletes was categorized as being “dressed but poised and pretty”, meaning they weren’t dressed in athletic apparel, in a non-sport setting, or dressed provocatively. Based on the results of this study, only 34% of female athletes pictured in *Sports Illustrated Magazine* were shown in athletic action and 55% were in a non-sport setting. Comparatively, male athletes were pictured 66% of the time engaging in action shots and 23% of the time in non-sport settings. Images such as these serve to perpetuate the ever present stereotype that women belong on the sidelines of sport, on the outskirts of the action (Martin & McDonald, 2012: 86). When women’s sports do receive coverage, this coverage buries female athletes deeper behind the stereotypical notions that competition in the women’s game comes second to the duties of femininity.

The Coverage in Numbers

A variety of studies have been done throughout the 1980’s- mid 1990’s on the coverage or lack of coverage of women’s sports in the media. Sociologists have looked at magazines, mainstream media networks and newspapers to gain the knowledge and statistics necessary to prove the substantial disadvantage women’s sports face in our society. Unfortunately, the comparison between the various media outlets reveals them to

be relatively similar; women's coverage is minimal and lacking in all. This section will examine the discoveries sociologists have made throughout the past twenty years separated by the different types of sports media.

1. Magazines and Newspapers

A study done by sociologists Fink and Kensicki in 2002 analyzed a total of 958 articles, all containing pictures in *Sports Illustrated* from 1997-1999. The study showed that a whopping 862 articles contained pictures of male athletes, while only 96 articles offered pictures of female athletes. During the same three year time span, within 816 non-photographic articles, 735 made reference to male athletes, while a disappointing 82 articles discussed female athletes. Quantitatively, this means that only 10 percent of sports articles with or without photographs included women in their story lines. These findings were consistent with Bishop's (2003) research of *Sports Illustrated* from 1980-1986, in which female athletes received 8 percent of coverage in articles and in 10 percent of photographs within the periodical (Martin & McDonald, 2012: 84).

A study done in 2008 by Kian, Vincent and Modello examined print media coverage of the 2006 Division 1 collegiate tournaments in both *USA Today* and *New York Times*, as well as online media coverage in *ESPN.Com* and *CBS Sportsline*. The data collected showed that approximately 76 percent of the articles were focused on the men's tournament and only 23 percent touched upon the women's tournament. Researcher's results concluded that the sports media sends the message that sport is still a male domain, even when articles discussed the women's tournament (in Cooky, Messner & Hextrum, 2013: 4).

2. Television News Programming

Research done by scholars Duncan and Messner in 2005 revealed that minimal coverage of women's sport doesn't simply occur in magazines. In a six week period in 2004, the two monitored sports coverage within the Los Angeles area based on affiliates of ABC, NBC and CBS. Duncan and Messner recorded the following,

Women's sports were under-reported in the six weeks of early evening and late night television sports news on three network affiliates (KNBC, KBCS, and KABC) sampled in the study. Men's sports received 91.4% of the airtime, women's sports 6.3%, and gender neutral topics 6.3%. These numbers indicate a decline in coverage of women's sports since 1999, when 8.7% of the airtime was devoted to women's sports." (in Martin & McDonald, 2012: 84).

This coverage proved that when it comes to sports on the tube, if it's male, it not only leads- it completely dominates the air time. Messner has continued to work on this analysis and in 2009 he noted networks KNBC and KBCS in Los Angeles use of ticker text bar across the bottom of the screen during their sports broadcasts. The portion of women's coverage included on the ticker text in 2009 was a mere 4.6 percent, more than triple the even slimmer air time on the main broadcasts (Messner, 2010:1).

3. ESPN's Sportscenter

Sportscenter on ESPN is one of the most prominent and well known hour-long sports highlight segments produced daily. In a longitudinal study recorded between 1999 and 2009 by Michael Messner, the coverage of airtime devoted to women's sports decreased over the ten year period. In 1999 coverage was at a devastating 2.2 percent and in 2009 it reached a new low of 1.3 percent. In 2009 the ticker time devoted to women's sports on Sportscenter was double the actual coverage with 2.6 percent (Cooky, Messner & Hextrum, 2013: 9).

All of these statistics illustrating the decline in women's sports coverage are particularly disturbing because the number of females competing has increased

exponentially. In 2009, 3.1 million girls (versus 4.4 million boys) were playing high school sports, compared with 1.8 million girls in 1989. This increase is mirrored in collegiate sports where an average NCAA college fields at least eight women's teams, up from two in 1972 when Title IX was enacted. This means only one thing; the media is reiterating the story of the past that shows men as superior to women in the field of athletics. Producers and editors of TV sports news, highlight shows, as well as magazine and newspaper editors are aiding in the maintenance of this outdated story by giving minimal coverage to women's sports (Messner, 2013: 3).

The Insider's Perspective: How Female Athletes want to be portrayed

Numerous studies have analyzed media portrayals of sportswomen that focus on femininity and heterosexuality rather than athletic competence, supporting the argument that the media does indeed trivialize women's sports. However, in 2013, sociologist Mary Jo Kane and her colleagues at the University of Minnesota sought to explore the ways elite female athletes hope and wish to be portrayed in the future. Kane's study surveyed 36 elite female athletes who responded to the ways they as a group are represented in the media (Kane, Lavoie & Fink, 2013: 269). Kane's main focus was to gain a sense of whether female athletes worked to embrace or resist the construction and practice of a dual identity (female/athlete). Although the discussion of more in depth and qualitative results will be further addressed in a later chapter, it is important to mention the overall messages received from this study.

A majority of the female athletes surveyed hoped the public would view them as both feminine and athletes, maintaining well roundedness and balance among their peers. These female athletes did not want to be perceived solely as "sweaty jocks" who spent their

lives in the gym, but rather as a people, who off the court could be traditionally feminine (Kane, Lavoie & Fink, 2013: 288). A number of these women polled preferred a “nice mix” combination of athleticism and femininity which they defined as “normal.” A handful of participations asserted that acting in a traditionally feminine manner also held true to the theme of “normality.” Kane found discussions surrounding being a “normal” girl, especially for team sport athletes, were accompanied by what several athletes considered unfair stereotypes that grouped women’s sports with homosexuality. Consequently, some women polled felt the need to overemphasize their femininity on the playing field and the court to defy these stereotypes. A softball player was quoted on this topic as saying,

So we wear makeup to our games. We care about what our hair looks like on the field. We wear ribbons. We wear sparkles. We wear glitter. It’s like we like to play it up tenfold. (in Kane, Lavoie & Fink, 2013: 289)

This scenario is identified as “pretty in pink” by a number of scholars who believe performance ritual is tied to hegemonic femininity, a coping mechanism that female athletes use to separate themselves from the ever present lesbian label. This theory directly connects to the response that half of the women polled provided: the best way to target males or fans is to sexualize women’s athletics. This statistic shows that even elite female athletes have internalized the deeply ingrained notion that the easiest way to increase interest in women’s sport is to appeal to male fans and do so in ways that is sexually provocative (Kane, Lavoie & Fink, 2013: 290).

Despite these notions being deeply embedded in some of the athletes polled, there were a significant portion of female athletes who actively resisted “living in two worlds.” These women were unapologetic about being an athlete and felt very little motivation to prove their femininity, regardless of certain society views and pressures. A margin of 49

percent of females polled chose to resist acknowledgment of looking at themselves as females or athletes but rather answered, “Why can’t we be both, collectively?” These women were unwilling to compromise the hard work and effort they had put into their sport to spend time worrying about how the public viewed their sexuality or appearance (Kane, Lavoie & Fink, 2013: 288). The question of whether sexualizing women’s sports is beneficial or not will be argued further in the following chapters.

Chapter Two will focus on the methods used in the present study for researching the coverage of women’s sports across thirty different episodes of ESPN’s Sportcenter in 2013.

Chapter II Methods

Before the discussion of the methods conducted throughout this study, allow me to reiterate the research question this thesis will analyze. Ultimately, the question this research seeks to evaluate is, *“Are certain forms of mass media still behind the times when it comes to portraying the popularity, performance and increased number of participants in women’s sport?”* Based on the enormous growth of participation in women’s sports since the enactment of Title IX in 1972, one might presume that the amount of coverage female athletes receive from the media would heighten as well. Unfortunately, previously recorded statistics and studies show that just the opposite trend has occurred. Sport is an institution in our society that is both historically and presently controlled by the hegemonic ideals which marginalize female athletes (Cooky et al., 144). The purpose of this study is to address the immensity of the struggle women’s sports are challenged with through the analysis of numbers which represent the invisibility of women’s sport in the media. This lack of media visibility is noted while simultaneously recording gendered language used to describe sport, ultimately revealing the trivialization of females and applause granted to male athletes. There are a variety of components that need to be analyzed to appropriately answer this question. Based on this, it is necessary to look at both the quality and quantity of women’s versus men’s coverage in two different forms of the media. It was helpful to not only record the number of stories (quantative), but to also look at the language used to describe the athletes, coaches and events (qualitative). The purpose of analyzing a variety of adjectives used to describe women’s and men’s sport is to identify whether the notions that are traditionally associated and are related to gender differences between femininity and masculinity. As Michael Messner noted, it is imperative to dispute and dismantle the

narrow representations of heterosexual femininity in the media that for generations have restricted females (Messner, 2002: 102). Although the coverage of women's sport is excessively limited, it is important to note the terms in which these female athletes are mentioned. On the other hand, the men's coverage, seemingly limitless, involved a variety of vocabulary that associated males with gendered terms of both masculine and feminine notions and stereotypes. By studying the sports media in terms of the amount of coverage and the nature of the coverage, I hope to provide another perspective on why the media seems to be behind in portraying the expansion in participation and popularity of women's sport.

As previously mentioned, this study was developed to explore the quantity and the quality of women's and men's coverage of sport. In the discipline of sociology, two types of research are used to elaborate on and explain a particular phenomenon: quantitative and qualitative study.

Quantitative Methods of Study

Quantitative research is the research that uses numerical analysis. In most cases of quantitative study, the researcher knows what she is looking for and all aspects of the study are planned accordingly prior to collecting results. Typically, the purpose of a quantitative research approach is to develop and employ mathematical models, theories and/or hypotheses pertaining to phenomena (Crossman, 2014: 1). Therefore, based on the definition of quantitative research, this study was designed to tally up the total amount of stories mentioning both women's and men's sports in a given time period. Then the number of stories per gender by the total number of stories was recorded. It was then

necessary to total the number of times language was used in regard to gendering men's and women's sports, whether it was with a connotation that correlated with notions of femininity or masculinity. This, being the quantitative side of this research, deals directly with calculations and percentages. The quantitative findings are concrete and the statistical analysis can only be interpreted in one of two ways: is women's sports coverage ignored or acknowledged, masculine or feminine, gendered or not.

Qualitative Methods of Study

Qualitative research is used when sociologists care less about the outcome, then the process of their findings. The focus of qualitative research involves perceptions and experiences. Qualitative researchers are commenting on the observations of certain behaviors of the population they are studying (Crossman, 2014:1). The qualitative side of this research is more open ended. For this aspect of this research, it seemed fitting to record all the adjectives pertaining to the traditional notions of masculinity and femininity. By recording these descriptive words, it was easier to understand the ways in which females and males are represented in sport. The purpose of noting these adjectives was to discover if the descriptions given by the media regarding sport are still primarily focused on masculine traits. If so, it could provide some insight as to why women's sports are lacking in both quality and quantity of coverage. Therefore, one could conclude that by the definitions and descriptions given by the media, women are still seen as infringing on the male domain of sport.

The Two Mediums

In studying both qualitative and quantitative data, this research focused on gathering and recording information from two different mediums of the media: television and internet. Just as Cooky, Messner and Hextrum did periodically from the late 90's through the new millennium, this study focuses on ESPN's *SportsCenter*, a daily sports news program (Cooky et al., 2013, 1). *SportsCenter* aired its first episode in September of 1979, when George Grande took the lead as head anchor beside co-anchor Lee Leonard (2). Leonard was quoted describing *SportsCenter* in the following sentence, "If you're a fan, what you will see in the next minutes, hours, and days to follow may convince you that you've gone to sports heaven" (Entertainment Weekly, 2000: 94). Since the beginning of its air time, *SportsCenter* has been a leader in American Cable Television and Satellite Television (Eaton-Rob, 2012:1). Today, *SportsCenter* is shown up to twelve times in 24 hours and provides all the updates and headlines from the latest and greatest sporting events and competition. Based on the continued success and prominence of *SportsCenter* at the peak of sports news, it seemed obvious it would be the best option for viewing. The second source this study incorporates is the headlines of the *NY Times* online sports page. The *NY Times* is a daily paper published from the headquarters of New York City. The credibility of the organization can be noted in the 112 Pulitzer Prizes that the paper has collected, more than any other company (Rainey, 2012: 1)

The Sample Population

Based on these two sources of information, *SportsCenter* and the *NY Times* online, it was necessary to slim down the sample population. In the discipline of sociology it is nearly impossible to study the entire population you are intrigued by. Therefore, researchers use

samples, or a smaller sector of this population to represent a much larger one they couldn't calculate for. These samples are used to make inferences about the entire population (4). The sample size was an array of 20 new *SportsCenter* episodes that aired between December 4th, 2013 and January 4th, 2014. These episodes varied from weekly to weekend episodes, all each an hour in length, roughly 46 minutes without commercials. For the *NY Times* headlines, the study discussed 10 days that spanned from late December through the first week of January. Every day the *NY Times* incorporated 9-12 stories or headlines into their Sports section online. Therefore, the study draws from the information collected from 20 episodes of *SportsCenter* and 10 days of news headlines to represent the coverage of women's versus men's sports in the media. The type of sample chosen for this study is called a convenience sample in the discipline of sociology. In short, a convenience sample is one in which the researcher chooses any subject or source available for the study (Crossman, 2014: 2). In regards to this study, the chosen dates to watch and read were based on availability of schedule and time allotted for the research.

The Method: Coding and Content Analysis

Following the preparation of the sample size, the research tool of data coding was selected to help simplify this work with the help of numbers. Data coding is described as,

A systematic way in which to condense extensive data sets into smaller analyzable units through the creation of categories and concepts derived from the data...Coding facilitates the organization, retrieval, and interpretation of data and leads to conclusions on the basis of that interpretation. (Borque, 2004: 132)

In the system of coding a researcher needs both variables and underlying categories. In this study, the variable is the media, the categories are *SportsCenter* and the *NY Times* headlines. The variable (the media) must be broken down into two or more categories or sources of information that can be further analyzed as the coding process accelerates. Coding can be used when a researcher is looking to generate a theory, meaning that categories and codes are formed after analyzing the gathered material. This form of inductive coding allows for the researcher to delve into the content analysis and later decide how data will be used (Borque, 2004: 133). By definition, content analysis,

Seeks to demonstrate the meaning of written or visual sources by systematically allocating their content to predetermined detailed categories, and then both quantifying and interpreting the outcomes.(Cooky et al. 2013: 5)

Methodologically, content analysis is a process that presents sociologists with the option of determining the presence, meanings and relationships to words or concepts within text or conversation (Cooky et al, 2013:5).

Consequently, all the information on each predetermined sports episode and headline was recorded, compared with notions of femininity and masculinity, and then categorized accordingly to seven different sub topics. The codes, or ordinal measures, included the following topics, “Women were ignored”, “Men were ignored”, Women’s Sports in Feminine Terms”, “Women’s Sports in Masculine Terms”, “Men’s Sports in Masculine Terms”, “Men’s Sports in Feminine Terms”, “No Ties to Gendered Terminology.” These seven codes can be labeled as exhaustive because there is a unique code for each category. The inclusion of the category, “No Ties to Gendered Terminology” signifies that all areas of study have been covered (Borque, 2004: 133). All of these seven categories are

results of the analysis of the transcript used to collect research information and story lines from the episodes and articles. A transcript is a reference tool that is appropriate for open ended answers in the practice of observation. The purpose of a transcript is to help strengthen the “audit trail” and allow for the review of the actual data (Epstein and Martin, 2005: 322). The transcript used for coding has different parts that aid in data retrieval; 1. Background information (data, participants, etc.) 2. Selected verbatim transcription 3. Observations made by the researcher after the session (Epstein and Martin, 2005:322). Therefore, prior to the start of every *SportsCenter* episode or the review of any headlining story, the date was recorded, as well as the journalist or the hosts of the particular episode for background information. Then the discussion of the particular sports topics, as well as the language used to describe the athletes, coaches and contests was indicated. Finally the summary of observations was recorded to help draw conclusions about the gendering of story lines and topics. By tallying up the number of stories for each of the seven categories and dividing them by the entire number of stories recorded, the study able to provide quantitative analysis or the description of data using numbers. In addition, by recording the adjectives and scenarios where language was used to describe athletes in a feminine or masculine manner the study able to provide qualitative and content analysis. The combination of the two methods of research in the coding samples (quantitative and qualitative) improves the validity of these findings and provides extensive detail of the findings to create a far more in depth discussion (Grbich, 2007:198).

Why This Method?

The motive for recording the coverage of both numbers and language of women's and men's sports in the media was to test the continued salience of sport as a dominantly male institution assured by the role of the mass media. Since the enactment of Title IX in 1972 there has been a boom in female participation in sport; however, the media has been reluctant to show mention of it (6, 122). First and foremost, it is imperative to mention that studies before show a significant underrepresentation of women's sport in the media, ultimately probing the continuation of invisibility of female athletes in the media. However, by recording the ways in which men were also portrayed by the media, this study hopes to shed even greater light on the disparity between the genders. Messner, Duncan and Jensen (1993) are sociologists that have looked at the gender hierarchy of naming in sport. Gender hierarchy is the association of language such as "women", "girls" or "young ladies" associated with female sport and "men", "boys", and "young men" associated with male sport (6, 127). Their research found that in addition to infantilizing women with linguistics, while granting male athletes adult status, the quality of commentators verbal attributions to weakness versus strength and winning versus losing differed based on the gender of the athlete and contest (6, 129). In this study it was critical to observe if women were overly sexualized or trivialized by commentators or journalists. It was imperative to record any adjectives that could possibly be associated with masculine or feminine tendencies and compare any overlap between the two. By recording descriptive adjectives for both males and females, it was easier to understand and explain the ways in which the media is portraying sport through a gendered lens.

This study incorporates the ideas and findings of the Messner, Duncan and Jensen while piggy backing off a more recent study by Cooky, Messner and Hextrum titled, “Women Play Sport, But Not on TV: A Longitudinal Study of Televised News Media.” These researchers chose the method of content analysis to systematically analyze the coverage of men’s and women’s sport in the televised news media throughout 1989, 1993, 1999 and 2004 data studies (Cooky et al, 2013:5). The codebook of their study chose to draw upon the gender of sport, type of spore, the competitive level of sport and the time allotted to each sport (Cooky et al, 2013: 7). Unfortunately, this study doesn’t have the ability to replicate the longitudinal methods of Cooky, Messner and Hextrum because of time constraints. Cooky, Messner and Hextrum also gathered network news by gender across three networks: KABC, KCBS and KNBC, as well as ESPN’s SportsCenter. The three categories they included for the collection of air time were, “men”, “women”, and “neutral/both.” (Cooky et al, 2013: 9).

The study by these three sociologists occurred over a much longer span of time allowing for the devotion to a variety of coverage on different networks. It can be argued that the longitudinal duration of their study provides a more complete and thorough investigation, representative of the reality in coverage for women’s sport. However, by recording the content of a shorter time span, based on adjectives that are traditionally associated with masculinity or descriptive words that positively display the personality or talents of a male athlete, this study seeks to provide an alternate view point. Simultaneously, this study mentions the language or adjectives that depict male athletes negatively, whether they are feminized or not. Similarly to Cooky, Messner and Hextrum, the study does the same for the little coverage that was shown of female athletes. Then, the

study notes the adjectives used to describe female athletes to see if there was an overlap between genders. This study probes to answer the following questions: "Are female athletes being described the same way male athletes are?" "Are the negative depictions of men's sport described through feminine language?" "Based on the descriptions of male and female athletes, are gendered notions changing?"

Chapter III Results

One of the most dominant findings in research on gender in sports media is the lack of coverage and marginalization of women's sport. Several studies of the past completed by researchers Cooky, Messner and Hextrum (2013), Messner, Duncan and Jensen (1993) and Martin & McDonald (2012) have further documented these tendencies by the media to ignore women's sport.

This thesis provides additional research on two mediums of the mass media: ESPN's *SportsCenter* and the *NY Times* Sports web page. Although there was a notable increase in coverage within the time period this thesis took place, the overall amount of air time allotted to women's sports was still extremely slim. This minimal amount of coverage attributed to women's sport, despite increased participation of girls and women in sport at the high school, collegiate and professional level, reiterates the message emphasized by Cooky et al. in 2013 that sport continues to be by, for and about men. In addition to recording the amount of time designated to women's sport, this thesis looks at the language used to describe athletes and sporting events through a gendered lens. The purpose of studying descriptive language is to compare the differences and similarities of how women's and men's sports are depicted by the media. These depictions provide researchers with a clearer look at the areas of overlap and separation between the genders. Viewing sports through a gendered lens allows sociologists to create more educated suggestions for a hopeful future based on the incorporation of female sports into the lime light of the media. This section of the thesis will provide the results and statistical analysis

of the percentage of coverage granted to women's sport, as well as the language used by commentators and journalists to describe the athletes and competition in the two mediums stated above.

Sports: Still a Man's Domain

Unfortunately, the data collected in this study does little to counter the argument that sports are a predominantly male domain, particularly when it comes to the media. However, the data from this study suggests that small improvements towards coverage of female athletes in the media have been made in the past few years. This study positively reverses the trend depicted by Messner and Cooky's (2010) survey that showed a decline in women's sports coverage from 2% in 2004 to 1% in 2009 (in Martin & McDonald, 2012: 85). Throughout the twenty *SportsCenter* episodes and ten days of *NY Times* Sport section headlines, the coverage accrued by women's sports paled in comparison to their male counterparts. Throughout the time period this study was conducted, women's sports were ignored on *SportsCenter* 94% percent of the time. In other words, 94% of the story lines on the most watched sports network in America were dedicated towards men's sports, the other were 6% allotted to women's. Although women's coverage is still minimal, it is a great deal higher than the 1.3% of coverage reserved for women's sports observed by Cooky, Messner and Hextrum in 2009 (Cooky et. al, 2013: 8). Fortunately, the headlines of the *NY Times* also provided a hopeful statistic, with 11% of their story headlines tailored to women's sports. This is an increase from a 2002 study of *Sports Illustrated Magazine* done by Fink and Kensicki where 10% of the stories (with or without pictures) included women (in Martin & McDonald, 2012: 84).

Sports: In Feminine and Masculine Terms

Analyzing the descriptive language in the media of women's and men's sports was a primary focus of this study. Each story line that was discussed on *SportsCenter*, as well as every article headlined in the *NY Times*, was examined for adjectives that could be associated with stereotypes of femininity or masculinity. The purpose of this was to decipher if women's sports were being described in the same terms as men's, if women were being trivialized/ sexualized, and to discover if traits associated with femininity were being used to mock poor performance by male athletes.

Appendix A

Women's Sports (#) SportsCenter	Portrayal of Athlete	Adjectives	Analysis of Description
Men's Sports (#) SportsCenter	[Comments]	[Comments]	[Comments]
Dialogue Women's	[Comments]	[Comments]	[Comments]
Dialogue Men's SportsCenter	[Comments]	[Comments]	[Comments]

A1

**Here's an example of the chart (not drawn to size), that was used to record the daily data and information collected from each SportsCenter episode which was later analyzed both quantitative and qualitatively.*

In all, 65% of the storylines that ran on *SportsCenter* didn't include adjectives that could be associated with either masculinity or femininity. The 35% of storylines on SportsCenter that mentioned descriptive adjectives of the athlete, game or coach, were broken down further into the coding categories mentioned in Chapter 2.

Appendix B

SportsCenter	Number of Times (Stories)
Women were Ignored	
Men were Ignored	
Women's Sports in Traditionally Feminine Terms or Descriptions	
Women's Sports in Traditionally Masculine Terms or Descriptions	
Men's Sports in Traditionally Feminine Terms or Descriptions	
Men's Sports in Traditionally Masculine Terms or Descriptions	
No Mention or Ties with Gender	

B-1

** This second chart shows how episodes and headlines were coded using gendered language. Each time a story contained information or language that fell into the following categories, a tally was placed in the box representative of that category.*

For the minimal coverage female athletes did receive, 43% of the time women were discussed in feminine terms. The descriptive adjectives applied towards women's sport included "ladies", "cute" and "dramatic". These adjectives intertwined with stories about roller derby, women's collegiate basketball and professional tennis. The terms aren't indicative of athletic ability, strength or performance; they are being used to denote gender in sport. The remaining 57% of the time, women were recognized in masculine terms. In other words, the adjectives used would be considered complimentary by a male athlete. These masculine terms included adjectives such as: "dominant", "smooth", "effortless", "unstoppable" and "bad ass". Again, this flattering language was used to describe roller derby, women's collegiate basketball and professional tennis. All of this descriptive language blurs the lines drawn by typical notions of femininity versus masculinity because male sports are discussed in the exact same terms. The language used to describe male sports was seemingly different, as 75% of adjectives used could be associated with masculinity or positively portrayed the male athlete. These masculine adjectives included the following: "intense", "irreplaceable", "mentally tough", "warrior", "dynamic", "physical", "swagger", "speed", "skillful", "unbeatable" and "determined." These adjectives were applied to describe the NFL, collegiate football, collegiate basketball and the NBA. The other 25% of the time male athletes were reported in feminine terms such as: "girly", "mamas boys", "soft", "panicky", "dramatic" and "passionate". This language was discussed by commentators, coaches and players to demean athletes by noting them in feminine ways. Any athlete, male or female, would regard these adjectives as derogatory when describing an athletic performance. They ultimately assert the message that there is no place for the womanly characteristics of emotion, feeling and prissy behavior in sport.

Language used in the *NY Times* Sports headlines showed a different pattern. Nearly 53% of the headlines couldn't be associated with positive or negative representations of gender. The remaining 47% of coverage was dedicated primarily to the coverage of male sport. However, the two headlines that were mentioned in the *NY Times* headlines regarding women's sports described women 100% of the time in masculine or complimentary adjectives regarding athlete performance. The following language was applied to women's coverage: "obliterated", "steamroll," "pound" and "consistency". These descriptions were used to illustrate the ferocious play of the top ranked UConn Huskies Women's Basketball team and their win over the #2 seed Duke. When men's sports were described in terms of femininity or masculinity the percentages were nearly identical to those of *SportsCenter*. Male athletes were portrayed 71% of the time in masculine terms using adjectives such as "gutsy", "exceptional", "talented", "tough", "fighter", "gritty", "dominant" and "trounce". The other 29% of the stories inserted language that was negative or feminized. For example, the words were all displayed in headlines depicting men's sport: "helpless", "flimsy", "passionate", "emotional" and "weak". It's important to note the context of the language and not simply the percentages of stories that involve males or females. This approach allows sociologists to gauge a better sense of what the issues with gender in sport truly are, rather than simply the exclusion of women's sport.

Explaining Women's Underrepresentation and Exclusion

Researchers have offered a number of explanations as to why women's sports aren't fully recognized by the sports media, despite the increase in participation and

popularity. One of the root problems behind underrepresentation lies within the ignorance of educational tools. Journalists are taught from the start, supposedly, to reject news values that rank one demographic as more worthy of news coverage than another. However, a study by Hardin, et al. in 2006 revealed that current journalism textbooks did a less than adequate job of maintaining this responsibility. A content analysis was performed across the spectrum of eight sports journalism texts used for undergraduate programs. A whopping 89% of references in all these texts were made in regards to male athletes. Nearly 50% of the references made towards females in these texts were not in a sporting context. The most recently published textbooks showed little to no increase in their mention of women in terms of athletic ability, strength or skill (in Martin & McDonald, 2012: 85). The importance of this analysis is crucial to explaining the underrepresentation of women's sports because sports journalism textbooks guide the minds and bestow knowledge upon the future broadcasters, television hosts and journalists of sports media. The texts that future journalists are learning from are reinforcing the gendered notions of sport that display sports as a masculine endeavor. Unfortunately, it becomes second nature for journalists to associate masculinity with the stereotypes of sport. Therefore sports journalists are being conditioned to reinforce these patterns of male dominance in the arena of sports, rather than promoting the increase of female athletes competing, the growth in popularity and the opportunities of participation for young girls everywhere (Martin & McDonald, 2012: 86). Thus, academic resources can be recognized for some of the problems regarding the exclusion of female athletes from sport. However they cannot take all the blame.

Television news and highlight shows remain two extremely valuable sources of updated sports information. Their tendency to ignore or marginalize female athletes helps maintain the misconception that sports are exclusively by, about and for males. When researchers asked producers, commentators and editors of sports programming why they choose to overlook women's sports, most responded with similar answers. Their explanation included constraints placed on them by marketing factors, and the overwhelming desire to provide viewers with "what they want to see." (Cooky, et al, 2013: 20) While these answers are plausible and *ESPN*, as well as other media outlets, have completed extensive studies to decide what to include, when and how, it's important to delve deeper and understand why is it that the lack of women's coverage builds audiences for men's sports. First, it is imperative to question *ESPN's SportsCenter's* grounds when it comes to financial burdens brought on by marketing, commercialization or ratings. In its 2010 media guide published for potential advertisers, *ESPN* boasts that it is the "most viewed and supported cable channel" and that the 2009 broadcast year was *ESPN's* "highest rated ever" (Cooky et al, 2013: 20). Therefore, *ESPN's* decision to ignore women's sports cannot be attributed to the excuse of marketing factors or budget cuts.

Despite their lack of financial woes, one noteworthy statistic *ESPN* shared with advertisers in 2009 was that it was honored as the top cable network viewed consistently by men ages 18-54 and has been dubbed "men's favorite TV network since 1998." This statistic is a clear indication of the audience that *ESPN* works to cater towards (Cooky et al, 2013: 20). Stereotypically speaking, an assumption of those who create programming for men on broadcasts similar to *SportsCenter* is that male viewers hope to view women as sexual objects, motherly figures, but never strong competitive athletes. Several studies

have argued that women's sports are portrayed through sexualization in news broadcasts to create a unified feeling towards male viewers of female inadequacy in sports. Although studies have countered this theory, the sexist assumption stands as a critical influence on the material included and ignored on *ESPN*. Despite a decrease from 2004 to 2009 of trivialization and sexualization of the portrayal of female athletes in highlight shows, an almost greater issue has occurred. The decrease of sexualized images and portrayals of female athletes has led to the unwillingness to portray and represent female athletes at all (Cooky et al, 2013: 21). The continued underrepresentation of women's sport involvement in the media reflects the symbolic annihilation of the female athlete. Media scholar Gaye Tuchman argued, "Individuals and the roles with which they are associated become incorporated by the media to reflect the dominant norms and values of American society." (in Kane, 1996: 107). Therefore, the ever present marginalization and underrepresentation of women's sports since the enactment of Title IX sends a distinct message from the media that women's sports have little value in our society when compared to men.

The Importance of Gender in Language

In this study, the purpose of recording language attributed to both male and female athletes was to evaluate the similarities and differences between the ways in which the genders were portrayed in sport. The evaluation of language and comparison of adjectives allows for the formulation of reasoning behind the portrayal of the continued hierarchy of males in sport. A 1993 study by Messner, Duncan and Jensen discusses the gendered differences in language of sport through the observation of basketball games and tennis matches. Through their research, these sociologists noted that women are constantly

marked by placing “women” in front of various phrases describing the sporting event, such as “*women’s* final four, *women’s* college basketball, NCAA *women’s* championship game.” Although men’s sports were partially gender marked, they were always referred to as universal, both verbally and in onscreen graphic logos (ie. “The NCAA National Championship Game”) (Messner et al, 1993:125). This is an example of asymmetrical gender marking, or marking women as the “other” in the realm of sports. Labeling women as the second class citizens of sports allows for greater separation between genders in sport. Although this thesis focuses more on the descriptive adjectives to define female and male athletes, it is imperative to mention gender marking as the initial, most obvious method of contributing to the maintenance of male dominance within sport (Messner et al, 1993: 127).

One of the tendencies researchers identify when describing the genders of sport is the linguistic infantilization of female athletes. In simpler terms, commentators will sometimes use the word “girls” or “young ladies.” For example, when describing the UConn versus Duke Game, the headline on *SportsCenter* read, “Ladies First”, noting that the singular mention of a women’s basketball game was going to be discussed before the other collegiate events from the previous night. The term “lady” has traditionally been used to evoke a sense of proper behavior or elegance. Another scholar concludes that the insertion of the term lady carries overtones of chivalry, implying that women are helpless and cannot accomplish things by themselves, all representations that are “decidedly un-athletic.” (Messner et al, 1993: 129). In instances when commentators use this feminine language to discuss women’s sport, it is likely to reinforce to the viewers that women are infringing upon a man’s domain. With the example of the “Ladies First” headline, *SportsCenter*

commentators seem to imply they are doing these athletes a favor by acknowledging them. This terminology directly correlates with the longstanding belief that women are still on the outside, slowly merging into a men's world.

This study's qualitative comparison of adjectives describing female and male athletes found a noticeable difference in the ways the genders were portrayed by the commentators, as well as the journalists. The female athletes were typically discussed in a situation where the women were described by team characteristics and unified performance rather than as individual athletes. For example, the UConn Women's Basketball team gave a noteworthy performance where the team, "Obliterated, steam rolled and pounded their opponents." This description, although complimentary, doesn't focus on the athletic ability or the talent of the team or certain players. Women's sport was noted in terms of "dominant, unstoppable and effortless performances" in regards to Serena Williams' tennis matches and the performance of the Baylor's Women's Basketball team. All of these adjectives, phrases and comments suggest that women's sports aren't very exciting or competitive. It is accurate to state that based on this study, when women's sports are depicted by the media, commentators do not focus across a spectrum of talent levels, personal records or overall wins versus losses. If a women's sports team is successful or dominant, they are considered the exception, indirectly implying that being a talented, exceptional and impressive female athlete is a rarity. The fact that women were constantly mentioned as a team and as uncompetitive doesn't allow for the personal connection between the player and the fan that is present in men's sport.

Men, on the other hand, were referred to as individual athletes and referenced in the concept of the team. Sports teams such as the Miami Heat were noted as being, “unified, mentally tough and showing composure” while stand out Lebron James was noted as, “the franchise who plays like a warrior.” The Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning was referred to as, “A big time player who is irreplaceable on the field.” Other NFL teams were discussed whether as a whole or amongst few players in the locker room, as “skillful, intense, physical and determined.” This descriptive formula differs significantly from the representation attributed to female athletes. The media portrays male athletes as confident individuals with a sense of swagger and personality that is justified by an overwhelming amount of talent. Through numerous mentions of individual male athletes, the audience can personally connect or form a strong opinion, leading to the possibility of fanhood. Female athletes are constantly jumbled together, discussed in terms of their team’s performance rather than their own skill set. This representation of female athletes relays the message that women athletes are only strong, powerful and successful in numbers. The theory displayed by the media is that male athletes deserve to be discussed individually in terms of talent, skill set and characteristics imperative to sport. However, women do not. By acknowledging individually these aspects of the female athlete, somehow these journalists and commentators would be overstepping boundaries, providing a connection between the fan and the athlete. It almost seems as though the association of stereotypically complimentary terms in sport, with individual female athletes, would welcome women sports into a realm of discussion that the media isn’t ready to present-- as dual gendered, or dare I say unbiased towards gender.

Yet another prominent issue displayed throughout the media, verified in this study, is the tendency for poor male performance to be associated with characteristics of or references to females. In an interview following a disheartening defeat by the Southern Illinois men's basketball team, Coach Barry Hinson roared about his players halfhearted and ill willed performance in a press conference. One of the quotes taken directly from the interview reads as follows,

Guys didn't listen at halftime...I'm struggling with this crew right now, they won't let me coach 'em. Any time I coach somebody, they put their head down. We're soft...I've got a bunch of mama's boys right now. (ESPN SportsCenter 12/19)

This rant associates negative performances on the basketball court with women. The coach says his team was out worked, out hustled, overly sensitive and emotional and he is berating them for their performance, using references regarding femininity to insult his players. The coach continues with his post-game interview saying that, "My wife could rebound better than we did tonight. Even she could go out and grab some boards." A statement such as this completely disrespects women in general, not to mention female athletes. Whether Coach Barry Hinson meant to or not, his insult to his players is a direct representation of the ignorant notions of hegemonic masculinity that place women as the subordinate, the lesser, or the infamous "other." This remark ties in with the assertion that if a boy is told he "throws like a girl", it is a devastating insult to his athletic ability (Griffin, 1998:22). Women in the world of sport continue to struggle between being the uncelebrated exception and the punching bags used to demean male athletes. Coach Hinson's statement translated is basically, if my wife, a woman, could outplay you (a man), you should be ashamed. Now, was Coach Barry Hinson trying to negate the athletic talents

and belittle the likes of women's sport on national television? Maybe not. However, it's notions, thoughts, statements similar to these regarding negativity towards female athletes and women's sport, that are unaccepting of the progress made since the enactment of Title IX. Affirmations such as this one coincide directly with the notion that women are infringing upon male territory, and female participation in sport should be discounted because it negates the exclusivity and importance of sports as a masculine domain (Griffin, 1998, 17). This coach's interview aired on SportsCenter December 19th, 2013, meaning that this marginalization and trivialization of females participating in sport is still present in today's society.

The Role of Theory in Sport

All of the qualitative and quantitative observations and analysis made throughout this thesis can be connected to the theories that play a large part in the connection between sports and society. For example, functionalist theory can be partially blamed for male dominance in sport because this theory emphasizes research that focuses on sport participation and positive outcomes for individuals and society (The McGraw-Hill Company, 2012: 27). Therefore, functionalists avoid pointing out the underrepresentation of women in sport, the lack of respectful coverage female athletes receive and the stereotypical gender portrayals in the media. Instead, functionalists focus on popular sports or those dominating headlines, particularly the main three: football, basketball and baseball. Those in a position of power, control and influence (males) often support this theory because it emphasizes stability and equilibrium in society (The McGraw-Hill Company, 2012: 30). The exclusion, underrepresentation and discussion of women's sport

in the media, following the enactment of Title IX, shows that the functionalist theory as those controlling the airwaves maintain masculine hegemony in the arena of sports (The McGraw-Hill Company, 2012: 30). Everyday discussions on and media coverage on *SportsCenter* and the *NY Times* often were clearly based on assumptions used in functionalist theory. The primary weakness of reflection theory is it does not recognize that sports are social constructions that privilege or disadvantage some people more than others (The McGraw-Hill Company, 2012: 31).

An alternative theory that plays a tremendous role in the research of this thesis is feminist theory. A key idea of feminist theory is that societal life is pervasively gendered and sports are no exception. The feminist perspective points out those attitudes about relative gender capability are not confined, in their effects, to the sporting arena. Sports, particularly through their portrayal in the media, maintain masculine hegemony, constantly granting privilege to males and inferiority to women (Byrson, 1987: 48). Society transcends into sport as sport is a gendered activity grounded primarily in the values and experiences of men with power and influence (The McGraw-Hill Company 2012:39). This idea of gender superiority in sport promotes male solidarity through the exclusion of women's sport in the media, which provides support and fuel for negative attitudes towards female athletes (Byrson, 1987: 48). This thesis discusses the ways in which male dominance in sport has been prevalent since before the enactment of Title IX and continues to exist today. In Chapter 1, the discussion of how sports reproduce gendered ideas and practices related to physicality, sexuality, and the body, ties in directly with the contemporary research of feminists with regards to sport. Feminist theory aids in demonstrating the inequalities of gender in sport by looking at the ways in which sports

are involved in the production of ideas about masculinity and femininity, the representations of female athletes in the media and the strategies used by women to resist or challenge the commanding gender ideologies (The McGraw-Hill Company, 2012: 39).

A Possible Upside

After comparing the statistics gathered for this thesis, with the research done by Cooky, Messner & Hextrum and other researchers involving the exclusion of women's sports from the media, there is a small increase in coverage. As previously mentioned, Cooky, Messner and Hextrum discovered that *SportsCenter's* coverage devoted to women's sports reached an all-time low at 1.3% in 2009. Based on the research completed for this study; *SportsCenter*, during this time period, allotted 6% of its airtime to women's sports. The increase in coverage could be attributed to a number of factors such as seasonal sports or the shortened segment of episodes recorded. However, an optimist's perspective of this tiny increase in coverage of women's sports leaves female sports fans hopeful that this is only the beginning.

Another positive attribute about these depictions of women's sport was the invisibility of labels for the female athletes. As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, a prominent issue that female athletes face is the "lesbian label" and a distinct fear of being viewed as homosexual. Female athletes encounter scare tactics such as name calling, "dyke", "lesbian" or "butch", which are used to enforce a gender boundary between femininity and masculinity in sport. For a number of years, the lesbian label was effective because women, especially during the immediate years following Title IX, were afraid to have their femininity and sexuality questioned, allowing them to be easily intimidated by

the opinions of others. Historically, the lesbian label was used as a method of discouraging the communal bond that is supposed to occur among women in athletics, as a way to prevent females from acknowledging their conjoined power (Griffin, 1998:20). This form of intimidation towards female athletes wasn't even briefly noted, mentioned, hinted at or discussed throughout the research collected for this thesis. There weren't any references to sexuality or appearance of athletes throughout these broadcasts or articles. If anything, the reverse trend of fear towards homophobia has occurred. The women's sports teams discussed, such as the UConn and Baylor basketball teams, were strictly mentioned in terms of unity, togetherness and the overall success of the team. Discussion surrounding this hopeful future increase in and expansion of women's sports coverage in the media will occur in the next chapter.

Chapter IIX Discussion and Conclusion

Although the future of women's sports in the media remains questionable, if the trend in coverage continues as it has since the enactment of Title IX, air time for female athletes will remain undoubtedly lower than air time granted to males. This study of *SportsCenter* and the *NY Times* headlines completed near the end of 2013 does little to dismantle the research compiled by previous scholars. This study found that women's sports were ignored on *SportsCenter* 94% of the time. In other words, 94% of the story lines on the most watched sports network in America were dedicated towards men's sports, the other 6% allotted to women's. The *NY Times* headlines granted 11% of their coverage to women's sport, a statistic that provides a glimmer of hope for the future. The second aspect of coverage this study chose to focus on was the use of gendered language in describing athletes and performance. Gendered language plays a substantial role in the preservation of sport as a male domain. With that being said, 65% of the storylines that ran on *SportsCenter* didn't include adjectives that could be associated with either masculinity or femininity. The 35% of storylines on *SportsCenter* that did mention descriptive adjectives of the athlete, game or coach were coded into categories mentioned in Chapter II. Despite being ignored the majority of the time, when women's sports were discussed by commentators using adjectives, 57% of the time, more than half, they were women were recognized in masculine terms. In other words, commentators used adjectives that would be considered complimentary by a male athlete. All of this descriptive language blurs the lines drawn of typical notions of femininity versus masculinity because male sports are

discussed in the exact same terms. These descriptions that positively or neutrally depict female athletes in the world of sport are countered by the 25% of coverage that discussed male athletes in negative (feminized) terminology. This language was discussed by commentators, coaches and players to demean athletes by noting them in feminine ways. These statistics representing language used in the sports media suggest that although there are times when the discussion of sport becomes non-gendered, there are still moments where gendered language is used to maintain sport as an arena built for by and about men. Therefore, the same question posed by earlier researchers remains: In the future, can these patterns of inequitable coverage of women's sport be broken or changed?

Suggestions for Change

Based on the conclusions drawn from this study, as well as several longitudinal studies on the question created since 1972, there is little reason to expect an extraordinary growth in media coverage dedicated to women's sport. A longitudinal study on the coverage of women's sport in the media completed by sociologists Cooky, Messner and Hextrum (2013) asserts a pessimistic view for the future, saying,

To the contrary, our research shows that the proportion of coverage devoted to women's sports on televised news over the past 20 years has actually declined, and there is no reason to believe that this trend will reverse itself in the next 20 years unless producers decide that it is in their interest to do so. (Cooky et al. 2013: 23)

The changes that need to be made to increase coverage of women's sports in the media are not going to happen overnight. Alterations to the air time dedicated to female athletes will

only occur if power relations and perceptions of gender continue to change within sports organizations, with commercial sponsors who advertise sports, and within the mass media(Cooky et al, 2013: 23). However, these shifts of the gendered perception in sport will not come about by themselves; the dismantling of sport as an exclusively male domain is a continually evolving process. The pressure and influence needed to cause this change will have to come from a variety of contributors.

As other scholars have previously explained, this culminated effort should begin with a push to promote equitable treatment of males and females in sport journalism textbooks, as well as an increased presence of women within the field of journalism. The continued research done by sociologists Cooky, Hextrum, Messner, Martin & McDonald, as well as the data collected in this study, should inform future sports writers, commentators and editors that the current levels of coverage for women are unacceptable. In order for sportswriters, producers and commentators to be educated on the disadvantages female athletes face through their portrayal by the media, sociologists need to keep updating the latest trends on the coverage of women's sport in the media.

One suggestion that can be drawn from this thesis regarding the obstacle of underrepresentation of female athletes in the media is to propose that feminists, proponents of Title IX, and fans of women's sports demand a fairer amount of airtime and recognition throughout mediums such as ESPN's *SportsCenter* or the NY Times. In the fall of 2010, ESPN created espnW and tried to take a step towards appeasing audiences of female sport. EspnW is a brand marketed to women that began airing in the spring of 2010 as a digital presence that hoped to expand to television. In the early stages of its existence,

espnW was nothing more than a small Twitter account and a Facebook page; however, the idea of the network was warmly received by leaders in women's sports who have pined for media coverage for as long as they can remember. Despite the previous failures in the women's market such as *Sports Illustrated* introducing *Sports Illustrated for Women* in the late 1990s and *Women's Sports and Fitness Magazine* in 2002, both closing after less than five years of publication, ESPN executives remained hopeful (Thomas, 2010: 1).

The idea of increasing the coverage of women's sports in the media is ideal in theory; however espnW only increases segregation and is a key example of the famous phrase in the court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, "separate is not equal." Although espnW is a sports medium dedicated to fans of women's sports and written by female journalists, underneath that facade stands the ever present notion that sports are a man's domain that women are looking to infringe upon. By creating a separate website and possible television network for women's sports, producers have an excuse not to include women's sports on ESPN's marquee news program: *SportsCenter*. As sociologist Michael Messner was quoted in an article discussing espnW,

Yes, it's going to give women's sports fans a place to go, but it might ultimately ghettoize women's sports and kind of take ESPN off the hook in terms of actually covering them on its main broadcast. (in Thomas, 2010:2)

ESPN is willing to consider including a separate network for women because they believe female fans are a necessary market to appeal to; however, the hidden agenda of espnW may only prolong the inequality between men and women in sport. This thesis does not belittle the accomplishments of the creation of espnW and the battles women have fought to receive this second rate coverage. Fans, scholars and supporters of women's sports must

continue to relay their dissatisfaction with the media that separate is not indeed equal. In the meantime, women athletes and fans should enjoy the aspects of the espnW digital network. The site provides in depth analysis, personalized stories and behind the scenes coverage of women's sport that have never been available anywhere else. The underrepresentation of women's sports in the media serves as a double edged sword; the creation of espnW has increased, but separated, coverage of women's sport from prime time television. In the future, athletes and fans need to continue to take pride in the coverage they have gained through espnW while trying to strive for more equal coverage across all forms of mass media.

As far as the use of gendered language of masculinity and femininity is concerned, descriptions of female athletes as portrayed by the media are going to be difficult to dissemble. From what history exhibits to us, success and superiority in sport has long been associated with the ideals of masculinity, not femininity. The quest for society to view prominence in sport, eminent athleticism and muscularity in association with female success continues to be an uphill battle. As Michael Messner argues in his article "Sports and Male Domain," gender relations, along with their constructions of masculinity and femininity, evolve historically as a consequence of interactions between men and women within socially structured limits and constraints. Just as first wave feminism in the 1920's freed women of the Victorian constraint, the current athletic wave of feminism expresses a quest for women's equality, control of their own bodies and recognition for their accomplishments. Despite this pursuit for equality in sport, women have difficulty achieving the same respect because of the continued patriarchal pattern of consumption

based capitalism in our society where men hold the majority of power. Messner discusses the immensity of this problem by noting,

The larger socioeconomic and political context will continue to shape and constrain the extent to which women can wage fundamental challenges to the ways that organized sports continue providing ideological legitimation for male dominance. And the media's framing of male and female athletes will continue to present major obstacles for any fundamental challenge to the present commercialized and male-dominant structure of organized athletics. (Messner, 2007: 44)

Therefore, until the media decides to dispel all notions of masculinity as being positively correlated to sport and femininity being negatively connected to sport, or simply begin to associate femininity as being positively correlated with sport as well, these issues will continue to exist. As demonstrated by this thesis, the reproduction of these gendered notions that society accepts occur frequently in the sports media. If there is any hope of solving this problem by revamping the definitions of femininity and masculinity connected with sport, it lies within the realm of feminist theory. The process of altering these notions needs to stem from a critical feminist theory that will recognize the contradictory definitions of femininity and masculinity within athletics (Messner, 2007: 44). Hopefully, by studying these contradictions, feminists will be able to inform and educate the media how to better present sports either without mention of gender or positively associating femininity with sport.

Future Research

This thesis could be elaborated on tremendously if undertaken without time constraints. The limitations of this research were the time allotted to do research and the

seasonal constraint of sports presented. Future research involving the basis of this thesis could look at the digital network of espnW and the way a women's sports network portrays women and the language they use to represent female athletes. Research regarding the roles of female commentators could also be incorporated into and further discussed with the topic of media portrayals of female athletes. By recording the ways in which female commentators use language, sociologists could present a possible platform for change in which female commentators could have a significant impact. The more creative and well rounded the argument presented to the producers and those in charge of media production, the better chance for change. Change will be longitudinal and likely fluctuate, but the passage of Title IX in 1972 serves as a reminder that change and movement toward gender equality is possible, and with that we move forward.

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Appendixes 1-A

Women's Sports (#) SportsCenter	Portrayal of Athlete	Adjectives	Analysis of Description
Men's Sports (#) SportsCenter	[Comments]	[Comments]	[Comments]
Dialogue Women's	[Comments]	[Comments]	[Comments]
Dialogue Men's SportsCenter	[Comments]	[Comments]	[Comments]

Appendixes B-B1

SportsCenter	Number of Times (Stories)
Women were Ignored	
Men were Ignored	
Women's Sports in Traditionally Feminine Terms or Descriptions	
Women's Sports in Traditionally Masculine Terms or Descriptions	
Men's Sports in Traditionally Feminine Terms or Descriptions	
Men's Sports in Traditionally Masculine Terms or Descriptions	
No Mention or Ties with Gender	