

Serving, informing, and inspiring today's female athlete and fan postfeminist, neoliberal
discourse: A critical media analysis of espnW

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Abstract

ESPN, Inc. uses espnW to shape discourse about female athletes as postfeminist and neoliberal subjects in the context of further normalizing sport as a masculine institution. Language in espnW articles is a principle activity by which this ideology is circulated and reproduced. Ideology fuels hegemonic conceptions of sport that benefit dominant groups such as corporations, sports media organizations, and sports leagues affiliated with ESPN, Inc. Discourse influences how individuals in our culture think about, behave towards, and support/do not support women's sports, so discourse contributes to female athletes and female fans as marginalized.

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Introduction

As a child/adolescent who directly benefitted from Title IX, I did not think twice about the opportunities afforded to me to participate in sports, a situation different than my mother, whose only sports opportunity in junior high school was the Girls Recreation Association. I enrolled in leagues for almost every sport at least once and enjoyed a successful career in golf at the high school and collegiate level. Along the way, media outlets such as *Sports Illustrated for Kids* and *Golf Digest* offered me supplementary information to take my game to the next level or to provide a perspective on how professional athletes in various sports trained. As an adult, I continue to consult magazines and websites on how to improve my golf game and enjoy reading behind-the-scenes information about my favorite professional athletes. Therefore, a couple years ago, when a professor in my graduate program suggested I check out espnW, ESPN's first digital product suite geared toward female fans and female athletes, I was eager to see what the largest sports media organization in the world had to offer women. This dissertation is a compilation of my analysis.

espnW

espnW is the first business subsidiary of ESPN marketed specifically to female athletes and fans, purporting its mission is "to serve, inform and inspire today's female athlete and fan" (Lynch, April 25, 2011, ¶16). Launched as a blog in December 2010 and converted to a website in April 2011, espnW features articles, blogs, videos, and statistics on both men's and women's professional and alternative sports as well as training tips designed specifically for female athletes from professional athletes, trainers, and "experts." The site is designed as a "digital product suite," which includes pc web,

mobile web, and social media (Facebook, Twitter) because “it’s really indicative of the audience, the fact that women tend to share more online, comment more online, to be more active in social environments” [Laura Gentile, Vice President of espnW, (video file) in Lynch, April 25, 2011], with no immediate plans to convert to a television presence (Lynch, April 25, 2011). Founding partners include Nike, Gatorade, Proctor & Gamble (specifically Venus razors and Secret deodorant), and the Women’s Sports Foundation (the “official charity” of espnW). Nike and Gatorade provide content for espnW in the form of articles on training and articles on nutrition, respectively (Lynch, April 25, 2011).

espnW was launched in June 2009 after three years of research on “girls’ and women’s experiences with sport and how we[it] can be added in and improve that experience” [Laura Gentile (video file) in Lynch, April 25, 2011]. ESPN researchers talked with 2,000 girls and 2,000 women via home visits, one-on-one interviews, and quantitative work and learned, “Women see us [ESPN] as an admirable brand that has authority. But they see us as their father’s brand, or husband’s brand, or boyfriend’s brand. They recognize it’s not theirs...these female sport fans feel that they have to prove that they’re a fan” (Kane & LaVoi, November 11, 2010, ¶11-12). ESPN research also showed that women consume media differently than men do, indicating storytelling as important as well as a “thirst to go a bit deeper with these superstars” (Thomas, October 15, 2010, ¶19).

At its inception, negative reactions to espnW were most vocal from female sports bloggers, who indicated the site “smacked of condescension and segregation” (Thomas, October 15, 2010, ¶4) with one blogger asserting, “Women already have an ESPN. It’s called ESPN. The idea that women need a 'girlier' version of sport programming is

insulting” (DiCaro, October 1, 2010, ¶13-14). Similarly, Michael Messner, sport sociologist, notes, “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” (Thomas, October 15, 2010, ¶11).

My analysis shows that ESPN, Inc. uses espnW to shape discourse about female athletes as postfeminist and neoliberal subjects in the context of further normalizing sport as a masculine institution. Language in espnW articles is a principle activity by which this ideology is circulated and reproduced. Ideology fuels hegemonic conceptions of sport that benefit dominant groups such as corporations, sports media organizations, and sports leagues affiliated with ESPN, Inc. Discourse influences how individuals in our culture think about, behave towards, and support/do not support women’s sports, so discourse contributes to female athletes and female fans as marginalized.

Rationale/Justification for Study

Undertaking a dissertation-level project of espnW is important for many reasons. First, there is a dearth of research on how athletes are covered online (Pedersen, Miloch, & Laucella, 2007). Analyses that exist include coverage of athletes in online forums such as ESPN.com (e.g., Bissell & Holt, 2006; Jones, 2006; Meân, 2011) or, more recently, how social media are utilized by fans, athletes, and sports organizations and how the technology has the potential to change the sports media landscape (e.g., Hambriek, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Williams & Chinn, 2010). Women are rarely the sole focus of these studies, if they are included at all. Although women’s sports are only one component of espnW (the site covers men’s sports, too), research in this area

has potential to contribute to myriad fields of sports studies in disciplines like communication studies, sociology, and kinesiology.

Second, espnW is a new site dedicated to women as fans and as athletes produced by one of the largest [sports] media organizations in the world. Importantly, it is ESPN's *first* attempt at a site dedicated solely to female athletes and fans. ESPN has a history of denying female athletes television coverage (Messner & Cooky, 2010) and of sexual harassment of female employees, especially in the 1990s (Freeman, 2000), so I am curious about whether or not espnW transcends this history to offer more positive portrayals of female athletes than they have in the past.

Third, mass media shape discourse surrounding female athletes' participation in athletics. This discourse influences how viewers perceive cultures of sport (Women's Sports Foundation, n.d.a) and is a socializing agent for getting girls and women involved in sport (Schell, n.d.). In an ideal media climate, "diverse sports characteristics – from grace and beauty to physical strength, endurance and power" (Women's Sports Foundation, n.d.a, ¶2) of female athletes are presented, empowering female athletes and encouraging various publics to take women's athletics seriously. In reality, two major themes emerge from studies of media coverage of female athletes at all levels and in all media: 1) female athletes are underrepresented in terms of amount of coverage compared to male athletes, and 2) female athletes are most often portrayed in ways that emphasize femininity and sexuality before athletic competence (Media Education Foundation, 2005). Assessing how media organizations, especially those that place female athletes and fans as their core audience, cover female athletes is important because media shape

how girls and women perceive sport and can be a tool to remedy gender injustice in the institution of sport.

Examining the ways female athletes are portrayed is important because of the potential for images to influence generations of girls. Growing up in a post-Title IX era undoubtedly shapes the sporting opportunities for young women in positive ways. Images of female athletes' bodies have proven more influential than other discourses surrounding sport related to success, health, and personal responsibility (Heywood, 2007). A study of 575 high school and college women reveals portrayals of women athletes in action garner less self-objectification for viewers than sexualized portrayals of women athletes (Daniels, 2009). Portrayals of strong female athletes have the potential to empower girls to view their bodies for what they can *do* rather than how they *look* as billboards for beauty (Daniels, 2009).

Fourth, the power media organizations have in shaping the ways individuals think about sports is significant because the institution of sport privileges men and masculinity and is a primary means by which gender roles are constructed and maintained in our *entire culture*, not just in the world of sports (Coakley, 2009; Jhally, 2010). Sports are social constructions that reflect the values of dominant powers in the sociocultural system in which they are embedded (Brooten, 2009). Sports operate under particular social, political, and economic conditions (Coakley, 2009), often reflecting masculine ideals in favor of protecting hegemonic masculinity (Harris & Humberstone, 2004). Additionally, a distinct shift in constructions of femininity has emerged with the spread of postfeminism, which encourages women to embrace practices historically disavowed by

feminists to claim power (typically through consumerism), making gender an even more complex phenomenon in the context of sport (McRobbie, 2009).

This project is decidedly political. I am a critical media studies scholar and a feminist, so I am skeptical of the potential for the current oligopoly of media conglomerates to offer media content that benefits consumers rather than increases corporations' bottom lines. I am White, live in a household in the middle-income tier, have been privileged to participate in sports my entire life, and believe sports and physical activity can instill confidence in girls and women like few other avenues can. I believe girls and women deserve open-access, scientifically-supported (not corporate-sponsored science) media that provides information on how they can use sports and physical activity to procure health and wellness and achieve physiological, mental, and emotional goals. In short, I want to use sport and physical activity to change the lives of girls and women to make them more confident, self-assured, and comfortable with themselves.

Contextualizing espnW in Past Literature

Sports are a \$410-\$425 billion per year industry (Plunkett Research, 2011) encompassing governments, educational systems, mass communication, businesses, and athletes (Fuller, 2006). The institution of sport operates at a cultural level and affects family, economic, media, political, educational, and religious realms of all our lives (Coakley, 2004). Players use sports to form and sanction their worldviews (Coakley, 2004). Even individuals who have never participated in sports themselves often emerge as fans passionately dedicated to players, teams, and coaches.

In just over a century, sport has evolved into a global industrial complex affecting every aspect of our culture (Rowe, 2004). As such, research on sport spans myriad topics and disciplines. To situate where my dissertation fits in the tradition of sport studies, I provide an overview of research on sport in communication studies and an overview of interdisciplinary research on sport. Specifically, I outline streams of research on sport as an institution, gender and sport, and media coverage of athletes. Analysts in the field are calling for a turn toward critical paradigms to enhance research in sport, and my dissertation follows suit. Additionally, my research helps remedy the lack of research on internet¹ portrayals of female athletes. Third, no peer-reviewed research has been published on the site espnW. Past initiatives such as *Sports Illustrated for Women* geared toward women as sports fans have failed because they did not present female athletes *as athletes* (Cooky, 2006), so it is important researchers discern the possibilities that espnW has to promote women's sports.

Research on sport in communication studies.

Research incorporating the role sport plays in the world varies by discipline. In communication studies, analyses are centered on communicative practices associated with broader contexts of sport and rhetorical techniques that frame how individuals participate in sports. Past research on sport in communication studies has covered 1) community in sport from the perspective of participants, organizations, media entities, and fans; 2) sport fan cultures; 3) sports and mythology (sport as ritual, sports heroes); 4) gender in sport (participation, hegemonic masculinity, gendered coverage); 5) race and ethnicity in sport; 6)

¹ I do not capitalize "internet" because it is a technology much like radio, telephone, and television that is integrated into the majority of our everyday lives (Schwartz, December 29, 2002). Using "internet" instead of "Internet" reflects the "everydayness" of the technology. Capitalizing "internet" promotes a sort of brand-name experience rather than emphasizing its status as open access (Turow, 2003).

politics/nationality and sports; 7) performance as related to sport (gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, disability); 8) communication and sport in parent-child interactions; 9) player-coach relationships in sports; 10) small groups/teams in sports; 11) crisis communication in sports organizations; 12) commodification of sport (the sports/media complex and corporate sponsorship); and 13) fantasy sports (Billings, Butterworth, & Turman, 2012). Although much sport research is housed in communication studies, most of it is interdisciplinary.

Interdisciplinary research on sport.

Billings (2011) has compiled a list of research combining aspects of sports and media from the past 30 years and found over 400 entries in over 70 different academic journals. Research on media and sport emerges out of the discipline of sociology most often, though other disciplines such as anthropology, critical/cultural studies, economics, history, kinesiology, psychology, physiology, and rhetorical studies contribute to the field as well (Billings, et al., 2012; Gantz, 2011). Ultimately all research combining media and sport is interdisciplinary in some respect because the pervasive context of how the institution works in our culture dictates a broader understanding than a single subject can provide (Billings, 2011; Rowe, 2004).

Streams of interdisciplinary sport research span even more categories than those undertaken by communication studies. My dissertation research spans three main categories of interdisciplinary sport research: sport as an institution, gender and sport, and media coverage of athletes.

Sport as an institution.

Although there are many different ways to define sports and definitions change according to social context, most definitions present sports as “officially governed

competitive physical activities in which participants are motivated by internal and external rewards” (Coakley, 2009, p. 6) centered on competition, physical prowess/ability, and standardized rules (Coakley, 2009). The development of modern sport is often traced to men and boys playing sport and games in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century to enhance strength and fitness and to prepare for combat against potential international skirmishes (Kraft & Brummett, 2009). Sport quickly became a pivotal institution in U.S. culture based on its fusion with the social world of individuals, shaping beliefs about bodies, relationships, abilities, character, gender, race, socioeconomic class, and other characteristics based on ideologies advanced by institutions and individuals with the most power (Coakley, 2009).

Sport is a *socially constructed* institution that changes according to cultural context and affects institutions such as family, religion, education, economy, politics, and media (Coakley, 2009; Kraft & Brummett, 2009). Sport participants style performances to appeal to audiences, creating symbolic rhetorical effects that uphold shared meaning among viewers (Kraft & Brummett, 2009). This shared meaning affects social and political ideologies encompassing race, gender, and citizenship that shape privileged values in our culture (Kraft & Brummett, 2009). The context of sport is affected chiefly by three issues: 1) the meaning, purpose, and organization of sports, 2) who is allowed to play sports and conditions of their participation, and 3) the individuals and organizations that support and provide essential resources to play sports (Coakley, 2009).

What types of sports are revered and by whom is indicative of historical trends favoring aggression and masculinity as cornerstones of the institution of sport. Based on a survey of approximately 60,000 households in the U.S. meant to reflect 2009

nationwide trends in sports fandom as measured by attendance, television viewing, and apparel expenditures (Sports Fan Market, 2010f), the most popular professional sports are football, baseball, basketball, NASCAR, and golf (see Table 1).

Table 1

Nationwide Trends in Sports Fandom

Sport league	Total fans	Fans attending games	Fans viewing games on television	Expenditures on logo sports apparel
National Football League (NFL)	110.9 million ¹	12.8 million ¹	108.9 million ¹	\$1.69 billion ¹
Major League Baseball (MLB)	83.9 million ²	31.9 million ²	76.1 million ²	\$2.03 billion ²
National Basketball Association (NBA)	45.7 million ³	7.4 million ³	44.0 million ³	\$324 million ³
NASCAR Cup Professional Golf Association (PGA)	45.5 million ⁴	5.3 million ⁴	44.1 million ⁴	\$602 million ⁴
	41.0 million ⁵	2.5 million ⁵	40.2 million ⁵	\$170 million ⁵

Note: Numbers rounded.

¹Sports Fan Market, 2010c

²Sports Fan Market, 2010a

³Sports Fan Market, 2010b

⁴Sports Fan Market, 2010e

⁵Sports Fan Market, 2010d

In contrast, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) garnered an average attendance of 8,039 fans per game, 269,000 television viewers per game (WNBA, September 16, 2009), and 437,000 television viewers for the playoffs during the 2009-10 season (Hiestand, May 13, 2010). Numbers show which sports are currently the most revered in the U.S. and which are still gaining ground based on measures of sport fandom measured by attendance, television viewing, and apparel expenditures.

Gender and sport.

In an era when ESPN's top 100 North American athletes of the 20th century includes only nine women (and three horses) (ESPN, n.d.a), women's role in the institution of sport is still perceived by many as marginal to that of men (Coakley, 2009). Dominant gender ideology in most cultures privileges men over women in activities utilizing physical strength, skills, and control of emotions (Coakley, 2009). Acceptance or exclusion of individuals into sport culture is based on "eligibility criteria" such as gender, race, ethnicity, ability/disability, age, weight, nationality, and citizenship (Coakley, 2009)².

Powerful entities such as professional league executives and corporations with a financial interest in sport privilege a definition of sport rooted in hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is also the most common framework used in sport research examining gender (Pringle, 2005). The term hegemony was coined by Antonio Gramsci to describe the process where a culturally diverse society is dominated by one ruling class that manipulates political, ideological, and social norms to the extent that these norms are viewed as the status quo (Gramsci, 1971). The status quo is presented as beneficial to all classes in society but in actuality mainly benefits the ruling class (Gramsci, 1971). Domination does not take place using force but rather, for example, through manipulating groups such as political parties and religious organizations or by controlling mass media (Gramsci, 1971).

² Combining other aspects of identity beyond gender complicates the communicative context of sport even more. Research shows that women, especially women in poor and working-class households, have lower rates of sport participation than do other categories of individuals due to lack of time, freedom, and money needed to play sports, little to no control over the facilities or programs in the facilities where sports are played, less access to transportation, and pressures to be socially and emotionally responsible for family members (Duncan, 2007; Sabo, 2009; Thomas, June 13, 2009; Tucker Center for Research on Women and Girls in Sport, 2007; Women's Sports Foundation, 2008).

Hegemonic masculinity was identified by scholars to explain a *pattern of social practice*, which encompasses more than simple role expectations or identity, in the early 1990s (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is defined as, “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 2005, p. 77). There is no hegemonic femininity; femininity and various subordinated masculinities are always defined as subordinate to masculinity (Connell, 1987). This does not mean, however, that hegemonic masculinity is not challenged. Oppositional forces consistently challenge hegemonic norms, rendering hegemony a fluid concept that is constantly being redefined (Hardin, Lynn, & Walsdorf, 2005). The predominant cultural ideals of hegemonic masculinity do not necessarily correspond to personalities of the most powerful men in society but rather models of masculinity that sustain power for the dominant group (Connell, 1987).

Hegemonic masculinity has been applied to numerous sporting contexts to illustrate the dominance of masculinity in sport [e.g., Hundley’s (2004) study on how symbolic decoding of language used on golf scorecards reveals that hegemonic masculinity upholds everyday practices of golf]. The premise of this scholarship is that sport has historically been considered a masculine endeavor due to characteristics needed for successful participation, such as aggressiveness, competitiveness, superiority, mental and physical toughness, initiative, strength, power, and confidence (Duncan, 2006; Mawson, 2006). The idealized sporting body, then, is male, muscular, and aggressive, and is the standard against which all sporting bodies are measured. Men are “naturally”

built for sport, which makes women “not naturally” built for sport (Hardin & Whiteside, 2010; Media Education Foundation, 2005). When women participate in sport and challenge hegemonic masculinity, then, they are often met with resistance. Resistance includes tactics such as media coverage that does not cover/underrepresents female participation in sports (Messner & Cooky, 2010), emphasizes individual sports (Duncan, 2006), minimizes female athletes’ accomplishments through diminishing or derogatory language in articles/commentary on games (Billings, Halone, & Denham, 2002), or labeling female athletes as lesbian and then stigmatizing this label (Media Education Foundation, 2005)³. This is important because media portrayals have the potential to shape various publics’ views of women’s participation (or media portrayals of the lack of participation) in sports (Elueze & Jones, 1998), and tactics like these discriminate against female athletes.

Hegemonic masculinity frames the institution of sport; however, the institution embodies multiple, complex meanings that are inconsistent with one another when women challenge existing ideology in myriad ways (Coakley, 2009). Participation is one example. Female athletes comprise 41.4% of the total high school athlete population (National Federation of State High School Associations, n.d.) and 45.6% of the total Division I intercollegiate athletics population (NCAA, 2010), numbers that are at an all-time high. U.S. female athletes outnumbered U.S. male athletes for the first time in history for the 2012 Olympic Games (LaVoi August 8, 2012) and earned 58 of 104

³ Violations of gender ideals call sexuality into question and, because identifying as queer is still not widely accepted as it should be (especially in sports), lesbian players remain closeted and others feel pressure to act and appear “wholesome,” which includes “acting” heterosexual (Harris & Humberstone, 2004; LaVoi & Kane, 2011; Media Education Foundation, 2005; Webster, 2009). Players who do not enact heterosexuality are often excluded from media coverage (LaVoi & Kane, 2011). Gender binaries are maintained by marginalizing women who do not conform to traditional gender roles.

(55.8%) medals (29/46 gold, 14/29 silver, 15/29 bronze) for the U.S. (NBC Olympics, August 13, 2012). While participation numbers for female athletes are the highest they have ever been, mainstream media coverage of these athletes does not match up.

Media coverage of athletes.

Mary Jo Kane, Director of the Tucker Center for Research on Women and Girls in Sport, claims, “As we enter a new century, we are in what I call the Best of Times and the Worst of Times with respect to media representations of female athletes” [Media Education Foundation, 2005 (video file)], asserting unprecedented acceptance of women in sport based on initiatives like Title IX yet consistent backlash about the success and presence of female athletes (Media Education Foundation, 2005). Kane (2009) groups media depictions of female athletes into three categories: 1) ambivalent images, where the athlete is presented in a feminine/sexualized way but the image contains some clue that she is an athlete (e.g., Michelle Wie in a wedding dress holding a golf club), 2) sexualized images (e.g., Brandi Chastain nude bending over holding two strategically-placed soccer balls), or 3) athletically competent images (e.g., Candace Parker charging down the basketball floor). Mainstream media outlets disproportionately portray female athletes as ambivalent or sexualized as a way to counter these individuals violating traditional gender roles to participate in sports (Kane, 2009).

Four factors are behind the trend of presenting female athletes as sexual objects. The first is the financial success of pioneers like Anna Kournikova and Gabrielle Reece in terms of off-field/court/pitch endorsements, which have been intensified by the popularity of the internet (Huang, 2004). The second factor is when younger female athletes disregarding the struggle women have gone through to attain equal opportunities

for sports participation (Huang, 2004). Younger athletes are often less conscious about posing scantily clad because the opportunity to participate in sports has always been afforded to them, thanks in large part to Title IX. The third factor is that the sports marketplace exists in the entertainment industry. The old adage that “sex sells” is still in full effect, and media associated with the sports industry embrace sexy endorsers as much as other industries like film or music do (Huang, 2004). The last factor is backlash from various publics against female athletes for participating in aggressive, team-oriented sports like basketball and softball, which have historically been the turf of male athletes (Huang, 2004).

Approximately 40% of all athletes nationwide are women, yet they still receive only 5-8% of media coverage (Media Education Foundation, 2005; LaVoi & Kane, 2011; Hardin & Whiteside, 2010). When women are depicted, they are more often participating in individual sports rather than team sports and are consistently presented in passive roles highlighting physical appearance rather than athletic ability (Brooten, 2009; Duncan, 2006). When women are presented in team sports, they almost always exhibit mainstream media sex appeal, like Natalie Gulbis or Jennie Finch (Duncan, 2006). This technique prompts viewers to judge female athletes on “stylistic standards of beauty” (Webster, 2009, p. 57) rather than on athletic competence (Webster, 2009).

Media coverage of athletes falls under the purview of producers, editors, program directors, programmers, camerapersons, writers, journalists, commentators, sponsors, bloggers, and website providers (Coakley, 2009). These entities work to realize one or more of five goals: (1) to make financial profits, (2) to influence cultural values, (3) to provide a public service, (4) to enhance personal status and reputation, and (5) to express

themselves in technical, artistic, or personal ways (Coakley, 2009). Priority given to one or more of these goals is influenced by the interests of the organization(s) from which coverage is produced/distributed (Coakley, 2009). As such, these organizations are largely responsible for framing different sports and for influencing how they are perceived and incorporated into viewers' lives.

One excuse media outlets give for why they do not feature women's sports is that few consumers express interest in women's sports, though no empirical data back this up (Women's Sports Foundation, 2002). When women's sports are covered, White athletes receive more coverage than minority athletes, who are typically depicted in racially stereotyped ways (e.g., animalistic) when they are covered (Women's Sports Foundation, 2002). There is a dearth of coverage of athletes with disabilities, too, and when coverage appears it is usually centered on the drama surrounding the disabled athlete's participation rather than the athlete herself (Women's Sports Foundation, 2002).

The master narrative of media organizations is that "sex sells" female athletes, though no empirical data prove this is true, either (Kane, 2009). Sex sells sex, not athletics, as evidenced by a study conducted by Kane and Maxwell (2011) that reveals ambivalent images of athletes offend all groups of consumers (men and women, all ages, all sport backgrounds). Sexualized images do not increase interest in watching games on television, going to games, or buying season tickets for any group (Kane & Maxwell, 2011).

There is evidence that non-profit media may be better than for-profit media in terms of media representations, but women are still consistently underrepresented in all aspects (multimedia, articles, covers) (Cooper & Cooper, 2009; Kane & Buysse, 2005).

One explanation is that female athletes are marketed differently based on a sport culture largely geared toward young, heterosexual men. Athletic personas like “the dominator,” “the playboy,” or “the lovable, big clown” adopted by male athletes for marketing materials do not fit gender norms of how women should behave in our culture and uphold a masculine definition of sport (Burriss, 2006).

Whether or not sexualization of female athletes is beneficial for the athletes is controversial. Many female athletes point out that they work hard for their bodies and want to show them off to be marketable for both sport- and non-sport products. These women claim their “window of opportunity” to be successful as an athlete is minimal compared to other careers and thus they want to seize every opportunity they can to earn sponsorship (Duncan, 2006; Huang, 2004)⁴. An alternative perspective is that revealing poses objectify women and place the focus more on female athletes’ bodies than on their sporting abilities (Duncan, 2006; Meân & Kassing, 2008). This trivializes and marginalizes the physical, emotional, and mental empowerment women gain from participating in sport (Media Education Foundation, 2005).

Media sexualization of athletes is not unique to women; however, male athletes are presented by media organizations and commercial sponsors as sexy mostly because of how they play, how many athletic skills they display, and how powerful they are when they participate in their respective sports (Hardin & Whiteside, 2010; LaVoi & Kane, 2011; Media Education Foundation, 2005; Webster, 2009)⁵. Female athletes are

⁴ Tiger Woods, highest paid male athlete of 2011, made over \$62 million in salary, winnings, endorsements and appearance fees last year (even after a significant media scandal that cost him some sponsorships) (Freedman, n.d.); Maria Sharapova, highest paid female athlete of 2011, made \$25 million in salary, winnings, endorsements and appearance fees last year (Sesno, n.d.).

⁵ Although male athletes are also presented in sexualized ways, the sheer magnitude of men’s sports coverage dictates an alternate reality: “‘for every image of a male athlete that supposedly sexualizes him, there are thousands and thousands of pictures of male athletes who are simply great athletes,’ Dr. Kane

presented as sexy not because of how they engage in their respective sports but for how they look off the field (Hardin & Whiteside, 2010; LaVoi & Kane, 2011; Media Education Foundation, 2005; Webster, 2009). Sexualized media representations of female athletes indicate the threat athletic women pose to traditional gender ideals of masculinity defined by physical strength, competence, and action (Jhally & Alper, 2002). Media portrayals of athletes are important because sport is one of the key places where norms of gender are defined, circulated, and maintained (Jhally & Alper, 2002).

Statement of Purpose/Research Questions

My dissertation is an analysis of espnW from two perspectives. First, I chronicle representations of female athletes on espnW as compared to past mainstream representations of female athletes to discern whether or not espnW represents more positive portrayals⁶ of female athletes than mainstream media has in the past. Second, I analyze espnW as it is situated in broader social contexts related, but not limited to, identity, the institution of sport, media conglomerates, entertainment, and power. espnW is a site aimed at female fans and female athletes and therefore has the potential to shape the future of how readers participate in and consume sports.

Research questions.

I divide research questions for this study by method.

[Mary Jo Kane, Director of the Tucker Center for Research on Women and Girls in Sport] said. ‘That’s not the case for women. If it was true that whenever I turned on ESPN I saw women athletes as athletes, I’d be less troubled by Playboy’” (Huang, 2004, ¶13).

⁶ I define positive portrayals as those that show girls and women how they can use sports and physical activity to enhance health and wellness and achieve physiological, mental, and emotional goals.

Critical discourse analysis, qualitative analysis.

How does espnW encourage users to think about women's sports? What connection does this have to gendered power relations in the broader sphere of sport in general?

What is the goal of ESPN products marketed to women understood using a political economy perspective?

Quantitative analysis.

What types of athletes (sex, sport, level of sport, team/individual sport) are featured in images/feature articles on espnW?

Do feature photos on espnW showcase athletes in uniform, on the playing surface, and in action?

How do contributors write about athletes (e.g., game/non-game reporting, reference to athleticism, references to psychological/emotional strengths/weaknesses) in feature articles on espnW?

Are athletes' non-sporting lives (e.g., references to physical appearance, family roles, personal relationships) referenced in espnW feature articles?

Theoretical foundation.

I construct the theoretical foundation for my dissertation on espnW using feminist theories of sport, postfeminism, neoliberalism, and political economy analysis. The broad framework I draw from is feminist critiques of sport and gender. Definitions of feminism are varied, but all share two constituents: gender and power (Smith, 2010; Van Zoonen, 2006). I start with the idea of "gender as a mechanism that structures material and symbolic worlds and our experiences of them" (Van Zoonen, 2006, p. 3) and that power

operates on a number of levels and through a number of entities such as government and corporations. Utilizing a feminist critique of sport and gender is ultimately about producing frameworks for social change (Birrell, 2000).

Postfeminism serves to further focus the framework for my study. Postfeminism suggests that feminism is no longer needed because equality between men and women has been achieved (McRobbie, 2004). McRobbie (2004) suggests postfeminism is sustained by a “double entanglement” (p. 4) of neoconservative values of gender, sexuality, and family undergirded by liberal values of choice and feminism conceived of as the Gramscian version of common sense. Specific aspects of postfeminism most relevant for my analysis are feminism as no longer necessary, a focus on individual women, difference arguments, and choice, all of which are explained further in chapter two.

Postfeminism flourishes in a neoliberal context (Vavrus, 2012). Neoliberalism as a mode of governmentality has recently proliferated with the modern State’s emphasis on privatization and making citizens self-enterprising; individuals embody a market model on an individual level to maximize their lives (Binkley, 2007; Nadesan, 2008). Postfeminism, neoliberalism, and political economy work together “because [postfeminism] undercuts feminism and doesn’t threaten what neoliberalism holds dear – profitability, privatization, and individualism – key features of...the political economy of today’s media” (Vavrus, 2012, p. 8).

A third key issue of this study is the political economy of espnW. Political economy is “the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including

communication resources” (Mosco, 2009, p. 2). A political economic approach analyzes the institutional context of a text as related to its producer organization (often its parent company) and target audience as these elements work together to maximize profits. The ESPN brand travels across different media environments and targets different consumer groups using multidimensional visual, social, and communicative experiences (Arvidsson, 2006)⁷. How it presents espnW shapes the ways consumers think about and communicate about sports, especially women in sports.

Methodology.

The methodology for my dissertation combines critical discourse analysis (CDA) and content analysis. Although these two methods are rarely used together because of differing epistemological stances, bridging scholarship in communication/media studies and other disciplines associated with sport studies necessitates the combination. My primary method is CDA, and content analysis aids in identifying which aspects of espnW are most prevalent and, therefore, most pertinent for CDA.

A call for critical analysis in sport studies.

Although hegemonic masculinity has been beneficial as a grounding principle for researchers to analyze power relations in sport the past twenty years, the concept needs to be reformulated according to contemporary sporting contexts (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). There is a trend in sport studies toward poststructuralist thought, especially

⁷ Overall, analyses of websites associated with traditional media outlets reveal that narratives privileging White, male, heterosexual athletes prevail (Dart, 2009; Meân, 2010; Oates, 2009). For example, analysis of ESPN.com from November 23 to December 2, 2009, shows the site presented a narrow range of men’s sports, excluding or sidelining other sports, countries, and women in coverage (Meân, 2011). Additionally, the site engaged in self-promotion through an “integrated self-referential narrative” (Meân, 2011, p. 171) and “cross-promotional platform-jumping” (Meân, 2011, p. 171) (cross-promoting other ESPN products), positioning itself as the utmost expert on all that is sport. As they made themselves the experts, they simultaneously put forth the illusion of participation with readers of the site, cultivating a sense of solidarity so readers bought into the system (Meân, 2011).

augmented by Foucauldian theorizing (Pringle, 2005). The most significant change is about incorporating the conceptualization of power as rooted in a dominant ruling group more purposefully. Gramsci conceptualized a binary division between the dominant class and other classes who were dominated (Pringle, 2005). Poststructuralist scholars such as Foucault conceptualize power as facilitated by discourse, not just one ruling group, and focus more on the body as a site constructed by discourse and power (Pringle, 2005).

Research on gender in fields like sport management has been primarily from the perspective of liberal feminist theory (Shaw & Frisby, 2006). Although autonomy and equality are important issues in the institution of sport, these studies simply identify inequalities instead of challenging or changing the discourse or power structures associated with sport (Shaw & Frisby, 2006). Innovative scholars call for research to be conducted from multiple paradigms because the paradigms from which we operate determine the questions asked, methods used, and the degree to which results can affect society (Frisby, 2005). Most importantly, invoking a critical paradigm, where sport organizations are integrated parts of cultural, economic, and political contexts characterized by imbalanced power relations, offers a way to promote social change by challenging hegemonic thinking (Frisby, 2005).

Poststructural feminist theory is one useful piece of the critical paradigm I draw from for my study. Re-defining categories of identity and normalized practices makes way for development of new meaning and understanding that can guide alternative policies and solutions (Shaw & Frisby, 2006). Dualistic descriptions of the world using hegemony may limit understanding of the complexity of issues and often ambiguous, entrenched power relations because “it is attempting to represent an unstable or contextually bound amalgam

of multiple and independent discourses” (Pringle, 2005, p. 267) including, for example, the combination of gender as defined by sexuality, affect, appearance, behavior, occupations, and dominance (Pringle, 2005). Poststructuralist theory moves beyond traditional descriptors of identity for a more thorough analysis of sport not hindered by categorical definitions.

Critical discourse analysis.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a method for examining the means by which power operates to constitute social reality (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Discourse includes “historically and culturally located systems of power/knowledge” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, p. 344) that go beyond symbolic ideologies to include attitudes, objects, and subject positions (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000; Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Subjects in discourse also simultaneously shape the discourse that constitutes social reality using technologies of the self (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000), so being cognizant of how discourse operates as a *system* is imperative. Ultimately, the aim of critical discourse analysis is to expose privileges that grant particular entities power while constraining others (Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

Characteristics of CDA dictate how research is conducted using this method. First, analysis of social problems using CDA is usually multidisciplinary because one perspective does not encompass all pertinent contexts of the problem (Van Dijk, 2003). Second, rather than describe discourse, as in content analysis, CDA seeks to explain it in the context of social interaction and social structure (Van Dijk, 2003). Third, CDA is centered on how discourse affects relations of power and dominance in culture (Van Dijk, 2003). Fourth, CDA bridges the gap between microlevel analyses of strategies such as language use,

discourse, and communication and macrolevel analyses of larger structures like power, dominance, and inequality between social groups (Van Dijk, 2003).

Combining theories with conflicting epistemological assumptions.

CDA and content analysis operate from conflicting epistemological perspectives: critical theory (post-positivist) and positivist (Pringle, 2005). As such, there are potential problems with combining the two methods in one dissertation. Post-positivist researchers assert positivist approaches have the potential to collude with and reinforce dominant political and economic systems (King, 2005) and contend dualistic categories used in positivist approaches limit understanding of social phenomena (Pringle, 2005). I use CDA in my dissertation to examine what strategies espnW uses to mark the presence of gender not defined by sex (e.g., the way *all* athletes enact masculinity, regardless of how they identify their sex category), yet I also use sex categories in the content analysis portion of the project, essentially reproducing dualistic dichotomies.

If CDA situates gender identity as socially constructed not according to specific categories of sex, then employing these same categories in content analysis is potentially troubling. I address this in my methodology by emphasizing CDA as a primary method and using content analysis to provide more insight into what emerges as most significant about espnW for the CDA. Most research on media representations of athletes are quantitative in some respect to establish groundwork for where female athletes stand, though alternative approaches are gaining momentum (Gratton & Jones, 2010). A purely positivist approach misses the complexity of sport, especially the complexity of the situation of female athletes in an institution that has historically been dominated by men (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Sport studies research is most useful, however, when

methodological contingency is utilized and the most useful methods are used to address research questions: “the assembled sources are always analyzed within the context of a network of economic, political, and social linkages that produce and give meaning to them” (King, 2005, p. 21). Content analysis reveals the most relevant aspects of the context of espnW for a richer CDA.

Quantitative/qualitative results.

Before I started CDA of feature photographs and articles on espnW for my dissertation, I used content analysis to establish a baseline for how athletes are portrayed in espnW photographs and articles (see Appendix A for full results). Overall quantitative findings reveal female athletes represented in unprecedented ways as compared to mainstream media: in uniform, on the court, and in action. At the same time, level of sport and team versus individual sport categories exhibit the same type of discouraging coverage found in past studies of coverage of male and female athletes.

Female athletes are covered photographically in unprecedented ways from mainstream media on espnW, both in frequency of images and in seriousness of coverage. espnW executives originally planned for a 60/40 split for presenting female athletes versus male athletes (Kane & LaVoi, 2009). Female athletes comprise 83.2% and male athletes comprise 16.8% of the photographs I examined with solely female athletes or solely male athletes. Article presentation mirrored photographic presentation, with 84.5% of articles on solely female athletes and 15.5% of articles on solely male athletes. Typically women’s sports in mainstream media receive only 5-8% of total sports coverage despite women making up over 40% of the athlete population (LaVoi & Kane, 2011; Media Education Foundation, 2005), so in examining the frequency of

photographs and articles of female athletes on espnW, the site is indeed the “primary destination for women’s sports” (espnW, n.d.a, ¶1).

Seriousness of coverage of female athletes is also a positive highlight of my quantitative analysis of photographs and articles on espnW. There were no significant differences in how female athletes and male athletes are photographically presented in terms of lead stories versus “side” stories, uniform presence, court location, pose presentation, true athleticism, posed athleticism, femininity/masculinity, or sexual suggestiveness. There were also no significant differences in how female athletes and male athletes are represented in articles for the categories lead article/side article; focus of the article; game/non-game reporting; physical appearance, sexuality, attire; athletic weakness/limitations; positive skill level/accomplishments, negative skill level/failures; family role/personal relationships; psychological strengths/emotional strengths, psychological weakness/emotional weaknesses; and humor. Statistical significance favors female athletes being talked about more in terms of athletic prowess/strength as a percentage of the total female athlete population as compared to male athletes.

Two factors mar espnW’s photographic and textual presentation of female athletes: level of sport and team versus individual sport. Statistical significance emerges for level of sport because a higher proportion of female athletes than male athletes (10.4% versus 3.2% of all photographs and 7.2% versus 0.0% of all articles) are shown engaging in recreational sports such as kayaking instead of organized sports, which are taken more seriously in the contemporary sporting landscape and therefore typically garner more media attention. Male athletes are also presented in team sports in a higher proportion (73.0% versus 51.3% in photographs; 85.5% versus 52.3% in articles) than

female athletes, which is consistent with past studies on media representation of male and female athletes (Duncan, 2006; Vincent, Imwold, Johnson, & Massey, 2003).

The three most prevalent themes based on qualitative analysis of articles on espnW are “‘behind-the-scenes’ access on the field,” “‘behind-the-scenes’ access off the field,” and “in the stands.” These themes are outlined in detail in Appendix A and serve as the basis for CDA in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Overview of Chapters

In chapter two, I explain the methodology I use for my analysis. I start with quantitative and qualitative methods to establish a baseline for how espnW targets female athletes and female fans. This baseline offers a springboard for CDA and political economic analysis of articles on the site rooted in power, language, and politics. In chapter two, I also outline the theoretical frameworks I used in my analysis: postfeminism and neoliberalism. Last, I discuss how I handle conflicting epistemological perspectives of post-positivism and critical theory.

In chapter three, I report findings from CDA; specifically, findings related to language and audience. First, divergent dialogues in articles about female athletes position male athletes as superior in their respective sports and have the potential to influence viewers’ attitudes about and behaviors toward female athletes. Second, espnW as “additive content” to ESPN reifies postfeminist ideology of natural sexual difference and choice. Choice, individualism, and empowerment facilitate espnW as a technology of the self that enables neoliberalism in articles geared toward viewers as athletes.

In chapter four, I present instances where espnW articles directly confront issues of gender discrimination in sport, a tactic few other mainstream media organizations

employ. Although authors seem forthright in confronting such issues, postfeminist, neoliberal conceptions of female athletes and other stakeholders in sport uphold the institution of sport as masculine.

In chapter five, I explain the political economic context of espnW. Because the site is part of The Walt Disney Company, it is legally obligated to make decisions that will financially benefit shareholders. espnW is thus an exercise in branding, not in advancing positive portrayals of female athletes.

In chapter six, I reflect on the implications of my analysis. I also present tactics I think we can use to change the institution of sport to be more inclusive of everyone. Last, I present future directions for research based on my analysis of the first six months of photographs and articles in espnW.

Chapter 2

Theory, method, and epistemology weave together to create a research nexus (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) that guided me through my analysis of espnW. Theory is an “interrelated set of constructs (or variables) formed into propositions, or hypotheses, that specify the relationship among variables (typically in terms of magnitude or direction)” (Creswell, 2009, p. 51). Methods are the tools I used to gather data, and epistemology is the philosophical belief system brought about by my questions, assumptions, and beliefs that guided me in how I conducted my analysis (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). These three elements define the *methodology* I used to formulate a research design, from initial thoughts about what might be interesting about the site to final interpretation of findings.

My methodology to analyze espnW was strategic but also a bit nontraditional, so I explain how I decided on each element of the project in this chapter. First, I provide an overview of mixed methods content analysis, which I used to gather background information on photographs and articles on the site. Second, I outline critical discourse analysis (CDA) and political economy methods as I used them in the study. Third, I address the challenges of combining methods with differing epistemological assumptions. Fourth, I explain postfeminism and neoliberalism as frameworks for my analysis of espnW in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Mixed Methods Content Analysis

To achieve a comprehensive analysis of espnW, I explored multiple strategies to ensure I would cover its most important aspects. My biggest challenge was bridging two fields of research – critical media studies and sport studies – which often employ different methods for investigating phenomena. Critical media studies typically relies on

theoretical perspectives that engage phenomena from a humanistic approach using political assessment and an activist orientation (Ott & Mack, 2010). Sport studies projects investigating media images rely more on quantitative and qualitative methods to report phenomena rather than interpreting them in terms of ideological power. Therefore, I knew I wanted to have a quantitative/qualitative component to my research, not only to follow precedent in the sports studies field, but also to establish a baseline for content of espnW because it is such a new website. After research on quantitative/qualitative approaches, I settled on a mixed methods approach, a combination of both methods, as most appropriate for this study.

“Mixed methods” is a research design that uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to answer research questions (Hesse-Biber, 2010). The strategy is not new in social research; however, the name “mixed methods” has been used only since the 1990s (Denscombe, 2007). Myriad combinations of quantitative and qualitative methods are housed under the “mixed methods” approach, and ideally data collected is integrated to provide a comprehensive picture of phenomena under investigation (Bryman, 2008). Content analysis is a method for gathering “hard data” about macrophenomena, and textual analysis is the most commonly used content analysis technique (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

There are four aspects that influence a mixed methods study design (Creswell, 2009). The first is timing: quantitative data and qualitative data can be gathered in phases (sequentially) or gathered at the same time (concurrently) (Creswell, 2009). The second aspect is weighting: priority given to quantitative or qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). Mixed methods research operates on a continuum of quantitative and qualitative

emphasis, so which method is privileged depends on the interest of the researcher, the audience for the study, and how the researcher poses research questions (Thomas, Nelson, & Silverman, 2011). For this study, I chose to use what Creswell (2009) labels a “concurrent embedded strategy,” which means I collected quantitative data and qualitative data at the same time and privilege one method over the other (Creswell, 2009). I privilege qualitative data over quantitative data to bridge connections between sport studies and critical media studies and also to ascertain a richer conception of how espnW positions athletes. My embedded case study is a “single-case design” rather than a holistic design, which means I look only at photographs and feature articles on espnW instead of examining the site as a whole or considering a broader conception of sporting websites geared toward women as a whole (Yin, 2009). Holistic designs span more content and are therefore often considered more desirable, but single-case designs are justifiable if the case is about content that represents a rare or unique circumstance (Yin, 2009). espnW is ESPN, Inc.’s first dedicated content for female fans and female athletes and therefore warrants examination as a single case.

The third aspect of mixed methods study design is mixing, which addresses at what stages (data collection, data analysis, interpretation, or all three phases) quantitative and qualitative data mix (Creswell, 2009). For this study, data mix only at the interpretation stage. I collected quantitative and qualitative data separately and use both to inform the conclusions I reach about content of the site (content analysis) and about how the site operates from a postfeminist and neoliberal perspective (critical discourse analysis). The fourth aspect of mixed methods design is “theorizing or transforming perspectives,” which encompasses the frameworks that guide analysis (Creswell, 2009).

This element is not as relevant to my study because I use content analysis more to establish a baseline of what is in espnW photographs and articles instead of as the crux of my analysis. Interpretation from a critical discourse perspective is where frameworks for my study are most relevant, and mixed methods research sets up how I analyze espnW from a postfeminist, neoliberal, and political economy perspective, which I explain later in this chapter.

Mixed methods content analysis works well for my study for a number of reasons. First, analysis of espnW is complex because there are so many contexts at stake (e.g., sport, journalism, gender). Using more than one method is a way to break down some of the complexity in the analysis (Creswell, 2009). Second, more insight is inevitably going to be gained from using two methods rather than either method alone (Creswell, 2009). Triangulation of methods offers a convergence of findings that enhance the credibility of research because I gain a fuller understanding of the research questions under consideration (Creswell, 2009). Third, using both quantitative and qualitative data means one method can develop/inform the other method and can clarify results that may contain contradictions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

Challenges from using mixed methods research arise, too. Using a mixed methods design means that I needed some degree of expertise in both quantitative and qualitative research (Cresswell, Plano Clark, & Garrett, 2008). I was trained as a qualitative researcher in my master's academic program and as a critical media studies researcher in my doctoral academic program, so proficiency in quantitative methods is where I lack expertise. I do not lack expertise, however, in asking for help in this area. I relied on Statistical Counseling Services at the University of Minnesota, a friend who holds a

Ph.D. in biostatistics, and one of my dissertation committee members to ensure I designed, executed, and analyzed the quantitative portion of the study appropriately. Using a mixed methods design also means more time to conduct research than I would have had to do if I had used only one method. I am lucky to have sufficient funding to concentrate on dissertation work through my Ph.D. program, so allocating the extra time it took to gather data using two methods for this part of the study was worth it for more rich results.

Now that I have established the rationale for choosing a mixed methods design, I delineate choices I made for each method before explaining my third and fourth methods: CDA and political economy. Last, I explain how these methods fit together despite differing paradigmatic perspectives.

Quantitative versus qualitative research.

In this study, I privilege qualitative and critical methods and use quantitative analysis as a complement to the other methods rather than as the primary base for interpretation of data. One of the controversies of using mixed methods research is that the methods are so different. Quantitative and qualitative research approaches the same types of problems but differ in five significant ways based on the politics of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The first difference is in epistemological perspective: quantitative research is most often positivist and qualitative research is most often post-positivist (although both methods blur into the other epistemological perspectives) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I discuss differences between these two epistemological perspectives later in this chapter. The second difference is to what degree researchers accept postmodern sensibilities. Qualitative researchers who use postmodern or

poststructural frameworks often reject quantitative research because the method relies on and reproduces a particular type of science that silences too many voices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In postmodern frameworks, reason and truth are broadened to include ethics like personal responsibility, political praxis, and multivoiced texts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The third way quantitative and qualitative research differs is in capturing co-researchers' points of view. Quantitative researchers rely on remote, inferential empirical methods and materials to gather information from a large group of respondents/texts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In contrast, qualitative researchers use methods like interviewing, thematic analysis, and ethnography to ascertain a richer description of a phenomenon from a smaller group of respondents/texts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Objectivity, reliability, and perspective differ between quantitative and qualitative methods as a result of how respondents are queried. This was a concern I had when designing my study to align with sports studies research and the major reason I chose a mixed methods design. My compromise is not perfect (e.g., purely quantitative research would yield more photographs/articles), but it is the best solution for gathering the necessary data for my initial analysis.

The fourth way quantitative and qualitative research differs is in how researchers examine constraints of everyday life. Qualitative researchers use an “emic, ideographic, case-based position,” which means they do not separate research from the social world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Quantitative researchers remove analysis from the social world using an “etic, nomothetic” science grounded in probabilities based on randomly selected large sample sizes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I situate my analysis of espnW in

social contexts intimately connected to the institution of sport because these contexts affect how authors and ESPN executives present discourse on the site. The institution of sport does not exist in a vacuum; it is deeply connected to social, political, and economic tenets of our culture⁸ (Coakley, 2009).

The fifth difference between quantitative research and qualitative research is the degree to which researchers value rich descriptions of phenomena. Qualitative researchers rely on rich descriptions of the social world to explain their findings, whereas quantitative researchers maintain that rich description muddies the process of developing generalizations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). These tensions are resolved relatively easily because I privilege qualitative and critical analysis for this study and use quantitative research as a baseline rather than as the basis for interpretation in my analysis chapters.

Content analysis.

For this study, I examined images and feature articles “above the fold” (the first screenful) of the espnW webpage as units of analysis. The first screenful of a webpage is the most important “real estate” of a website because it is this content that determines whether or not a reader will continue exploring or leave the site (Niederst, 2006). I also coded photos accompanying feature articles as well as feature articles themselves for this study (see Appendices B and C for website units of analysis and for more specific definitions of photos/articles). In any analysis of internet webpages, the time and date

⁸ Myriad examples of how sport affects our culture exist. For example, participation in sports fosters important social relationships connected to identities related to particular sports, e.g., a mother teaching her son to play basketball (Coakley, 2009). Politically, sports are linked to national pride and identity, e.g., U.S. citizens using sport events as sites to reaffirming a collective identity after the 9/11 terrorist attacks or nations hosting Olympic Games to gain power and recognition through a show of power and wealth (Coakley, 2009). Economically, individuals interested in sports spend money on things like attending professional league games, participation fees, and athletic club memberships; professional athletes and large sporting events also command large sums of money through ticket sales, appearance fees, advertising, and sponsorships (Coakley, 2009).

webpages are coded should be carefully controlled (Weare & Lin, 2000). I used the screen capturing software SnagIt to convert webpages into portable document format (pdf) files with embedded links to articles between 10 p.m. and 11 p.m. for most days of the six months analyzed.

The sample for this study was the first six months espnW was live as a website: April 26, 2011-October 26, 2011 (the site originally existed as a blog but switched to an official website on April 26, 2011). The first six months the site was live covers a time period when significant sporting events for both men's and women's teams took place: NBA Finals, Kentucky Derby, NFL Draft, PGA Players' Championship, Women's World Cup soccer, Indy 500, college softball and baseball World Series', Wimbledon tennis tournament, U.S. Women's Open (golf), Women's British Open (golf), U.S. gymnastics nationals, Women's Professional Soccer League (WPS) championship, U.S. Open (tennis), WNBA Playoffs, Ladies' Professional Golf Association (LPGA) Solheim Cup, MLB World Series, World Gymnastics Championships, and Pan Am Games. Additionally, for women's professional sports leagues, this time period covers most of the WNBA and WPS seasons and part of the LPGA and World Tennis Association (WTA) seasons. For men's professional sports leagues, this time period covers part of the NBA season (only the Finals and draft), the NFL season (a few months), the National Hockey League (NHL) season (about a month), and the PGA and Major League Soccer (MLS) seasons.

The total number of photographs coded for this study is 437 and the total number of articles coded for this study is 447. I was not able to capture screenshots for 26 of the

184 days (14.1%) due to varying circumstances (mainly occasional lack of internet access). Table 2 reveals the number of photographs and articles by month.

Table 2

Number of days coded by month

Month	April/May	June	July	August	September	October
Total Days	36 (19.6)	30 (16.3)	31 (16.8)	31 (16.8)	30 (16.3)	26 (14.1)
Missing Days	4 (15.4)	7 (26.9)	5 (19.2)	3 (11.5)	3 (11.5)	4 (15.4)
Number of Photos	99 (22.7)	55 (12.6)	61 (14.0)	87 (19.9)	64 (14.4)	71 (16.2)
Number of Articles	99 (22.1)	56 (12.5)	65 (14.5)	87 (19.5)	70 (15.7)	70 (15.7)
Repeat Articles	17 (27.4)	1 (1.6)	4 (6.5)	11 (17.7)	18 (29.0)	11 (17.7)

Note: Actual count of number of days appears next to percentage in parentheses.

Repeat articles (62) were coded just once. Seventy-seven videos appear as feature articles, though I did not code the videos or any text accompanying the videos for this portion of the analysis.

Delimiting the Study

Delimiting the scope of this dissertation was strategic. I choose espnW as a case study because it is the first attempt by ESPN, Inc. to specifically solicit female athletes and fans. I am interested in the site as an intrinsic case study, which focuses on understanding of one particular case because of its uniqueness, rather than as an instrumental case study, which focuses on understanding of one particular case to facilitate understanding of broader theoretical concepts (Stake, 2000). I do not compare espnW to ESPN's main website because control/reference cases are rarely helpful for explaining findings in case studies, regardless of the type of case study (Stake, 2000). The purpose of espnW as additive

content to ESPN also makes comparison beyond the scope of this dissertation. I do, however, compare the content of espnW to past analyses of media coverage of female athletes and past analyses of sports content directed specifically toward women.

An additional reason I do not compare espnW and ESPN websites is because of the propensity for comparisons to lead to false conclusions. Comparing espnW, which is brand new, to espn.com, which has existed since 1995, is like comparing apples to orange *groves*, not apples to oranges (Kane & LaVoi, November 11, 2010). Structures and traditions within the world of sports that have protected masculinity and men as the benefactors of sport since its inception ensure the success of ESPN but not necessarily the success of espnW. In fact, these may work to undermine the success of espnW. The question now is whether or not times have changed enough in sport so that espnW has the opportunity to succeed. espnW is additive content to ESPN, not competition with ESPN (Lynch, April 25, 2011), so comparison is not appropriate at this time.

To further limit the scope of the study, I analyze content from the first six months of espnW because this is a time period when ESPN had already worked the “kinks” out of the blog-version of the site and because it is a strong representation of significant sporting events and league seasons listed above.

Quantitative method.

I use quantitative analysis in my dissertation for two reasons: 1) to establish a baseline for content of espnW because no one has ever published a study on the site, and 2) to follow trends in analysis of mediated images of athletes in sport studies.

Quantitative content analysis is defined as,

the systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication, which have been assigned numeric values according to valid measurement rules and the analysis of relationships involving those values using statistical methods, to describe the communication, draw inferences about its meaning, or infer from the communication to its context, both of production and consumption. (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005, p. 25)

In a traditional quantitative study, researchers 1) define a research problem, 2) conduct a literature review, 3) formulate hypotheses, 4) design methods, 5) devise instrumentation and sampling, 6) collect data, 7) analyze data, 8) advance conclusions, and 9) revise hypotheses (Black, 1999; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Because my study employs a mixed methods approach, critical discourse analysis, and political economy analysis, I only employ steps 1, 2, and 4-7.

Research questions for the quantitative portion of this study include the following:

What types of athletes (sex, sport, level of sport, team/individual sport) are featured in images/feature articles on espnW?

Do feature photos on espnW showcase athletes in uniform, on the playing surface, and in action?

How do contributors write about athletes (e.g., game/non-game reporting, reference to athleticism, references to psychological/emotional strengths/weaknesses) in feature articles on espnW?

Are athletes' non-sporting lives (e.g., references to physical appearance, family roles, personal relationships) referenced in espnW feature articles?

The coding procedure for this study is grounded in past sports studies research on representations of athletes in mediated publications. I adapted the photograph coding schema from Buysse and Embers-Humbert's (2004) and Kane and Buysse's (2005) studies of intercollegiate media guides and coded date, sport, category of sport (recreational, high school, college, professional, Olympics), male/female, new/repeat image, game/non-game reporting, individual/team sport, uniform, pose presentation, court location, and thematic presentation (true/posed/femininity/pop culture) for each photograph. Definitions of these variables are in Appendices C and D.

To test reliability, a research assistant coded every photograph and article in my sample. First, I taught the assistant how to code using the schema for this study in an extensive training session (Weare & Lin, 2000). Then, we each coded two months of photographs and articles and met to assess intercoder reliability. Intercoder reliability for the first two months of photographs ranged from 0.69-0.93 for all the variables as measured by Cohen's kappa⁹. I then met with the research assistant to clarify definitions of variables and we achieved a final intercoder reliability of 0.77-0.97 as measured by Cohen's kappa after coding of photographs was complete.

For each article, I coded date, sport, category of sport (recreational, high school, college, professional, Olympics), male/female, new/repeat image, game/non-game reporting, individual/team sport, presence of overt/explicit sexuality, and presence of overt/explicit femininity. These categories are derived from a study of internet coverage of NCAA March Madness conducted by Kian, Mondello, and Vincent (2009), who based

⁹ I use Cohen's kappa because Carletta (1996) argues the kappa statistic should be adopted as a universal method for computational linguists and cognitive scientists working in the areas of discourse and dialogue. Additionally, Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken (2004) suggest Cohen's kappa as a more reliable method than percent agreement because the method accounts for agreement based on chance.

their categories on a comprehensive analysis of what has been used in previous content analyses of sport. Definitions of these variables are available in Appendices C and D. The same research assistant who coded photographs also coded articles to establish intercoder reliability. Initial intercoder reliability for the first two months of data was 0.63-0.79 as measured by Cohen's kappa and final intercoder reliability was 0.73-0.92 as measured by Cohen's kappa.

Using SPSS 17.0 for analysis of quantitative data, I generated frequency statistics to report findings on all variables coded for photographs and articles. I used cross-tabulation, the "process of creating a contingency table from the multivariate frequency distribution of statistical variables" (Black, 1999), to analyze configurations of two variables, such as sex of athlete and sport. I also used Chi-square test for two independent samples to determine statistical significance between selected variables that directly related to the research questions for this portion of the study, such as sex and uniform presence.

Statistics serve as a valuable starting point for further analysis of espnW photographs and articles, especially how representation of athletes on the site aligns with or diverges from past media representations of athletes. Statistics do not tell the entire story about how athletes are presented, however, because language and the contexts within which the site is situated affect interpretation of photographs and articles. I used qualitative analysis to complement quantitative findings to gain a more thorough understanding of how gender is presented on the site.

Qualitative Method.

The global community of qualitative researchers is in the midst of two extremes on a continuum: scientifically-based research on one end and critical social justice research on the other (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative methods encompass a variety of methodological practices in between, such as semiotics, narrative analysis, content analysis, discourse analysis, phonemic analysis, and archival research and a variety of theoretical paradigms such as constructivism, cultural studies, feminism, and Marxism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Methods are constantly shifting based on tensions about method and the forms researchers use to present findings and interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). My research falls closer to the critical social justice realm of the continuum rather than the scientifically-based end of the continuum because I am concerned with operations of gender and power as constituted by social contexts and hope for change in the way women athletes and athletic events are constructed in media.

The sample for the qualitative research portion of my dissertation is a purposive sample (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) of the first six months of feature articles of espnW for the reasons I mention earlier in this chapter. I acknowledge that my findings represent only one of many ways the data can be interpreted (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003) and am concerned with in-depth understanding of what the articles reveal about athletes (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). I advance only two research questions for the qualitative portion of the study: “How does espnW encourage site users to think about women’s sports? What connection does this have to gendered power relations in the broader sphere of sport in general?” The answers to these questions are used to forge

connections between context, language, and power in the critical discourse analysis portion of the study.

I followed a five-step process for the qualitative portion of my analysis of espnW. The first step was preparing the data. I decided to focus only on feature articles of espnW for the first six months the site was live to limit the breadth of the study. I printed and numbered each feature article and organized articles by month in three-ring binders. I read through each article once with my research questions in mind and became familiar with the data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Second, I read through the articles again and created memos about recurring ideas as I read (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). I put each relevant idea into Microsoft Word documents and ended up with 28 initial themes. Third, I grouped initial themes addressing similar topics or repeating ideas into larger themes (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) and whittled themes down to seven. Because of space considerations in this dissertation, I report only the three most common themes in Appendix A and have bracketed the other themes for future research.

The fourth step of a qualitative method is to organize themes into larger, more abstract theoretical constructs, and the fifth step is to organize these constructs into a theoretical narrative (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). In my dissertation, I engage these two steps as context for research questions, frameworks (postfeminism, neoliberalism), and past literature on mediated representations of athletes in the critical discourse analysis and political economy chapters instead of as results of the qualitative study.

Quantitative and qualitative methods serve to establish a baseline for the content of feature photographs and feature articles on espnW and align with the methods most commonly used in sport studies. However, because I am interested in espnW from the

perspective of critical media research, I deemed it essential to contextualize results of these two studies in terms of “power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, pp. 436-437). CDA is a method that addresses all of these aspects as they shape culture, power, and domination.

Critical Discourse Analysis

In the planning stages of my dissertation, I conducted a thematic analysis of Women’s World Cup coverage on espnW based on my research questions and what initially interested me most about the site to figure out what would be the best methodology for my project. Three ideas consistently permeated my analysis: context (mostly related to the institution of sport, but also to ESPN, Inc. as a media organization shaping discourse about athletes), language (related to how male athletes are written about differently than female athletes), and power (what these two elements combined mean for who has power in the institution of sport). After some research on methods, critical theory emerged as the best option to conceptualize these three ideas, especially in its conception of power as a combination of hegemonic, ideological, and linguistic/discursive (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). Hegemony ensures that the interests of dominant groups such as corporations, sports media organizations, and sports leagues are protected by manipulating political, ideological, and social norms to the extent that these norms are viewed as the status quo (Gramsci, 1971; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). Production of ideology is directly related to formation of hegemony because ideology facilitates the cultural forms, meanings, rituals, and representations that make up social

norms (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). Linguistic/discursive power is the way language is used to construct the world according to standards of regulation and domination surrounding what can and cannot be said, who can speak with authority and who cannot, and which social constructions are valid (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). Ultimately, critical theory expands post-positivist assumptions about reality and grounds them in power, which is why the method is so appropriate for my study. After I chose a critical epistemology, I decided on CDA as a method because of its focus on intersections between texts, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice (Fairclough, 2001).

Three concepts guide CDA: power, language, and politics. Power is conceptualized as the way “social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 85). In media, power is about *influence* – who or what *controls* knowledge, beliefs, values, social relations, and social identities using discourse (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2003; Van Dijk, 2008). Therefore,

groups have (more or less) power if they are able to (more or less) control the acts and minds of (members of) other groups. This ability presupposes a *power base* of privileged access to scarce social resources, such as force, money, status, fame, knowledge, information, "culture," or indeed various forms of public discourse and communication. (Van Dijk, 2003, 354-355; italics in original)

The central inquiries of CDA, then, are who controls discourse, who is controlled by discourse, and what the social consequences of this control are (Van Dijk, 2003; Van Dijk, 2008). I am especially interested in these aspects of power as they relate to

espnW's power to define what female fans and female athletes desire from a website maintained by one of the largest sports media organizations in the world.

Power, dominance, and social inequality are macrolevels of analysis and can be difficult to conceptualize without being supplanted with microlevel analysis of elements like language use, discourse, verbal interaction, and communication (Van Dijk, 2003; Van Dijk, 2008). CDA bridges these two levels by focusing on how entities that control language wield power. Language is conceptualized as a principle activity through which ideology is circulated and reproduced in CDA: ways of talking produce and reproduce ways of thinking (Johnstone, 2002). Language choices are strategic in that every utterance represents an epistemological agenda simply by the words chosen to represent a particular idea (Johnstone, 2002). Individuals' thinking can therefore be manipulated by grammar, style, wording, and other aspects of language (even what is *not* spoken) (Johnstone, 2002). Though the focus on language in CDA started with the turn toward "critical linguistics" in various academic fields in the 1970s (Van Dijk, 2003), research today is typically multidisciplinary to adequately evaluate how language is connected to power (Van Dijk, 2003; Van Dijk, 2008).

The third assumption that guides CDA is that the practice is explicitly political (Johnstone, 2002). As a critical method, the focus is on social problems and researchers do not hide the fact that the purpose of research is to advance social change by understanding, exposing, and resisting social inequality (Van Dijk, 2003; Van Dijk, 2008). As a feminist researcher, I am concerned with issues of power as they relate to gender, especially for female athletes. Media have the power to influence girls' and women's beliefs about health and sports are an outlet that should teach these individuals

to think of their bodies for what they can *do* rather than what they *look like*. Positive portrayals emphasize health and wellness as a way to achieve physical, mental, psychological, and emotional goals¹⁰. I analyze espnW from this perspective and base my analysis on supporting media that are positive for girls and women.

The three assumptions of CDA capture my goals for analyzing espnW. Practical methods are essential for fulfilling these assumptions, however. Fairclough (1995) advances various approaches to methodologically approach studying media discourse: how wider changes in society are manifest in media discourse; language “texture,” visual images, and sound effects; text production and text consumption; institutional and wider social and cultural context of media practices; linguistic analysis and intertextual analysis (mostly genres); representation and constitution of relations and identities in texts; and studying texts as dialectically shaped by society (texts are shaped by society but also shape society). Of course, all of these approaches are not possible in one research project, so Fairclough (1995) advises choosing the most appropriate approaches as a program of research. For my analysis of espnW, two approaches are most relevant: communicative events (texts, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice) (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2005; Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough, 2001) and the order of discourse (genres, relation to other discourse) (Fairclough, 2001).

Focusing on communicative events provides me with an opportunity to look at espnW from a textual standpoint and to incorporate how its texts relate to broader institutional structures of sport and media directed toward women. The first aspect of

¹⁰ Research shows moderate and consistent levels of physical activity have a significant impact on prevention of health ailments such as obesity, coronary heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis, Alzheimer’s Disease and related dementias, illicit drug use, tobacco-related disease, sexual risk and teen pregnancy, and eating disorders (Women’s Sports Foundation, 2009b).

communicative events is texts. Texts include spoken and written language, visual images and sound effects, and visual elements such as layout and visual impact (Fairclough, 1995). I adopt Fairclough's (1995) "multifunctional" view of texts as sites that generate representations of the world (ideational function) and constitute relations between and identities of individuals (interpersonal function). In my analysis of espnW, I am interested in how photographs and articles produce and encourage a specific philosophy related to how site users should think about women's sports and what connection this has to gendered power relations in the broader sphere of sport in general.

The second aspect of communicative events as a method in CDA is discourse practices, which encompasses processes of text production and text consumption (Fairclough, 1995). Institutional processes such as editorial procedures used to produce texts and how particular media fit into readers' everyday lives provide insight into why espnW exists only as a digital presence with no immediate plans to expand to television or print. I am especially interested in how executives conceptualize female fans and female athletes as different from male fans and male athletes and what social implications this has for how women potentially consume sport. I address text production more in the political economy section of my project, explained later in this chapter.

The third aspect of communicative events as a method in CDA is sociocultural practice, which is the specific "social goings-on" where the discourse exists (situational level), institutional frameworks where the discourse exists (institutional level), and the "societal matrix" of the discourse (societal level) (Fairclough, 1995). Scholars draw upon economic, political (power and ideology), and cultural (value and identity) aspects most to discern sociocultural practice (Fairclough, 1995). I cover economic aspects in a

chapter on the political economy of espnW and situate broader institutional discourses like sport and gender in additional analytical chapters.

The second component to my CDA methodology is the order of discourse, or how genre affects discourse (Fairclough, 1995). Genre includes what discourses producers draw upon to produce particular texts and what traces of these genres are identifiable in the text (Fairclough, 1995). For example, a documentary may mix genres of information, persuasion, and entertainment (Fairclough, 1995). Van Dijk (2003, 2008) advances four ways to conceptually cover order of discourse: 1) members-groups (social groups, organizations, and institutions of authors affect the way discourse is presented), 2) actions-process (social acts are part of social process such as legislation, newsmaking, or reproducing racism), 3) context-social structure (social structures like a press conference as typical practice for organizations and media institutions), and 4) personal and social cognition (social actors have personal and social cognition – personal memories, knowledge, and opinions – that influence the way they act collectively). If espnW purports to “serve, inform, and inspire” female athletes and fans, then the site’s sports writing is indicative of the way its writers and editors conceptualize their audience.

Feminist CDA.

CDA is the best method to incorporate power, language, and social change into my analysis of espnW. To further narrow the scope of the project, however, I utilize CDA from a feminist perspective. The main task of feminist media research is unraveling dominant and alternative meanings of gender in media texts, including how gender intersects with other aspects of identity like ethnicity, class, and sexuality (Van Zoonen, 2006). Van Zoonen (2006) advances the following elements of feminist

research: 1) gender is the key concept, and is conceived of as produced by social and discursive practices; 2) research is inductive using empirical observations; 3) data collection and data collection are qualitative (though I argue this could include CDA because “qualitative” in this definition means using words, sentence, and language as units of analysis; focusing on linguistic operations; and triangulating, comparing, and incorporating editorial procedures), and 4) self-reflexivity, which means acknowledging that the research process is political because it ultimately produces its own construction of gender.

Feminist CDA (FCDA) aims to “show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities” (Lazar, 2007, p. 142). Lazar (2007) identifies five components of feminist discourse praxis. First, FCDA is political because its central concern is critiquing discourse that sustains a patriarchal social order (Lazar, 2007). Researchers analyze gender as an interpretive category individuals use to define their social practices and as a social relation that constitutes all other social relations and activities (Lazar, 2007). The aim of analyzing gender in these ways is “analytical activism,” creating critical awareness and developing strategies for resistance and change (Lazar, 2007). Second, FCDA conceptualizes gender as an ideological structure. Ideology upholds a hegemonic gender order that privileges men as dominant and women as subordinate through institutions and social practices on both individual and social levels (Lazar, 2007). Third, researchers acknowledge that feminist political action from enacting feminist discourse praxis is rooted in cultural, historical, and institutional

frameworks that construct particular social identities (Lazar, 2007). Fourth, discourse is viewed as only one element of social practice and should be examined from an interdisciplinary perspective to produce the most complete picture of social relations (Lazar, 2007). Fifth, critical reflexivity toward institutional practices and of individual attitudes is essential to truly enact social change (Lazar, 2007). FCDA narrows CDA to focus on gender as a lens for problematizing the texts, discourse practices, and sociocultural practices of *espnW*.

FCDA is the ideal way to analyze *espnW* with a focus on gender, but the perspective is used with caution. First, I am cognizant of the relationship between context and text, making sure I acknowledge the multiple identities such as social class, ethnicity, culture, religion, and sexuality from which the perspective of a particular text is drawn (Wodak, 2008). Women perform multiple identities and the degree to which gender plays a part in a particular text varies according to how much these other identities play a role (Wodak, 2008). Second, I am aware that gender is a constantly shifting identity that changes according to sociopolitical developments such as oppression, liberation, critical consciousness, and culture (Wodak, 2008). Third, I acknowledge connections between ideology and material practices; in other words, what is advanced by governing bodies and even dominant social groups is not always what is carried out in everyday practice [e.g., statistics show up to 80% of academic institutions are not in compliance with Title IX (Women's Sports Foundation, 2009a)]. To do this, I deconstruct hegemony as related to gender in broader contexts of which *espnW* is a part. Two research questions guide the FCDA portion of my analysis of *espnW*: "How does *espnW* encourage site users to think about women's sports? What connection does this

have to gendered power relations in the broader sphere of sport in general?” Addressing these questions necessitates integration of communicative events and the order of discourse outlined above.

FCDA is a method for addressing communicative events (texts, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice) and the order of discourse (genres, relation to other discourse). I also believe the media corporations from which content is derived are important to analyze because these corporations enable and constrain meanings (Vavrus, 2012) in communicative events and in the order of discourse. Interpretation of espnW is affected by factors such as where the site is situated in its parent corporation’s (The Walt Disney Company) family; its relationship to ESPN, and corporate partnerships with other powerful corporations like Nike, Gatorade, and Proctor & Gamble.

Political Economy

As a critical media scholar, having a comprehensive picture of the entities that create, distribute, and consume media content is important to me. Political economy offers a perspective for exploring these issues as they relate to espnW, especially in the broader trend of the commercialization of sports. Winseck (2011) claims four perspectives on political economy have currency in the field of communication: 1) conservative and liberal neoclassical economics (stresses “marketplace of ideas” in democratic societies; if there is a problem, it is not media concentration but that fragmentation is eroding any sense of a common culture; even the largest firms are but tiny specks in the competitive universe), 2) radical media political economies (the monopoly capital and digital capitalism schools), 3) Schumpeterian institutional political economy and two of its descendents - the creative industries and network political

economy schools (technological innovation is the motor of competition, not price and markets), and 4) the cultural industries school (different sectors of the cultural industries cannot be treated as one and the same thing because of the crucial organizational differences that exist between “publishing,” “flow,” and “editorial” models). The radical media political economies perspectives, specifically monopoly capital school largely influenced by Robert McChesney, is most fitting for my analysis of espnW.

The monopoly capital school of political economy is in favor of free press principles and theories of democracy that argue everyone benefits from high-quality journalism and a rich media environment based on greater emphasis on the “public good” characteristics of media (Winseck, 2011). These principles are threatened by monopoly capitalism, however, when an oligopoly of corporations control what we see in the media, overtaking competitive capitalism (Winseck, 2011). McChesney advances a “three-tier” model for U.S. and global media systems. The first tier is the 6-10 major media conglomerates that control most of what we see in film, television, music, radio, cable and satellite, publishing and internet (Winseck, 2011). The second tier is another 15-20 smaller firms in the U.S. and about three dozen worldwide that are largely affected by conglomerates in the first tier (Winseck, 2011). The third tier is the “thousands of tiny voices that fill the nooks and crannies of the media system” (Winseck, 2011, p. 6). The study of political economy, then is the study of “social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources” (Mosco, 2009, p. 2) as part of a broader “study of control and survival in social life” (Mosco, 2009, p. 2).

The monopoly capital school of political economy uses industrial organization theory to understand how corporations dominate the cultural landscape in two ways: through control of cultural production using actual media content and control of cultural production through advertising and sponsorship (Murdock & Golding, 2005). Media conglomerates serve the best interests of their shareholders, which impedes democracy: “concentration accentuates the core tendencies of a profit-driven, advertising-supported media system: hyper-commercialism and denigration of journalism and public service. It is a poison pill for democracy” (McChesney, 2008, p. 427). “Free markets” do not govern the media system; instead, particular laws such as the 1996 Telecommunications Act, regulations, and subsidies open doors for corporations to conglomerate (McChesney, 2008). In light of these aims, my political economy analysis of espnW addresses one research question: “What is the goal of ESPN products marketed toward women from a political economy perspective?”

The commercialization of the institution of sport influences the political economy perspective I adopt in my analysis of espnW. In an era where the “bottom line has replaced the goal line” (Coakley, 2009, p. 354), conditions under which commercial sports grow and prosper combined with the political economy of espnW illustrate ways power plays out through the site. Coakley (2009) claims commercial sports flourish most in market economies where material rewards are highly valued by stakeholders in sport; in societies with large, densely populated cities (for potential spectators); in societies where people have the time and resources to play and watch sporting events for enjoyment; in societies where stakeholders have the capital available to build stadiums/arenas; and in places where consumption and material symbols are important

indicators of status. Within these conditions, the sports commercialized are those that are watched, played, or used for profit by those individuals who have power and control over economic resources (Coakley, 2009). The biggest connection to political economy, then, is that those sports that are commercialized are also those sports that are given *cultural significance* in our society (Coakley, 2009). Analysis of espnW's ties to its parent company and to other corporations within the site reveals who wields power over the commercialization of sport on the site.

Challenges of Combining Mixed Methods Content Analysis, CDA, and Political Economy

A dissertation-level project offers a unique forum for bridging research in critical media studies and sport studies. While smaller-scale investigations have to pare down methods to fit the constraints of publication requirements and researchers' time, I have the luxury of pursuing a variety of methods to thoroughly analyze espnW. However, I am also cognizant that combining mixed methods content analysis, critical discourse analysis, and political economy can be complicated based on conflicting epistemological stances of positivism, post-positivism, and critical theory.

Denzin & Lincoln (2011) trace paradigm wars between conflicting epistemological stances that started in the 1980s to three time periods: postpositivist-constructivist war against positivism (1970-1990); conflict between competing postpositivist, constructivist, and critical theory paradigms (1990-2005); and the current conflict between evidence-based methodologies and the mixed methods, interpretive, and critical theory schools (2005-present). For my analysis of espnW, discord among positivism, post-positivism, and critical theory is most relevant. Paradigm positions and

basic beliefs of each perspective on selected practical issues for post-positivism and critical theory (the two perspectives utilized most in my dissertation) are summarized in Appendix E.

The positivist epistemological approach undergirds the quantitative portion of my analysis. Positivism positions reality as objective, where “true knowledge” comes from observing empirical phenomena often using concepts and methods of natural science (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Complexity of phenomena is broken down by isolating specific elements and aggregating subjects based on a similar trait or characteristic (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). In line with scientific methods, theory is developed deductively, so researchers propose hypotheses and then test them based on existing knowledge about the phenomena under investigation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Although positivism is helpful for quantitative content analysis to identify broad overviews of particular phenomena, researchers in sport studies rightly claim that sport is a social institution that allows individuals who participate in, watch, or manage games the free will to respond to external forces; therefore, analysis should be about more than just numbers (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Post-positivism is a means by which the social can be at least partially combined with the positivist approach.

The post-positivist epistemological approach undergirds the qualitative portion of my analysis. Post-positivism incorporates many of the beliefs of positivism but is more centered on the social aspects of the physical and social worlds (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Post-positivists believe humans interact in patterned ways that offer predictability, significance, and consequence for social beliefs (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Post-positivist researchers believe

inquiry cannot be value-free but that techniques to reduce bias in research (e.g., a peer review process) are possible and desirable (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Post-positivists use both quantitative and qualitative methods, though statistics are typically descriptive (e.g., frequencies) rather than inferential (e.g., regression analysis) (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

The critical theory epistemological approach undergirds the bulk of my analysis of espnW. Critical theory scholars believe inquiries are never value-free and that the perspective of the researcher always tempers analysis (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The goal of research is critique and transformation of structures that perpetuate unequal cultural meanings and practices to challenge ways oppression is created, reproduced, and transformed (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Critical researchers view reality as constituted by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values solidified over time, so inquiry is based on contextualizing problems in social and historical contexts to uncover inequities in the interest of rectifying oppression (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

Many researchers assert positivist, post-positivist, and critical theory epistemological perspectives are too disparate to use in one research project, and I concur. I address this issue in two ways. First, I use each method/epistemological perspective separately and combine findings only to make final conclusions about espnW. No analyses of espnW have been published at this point, so I use quantitative and qualitative inquiry only to set a baseline for what is most important to analyze using critical discourse analysis and political economy analysis of the site, which constitute the crux of the study. Although these methods are used only for background knowledge, I

believe it is important to address conflicting epistemological stances because they ultimately inform my overall analysis. Second, my research is only slightly positivist, if at all. Statistical analysis I undertake is mostly descriptive. Post-positivist and critical theory stances undoubtedly differ on many aspects of the research process, but they are much closer than either perspective is to a positivist orientation.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework I use for my analysis of espnW is postfeminism and neoliberalism. Postfeminism is an ideology that flourishes in a neoliberal context upheld by privatization, profitability, and individualism (Vavrus, 2012). These elements are also explicitly tied to the oligopolistic state of media conglomerates, as I explain below.

Postfeminism.

Postfeminism has been hotly contested by various researchers (Gill, 2007). No universal definition of the term exists, partially because no universal definition of the ideology's root term, feminism, exists (Genz & Brabon, 2009). After investigating how the ideology has proliferated in scholarly literature and specifically how it has been taken up in media studies¹¹, I find Judith Stacey's (1987) definition most appropriate for my dissertation: "the simultaneous incorporation, revision, and depoliticalization of many of the central goals of second-wave feminism" (as quoted in Projansky, 2001, p. 66). Three

¹¹ Projansky (2001) identifies five categories of postfeminist discourses that emerge in popular press: 1) linear postfeminism: historical trajectory from prefeminism through to feminism and then to postfeminism; ensures impossibility of feminism and post-feminism coexisting; 2) backlash postfeminism: rather than simply declaring feminism over, these discourses aggressively lash back at feminism; 3) equality and choice postfeminism: narratives about feminism's 'success' in achieving gender 'equity' and having given women 'choice,' particularly with regard to labor and family; 4) (hetero)sex-positive postfeminism: defines feminism as antisex and then offers itself as a current, more positive alternative; and 5) men can be feminists too: feminism can be embraced by both women and men, and men turn out to be better feminists than women.

features of the ideology work especially well for my discussion of postfeminism in sport: feminism as no longer necessary, a focus on individual women, and choice.

The first characteristic of postfeminism most relevant to my analysis of espnW is the idea that feminism is no longer needed. Stacey (1993) asserts that postfeminism acknowledges and even takes for granted the achievements brought on by second-wave feminism yet simultaneously denies that continued feminist action is needed. The two most important components of this are a general rejection of sexual politics that critique issues such as the isolation of women, the gender-based division of labor, and domestic violence; and “difference” arguments that assert women and men are psychologically and emotionally different (Stacey, 1993). The second aspect of postfeminism most relevant to my analysis is that any problems that women encounter are individual issues rather than systemic issues because of the mentality that feminism has taken care of broader issues affecting all/most women (Stacey, 1993). This mentality leaves women to deal with issues on an individual basis rather than working collectively to change systemic oppression (Stacey, 1993). The third aspect of postfeminism most relevant for my analysis is the idea of *choice*. Postfeminism frames patriarchy as gone and therefore women are free to make choices about how they live their lives (Dow, 1996). This, of course, neglects the fact that most women live in cultures that limit their choices (Dow, 1996).

Criticism of postfeminism.

Criticisms of postfeminism center on three themes: that the concept divides women because post-worlds do not have any fixed ideology around which policy can be organized; that abjuration of feminism opens up opportunities to re-inscribe gender

discrimination; and that the ideology ignores issues of race, class, sexuality, and other aspects of difference among women. Postfeminists are intent on dismissing feminism as a tool because they perceive gender equality has been achieved. Dismissal often comes in the form of postfeminists inscribing generational differences between young women and women who make up the Second Wave feminist movement (McRobbie, 2004).

Dividing women into these tropes makes interacting on parallel issues difficult (McRobbie, 2004). Because postfeminism does not advance an ideology that facilitates policy or intervention (Jarvie, 2006), gender discrimination can be re-inscribed on women.

Scholars disparage postfeminism because enacting femininity as a choice based on the idea that gender equality has been achieved aligns closely with patriarchal ideals historically instated to control women in many ways. Freedom to embrace femininity is focused on more than how the practices of femininity marginalize women; however, “gender retrenchment is secured, paradoxically, through the wide dissemination of discourses of female freedom and (putative) equality. Young women are able to come forward on condition that feminism fades away” (McRobbie, 2007, p. 720). Bartky (1990) calls the feminine body a “practiced and subjected body” (p. 71) that is regulated by size, gesture, comportment, movement, and festooned display as the discipline of femininity (Bartky, 1990). At the same time, playing the femininity game provides very real opportunities for women in terms of relationships, intimacy, and livelihood, so denouncing it as purely misogynist ignores the draw women may feel to enact these ideals (Bartky, 1990; McNay, 1992).

Postfeminism is also criticized by scholars for ignoring important aspects of identity like race, class, and sexuality, especially the role consumerism associated with the ideology plays out (Tasker & Negra, 2007). Consumerism is a way for postfeminists to embrace femininity that has long been denied to them because of feminism and as a strategy to address structural frustrations that seem insurmountable (Tasker & Negra, 2007). Integrating popular culture as a way to display identity plays down feminist politics that may have addressed other aspects of identity such as race, class, and sexuality (Tasker & Negra, 2007).

Both the academic and popular focus on feminism changed around 1990, when Foucault's ideas prompted a shift from investigations of exercise of sovereign power to exercise of power in more isolated sites (McRobbie, 2004). One way contemporary power plays out is via neoliberalism, the idea that individuals govern themselves in a culture dictated by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade that ultimately serves the needs of the State (Foucault, 1979/2004a).

Neoliberalism.

I analyze photographs and articles on espnW using neoliberalism (for a brief history of U.S. neoliberalism, see Appendix F) as a theoretical framework to determine to what degree the site prescribes readers use the site to conceive of their lives as a project, especially in articles targeted to readers as athletes. Neoliberalism is

a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights,

free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (Harvey, 2005, p. 2)

Characterized by “deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision” (Harvey, 2005, p. 3), neoliberalism has proliferated in political economic practices and thinking since the 1970s (Harvey, 2005). As a mode of discourse, the ideology is hegemonic because “it has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world” (Harvey, 2005, p. 3).

Foucault (1979/2004a) identifies two elements of U.S. neoliberalism: human capital and civil society. Human capital encompasses two processes: 1) the expansion of economic analysis into labor, a previously uncharted domain of political economy focusing more on land and capital, and 2) the creation of homo economicus, a conception of people that reduces them to what value they serve for the broader needs of the State (Foucault, 1979/2004a). Human capital is made up of innate elements (hereditary traits) and acquired elements (things like educational/professional training and spending time with children as a means to create citizens who will earn an income) (Foucault, 1979/2004a).

Foucault (1979/2004b) identifies two consequences of conceiving of citizens in terms of their human capital. First, a market schema becomes applicable to non-economic domains like marriage (e.g., “I’ll have sex with you if you plow my field”) or child-rearing (e.g., putting in extra time to make sure a child is raised “right” will constitute human capital, which will produce an income – monetary for child, psychological for parent) (Foucault, 1979/2004b). Second, the economic grid oversimplifies more

complex social processes such as creating partnerships or friendships because the elements of these issues extend beyond what can be conceived using market ideas (Foucault, 1979/2004b).

The second element in neoliberalism is civil society: the “concrete ensemble” where human capital is managed (Foucault, 1979/2004c). Civil society is premised on a “mythical background” where “spontaneous synthesis” of citizens takes place (Foucault, 1979/2004c). Citizens are not governed explicitly by a sovereign, are not called upon to relinquish their subjectivity to the State, and do not have to renounce rights; a “de facto bond” ensures individuals comply with the system of human capital and maintain the system as-is (Foucault, 1979/2004c).

Operating with human capital and civil society as a base, characteristics of neoliberal democracies include 1) lifestyle choices rooted in financial management, especially calculating risk using audit mechanisms, 2) a reconfiguration of social relationships such that the relationship between a social citizen and “common society” is replaced with a relationship between a social citizen and his/her civil society, and 3) government presented as serving enterprising individuals who seek to maximize the quality of their lives through choice and expertise (Rose, 1996b). The market is structured by laws and political institutions, so political intervention is required to ensure the State responds to facets of the market and thinks and operates in terms of a market (Brown, 2005). As a result, performance of the State is measured in terms of how healthy and how prosperous the economy is, potentially altering and tightening what constitutes progressive social policy (Brown, 2005).

Privileging elite, organized, competitive, and commercial sports reaffirms neoliberal ideology in U.S. culture (Coakley, 2011). Coakley (2011) identifies three key ideas connecting sport and neoliberalism:

(a) a belief in competition as the primary basis for assessing merit and allocating rewards, (b) the idea that victories in competitive reward structures are proof of ability and moral worth, and (c) a commitment to meritocracy and the belief that economic winners deserve power and privilege, whereas economic failure is due to poor choices or weak character. Taken together, these ideas and beliefs normalize status hierarchies and socio-economic inequality as inevitable products of merit-based differences. (p. 69)

Recreational pursuits (e.g., games like “tag”) give way to organized activities (e.g., the Adidas Gatorade Girls Invitational Showcase soccer tournament) sponsored by corporations who directly benefit from participants competing for tangible rewards (Coakley, 2011). Additionally, personal choice and commodity consumption prevail when individuals do pursue health and wellness goals (Atkinson & Young, 2008, p. 58).

Neoliberalism is a fusion of economic policy, politics, and culture:

The most successful ruse of neoliberal dominance in both global and domestic affairs is the definition of *economic* policy as primarily a matter of neutral, technical expertise. This expertise is then presented as separate from *politics* and *culture*, and not properly subject to specifically political accountability or cultural critique...Neoliberalism is not a unitary ‘system,’ but a complex, contradictory cultural and political project created within specific institutions, with an agenda

for reshaping the everyday life of contemporary global capitalism. (Duggan, 2003, p. xiv , p. 70; italics in original)

Neoliberalism as a mode of governmentality advances practical knowledge at both micro- and macro-levels to perpetuate the “conduct of conduct” (Bröckling, Krasmann, & Lemke, 2011) of citizens. Technologies of the self and postfeminism work together at the micro-level as a means to transform oneself into an improved subject; for espnW, this is a *consumer* subject. At the macro-level, media economics have enabled media merger mania so that espnW can capitalize on a generation of women who have grown up with the benefits of Title IX.

Technologies of the self.

Neoliberalism situates the lives of individuals as projects formed by the choices they make to maximize their existence (Rose, 1992). Assembling a “lifestyle” (Rose, 1992, p. 155) means choosing from consumer products that convey meaning via “the fantasies of efficacy and the dreams of pleasure that guide both product innovation and consumer demand” (Rose, 1992, p. 155). Technologies of the self are a means to construct the best lifestyle possible.

Technologies of the self are means by which individuals enact neoliberal ideals in cultivation of selves (Nadesan, 2008). Foucault (1982/2003) notes these mechanisms permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (p. 146)

Governmentality, then, is the mix of technologies of the self and technologies of domination of sovereign government and other influential entities used to govern individual conduct (Foucault, 1982/2003). Technologies of self are intentional and voluntary, tools individuals use to actively and purposefully transform themselves into a state of “happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault 1982/2003, p. 146) (McNay, 1992). Technologies operate under the mechanism of expertise and under the jurisdiction of seemingly autonomous experts who authorize and direct the strategies to make it seem like the techniques are not state-sanctioned, though they align with the goals of the state concerning the welfare of a population (Ouellette & Hay, 2008; Rose, 1996a).

Expertise developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries affiliated with authorities in fields like education, psychology, psychiatry, and medicine influenced by philanthropic organizations and the State enabled a neoliberal mentality to take hold (Nadesan, 2008). Neoliberal ideals are fostered in contemporary culture because the license garnered from “expert” knowledge to “shape, channel, organize and direct the personal capacities and selves of individuals under the aegis of a claim to objectivity, neutrality and technical efficacy rather than one of political partiality” (Rose, 1992, p. 147) using technologies of the self thrives (Rose, 1992). Self-help media offer a popular avenue for enlisting professionals who provide what are presented as objective accounts for how individuals can shape lifestyles that maximize the potential for the highest quality life (Rose, 1992). Corporations and the State benefit from technologies that encourage consumption by capitalizing on marketing niches as impetuses for even more

lifestyle choices, not for the well-being of the population but for profit or compliance with the system (Rose, 1996a).

Neoliberalism and political economy.

Media economics enables postfeminism and neoliberalism to take hold by enabling and constraining content and meaning through the products that oligopolistic multinational corporations distribute to the public (Vavrus, 2012). These corporations sponsor broadcasts of sporting events and establish “ideological outposts in people’s heads” (Coakley, 2011, p. 75) that serve as an inroad for neoliberal policies (Coakley, 2011). Similarly, private sponsors take over sporting events and encourage participants to purchase equipment, clothing, or energy drinks sold by their companies (Coakley, 2011). Under a neoliberal ideology, informal games and programs previously publicly-funded are replaced by “organized programs emphasizing paid membership, exclusive recruitment, systematic training, certified coaches, preparation for competition, and regularly scheduled competitive matches, tournaments, playoffs, and championships” (Coakley, 2011, p. 77). espnW promotes neoliberalism by reporting primarily on commercial spectator sports.

Conclusion

My methodology for this dissertation is nontraditional because I combine methods with conflicting epistemological perspectives. I do so to bridge scholarship in critical media studies and in sports studies. I use mixed methods research to establish a baseline for espnW content and proceed with FCDA and political economy for a more nuanced analysis of the site. I decided on postfeminism and neoliberalism as theoretical frameworks based on results of my pilot study on media coverage of the Women’s World

Cup soccer tournament. Quantitative, qualitative, FCDA, and political economy analyses ensure I thoroughly examine photographs and articles on espnW.

In chapter three, I present results of FCDA as related to language and audience. First, divergent dialogues about female athletes uphold men as the primary beneficiaries of media sport content. Second, as “additive content” to ESPN, espnW relies on ideas of natural sexual difference and choice. In articles geared toward female athletes, espnW is a technology of the self that enables of neoliberalism. Executives also take up postfeminist ideology to situate White, middle- to upper-class, heterosexual women as their ideal consumers.

Chapter 3

On December 10, 2010, *The Onion* published an article predicting features of the then-newly launched espnW.com:

Highlights that feature an explanation of the rules, what's happening, and who everyone is

Bill Simmons' column will run utterly unchanged

Team-by-team sensitivity ratings

Supportive code keeps the site from bouncing up and down as it scrolls

Pretty much the exact same amount of Tom Brady coverage

Message boards where a bunch of chicks can dyke it out like crazy

Community feature where site users can discuss goings-on, share stories, and then secretly trash on each other in private chats

Somewhat less male-on-male eroticism.

Although satirical, the publication's interpretation of espnW delineates many of the issues scholars advance about women's participation in the historically masculine institution of sport.

In this chapter, I use FCDA as a method and postfeminism and neoliberalism as frameworks for analysis to address the research questions, "How does espnW encourage site users to think about women's sports?" and "What connection does this have to gendered power relations in the broader sphere of sport in general?" Fairclough (2001) advances three elements as important in CDA: analysis of text (written, oral, or visual); analysis of discourse practice, which is about text production and text consumption; and analysis of sociocultural practice, which is the immediate situational context of the text,

institutional practices of which the text is part, and the wider cultural frame surrounding the text. I focus on the first and third of these elements in this chapter and the second element in the next chapter using political economy as a method.

A principle component of CDA is the way language (oral, visual, and written) is used to maintain power differentiation between social groups by upholding particular ideologies and discounting others (Fairclough, 1995). This component is the product of more microlevel analysis (Van Dijk, 2003). What makes CDA unique, however, is that the researcher must connect microlevel findings to power, dominance, and inequality among social groups, which are typically part of macrolevel analysis (Van Dijk, 2003). I use FCDA and bridge micro- and macro-level analyses “to show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities” (Lazar, 2007, p. 142).

I use postfeminism and neoliberalism as frameworks to identify discursive formations of espnW related to gender and other aspects of identity. Vavrus (2012) argues postfeminism, neoliberalism, and today’s media political economy are mutually constitutive, so I use the first two as frameworks in this chapter and follow up with a complementary, more nuanced analysis of political economy in the next chapter. Neoliberalism complements postfeminism by situating lifestyle choices in the language of a market economy (Vavrus, 2012). Neoliberal ideology advanced by institutions and corporations encourages individuals to think of their lives as projects, so the choices they make determine to what degree they maximize their lifestyle potential (Foucault, 1979/2004a). These entities also strategically restrict individuals’ choices, however, to

those that ultimately maximize profits for their shareholders and executives (Foucault, 1979/2004a). espnW produces discourse that benefits its parent company The Walt Disney Corporation as well as its major sponsors: Nike, Gatorade, and Proctor & Gamble.

FCDA of espnW for the first six months the site was live reveals two major themes. First, divergent dialogues are used in espnW articles to reify relations of power and privilege for male athletes. Second, positioning espnW as “additive content” to ESPN for female fans relies on ideas of natural sexual difference and choice. In articles targeted to readers as athletes, espnW invokes a self-as-project technology of the self that enables neoliberalism. Intersections of identity show postfeminist ideology used in articles situate a particular type of woman as the ideal consumer of espnW. I elaborate on both of these themes in the following sections.

Language

An ESPN.com article re-posted on espnW (article 190) profiles the World Series of Poker’s “first couple,” Erika Moutinho and David “Doc” Sands. In the article, the author reveals how the two met and talks about when they moved in together, quipping,

Erika Moutinho’s odyssey through the 2011 World Series of Poker main event has been a triumph of love, and yes, you’re reading this on ESPN.com. You came here for blood, sweat and tears, and you’re getting this mushiness instead...Bear with me, tough guys. (article 190, ¶2)

If “mushiness” is uncharacteristic of ESPN.com, perhaps they have relegated more of the gushy stuff to espnW. Critical analysis of articles on espnW reveals such language use in some of the articles which otherwise reflect solid sports reporting on female athletes; as

such, it serves as divergent dialogue that takes away from the significance of events presented in the article. As a result, the discourse constructs men as privileged in the institution of sport.

Divergent dialogues are characterized by stark differences in how female and male athletes are discussed that do not necessarily reflect traditional, overt sexism but that contribute to upholding both biological and social gendered power structures in sport (Billings, Butterworth, & Turman, 2012). Divergent dialogues appear in three forms in articles on espnW: 1) descriptive language used for female athletes, 2) mention of non-sporting topics that have little or nothing to do with athleticism, and 3) direct references to physical/personality attributes (see Appendix G for examples of divergent dialogues in espnW articles).

First, the language used to describe female athletes in some articles on espnW is more descriptive than language used to describe male athletes in some articles on the site. Two articles about athletes coming back from injury/struggles are examples of this divergence. The author of article 314 on the tennis match between Serena Williams and Carolina Wozniacki in the 2011 U.S. Open notes, “Williams was jumping up and down in the middle of the court to celebrate...’For me, it’s amazing,’ Williams said. ‘I’ve come a long way. Thinking about going from being in the hospital to beating the No. 1 player. I think it calls for an even bigger reaction’” (¶15). In contrast, the author of article 64 quotes Oklahoma Thunder NBA player Nick Collision on his team going to the Finals:

“We look at ourselves as a team that’s come a long way from our struggles a few years ago...It’s continuity. It’s a lot of young, hungry players who play with a lot

of effort. It's kind of boring, but we just come in and do our work every day. We realize we've come a long way from being one of the worst teams in the league.”

(¶8)

Other instances reflect more descriptive language, too. Article 67 presents five things to watch at the French Open women's draw. The author claims, “Short on matches or not, if Clijsters is in the draw, she's a natural to win the title” (article 67, ¶5) and “All eyes will be on defending champion Schiavone and 2010 finalist Stosur to see if they can rekindle last year's French Open magic” (article 67, ¶5). Lauren Davis, 17-year-old tennis player who qualified for the U.S. Open is described as, “a 5-foot-2, 121-pound package of relentlessness on the court,” the author later noting, “Wearing a pink Nike outfit with her long hair in a thick braid as she texts before a match, Davis doesn't look intimidating, not at a couple of inches over 5 feet. On the court, she becomes so” (article 245, ¶6). Another example is an article that talks about the U.S. Open match between Serena Williams and Ana Ivanovic:

like a boxer in a title fight with a ballerina... There were no explosions of emotion by Williams on Monday. It was all very businesslike, save for a fist pump or two. Another seed down, another in the crosshairs. They are like notches on a belt for Williams. A heavyweight boxer's championship belt. (article 301, ¶1)

Language used to describe female players in articles on espnW is more descriptive than language used to describe male players, perhaps to entertain readers. Ultimately, however, it takes away from the seriousness of the presentation of the female athletes.

The second sign of divergent dialogues is when authors include information that has little or nothing to do with athleticism. This occurs when authors mention non-sport

topics, such as trivial aspects of athletes' personal lives, and when authors include extra details about particular sports/events that have little to do with those sports/events. An article on Kelly Cobb, a Duke University soccer player from Alaska, includes more information about how excited she is for winter in North Carolina than about her career as a soccer player (article 305). The author of an article on Lauren Cheney takes 225 words across 6 paragraphs to start discussing information related to Cheney as a professional soccer player (article 179). Instead, the author reports about how she is the official team deejay in the U.S. Soccer team locker room. In that same article, not once are Cheney's soccer statistics -- goals, assists, or caps -- mentioned. Instead, the author lists all the musicians she plays in the locker room to loosen the team up.

The author of another article talks about Jill Loyden, a substitute goalkeeper for the magicJack WPS team, who is ascribed the "most technically sound" (article 248, ¶15) of all the goalkeepers on the team. Reactions from players and the coach on Loyden's substitution cover her training regime, but most teammate comments are not about her play. Hope Solo, the usual starting goalkeeper for the team, says Loyden is, "a kind, kind heart who can cook amazing meals! She can make pretty amazing salsa and fish tacos" (article 248, ¶15). In the last line of the article, Loyden comments on Abby Wambach as the team's coach:

Loyden is drawing on Wambach's experience not just in soccer but also in their daily routine of solving crossword puzzles. "Abby always finishes more than me," Loyden said. "I'm usually the one asking her what the answer is. But I just started in the past two years, so she's got a bit of a lead on me." (article 248, ¶27-28)

Although access to players beyond game reporting is a motive behind espnW, authors of these articles diminish athletic accomplishments by reporting trivial aspects of their personal lives that have little or nothing to do with athleticism.

Similar to trivial aspects of athletes' personal lives appearing in articles, "extra" details about sporting events that have little or nothing to do with athleticism required for the sport contribute to divergent dialogues between female and male athletes. An article on women referees in the MLS references an experience from Bibiana Steinhaus, the first German referee to officiate a men's game in 2007, where a player accidentally tapped her on the breast. The player, defender Peter Niemeyer, recalls, "'She was standing a bit further away than I thought – I meant to give her a pat on the back...But you do have to entertain the fans a bit, too'" (article 417, ¶14). An article on Laura Davies preparing to overtake Annika Sorenstam's record for the most Solheim Cup wins talks extensively about European team uniforms. Davies "fretted" over team uniforms in 1994 and her game suffered as a result:

when the rest of the players were at work on the practice ground in matching pink short-sleeve shirts, Davies was in her rain gear. She hated the uniform and was below par because of it. Today, Ladies European Tour officials make sure that each player has clothes that have her feeling good about herself. As they have come to understand, the right outfit can have much the same effect as a holed putt across the first green. (article 339, ¶21)

An article about Minneapolis rallying around the WNBA Lynx in the playoffs starts off with really positive sports reporting, chronicling record-breaking crowds for games, the WNBA commissioner studying tactics the team uses to entice fans to come to games, and

why the Lynx are so good: high-scoring, ball-sharing basketball (article 364). The last two paragraphs, however, are about Candace Wiggins interacting with a fan while Wiggins was getting a manicure at the Mall of America:

a young fan walked past the shop, saw Wiggins inside and started screaming. I said to her, "Do you play basketball?" and she said no, Wiggins said. "I think that's the biggest thing. We have transitioned from just appealing to people who love basketball to people who are coming out who admire and respect what we are doing. I think that's important not just for us, but for women's basketball."
(article 364, ¶25)

Wiggins hits on an extremely important development for the Lynx team, but why does it have to be in the context of getting her nails done? "Extra" information not related to athleticism takes away from the seriousness of female athletes.

The third way divergent dialogues emerge in articles on espnW occurs when authors directly mention a physical characteristic or a personal characteristic of an athlete. Victoria Azarenka's "blue eyes sparkle" (article 296, ¶1), Sloane Stephens' "bubbly effusiveness" (article 299, ¶3), Serena as "the mighty Williams, wearing the emerald green shirt and black skirt she'd been sporting all week" (article 242, ¶7), Taj McWilliams-Franklin's pre-game rituals that include "painting her nails or stitching a dress she designed" (article 258, ¶1), and the "ponytailed point guards" (article 316, ¶6) represent examples of references to physical or personality characteristics. In article 218, Yani Tseng, the youngest player, man or woman, to win five major tournaments in professional golf, is presented as "just what LPGA needs to get out of its slump...in one smile flat" (article 218, ¶1). Style, the representation of signs on the physical body,

comes through in discourse about physical attributes of athletes. The body is the site for how style is played out, style is ascribed based on gender, and then style shapes ideological views about gender and athleticism (Webster, 2009). Referencing physical characteristics of athletes that do not relate to their athleticism takes away from the seriousness of presentation of these athletes (Seagrave, McDowell, & King, 2006).

Language analysis.

Language comprises social identity, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief at situational, institutional, and societal levels (Fairclough, 1995). In turn, these facets operate in a dialectical relationship to shape language as a social and historical mode of action (Fairclough, 1995). Language presented in media influences individuals' thoughts, conversations, decisions, and experiences (Coakley, 2009; Fairclough, 1995). More importantly, language is used to reify relations of power and privilege for particular groups of people (Wachs, 2006). Groups have more or less power depending on how much influential media they control (Van Dijk, 2003), and those in control perpetuate ideologies that work in their best interest using power that upholds particular constructions of social relations (Fairclough, 1995; Lazar, 2005). Media conglomerates are responsible for most discursive manifestations of sport, and male athletes are privileged over female athletes in the best interest of upholding sport as a masculine institution¹².

¹² Language has been used historically to relegate female athletes to second-class status in media representations (Billings, et al., 2012). Billings, et al. (2012) identify five ways language is used against female athletes. The first is that female athletes are more likely to be referred to by their first names (e.g., Serena, Annika, Hope), whereas male athletes are more likely to be referred to by their last names (e.g., Jeter, Sabathia, Manning) (Billings, et al., 2012; Seagrave, et al., 2006). The second is "gender marking": a sport played by female athletes is labeled with a qualifier such as "women's" soccer instead of just "soccer," as is the case with most men's sports (Billings, et al., 2012; Seagrave, et al., 2006). Male athletes are presumed if a qualifier is not included (Billings, et al., 2012). The third way language is used against female athletes is divergent dialogues, referenced in my description earlier. Divergent dialogues can

In an analysis of sport magazines, Duncan and Hasbrook (1988) use the term “ambivalence” to describe the practice of media outlets presenting overall positive portrayals of female athletes with subtle messages that trivialize the athleticism of the players. In espnW articles, the focus of most articles is on behind-the-scenes access to athletes/teams/coaches on or off the field. For the most part, authors portray the athletes *as athletes*. However, in some articles, there is a “twist”: the author discusses something not related to athletic achievement that diminishes the achievements of the athletes/teams/coaches. Sport is organized, enacted, and reproduced using communication and language that uphold traditional ideologies and particular cultural forms (Meân & Halone, 2010). If language shapes and reflects who has power and privilege in our culture (Wachs, 2006), the extra information keeps female athletes in a lower position of power than male athletes. So when an espnW author writing an article about Jennifer Pharr Davis, an ultrahiker who recently set a record for the fastest time (man or woman) hiking the Appalachian Trail, uses one of six interview questions to ask her about taking a pregnancy test on the trail because of early morning nausea (article 227), she discounts Pharr’s record by focusing on trivial aspects of the event rather than the record itself. Do you suppose the early-morning nausea could have been caused by hiking 50 miles a day? I think so, but the connection to femininity through pregnancy in contrast to the masculine characteristics traditionally celebrated in sport (and no doubt needed to accomplish this feat) discounts her record.

include differences in reporting but also differences in descriptors, such as male athletes as “powerful,” “fearless,” and “incredible” and female athletes as “talented,” “dedicated,” and “nice” (Billings, et al., 2012). Fourth, male athletes are more often attributed with superior athletic skill, experience, and composure compared to female athletes (Billings, et al., 2012). Fifth, female athletes are more likely to be the subject of comments on overall attractiveness, emotional play, and attributions of luck (Billings, et al., 2012; Seagrave, et al., 2006). Seagrave, et al., (2006) add masculine generics (e.g., defenseman) as another way women are pushed to the sidelines using language.

Framing of sports is determined by media organizations and affects the way audiences perceive sports in broader contexts (Coakley, 2009). Traditional gender patterns of media coverage have not changed as quickly as other genres because sports media organizations rely on masculine conceptions of sport that ensure the most commercial gain (Coakley, 2009). The organizations decide which sports/contests to cover as well as what type of coverage to grant to athletes/teams/coaches (Coakley, 2009). These frameworks inform individuals' use of sport to form personal and social identity and to construct difference (who is normal and who is not) (Kraft & Brummett, 2009). Sports are *rhetorical constructions* that influence social and political attitudes in our culture (Kraft & Brummett, 2009). Further, analyzing the ways language and power interact with gender and sport is important because "sportspeak" infiltrates other cultural discourses such as politics, sexual relations, and business (Seagrave et al., 2006).

Audience

Sports fandom is connected to social and political workings of U.S. culture (Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2007). Identity, especially gender identity, plays out in how sports fans enact fandom. A *Jezebel* post titled "Female sports fans just want to watch the game" reads,

You might be able to pick us out in the pub. We're alongside those with eyes glued to the screen, holding our breath, crossing our fingers and cursing at the ref. With one small difference: We're female. We're the ones listening to the match on the radio as we arrive late to a cousin's wedding or yelling "GOOOOAAAL!" in an airport plane full of weary travelers. We're the ones surreptitiously checking our Blackberries and iPhones on the drive to work, minimizing the game on our

work computers and pulling up something else like the *Times* or TMZ when our boss walks by... For women like myself, we don't need extra reasons to support soccer or any other sport. Like our male counterparts, our love of the game is enough. (Romero, June 29, 2010, ¶1-2, ¶5)

In this section, I profile research on female sports fandom to set up analysis of how espnW views the two constituencies of their site: female fans and female athletes. Executives operate from a postfeminist perspective by presenting espnW as “additive content” to ESPN, thereby giving women a choice for how they consume sports. This choice is based on a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference based on the (faulty) notion that feminism has taken care of inequities in gender roles (McRobbie, 2004). In articles geared toward viewers as athletes, choice, individualism, and empowerment undergird the site as a technology of the self that enables and intensifies neoliberalism.

(Female) sports fandom.

Research on sports fans comes from two perspectives: 1) a sport marketing perspective, which uses demographic characteristics of fans to understand how issues like economic factors, promotions, scheduling of games, new arenas, and accessibility affect attendance at sporting events, and 2) behavior of sports fans as connected with identification with a particular sport/team, where those fans with higher identification attend more games, are more knowledgeable about players and history of the team, and are fans despite the team's win-loss record (James & Ridinger, 2002). I focus on the latter of these to set up my analysis of sports fandom as connected to espnW. Sport fan research is typically presented by sex, so I report findings of analyses in terms of men

and women. In reality, of course, gender and sex are social constructions, so these categories are incomplete. They are important, however, in situating how espnW conceptualizes female fans.

Most research on sex differences in sports fandom show women enjoy sports and identify with particular sports/teams but do not derive as much of a *social identity* from sports as men do (James & Ridinger, 2002). In a survey of 634 attendees at women's and men's college basketball games at one Midwestern university, female respondents say they felt a sense of achievement when "their" team played well or won a game whereas male respondents felt more empathy for the team and report knowing strategy and technical aspects of the game as more important for being a spectator (James & Ridinger, 2002). Both female and male fans rated action, escape, and drama as the three most important motives for attending a game and female fans did not rate spending time with family or social interaction any higher than males did (James & Ridinger, 2002). Female fans identify more with a particular team; male fans identify more with an entire sport (basketball in this case) or the institution of sport in general (James & Ridinger, 2002).

Studies of different sports reveal different results between female and male fans. Clark, Apostolopoulou, and Gladden (2009) surveyed 1,090 women and men to determine motives for tuning into NFL football games. Both female and fans acknowledge that watching an NFL game is a social experience, but female fans report the opportunity to share an experience with friends and family as the primary motive for tuning in, whereas male fans report tuning in more so for appreciation and love for the game itself (Clark, et al., 2009). These findings are echoed when respondents were asked about the Super Bowl with the exception of the "pageantry" of the event rated higher by

female fans than by male fans, which the authors claim illustrates that female fans tune in more for a more multi-faceted view of the event while male fans are more interested in the competitiveness of the game (Clark, et al., 2009).

Dietz-Uhler, Harrick, End, and Jacquemotte (2000) surveyed college students to determine differences in sports fanship and sport fan behavior between female and male participants. Results show female and male fans consider themselves sports fans in equal numbers but that males identify more strongly with sport fan identity than females (Clopton & Finch, 2010; Dietz-Uhler, et al., 2000). Female fans consider themselves fans because they attend and watch sporting events with families, whereas male fans consider themselves fans because they play sports and because they acquire sports information (Dietz-Uhler, et al., 2000). A survey of 1,252 traditional-aged, undergraduate college students attending Bowl Championship Series (BCS) NCAA Division I schools echo these findings and assert that female fans may receive more social capital from being sports fans because they place less importance on team identity as connected to self-identity (Clopton & Finch, 2010).

Research on sports fans also suggests female fans may be interested in different kinds of sports than male fans. Statistics show female fans are more attracted to individual sports like figure-skating, gymnastics, diving, and skiing whereas male fans are more attracted to ball games, boxing, martial arts, and extreme and motor sports (Gems & Pfister, 2009). A recent Pew Research Center (February 1, 2010) survey of 1,504 adults showed that 63% of women and 59% of men said they were especially looking forward to the 2010 Winter Olympics. In contrast, 67% of men compared to

50% of women said they were especially looking forward to the 2010 Super Bowl (Pew Research Center, February 1, 2010).

Statistics on women who are sports fans reveal women consume sports via attendance at games/matches; television viewership; the digital market, which includes access to games/league sites via computer, laptop, netbook, tablet, and smartphone; social media (Facebook and Twitter); and sports logo apparel purchases (see Appendix H for specific statistics). Of the top five sports covered on espnW, female fans make up 41.4% of attendees at NBA basketball games, 53.9% of attendees at WNBA games, and 37.9% of attendees at college basketball games; 37.1% of attendees at MLS soccer games; 40.6% of attendees at professional tennis matches; 31.2% of attendees at PGA golf tournaments; and 37.8% of attendees at baseball games (Sports Business Research Network, 2012). The average percentage of female fans who make up television viewership for these leagues is 39.4 (Sports Business Research Network, 2012), excluding WNBA statistics because they are not available by gender. The average percentage of female fans who make up the digital market for these leagues is 28.7 (Sports Business Research Network, 2012), excluding WNBA statistics because they are not available by gender. At the end of the 2011 season, WNBA statistics on both male and female fans show attendance at games was up 1.25%, television viewership was up 5% (up 46% for the All-Star Game and 47% for the Draft), the WNBA Facebook page showed an 11% increase in fans, and league merchandise was up 12% for the 2011 season (Glass, September 15, 2011).

Studies on sport fandom delineated by gender present differing results for motives behind being fans, how fandom is enacted, and how identity plays a factor in sports

fandom. Analyses reveal that sports fandom is not exclusive to men and that women are consuming sports and integrating sports into their lives now more than ever. A principle reason espnW was created was to appeal to female sports fans who felt traditional media did not speak to the type of fandom they live (Kane & LaVoi, November 11, 2010). Executives creating the site conducted research to ascertain what female fans desire for sport fandom and published a site dedicated exclusively to female fans and female athletes. Components of the site, however, rely on postfeminist and neoliberal conceptions of female fans.

espnW: “Authentic to ESPN but unique to espnW’s audience” (Lynch, April 25, 2011, ¶11).

The initial mission for espnW was, “to serve, inform and inspire today’s female athlete and fan” (Lynch, April 25, 2011, ¶16). The mission was revised in December 2011 to read,

espnW’s mission is to connect female fans with the sports they love and follow. espnW.com provides an engaging environment where women are an integral part of the sports conversation, share their perspective on men’s and women’s sports and find the motivation and support for their athletic goals and interests. (ESPN Media Zone, December 13, 2011)

espnW is for two (likely overlapping) audiences: female fans of both men’s and women’s sports and female athletes. Tina Johnson, Editor-in-chief of espnW, explains,

What makes espnW different than anything out there is primarily the conversation we’re having with these women. It’s really unique because no one is really talking to this woman as a sports fan and an athlete combined. And we’re doing

that in a way that is fun, smart, funny, intelligent. [(video file), Lynch, April 25, 2011]

Female fans.

ESPN investigative research on the feasibility of a female market for espnW reveals eight major findings. First, women fans often feel that leagues and teams direct aspects of fandom toward men and neglect women (Kane & LaVoi, 2009). Second, ESPN research shows watching sports validates masculinity for men but that women must “prove” they are real sports fans (McBride, December 26, 2011). Third, men prefer in-depth statistics on games and on players’ past performances, whereas women prefer basic statistics and personal narratives (McBride, December 26, 2011). Fourth, similar to past research on sports fandom, men stake more emotions in “their teams” winning and losing than women, and fifth, more than half of all men ages 18-34 consider themselves “serious” or “super fans” whereas only twenty percent of women in that age range label themselves as such (McBride, December 26, 2011). Sixth, men watch sports shows three to four times as often as women (McBride, December 26, 2011). Seventh, both men and women are fans of the NFL but diverge in men liking NCAA football and the NBA more than women, and women liking figure skating and the Olympics more than men (McBride, December 26, 2011). Last, female fans do not necessarily prefer to watch women’s sports and ESPN’s research shows more men watch the WNBA and the women’s collegiate softball tournament (McBride, December 26, 2011) (though this differs from statistics obtained from other sources).

espnW executives claim they designed the espnW site based on “really listening to women around the country as to what they really want from us” (Gentile in Lynch,

April 25, 2011, ¶7). To address these wants, the site includes a “Features and Profiles” section with “in-depth stories surrounding issues in sports as well as compelling stories about athletes” (Lynch, April 25, 2011, ¶12); a “News & Opinion” section that converges “top athletes, writers and newsmakers in a way that is authentic to ESPN but unique to espnW’s audience” (Lynch, April 25, 2011, ¶11); headlines linked to articles from other ESPN sites and from the Associated Press; athlete blogs; video such as espnW’s top 10 of the week; “around the web,” sports stories from newspapers like the *New York Times* or *Miami Herald*; top photos of the week, athlete tweets; “Live on ESPN3;” and the espnW Facebook feed. Other features are a columnists section and recent articles authors have written; “things to do near you,” events based on the sport and zip code you enter; reader polls; quotations (e.g., “Things may come to those who wait, but only the things left by those who hustle” – Abraham Lincoln); and highlights from particular tournaments (e.g., the Women’s World Cup).

espnW continues to evolve and offer new content to readers. One of the newest initiatives is a video series called *The Word* where ESPN anchors, ESPN commentators, and espnW contributors discuss issues in the realm of sports 2-3 times per week in 3-5 minute episodes (Sports Video Group, February 10, 2012). Tina Johnson, editor-in-chief at espnW says,

We’ll bring a smart, funny and distinctly female point of view to the larger conversation around the sports events and stories that are top of mind... Think ESPN’s *SportsCenter* meets ABC’s *The View*. We’ll offer a fresh perspective and insight on topics of the day that both engages and enlightens our audience.

(Sports Video Group, February 10, 2012, ¶5)

Julie Foudy, a regular on the show, comments, “Similar to my playing days and the constant banter with teammates, it’s great to be back on a team debating hot topics...with more makeup on now” (Sports Video Group, February 10, 2012, ¶3). *The Word* aligns with creating a site based on what initial audience research for espnW showed.

The most frequent categories of articles on espnW based on my qualitative analysis in the previous chapter also align with catering to the audience surveyed in initial market research. The most popular type of feature article, “behind-the-scenes” access to athletes/teams/coaches on the field, gives readers access to athletes as they prepare for or reel from specific events and looks at athletes’ careers or more than one event. The second most popular type of feature article, “behind-the-scenes” access to athletes off the field, includes background on athletes’ personal relationships, parents’ role in athletes’ lives, and athletes/executives parenting. The third most prevalent type of article is about sports fandom and provides advice for watching/attending sporting events, talks about what fans are like at big sporting events, and offers previews and summaries of big sporting events.

Postfeminist conception of female fans.

espnW was created for female fans and female athletes in a “unique dedicated platform specifically for her” [(video file), Lynch, April 25, 2011]. Creating a site that serves as “additive content” to ESPN shows that ESPN executives operate from a postfeminist perspective because they present women with a *choice* for consuming sport. As I stated earlier, this choice is based on a resurgence of ideas about natural sexual difference which are based on the erroneous notion that feminism has taken care of inequities in gender roles (McRobbie, 2004). Title IX may fuel this mentality, too, by

creating the perception that women are equal to men in the arena of sports when in actuality severe disparities still exist.

espnW executives acknowledge that ESPN has served women for decades and are up front about the fact that espnW is not supposed to be the same as ESPN. Laura Gentile, Vice President of espnW, says the site is a “complement” to all that ESPN already does (Lynch, April 25, 2011). Jamele Hill, espnW analyst on recent espnW initiative *The Word*, says,

There are topics that are in the general sports atmosphere that I think women look at differently, and so this is our opportunity to not only give our opinion but kind of put a woman’s perspective to it. Because I think that’s needed in sports.

[ESPN Media Zone, n.d.a (video file)]

If espnW “connects female fans to the sports they love and follow” (espnW, n.d.a, ¶1), “aim[s] to provide an engaging environment where women are an integral part of the sports conversation” (espnW, n.d.a, ¶1) about both men’s and women’s sports, and is women’s “primary destination for women’s sports” (espnW, n.d.a, ¶1) in different ways than ESPN, this suggests that female fans are different from male fans who visit ESPN for traditional sports information. espnW executives do not hide the fact that the site is designed based on what women in their research pool desire. Further analysis shows their research pool must have been constructed of mostly White, middle- to upper-class, heterosexual subjects with spending power, because these are the demographics to which discourse on the site caters, as I explain later in this chapter.

ESPN’s viewership is 76% men and 24% women, and only two programs pull in more of a female audience than a male audience: the National Spelling Bee and

cheerleading shows (Hiestand, October 1, 2010). Girls and women queried in espnW research reveal they desire different sports content than what appears on ESPN.

Storytelling, the “personal journeys of athletes” (Thomas, October 15, 2010, ¶19), and the accomplishments of female athletes emerge as more important to women than to men, which ESPN surmises is the reason why more women watch events like the Olympics (Thomas, October 15, 2010). espnW gives women a choice for how they consume sports. espnW’s motto “one letter says a lot” and presenting the site in lower-case letters with a capital “W,” both to emphasize *women*, are rhetorical devices attempting to empower (Tasker & Negra, 2007) visitors who want more than detailed statistics and player histories they get on ESPN.

The issue with espnW as the choice for women, however, is that the site’s existence reinforces hegemonic codes that define authentic sports fandom as male. Feminism is no longer needed because equality has been achieved, so now women are free to abandon stats-filled, emphasis-on-television-content-ESPN in favor of something new that appeals to the way they consume sports.

If espnW purports to “serve, inform, and inspire” female athletes and fans, the way it enacts sports writing, especially as compared to ESPN, is indicative of the way executives conceptualize its audience. A traditional journalistic-style sports story includes facts and information, short, subject-verb-object sentences, short paragraphs, short words with precise meanings, action verbs, quotations with attribution, numbers and statistics (Stofer, Schaffer, & Rosenthal, 2010, p. 105). espnW focuses on behind-the-scenes access to athletes rather than journalistic accounts of sporting events. Stofer, et al. (2010) explain,

Sports writing has rules, too: grammar rules, spelling rules, punctuation rules...Not only are there rules to learn, there's a sports idiom to master. The sports idiom is a language spoken by insiders and somewhat familiar to followers. It's a combination of sports terminology, slang and cliché that has grown up within the world of sports over the last century or more and has become sports-speak. (Stofer, et al., 2010, p. 105)

Diverging from traditional sports journalism is not necessarily negative; ascribing this diversion to how *female* fans interpret sport means women are not sports fans in the same way men are sports fans. If the institution of sport is defined by masculinity and partially upheld by traditional sports journalism, women are excluded.

The relationship between representation and subjectivity (Gill, 2007) reveals a “haze of male exclusivity” (J Danielle, February 4, 2011) in sports fandom because women who are sports fans are often perceived as a threat to men who are sports fans. Comments after an *Atlantic* article on the “plight of female sports fans” infiltrating men’s territory reveal anxieties. [Tommy Clark] says, “makes me think of article 14 of the man code: ‘Women who claim they ‘love to watch sports’ must be treated as spies until they demonstrate knowledge of the game and the ability to pick a Buffalo wing clean” (Rosenberg, February 2, 2011, ¶9). [oscarnye] later responds, “the horror! how dare men have any area left where they can congregate among themselves. onward with the emasculation, so that you can complain about how emasculated men are!” (Rosenberg, February 1, 2011, ¶13). A popular culture article categorizing the “six types of female sports fans” posts a “male opinion” on the female “All knowing” fan, the woman who knows as much about sports as most men do: “Threatened. An All Knowing gal is

attractive at first, but what am I supposed to be better at if she's better than me in sports knowledge?" (Santos, February 2, 2012). On the other hand, the author claims the "Die Hard," a fan who knows her team well but is not as familiar with the Xs and Os of the game, is acceptable; the "Nurturer," the woman who is a fan to please her significant other, is "cute;" the "All-Knowing Wannabe" who mixes up sports jargon is "semi-offensive;" the "Passive," a woman who does not care about sports, is "respectable;" and the "Fair Weather," the fan who cheers only when a team is winning, is annoying (Santos, February 2, 2012).

The inclusion of the aforementioned popular culture article is not to suggest that one popular culture article has the power to define female fandom or to even produce worthwhile categories of female fandom (or that female fans can be classified in categories like "fans" or "female" at all, frankly), but the author's assertions reveal the socially constructed connection of sport and masculinity. Sport fandom is a masculine domain, and presence of women is therefore perceived as a threat to men. Cultural constructions of sport as masculine exclude women because they are perceived as feminine, and espnW is a place for women to go to consume sports in different ways than men do. espnW Vice President Gentile claims the espnW staff is "sensitive to concerns about delivering stereotypical coverage" (Thomas, October 15, 2010) and continues by explaining, "We're not going to do anything to condescend to fellow women because we are women, and we are sports fans at our core" (Thomas, October 15, 2010). The site *is* condescending to women, however, if authentic sports fandom is defined as male and therefore women are excluded and given a separate space to consume sports.

Although exceptions exist, most research shows male fans are more “committed” and “addicted” consumers than female fans because they spend more time consuming sports, have more knowledge about sports, are more emotionally involved, and identify with sports/teams to a higher degree to uphold important aspects of their identity (Gems & Pfister, 2009). This conception of sports fandom obscures barriers for why women might not be sports fans in the same way men are sports fans. Women are more restricted in their leisure choices, are subject to narrow social expectations of caregiving for families (e.g., women who are out at dinnertime at a ballgame may be perceived differently than men who are out at dinnertime at the same ballgame), are subject to overt sexism and aggressive masculine behavior at sport venues, and wrestle with sport as an ideologically male domain (Gosling, 2007). Traditional fandom research also obscures the fact that not all men are sports fans and that the institution of sport is often exclusionary to those who do not fit traditional conceptions of fans as male, heterosexual, and ages 18-34 (Gosling, 2007). The real initiative should not be finding a separate space for *women* but about modifying ideological perceptions of sports fandom for *everyone*.

A postfeminist mentality brought on by public perceptions of Title IX may undergird how espnW thinks of female fans. Laura Gentile, Vice President of espnW, claims espnW is geared toward “that woman who’s grown up playing sports” [(video file), Lynch, April 25, 2011]. Women who have grown up playing sports were given the opportunity to play sports because of Title IX, a law passed in 1972 that legislates equal opportunity in educational programs must be given to men and women in institutions that receive federal funding. Although the law applies to all educational programs and to rights of students in other areas such as sexual harassment, pregnancy, admissions, and

recruiting, women in athletics have garnered the largest benefit because there was such a disparity before the law's passage (1972: 1:27 women played; now it's 1:3; Women's Sports Foundation, n.d.b). Although the enormous opportunities the law has created for women are indisputable, I argue public perceptions of Title IX contribute to a postfeminist sensibility because people assume the law has created equality in educational opportunities for men and women. The perception is that feminist efforts to secure equal opportunities for girls are no longer needed because the law should take care of whatever disparities exist. Any issues individuals have with discriminatory practices are seen as individual issues, not larger structural issues at work.

The problem with the perception that Title IX has alleviated inequality is that according to estimates, 80% of schools are not in compliance with the law (Women's Sports Foundation, n.d.b). Schools must offer equal opportunities for women and men in all aspects of play – practice, coaching, equipment, competition – and most often comply using the “proportionality” prong of the law, showing the number of athletes is proportional to the total population of the school (U.S. Department of Education, July 11, 2003). This sounds relatively simple; however, girls represent over half of the total high school population yet are only 41% of athletes (National Women's Law Center, 2011). Women are 53% of the total college/university population yet only receive 45% of participation opportunities (National Women's Law Center, 2011). Title IX's existence makes women's chances for an equal opportunity to play sports seem legally guaranteed, which encourages a postfeminist view of sport: we do not have to worry about women's participation as a feminist issue anymore.

Another factor in espnW's conception of female fans as separate from male fans is the trend in diversification of ESPN sites based on audience. ESPN operates as a hub site with five other local sites: ESPNBoston.com, ESPNChicago.com, ESPNDallas.com, ESPNLosAngeles.com and ESPNNewYork.com. The perception is that espnW just caters to yet another niche market: *women*. Deadspin sports website contributor Katie Baker responds to criticisms of espnW:

If anything, it's more like the balkanization of ESPN that has already been in motion what with all the hyperlocal sites they've been launching. No one made a huge deal when they launched ESPN New York or called that a ghetto. The site caters to a niche and is both a complement and supplement to ESPN. I don't see why a women's site couldn't exist in a similar way. (Yarow, December 6, 2010)

The first issue with conceiving women as a differentiated market is that creating a website for a particular part of the country is different from creating a website for 50.8% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, January 17, 2012). Even if the populations of all the local sites were combined [Boston: 617,594 (U.S. Census Bureau, January 31, 2012a) + Chicago: 2,695,598 (U.S. Census Bureau, January 31, 2012b) + Dallas: 1,197,816 (U.S. Census Bureau, January 31, 2012c) + Los Angeles: 3,792,621 (U.S. Census Bureau, January 31, 2012d) + New York: 8,175,133 (U.S. Census Bureau, January 31, 2012e) = 16,478,762], they still would add up to only 10.5% of the total U.S. female population (156,842,733) (U.S. Census Bureau, January 17, 2012). "Women" as a niche market does not even come close to how ESPN has conceived of a niche market for other local sites.

The second issue with conceiving women as a differentiated market is that it clusters all women into one category based on sex. Differentiated marketing uses different marketing mixes to satisfy smaller segments of consumers (Boone & Kurtz, 2012). Conceiving of women as one category, however, reproduces an essentialist binary for sex. Male or female sex is typically reduced to each side's role in reproduction, though in actuality neat division according to "male" or "female" is not clear (Allwood, 1998), and has been challenged by groups like intersex activists and trans activists (Butler, 2004). Butler (1993/1999) calls for a re-conception of gender construction that theorizes regulatory norms through which sex is materialized. Biological sex is a "*process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*" (Butler, 1993/1999, p. 9, italics in original). Materiality manifests in "forcible and reiterative practice of regulatory sexual regimes" (Butler, 1993/1999, p. 15) that "circumscribe and contour the 'materiality' of sex, and that 'materiality' is formed and sustained through and as a materialization of regulatory norms that are in part those of heterosexual hegemony" (Butler, 1993/1999, p. 15). Tied to their roles in reproduction, then, differentiating individuals based on biological sex relies on cultural framing of men and women in particular ways (Butler, 2004). Sex is produced and stabilized based on reiteration of norms (Butler, 1993/1999).

espnW should also heed caution in separating sports content for "women" based on past female-dedicated publications that have failed. Publications like *Sports Illustrated for Women*, *Fitness* magazine, *Conde Nast Sports for Women*, *Sports Traveler*, and *womenSports* (later changed to *Women's Sports and Fitness*) have all failed because they tried to combine physicality and femininity (Creedon, 1998). Magazine publishers

need advertisers so they can earn profits, and publishers for women's magazines at the time these were published relied on advertisements about personal care, beauty, apparel, electronic, shoe manufacturers (Creedon, 1998). One editor comments, "If they [potential advertisers] opened it up and found all volleyballs and hockey pucks, I'd never get cosmetics [ads]" (Creedon, 1998, p. 97). Another hang-up is that executives in male-dominated publishing companies perceive women are more interested in beauty-oriented fitness than sport-related fitness. An analysis of almost 5,000 editorial photos in *Women's Sports & Fitness*, *Sports Illustrated for Women*, *Real Sports*, and *Shape* by Hardin, Lynn, and Walsdorf (2005) reveals these magazines operate on a continuum in how they present sporting women. On one end of the scale, *Shape* reinforces sexual difference between men and women, and shows women in passive, non-sporting poses or participating in individual sports. On the other end of the continuum, *Real Sports* rejected sexual differences, showed women exerting power in sport (not aesthetic sports) and participating mostly in team sports (Hardin, et al., 2005). In between the two were *Women's Sports & Fitness* and *Sports Illustrated for Women* (Hardin, et al., 2005). Fink & Kensicki (2002) found significantly fewer sport-related articles and significantly more articles about athletes' personal/sport struggles in *Sports Illustrated for Women* than *Sports Illustrated*. The only one of these magazines still published monthly is *Shape* (*Real Sports* publishes a once-yearly "top ten moments in women's sports" guide), which sends a strong message that female athletes' performance have not sustained interest in the same way more traditional, masculine sport publications have (Fink & Kensicki (2002). espnW's goal as an online presence is to change the reception of information about female athletes.

Borer (2009) conducted field research on baseball fans and presents three categories of female baseball fans, one of which is designated the “pink-and-proud fan.” The “pink and proud” fan is a “true follower of the game and fan of the team who refuses to dismiss her femininity once she enters the public realm of fandom or the parochial realm of the ballpark” (Borer, 2009, ¶7). espnW is made for the “pink and proud” fan who is not getting what she wants from ESPN. The site “provides comprehensive coverage of the opportunities and challenges facing female athletes today as well as topical sports news and long-form feature stories” (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.b, ¶1) and is not meant to be the

go-to source for sports news for women. Sports savvy females, like myself, who frequent ESPN will continue to do so. espnW is not meant to supplant the news I would go to ESPN to receive. Instead, it is meant to cover topics that interest women. (Dosh, December 13, 2010, ¶12)

ESPN relies on postfeminist conceptions of choice and natural sexual difference based on the assumption that feminism is no longer needed in creating a separate site for women. This reinforces hegemonic codes that define authentic sports fandom as male and therefore makes existing inequality based on gender seem inevitable (Gill, 2007) when we should be challenging the ideological underpinnings of sport fandom as a whole instead. Similar themes emerge in sections of espnW dedicated to female athletes.

Female athletes.

espnW’s second audience is female athletes. ESPN market research shows women prefer an “active” approach to consuming sports, including “showing sports but also talking about working out and being healthy and connecting to other women”

(Hiestand, October 1, 2010, ¶9) as opposed to the “passive” approach to consuming sports undertaken by most men (Hiestand, October 1, 2010). The top of espnW’s Facebook timeline presents photos of recreational athletes, Olympic athletes, professional athletes, and fans in the stands adorned with quotations like, “make space in your life for what matters,” “raise your own bar,” and “Get up. Brush off. Move on.” In articles devoted to viewers as athletes, espnW relies on postfeminist ideals of individualism, choice, and empowerment to invoke a self-as-project mentality and is a technology of the self that enables neoliberalism.

Most articles geared toward readers as athletes are for elite recreational athletes who participate in physical activity at higher levels than the average recommended weekly guidelines. This is not particularly surprising, as the “about” section of espnW says, “we aim to offer you behind-the-scenes access to female athletes across the globe, with personal training tips and guidance from the pros to help you find motivation and support for all your athletic goals and interests” (espnW, n.d.a, ¶1). Articles are most often numbered lists with advice for recreational athletes to step up their athleticism to the next level. Experts such as university researchers, sports psychologists, professional athletes, coaches, Registered Dietitians, personal trainers, and physical therapists are the sources of information for advice provided in the articles.

Articles geared toward female athletes fall into three categories: exercise techniques, food, and reviews of products made especially for athletes. Exercise techniques are practices like yoga or barefoot/running/Chi running meant to help athletes perform at their best in a particular sport (e.g., articles 14, 63, 71, 128, 380, 421). Experts offer advice on how to train in extreme conditions such as rain or hot weather and

methods for getting the most out of race days in training, the day-of a race, and in recovery (e.g., articles 19, 68, 144, 246). Articles also cover how athletes can predict risk for or avoid injuries (e.g., articles 131, 138). Athletes can read about topics like ways to get over open-water anxiety in triathlons (article 19), an eight-point screening program to predict risk of ACL injuries (article 131), and planning for their next marathon based on how much of an increase in intensity their bones can take (article 138).

Articles on food are about how athletes can change their diets to maximize sports performance and how certain foods are performance enhancers for games/races. Diets such as the Paleo diet, gluten-free diet, vegan diet, and raw foods diet are broken down and analyzed for why they offer so many benefits to athletes (articles 34, 134, 150, 420, 423). Authors also analyze performance-enhancers such as chocolate and snacks made for athletes from the Sweets and Snacks Expo to see how these foods might benefit athletes (articles 41, 56, 74, 81, 141). Athletes can even read about foods that help heal sports injuries like scrapes, sprains, bruises, and broken bones faster (article 141).

Other articles review products made for athletes meant to enhance workout routines. Running, cycling, hiking, and yoga are the sports most referenced in these articles. Products like GPS devices (article 45), sunglasses (article 221), devices to involve dogs in training (article 66), and energy snacks (article 224) are showcased when espnW staffers describe the product and then talk about “performance notes” after using them in their own exercise routines. For example, athletes are given specific suggestions on athletic shirts for the “tennis-obsessed,” “adventure racer,” “postwork runner,” “hiker,” and “yogi” made by Nike, North Face, Asics, Columbia, and Athleta (article 254).

Messages geared toward female athletes on espnW rely on a postfeminist ideology constructed from individualism, choice, and empowerment that invokes self-surveillance as a mechanism to work on outer appearances and inner selves. Under postfeminism, individuals appear to choose the types of lives they want to live (McRobbie, 2004) so the self is seen as a project and women working out are “expressions of agency” (Tasker & Negra, 2007, p. 21). An article on mental training boasts, “mental training is no substitute for physical training, but athletes who do physical training can make themselves much better through additional mental training...It can literally mean the difference between winning and losing” (article 14, ¶4). Another article claims that the number of push-ups an athlete can do is a good way to measure upper body strength for recreational athletes. The more upper body strength an athlete has, the more likely she is to boost performance: “The difference between elite and national level athletes almost always comes down to strength” (article 421, ¶2). The self-as-project mentality goes beyond aesthetics because the emphasis on training, diet, and products is about improving athletic performance for elite recreational athletes.

The “about” section of the espnW website also targets female athletes. This section of the site is relatively simple, listing the espnW mission, links to each of the site’s contributors, a list of the site advisory panel, and “official partners” of espnW. Next to the mission is a five-segment motivational message complemented by photos of athletes in action (e.g., a soccer player doing pull-ups on the cross-bar of a soccer net, a photo of Billie Jean King and Bobbie Riggs after their groundbreaking match in 1973, and the Texas A&M women’s basketball team celebrating a championship). The

message starts with “Our own Julie Foudy says it best” and lists 19 statements over the five segments:

When outsiders say you can't, the team says we can.

People who take shortcuts eventually finish last.

If you believe, you can achieve.

We celebrate others (and life could use more of that).

Good pain is hard to find.

We discover what truly matters in the soul of a teammate.

We learn how to be comfortable in uncomfortable situations.

Mediocrity has no place to hide.

You understand that pressure is a privilege.

Confidence follows.

Or you learn to fake it 'til you make it.

Hard work becomes a habit.

That feeling of BRING IT ON, when you know you are fit and ready.

Risk is indeed rewarded.

You teach the butterflies to fly in formation.

Discipline matters.

We learn that TOGETHER we are always stronger.

Dreams aren't crazy, just courageous.

The older I get, the better I was. (espnW, n.d.a)

Though Foudy invokes language typically used in sports to emphasize teamwork (e.g., “TOGETHER we are always stronger”), information on espnW presented to female

athletes is ultimately reinforced by ideals of postfeminism and neoliberalism to encourage readers to develop a particular self that benefits ESPN, Inc. and the company's affiliates (as I discuss in chapter 5).

Conceiving of oneself as a project requires espnW viewers to think of themselves as individuals with initiative, ambition, and personal responsibility, all components of neoliberalism. Technologies of the self are means by which individuals enact neoliberal ideals in cultivation of selves (Nadesan, 2008). Foucault (1982/2003) notes these mechanisms permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.

Neoliberalism situates the lives of individuals as projects formed by the choices they make to maximize their existence (Rose, 1992). Assembling a "lifestyle" (Rose, 1992, p. 155) means choosing from consumer products that convey meaning via "the fantasies of efficacy and the dreams of pleasure that guide both product innovation and consumer demand" (Rose, 1992, p. 155). Technologies of the self are promoted as a means to construct the best lifestyle possible. espnW is a technology of the self to enact neoliberalism.

Intersection (or not) of other aspects of identity.

Because my dissertation is a feminist critical discourse analysis of espnW, the focus of my interrogation is gender. However, I would be remiss to not address ways gender interacts with other aspects of identity such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and sexuality, especially given these sites as contested terrain in the institution of

sport (Lazar, 2005). espnW discourse is depoliticized and consumer-oriented to facilitate profit maximization for advertisers connected with the site. Its discourses construct a White, middle- to upper-class, heterosexual subject with spending power.

Race/ethnicity.

espnW profiles mostly white athletes in photographs and articles during the six months I analyzed. The only deviation to this pattern are more African American athletes in the sports of basketball (men's and women's) and football and Asian players featured as winning tournaments on the LPGA Tour. White athletes are especially prominent in articles about fitness and fitness-related races like Ultraman competitions and marathons. The sporting world as defined by espnW discourse is shaped by who is *not* included as much as by who is featured, and power is manifest in whose voices are heard and whose are not (Johnstone, 2002); thus, espnW discourse constructs a White subject as the ideal consumer of sport.

Authors trivialize or do not address the struggles that minority athletes have experienced related to race/ethnicity in favor of focusing on gender. For example, Shelia Johnson, the first African-American woman to own a part of three sports franchises, is asked, "As the managing partner, president and part owner of the WNBA's Washington Mystics, and also an owner of the NHL's Capitals and NBA's Wizards, you're the first African-American woman to own a piece of three teams. What does it feel like to make history?" to which she responds,

It's empowering. It really is. This is the opportunity of a lifetime. Women do not get this kind of opportunity. I have to give credit to Abe Pollin [former owner of Washington Sports and Entertainment] for giving me the chance to do this and

then Ted Leonsis [owner of Monumental Sports] for letting me buy into the teams. (August 22, 2011, ¶3)

She sidesteps race in favor of focusing on gender, neglecting to reflect that these aspects of identity are intimately related to one another. In another response (August 22, 2011), Johnson mentions being the first African-American cheerleader at the University of Illinois, though the author does not follow up on what this experience was like for her.

The author of article 195 profiles Mariah Stackhouse, a 17-year-old prodigy playing in the LPGA U.S. Open, the only African-American player in 156-woman field. In the article, the author cites Stackhouse's father advising her not to think about race because she will face challenges "far greater than your blackness" (¶12). The author sums up, "With tremendous parental support and personal drive, Stackhouse will have a future as bright as the multicolored Nike Dri-FIT T-shirt she sported during our interview that read 'Can't Stop Me'" (article 195, ¶14). Another author (October 10, 2011) interviews Wendy Lewis, MLB's senior vice president of diversity and strategic alliances, as part of the Power Play series. Again, race is not an issue that is addressed except in the introductory description of Lewis as the highest-ranking African-American woman in MLB. In line with other articles in the series, the author does ask how she balances being a (single) parent to three daughters. Discourse constructs a white subject as privileged in sport when minority athletes are only presented in specific veins. White supremacy is reproduced in the continued absence of athletes of color and their experiences.

Class.

espnW is a consumer-oriented way of making a women's sport site that facilitates profit maximization and connections with advertisers. espnW articles are targeted toward women who have the time and financial means to read about sports and to participate in sports, perpetuating a consumer-driven view of the institution. Statistics on game attendance (Table 3), television viewership (Table 4), and viewership via electronic devices (Table 5) reveal disparities in income surrounding who consumes sports.

Table 3

*Percentage of fans who attend games by income (2011 statistics) – both men and women
– for the top five most popular sports reported on in espnW articles*

League	Under \$25,000	\$25,000- \$49,999	\$50,000- \$99,999	\$100,000 or more
NBA Basketball	8.1 ¹	15.3 ¹	35.1 ¹	41.5 ¹
MLS Soccer	10.3 ²	22.3 ²	37.1 ²	30.2 ²
Tennis	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Golf	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
MLB Baseball	10.7 ³	18.5 ³	33.8 ³	37.0 ³

Notes: N/A = not available

Sources: ¹Sport Business Research Network, 2011h; ²Sport Business Research Network, 2011e; ³Sport Business Research Network, 2011b

Table 4

Percentage of television viewers by income (2011 statistics) – both men and women– for the top five most popular sports reported on in espnW articles

League	Under \$25,000	\$25,000- \$49,999	\$50,000- \$99,999	\$100,000 or more
NBA Basketball	13.9 ¹	21.7 ¹	35.9 ¹	28.5 ¹
MLS Soccer	14.8 ²	19.8 ²	37.0 ²	28.4 ²
Tennis	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Golf	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
MLB Baseball	17.0 ³	21.6 ³	32.7 ³	28.7 ³

Notes: N/A = not available

Sources: ¹Sport Business Research Network, 2011j; ²Sport Business Research Network, 2011g; ³Sport Business Research Network, 2011d

Table 5

Percentage of fans who view games with electronic devices (computer/laptop/netbook, tablet, smartphone) by income (2011 statistics) – both men and women– for the top five most popular sports reported on in espnW articles

League	Under \$25,000	\$25,000- \$49,999	\$50,000- \$99,999	\$100,000 or more
NBA Basketball	23.3 ¹	15.5 ¹	36.3 ¹	25.0 ¹
MLS Soccer	14.5 ²	29.1 ²	38.4 ²	18.1 ²
Tennis	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Golf	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
MLB Baseball	21.7 ³	18.8 ³	31.4 ³	28.1 ³

Notes: N/A = not available

Sources: ¹Sport Business Research Network, 2011i; ²Sport Business Research Network, 2011f; ³Sport Business Research Network, 2011c

Well over fifty percent of fans¹³ who attend and watch NBA, MLS, and MLB games earn more than \$50,000 per year. U.S. Census Bureau (2011) statistics reveal disparities in

¹³ Fans polled in the 2011 Sport Business Research Network survey are 67,641 U.S. consumers age 13 or

race measuring White individuals' median income at \$51,846, Black individuals' median income at \$32,068, Asian individuals' median income at \$64,308, and Hispanic individuals' income at \$37,759. Correlations show white and Asian individuals as those most likely to attend games, watch televised games, and view games with electronic devices.

When covering fitness topics, espnW excludes individuals based on the correlation between income and opportunity to exercise. Statistics show that only 22.2% of males and 16.3% of females meet both aerobic activity and muscle-strengthening guidelines¹⁴ established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Barriers to exercise for women include culture, time, lack of money, motivation, accessibility, education, and health or physical conditions (Murthy & Smith, 2010; Rosenfeld, 2004). Only six percent of individuals who do not have a high school diploma or GED meet the guidelines (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). This percentage rises to about 10% among individuals who have a high school diploma or GED, and 24.9% of the total population with some college or more meet the guidelines (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Additionally, 11.9% of the total population below 100% of the poverty level, 10.9% of the total population between 100-199% of the poverty level,

older (Sport Business Research Network, 2011a). Data presented is weighted to the U.S. population (256.3 million) and to represent the demographic composition of U.S. households based on geographic region, income, household size, age and gender (Sport Business Research Network, 2011a).

¹⁴ “The 2008 federal guidelines recommend that for substantial health benefits, adults perform at least 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) a week of moderate-intensity, or 75 minutes (1 hour and 15 minutes) a week of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity. Aerobic activity should be performed in episodes of at least 10 minutes, and preferably, it should be spread throughout the week. The 2008 guidelines also recommend that adults perform muscle-strengthening activities that are moderate or high intensity and involve all major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week, because these activities provide additional health benefits” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010, p. 262).

16.8% of the total population at 200-399% of the poverty level, and 27.1% of the total population at 400 or more percent above the poverty level meet the guidelines (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Topics in articles on exercise are about exercise techniques, food, and reviews of products made especially for athletes. This excludes individuals based on time to exercise, availability of healthy food and funds to buy recommended products.

Another aspect of class relating to espnW is that much planning for the site happens at the espnW Women + Sports Summits, which are expensive and exclusionary. The cost of the 2011 Summit was \$1,500 plus travel expenses; the cost of the 2012 Summit is \$2,500 plus travel expenses. These costs are not particularly surprising when the locations for the events have been at The Lodge at Torrey Pines, “commonly referred to as a San Diego top hotel and resort” that has earned the AAA Five Diamond award for the past ten years (The Lodge at Torrey Pines, n.d.) and The Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain, one of the newest luxury resorts in Tucson, AZ, a “casually elegant yet sophisticated resort hotel that melds into its high Sonoran Desert setting” (Ritz Carlton, n.d.). In her opening remarks, Gentile says, “We chose La Jolla for three simple reasons: sun, fun, and sand. Clearly, we’ll have to emphasize the fun” (espnW, October 4, 2010). Both retreats were by invitation only, and invitations could not be transferred to others. Summits brought together some of the most powerful individuals from sports organizations (e.g., ESPN, NFL, NBA, WNBA, USOC), corporations (e.g., Nike, Gatorade, Oracle, Oakley), and professional leagues (e.g., athletes such as Laila Ali, Tamika Catchings, and Annika Sorenstam). Participants were charged with “help[ing] shape the future of Women + Sports.” Shaping women’s sports from espnW’s

perspective means integrating ideas from the powerful, wealthy individuals who attended the retreats.

Sexuality.

Sport has historically been considered a masculine endeavor based on characteristics needed for successful participation, such as aggressiveness, competitiveness, superiority, mental and physical toughness, initiative, strength, power, and confidence (Duncan, 2006; Mawson, 2006). This notion of hegemonic masculinity depicts men as “naturally” built for sport, which makes women “not naturally” built for sport because hegemonic femininity is positioned as opposite of hegemonic masculinity (Hardin & Whiteside, 2010; Media Education Foundation, 2005). When women participate in sports and violate hegemonic roles, they cross boundaries into the masculine realm of sport. To counter this crossover, powerful institutions in our culture such as media often suggest female players, coaches, and athletic administrators are lesbian and stigmatize them for it (Media Education Foundation, 2005).

espnW participates in such heteronormative constructions of sport. For example, every reference to a romantic partner in espnW discourse is a heterosexual partner (see Appendix I for examples); references to gay/lesbian athletes or relationships appear in the comments sections of articles instead of in the prose of the article. A comment after an article on why girls need to play sports now more than ever claims girl athletes are labeled bitches and lesbians if they are athletes (article 373). Another comment after an article about German soccer players posing in *Playboy* says, “Those pix looked pretty lesbian to me...Not sure that sends a message that they are ‘normal’” ([agnigrin], article 126, ¶17). In contrast, readers get to read about Bob Bryan, a tennis player whose idea of

happiness is being with the person he loves: his wife (article 127) or Phillies first baseman Ryan Howard, whose heroine is his fiancé Krystal Campbell, a 2nd grade teacher (article 37). They also read about the support of Dan Wheldon's wife in his Indianapolis 500 victory (article 90); or how Val Ackerman remembers sitting next to her husband, to whom she credits for helping her attain some semblance of balance between motherhood and her career, for the inaugural WNBA game at Madison Square Garden (article 142). If espnW is going to include "behind-the-scenes" access to players/teams/coaches and referencing romantic partners is a part of this tactic, they should reference *all* romantic partners.

Perhaps espnW does not reference gay or lesbian relationships because they do not perceive gay and lesbian individuals as a target market. Lesbians have been a notoriously elusive market because they do not fit how marketers perceive gender roles: heterosexual women as housewives or femme fatales and gay men as affluent and trendsetting (Sender, 2004). Lesbians are perceived to be hostile to families and fashion and are stereotyped as frugal and frumpy (Sender, 2004). Additionally, a lack of lesbian professionals in marketing companies, finding lesbians for market research despite the group being less likely than gay men to read gay media or attend gay events, less lesbian population concentration in more populous urban areas, and lesbians having lower disposable incomes than gay men are challenges for marketing professionals to define the group as a niche (Sender, 2004). This, of course, assumes corporations should be treating individuals as nebulous groups of consumers, which is detrimental.

Vavrus (2002) presents "postfeminist solipsism" as a discursive pattern used to generalize about all women using a "small and very particular group of women's voices

and concerns to the exclusion of others” (pp. 165-166). Characteristics of postfeminist solipsism include emphasizing maternity and marriage, reducing feminism to a fight for equality in public and private realms, and the “subtle privileging of a mostly white, middle-class to elite, straight perspective on women’s lives and needs” (Vavrus, 2002, p. 177). espnW articles exhibit such postfeminist solipsism, mostly in the form of invisibility of issues related to identities other than gender.

Conclusion

espnW’s motto “one letter says a lot” is applicable to espnW’s conception of how female fans and female athletes are positioned in the institution of sport. Divergent dialogues in articles and executives conceiving of espnW as “additive content” to ESPN grant power to men as the primary beneficiaries in the institution of sport. Although seemingly innocuous, these practices shape readers’ views about gender ideology in sport:

Gender ideology is hegemonic in that it often does not appear as domination at all; instead it seems largely consensual and acceptable to most in a community.

The winning of consent and the perpetuation of the otherwise tenuous relation of dominance are largely accomplished through discursive means, especially in the ways ideological assumptions are constantly re-enacted and circulated through discourse as commonsensical and natural. (Lazar, 2005, p. 7)

Discourse influences individuals in myriad ways; espnW discourse perpetuates a masculine conception of sport that privileges male athletes over female athletes.

In chapter four, I outline five themes related to articles where espnW authors directly confront issues of gender in sport. These topics are not typically covered by

mainstream media and therefore espnW seems feminist in confronting these issues; however, analysis reveals they rely on difference arguments to construct a postfeminist athlete that upholds neoliberalism.

Chapter 4

McRobbie (2004) suggests postfeminism is sustained by a “double entanglement” (p. 4) of neoconservative values about gender, sexuality, and family undergirded by liberal values of choice and feminism that exist as the Gramscian version of common sense. The most important aspect of postfeminism that arises in my CDA is the idea that feminism is no longer needed because many of the central goals of second wave feminism are no longer an issue (Stacey, 1993). Two components of this are a general rejection of sexual politics and “difference” arguments predicated on the idea that men and women are fundamentally different physically, psychologically, and emotionally (Rosenfelt & Stacey, 1987). Because feminism is no longer needed, women are free to *choose* to enact lifestyle inclinations previously criticized by feminists (Dow, 1996). Additionally, postfeminism operates from the idea that gender issues are *individual* issues and that collective action to correct them is no longer needed (Stacey, 1993). This postfeminist framing is significant because in reality female athletes continue to be marginalized in areas such as coaching, financial support, and media representation because the institution of sport is so often characterized by gender ideologies that are male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered (Coakley, 2009).

espnW uses a postfeminist standpoint in articles that directly confront issues of sex and gender in sport that have historically plagued female athletes and female sports executives. These articles seem bold in directly addressing such issues in sport because mainstream media do not typically call out discriminatory practices so blatantly (perhaps because they often perpetuate the discriminatory practices); however, the discourse on espnW also reifies differences between male and female athletes to create a postfeminist

athletic woman/fan that upholds neoliberalism. To illustrate this argument, I present descriptions of how each theme appears in the discourse derived from qualitative analysis and then critically analyze the themes, explaining how postfeminism and neoliberalism emerge in articles.

Direct confrontation with issues of sex in sport

I organize my findings into five themes in order of prevalence. The first theme, which I label, “H-O-R-S-E vs. one-on-one,” emerges in articles about female athletes playing in men’s professional leagues. In these articles, espnW defines sport in terms of masculinity and physical aggressiveness and so female athletes are presented as physically inferior to male athletes and therefore unable to compete in the “gold standard” of athletics. This upholds the power men have cultivated for so many years in the institution of sport. In the second theme, which I label, “(not) calling the shots,” espnW again presents sport as a masculine institution where women are interlopers because they cannot use physicality in the same way as men to score and win. The underlying feel of this group of articles on female officials in men’s leagues is that feminism is no longer needed because equal opportunities exist for women officials to work in women’s leagues and men’s leagues. My analysis shows that the underlying premise of this discourse is false: an “even playing field” cannot exist for women in sport when the institution is defined by aggressive, violent masculinity. The third theme, which I label, “breaking the ‘pink ceiling,’” focuses mostly on a series of articles espnW titles “Power Players,” which follows female executives in major sports organizations. Most executives claim gender is irrelevant in their profession and that any woman can succeed as a sports executive if she tries hard enough. Fulfilling expectations of league

executives may obscure the difficulties women face in balancing work and home life, however. Articles in the fourth theme, which I label, “normal and lovely girls,” address the sexualization of female athletes. These articles are informed by aspects of postfeminism, especially those that frame athletes using femininity and sexuality as a marketing strategy. Exercising power by using their bodies to garner extra earnings, however, is merely a fantasy of power, because women are still discriminated against in so many areas of U.S. culture. The last theme, which I label, “commentary from readers as a way to protect ‘our house,’” shows that comments are indicative of past research on online discussion forums and continue to uphold men as most powerful in the institution of sport.

H-O-R-S-E vs. one-on-one.

I encountered direct confrontation with an issue that has historically plagued female athletes in a series of seven articles on whether elite professional female athletes could/should compete in men’s professional leagues thirteen days into my analysis of espnW. The set-up to the series asks,

Would players in the NBA or another professional men's league accept a woman as a teammate? Over the next six days, espnW will look at the sports landscape in detail -- the NFL, NBA, Major League Baseball, the NHL, tennis and golf -- to see if an exceptional woman could play against, and with, men. And if she would be accepted as a peer. (article 32, ¶4)

The series starts off with a general article on whether or not women could compete with men, summarizing the series (article 32), and then addresses each of the men’s major leagues in six additional articles on the MLB (article 36), NFL (article 38), NBA (article

42), NHL (article 48), PGA Tour (article 169), and ATP (article 223). Each of the articles that addresses the major leagues follows a similar format: exploring whether women can compete on both physical and social planes, “exceptions” by which women could potentially compete, past instances in which women have competed against men and failed, and “pioneer” female athletes who broke the “pink ceiling” (article 287) to compete in men’s leagues.

Every article in the seven-article series on whether female athletes could compete in men’s professional leagues explores the physical dimension of athletics. All claim women cannot compete directly against men because they do not measure up in terms of size and/or strength. Nancy Lieberman, then-coach of the NBA Development League Texas Legends, says, “There are no women today who are 6-foot-6, 250-pounds and can plow through a dude” (article 32, ¶9). The article that talks about the NHL echoes these sentiments:

As in other men’s sports, NHL players have gotten bigger, faster and stronger.

Plenty of men are getting hurt after taking hits from some of the behemoths on the ice these days...”You take a female body getting hit like that, by somebody 60 to 70 pounds heavier, it’s a pretty dangerous situation.” (article 48, ¶6, ¶7)

The NFL article further elaborates, “when it comes to a woman playing in a professional sport in a traditionally male league, the NFL just might be the longest shot. The sport includes tackling, which still carries a stigma when it comes to women” (article 38, ¶5). Even tennis, a sport historically considered more “feminine” than other more aggressive sports, is out:

In the world of professional tennis, the men, when asked, say they believe in equality. They also say none of the women players can successfully compete against them. The women don't protest. Tennis is a sport where strength and speed are essential, and while the women are highly gifted, world-class athletes, they seem to understand they have some limitations in comparison to their male counterparts. (article 223, ¶1-3)

Geno Auriemma, coach of U.S. women's national basketball team, comments, "Never in my lifetime will a woman be able to compete in a men's sport – nor should they want to – when there is a physical comparison between the two" (article 42, ¶10). Diana Taurasi, among best WNBA players in the world, says,

"If you could put me in a machine that could make me 6-foot-5 and as strong as they were, I could play in the NBA...When you talk about how physically superior they are...I can't help it...Skill-wise, knowing the game, there's no difference between men and women." (article 42, ¶3)

As Taurasi indicates, many of the articles acknowledged that female athletes can compete with male athletes skill-wise: "the skills – the ability to shoot with dead-eye accuracy, handle a ball, make a crisp pass – all translate. The physical disparity in size and speed and strength – not so much" (article 42, ¶7). The PGA article resonates,

on the men's tour, the fairways are generally longer and narrower, the greens harder and faster. It's true women are getting stronger, and technically improved equipment adds length to shots. But for the most part, men still have more power, and that's a huge advantage. The longer the tee shot, the shorter the approach, which makes it easier to get close to the hole for birdie chances. (article 169, ¶5)

Craig Bowden, PGA Tour player, comments, “‘‘Could a woman win on the PGA Tour? Absolutely not. Could a woman make the cut? Sure. Absolutely’’” (article 169, ¶11). Dr. Cindy Chang, chief medical officer for U.S. Olympic Committee, said studies have shown that men have greater upper-body strength than women but added that studies that compare physical difference do so by comparing the averages. Women who are at the end of the continuum or who can use strength “‘‘efficiently’’” like Danica Patrick in IndyCar racing could compete with men. Jim Nill, NHL Red Wings assistant general manager, comments, “‘‘It’s nothing against women, it’s just you’re dealing with human nature, there’s only so much you can do’’” (article 48, ¶14).

Sociological complications of female athletes competing in men’s leagues are another concern raised by most of the articles in the series exploring whether or not women could compete in men’s leagues. In the overview article at the beginning of the series, Dr. Earl Smith, director of American Ethnic Studies at Wake Forest, comments, “‘‘few girls are going to be encouraged to truly go against the grain...’you have to ask yourself as a parent, would you put your daughter through that just to play a game?’’’” (article 32, ¶15, ¶16). The author of the NBA article notes,

The thickest of skins would be required to deal with a myriad of emotional stressors, from separate hotel rooms, to verbal abuse from fans and interaction with the media, to what would likely be something less than a run-of-the-mill bonding experience with teammates. (article 42, ¶24)

The locker room was another sociological issue brought up by individuals interviewed in most of the articles. Though Nancy Lieberman says a woman in a men’s locker room works if the team keeps to a schedule (article 32), Arizona kicker Jay Feely says, “‘‘I

think that'd probably be the most difficult challenge for her...I think her teammates would accept her if her skill level merited her being there” (article 28, ¶13). The author of the NFL article comments, “locker room issues could be tricky. Much of the team building takes place there, but would a woman be welcome or feel comfortable in that environment?” (article 38, ¶5).

Broader sociological issues ensue, too, when a woman is the first to break the gender barrier and compete in a men’s league. Katie Hnida, the first woman to score in an NCAA Division I-A (now Football Championship Subdivision) game,

wonders what her experience as a football player would have been like if it could have been unshackled from the politics of being a woman in a sport where stereotypical ideas of masculinity are pervasive. “That football mentality travels through all levels... Whether or not it’s open to females, it’s still up for debate.” (article 38, ¶16-17)

The only opposing view raised in any of the articles is “the issue of whether female athletes should use a male standard to judge their own excellence, particularly when women’s leagues need to showcase the best of the gender to attract fans” (article 32, ¶23).

The second major component in the series of articles about whether female athletes can compete in men’s professional leagues is “exceptions” that would help women compete. Many of the authors and interviewees claim women would be accepted if they helped their team win, like Danica Patrick in IndyCar or Kelly Kulick on the Professional Bowlers Association tour (article 32). All concede female athletes’ skill level has improved since Title IX (article 32) and that professional female athletes have

come a long way to compete with the men (LPGA's Annika Sorenstam) or mastered a skill that used to be considered male-only (Brittney Griner – dunking a basketball). One interviewee in the MLB article predicts a female athlete who masters a knuckleball or another off-speed pitch, one based on feel, not power, could play in MLB first (article 36). Another says a woman could be a second basemen, “a position requiring finesse, agility and savvy more than size and strength” (article 36, ¶6). In the NBA article, Boston Celtics coach Doc Rivers advances a “scenario of specialization”: “If a female did make it, it'll have to be someone who could shoot the hell out of the ball, because physically it would be tough” (article 42, ¶23). The author of the NHL article claims female athletes could potentially be goaltenders but that even goaltenders have increased in size, such as Nashville Predators' Pekka Rinne at 6'5", 207 pounds, and Anders Lindback at 6'6", 212 pounds (article 48).

A third major component of articles in the series debating whether or not female athletes could compete in men's leagues is referencing past instances where female athletes have tried and succeeded/failed when competing against men. The only success reported is the 1973 unsanctioned “Battle of the Sexes” event between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs. Otherwise authors cite examples such as Serena and Venus Williams getting trounced by ATP Tour player Karsten Braasch, a player ranked No. 203 at the time who drank beer and smoked cigarettes on the changeovers at their exhibition match in 1998 (article 32, article 223). Braasch comments,

Against anyone in the top 500, [they have] no chance, because I was playing like No. 600 today. I took at least 50% off my serve and only put in a few hard ones, because it was supposed to be fun. (article 223, ¶19)

The LPGA article mentions

the now-retired Annika Sorenstam, one of the great LPGA champions with 72 titles, including 10 majors, missed the cut the one time she crossed over to play the PGA Tour's Colonial Tournament in 2003. And young Michelle Wie has entered the men's forum on numerous occasions, with the 2006 Asian Tour SK Telecom Open being the one time in 13 attempts she's made the cut. (article 169, ¶3)

In the ATP article, former world number one player Jelena Jankovic comments,

"No -- I never thought about that [playing against men] because I have a coach who was No. 13 in the world, Andrei Pavel, and I play some points against him sometimes and he always beats me," Jankovic said. "I've even lost to some young juniors, 17-, 18-year-olds, in practice matches. We have our own tournaments and I'm not good enough to be on the men's tour. I don't even know why I'm talking about it." (article 223, ¶5)

Most articles in this series profile female athlete "pioneers" who have competed at lower levels of a league or who broke the "pink ceiling" (article 287) to become an anomaly in a professional men's league. The article on MLB mentions Japanese knuckleballer Eri Yoshida, who joined the Chico Outlaws in the MLB independent Golden League in 2010 (article 36), and the article on the NFL profiles previously-mentioned Katie Hnida (article 38). Ann Meyers Drysdale, current vice president of personnel and scouting for Phoenix Suns as well as president and general manager of Phoenix Mercury, was the first woman to sign a contract with the NBA's Indiana Pacers in 1979 but was cut before she played in a game (article 42), and Manon Rheume was

the first woman to play in an NHL game when she played in goal for Tampa Bay Lightning in an exhibition contest in 1992 (article 48).

All authors of articles in the series on the potential for female athletes to compete in men's leagues interview executives, coaches, or scouts in the league on their perspectives, though these individuals are not always open to comments on the issue. The author of the MLB article contacted nine MLB officials to solicit comments for the articles, and only three, none of whom agreed to be quoted, agreed to talk about the potential of female athletes crossing over into MLB franchises. Their reactions? The author notes, "One considered a woman playing in the majors unlikely, and the other two rejected it out of hand" (article 36, ¶8).

Some of the articles in my analysis offer conditions by which women could compete with men. The first is finding a sport that offers a level (figuratively) playing field, like racecar driving or, to a lesser extent, golf. The author of an article on IndyCar notes,

Motorsports in general, and open-wheel racing in particular, provide one of the only true equal venues for competition between men and women, with identical rules, identical equipment and an identical possibility of success dependent on talent and commitment to craft. IndyCar attempts to exploit its gender-neutral platform...Body weight applied to a sliding scale determines how much ballast each car carries to meet the minimum of 1,565 pounds, meaning the diminutive frame of the 5-foot-nothing, 100ish-pound Danica Patrick is equalized with her peers. So success in IndyCar is determined by preparation and talent. (article 79, ¶8, ¶12)

The PGA article claims, “In golf, you play the ball, not the opponent. That fact makes golf one of the few viable sports where women can compete with men on somewhat of an even playing field” (article 169, ¶1-2), though later concedes that women cannot hit the ball as far because of lack of strength and therefore don’t get as many birdie opportunities as men. Socially, female athletes need to show an ability to fit in with the guys if they want to compete in a men’s professional league. Ila Borders, former pitcher for the St. Paul Saints, says,

“You need to know how to banter with them, how to be respectful with the banter and how to gain their trust... You have to have thick skin. They need to see if you can keep your wits about you. They need to know you’re out there for the right reasons – not to be a prima donna, not to change the game, but to win.” (article 36, ¶18)

espnW also confronts the issue of whether or not female athletes could compete directly with men in articles on other topics throughout the period of my analysis not in the designated seven I cover in this section. An article about Sabine Lisicki, WTA tennis player coming back from ankle injuries to secure the 26th spot on the Tour, includes a quotation from an opponent on how fast her serve was in a match:

“Every serve was like around 117 miles,” she [Li] said in the postmatch interview. “I mean, this is impossible for the women. ... I don’t think the player can stay same level like today. If like this, I mean, she’s No. 1 in the world.” (article 213, ¶8)

Lisicki responds, “I take it as a compliment... The men are serving amazingly... It’s a good thing, I think” (article 213, ¶10).

In these articles on whether or not women athletes can compete in men's professional leagues, espnW as part of ESPN, one of the largest sports media organizations in the world, controls public discourse about gendered participation in athletics. The world of sports is normalized as masculine, so identities of male athletes are privileged over identities of female athletes (Seagrave, et al., 2006). Social consequences of this control are that female athletes are not considered athletes at the same level as male athletes. Importantly, sport privileges a *particular kind* of masculinity, not *all* masculinities (e.g., gay masculinity, non-White masculinity) even though “masculinities are complex, often contradictory, always in process and never finished” and is constantly being reformulated according to changing cultural conditions (Whannel, 2007, p. 23). Emphasis on hegemonic, aggressive masculinity in sport may emerge from a perceived crisis of male power in other cultural realms (Whannel, 2007) and privileges men as the “gold standard” in athletic success.

Interestingly, authors and interviewees in most articles use language that positions female athletes as competitive in their respective sports, though ultimately refer back to biological differences to discourage mixing sexes in one professional league. James Blake, a former top-10 ATP player, says, “It’s no offense to them and I’m all for equality, but it’s just a different game” (article 223, ¶7). Jim Nill, NHL Red Wings assistant general manager, comments, “It’s nothing against women, it’s just you’re dealing with human nature, there’s only so much you can do” (article 48, ¶14). There’s “no disrespect” (article 79) and women are “highly gifted, world-class athletes” (article 223), yet “it’s a pretty dangerous situation” (article 48) because “there are big, strong, fast guys that play this game, so I think that might kind of be against them [women]” (article

48). “Limitations” (article 223) hold female athletes back from what authors set up as the *highest* level of sport, which is success in the male professional leagues presented in the articles (baseball, football, basketball, hockey, golf, tennis). These limitations are presented as biologically-based, however, so there is little intervention possible: a classic means by which a gender hierarchy is naturalized, disadvantaging women. Beyond espnW, these ideas could be spurred by differences in rules between male and female professional leagues (e.g., no checking in women’s ice hockey).

When the authors of espnW articles that incorporate difference arguments choose physicality as a major component of their analyses and cover traditionally male-dominated, physically aggressive sports where power and privilege are protected, female athletes cannot win. Sports discourse in media privileges identities of male athletes over identities of female athletes when sports are framed as masculine (Seagrave, et al., 2006). Instead of critiquing reasons why female athletes do not operate on a level playing field, the authors of the articles reinforce hegemonic assumptions about sport as masculine. If sport is defined according to skill rather than aggressiveness (or, frankly, defined most other ways except based on brute physicality) or if the authors choose to cover different sports, female athletes have more of a chance to be presented as equally competent competitors with male athletes. All this is tied up in a social context of sport indicative of historical trends favoring aggression and masculinity as cornerstones of the institution.

Many of the articles give credence to female athletes’ abilities to compete with male athletes in terms of skills. For example, in the opening article, Dr. Cindy Chang, chief medical officer for U.S. Olympic Committee, explains that studies have shown that men have greater upper-body strength than women but adds that studies that compare

physical difference do so by comparing the averages. Women who are at the end of the continuum or who can use strength “efficiently” like Danica Patrick in IndyCar racing could compete with men. Acknowledging that female athletes have skills to compete at a professional level of sports is a step forward from how they have been presented in media in the past. However, when espnW chooses to cover sports in which physicality trumps skill, female athletes are relegated to second place. The only opposing view to emerge in any of the articles is “the issue of whether female athletes should use a male standard to judge their own excellence, particularly when women’s leagues need to showcase the best of the gender to attract fans” (article 32, ¶23).

This type of discourse is postfeminist because authors prompt readers to accept differences between male and female athletes as natural, which suggests that continued feminist action to change the institution of sport as defined by brute physicality is no longer needed. The series on whether or not women can compete in men’s professional leagues sets female athletes up for failure before analysis of each professional league even begins. The set-up to the series asking, “Would players in the NBA or another professional men’s league *accept* a woman as a teammate?” (italics inserted) illustrates the historic division in sport between men and women. Use of the word *accept* denotes that women are not part of the institution of sport, which already privileges men as members. Further, profiling major men’s sports (football, basketball, baseball, hockey, tennis, and golf) sets the profiled female athletes up for failure right away because most of these sports privilege physical aggressiveness over skills or finesse. Instead of analyzing sports where the physical dimension is lessened and skills or speed are more

important, espnW invokes a masculine, aggressive definition of athleticism where female athletes have not historically been welcome.

Authors do not address broader institutional issues of sport in articles on whether or not female athletes should compete in men's professional leagues. This is due in part to their focus on traditionally male-dominated, physically aggressive sports that protect power and privilege, mentioned earlier. Authors raise sociological issues of female athletes competing with male athletes in each of the articles but do not place these issues in the context of larger social structures of sport. For example, a few authors mention the locker room environment as a potential barrier for female athletes because they may not "feel comfortable" there even though players and coaches quoted acknowledge much socialization between teammates takes place in this venue. Authors do not question *why* a locker room might be hostile to female athletes, alluding to the idea that sport is a male domain where women are not welcome (Kraft & Brummett, 2009). Additionally, sport media operated by large conglomerates like Disney design content in a functionalist way to appeal to mass audiences perceived as holding commonly-held values, attitudes, and beliefs and not appreciative of controversy, opinions, and discussion that challenges these values (Woods, 2011). Diversion from information, access, and public forums necessary for participation in debates and decision making such as this is also a practice of neoliberalism (McChesney, 1998). Entities that derive power from neoliberal doctrine rely on tunneled media portrayals to encourage citizens to support their interests rather than the best interests of the citizens themselves.

Neoliberalism contributes to how gender relations operate in the institution of sport. Scoring and winning defines success in mainstream American sports (Woods,

2011). Sport media publications promote dominant social values such as character building, religiosity, nationalism, discipline, mental fitness, competition, and physical fitness (Woods, 2011). Athletes' careers are projects tempered by the choices they make to maximize their existence. If espnW articles about whether or not female athletes can compete in men's leagues profile sports where physicality is integral to athletes' success *and* if espnW authors argue male athletes are typically larger in stature compared to female athletes, then female athletes cannot succeed in men's professional leagues. Even when each league-specific article profiles "pioneer" female athletes who have broken the "pink ceiling" (article 287) to compete in men's leagues, athletes either play an extremely short stint in the league or look ridiculous because they are, for example, beaten by junior players or by professionals who smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol in between matches. Power, dominance, and violence (male characteristics) (Woods, 2011) uphold espnW's definition of sport in this series of articles. Maximizing potential in sport based on this definition is predicated on postfeminist "difference" arguments about men's and women's dissimilar physical, psychological, and emotional states (Stacey, 1993).

Privileging aggressive masculinity in sport relies on socially constructed gender differences. If femininity exists in opposition to masculinity, masculinity undergirds the institution of sport, and males are assumed to be masculine, then male athletes retain privilege while female athletes maintain their status as second-class citizens (Messner, 2007). Both sex and gender are regulatory practices by which "force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls" (Butler, 1993/1999, p. 236). From a CDA perspective, the very notion of sex and gender are considered social constructions, disrupting the entire concept of a

sex or gender identity. Halberstam (1999) explains that taxonomies of gender fail to account for all sorts of individuals and identities: “Gender fictions [homo-hetero sexual binary] are fictions of a body taking its own shape, a cut-up genre that mixes and matches body parts, sexual acts, and postmodern articulations of the impossibility of identity” (p. 125). Sex and gender are social constructions of loosely defined, historically variable, and interrelated social ascriptions that characterize individuals whose bodies fit those constructions (Gardner, 2005). Removing both categories as markers of difference between male and female athletes is especially interesting in the realm of athletics and opens up opportunities for athletes to operate on a level playing field.

Erasure or redefinition of sex and gender by athletes themselves, media, and other powerful entities within the institution of sport could open up possibilities for women athletes who are constrained by discursive practices surrounding sex/gender identity (Webster, 2009). Experiences could be expressed according to new discursive formations not constrained by existing realities of sex and/or gender. Athletes could simply be athletes and not feel pressure from a dominant social order to enact a female apologia for utilizing traditionally masculine traits to compete. Women (and men) who have not fit traditional gender norms are free to express multiple gender identities that represent multiple modes of athleticism (Webster, 2009).

(Not) calling the shots.

Another series directly confronting female athlete forays into men’s professional sports occurs in a series of seven espnW articles on whether or not women could/should officiate games in men’s leagues published August 9-13, 2011. The series is set up similarly to the series on whether or not female athletes could compete in men’s

professional leagues, with an introduction article (article 422) followed by articles on officiating in the MLB (article 412), NBA (article 415), MLS (417), NHL (233), and NFL (article 237). The opening to the introduction article reads, “Women continue to struggle to break in as officials at the highest levels of sports. espnW examines the sports showing progress and those lagging far behind” (article 422, ¶1). The author then presents an overview of the state of female officials in men’s sports, noting tennis offers the most promising opportunities for women (example: one-third of the chair umpires in the men’s 2010 tennis U.S. Open main draw were women) (article 422). Leagues claim they want officials who know the rules, who have a thick skin, who are impartial, and the “best person for the job” (article 422, ¶9), though all consistently hire more male officials than female officials (article 422). The author sets up analysis of each men’s professional league by claiming, “The difference in whether a league has women in the system seems to come down to a professional league's willingness to attract and train prospects, then allow competition for jobs on an even playing field” (article 422, ¶18). Articles on each league cover “first” umpires/refs/officials in men’s professional leagues, the state of female officials in each league, current contenders in each league, training, and obstacles female officials have encountered when trying to break into officiating men’s sports.

The first component of these articles is the history of female involvement officiating each sport. Pioneer officials who often only officiate a few games, like Heather McDaniel in the 1995 NHL season (article 233), or a few years, like Sandy Hunt and Kari Seitz in the 1998-2001 MLS season (article 417) are mentioned. Some officials are granted the chance to officiate because they win a discrimination lawsuit, like in the case of Bernice Gera during the 1973 MLB season (article 412) or Sandra Ortiz-Del

Valle after the 1998 NBA season (article 415). Violet Palmer, an official in the NBA (article 415), and Sarah Thomas, Division I football official (article 237) are two “first” female officials who still officiate in their respective leagues.

The second component in the series of articles on whether or not women could/should officiate in men’s professional leagues is reporting overall trends in the league related to female officiating. The MLB is in the worst state of affairs, only employing six female umpires over the last 35 years, the most recent in a Double-A Southern League in 2007 (article 412). The NHL statistics are also staggering, with no female referee working in pro hockey since 1999 due in part to the rise of women’s hockey offering ample opportunities for accomplished female officials (article 233). Twenty-eight-hundred female hockey officials are registered in North America, but only a few have crossed over to work junior-level men’s games (article 233). The NBA is presented as the best for training opportunities for female officials in its WNBA and D-Leagues, where women represent 12 of 30 referees and 9 of 41 referees, respectively (article 415). This is promising because NBA officials are often pulled from these leagues’ officials, yet only Violet Palmer works at the NBA level as an official (article 415). Joel Litvin, NBA president for league operations, comments, “We’re not worried about it... We think it’s inevitable we’ll have additional women referees. I can’t give you a timetable, but the odds are strongly in favor of it happening at some point, I have no doubt” (article 415, ¶9-10). Carl Johnson, NFL head of officials, echoes his sentiments:

there are women who are currently under consideration, and that he [Johnson] expects he will be hiring one to officiate in the NFL. “We have some in our

pipeline, and I expect we'll see it soon"... there is plenty of institutional support for women from the NFL. (article 237, ¶25)

FIFA is the most promising professional league for number of female officials with 400 women worldwide as certified FIFA referees (article 417). Officiating is divided, however, because most of these referees work women's games and not men's games because of religious restrictions in Islamic countries (article 417). No women currently officiate MLS games (article 417).

Numbers of female officials reveal that gender is not a consideration that should be brushed off¹⁵. MLB is in the worst state of affairs, employing only six female umpires over the last 35 years, the most recent in a Double-A Southern League in 2007 (article 412). MLB's Kate Sargeant was the last woman to advance from umpire school to the last round of selection for entry-level professional umpires in 2007 but was not hired (article 412). The MLB article also talks about crew chiefs refusing to work with female umpires, overruling calls a female umpire made, and firing female umpires as they went too far up the ranks. After all, as the author of the article notes, "If all the women who have umpired in affiliated ball were still alive, they would fit comfortably in one large automobile" (article 412, ¶13).

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The third component of articles on whether or not women should officiate in men's leagues is "current contenders," spotlights on women who are or have recently been referees in men's games. The NBA's only female referee, Violet Palmer, is referenced:

players respect her as a strong maternal figure, and she receives no guff from fellow officials. "I have 60 or more of the most respectful, most wonderful men as co-workers in my life," she said. "They open doors for me. If I go to the bar, I don't pay for drinks. They call me Queenie. When we go out it's, 'Queenie, what do you need?' I'm in the good ol' boys club, and they appreciate that I'm still a woman and they respect that." (article 415, ¶21-22)

Kari Seitz is one of two female FIFA referees from the United States who has officiated in games such as the World Cup and who was a referee and assistant referee in MLS from 1998 to 2001 (article 417). MLB's Kate Sargeant was the last woman to advance from umpire school to the last round of selection for entry-level professional umpires in 2007 but was not hired (article 412). "Current contenders" are experts who provide insight into behind-the-scenes politics of female officiating in their respective leagues.

Palmer may think she is respected when she and her colleagues go out to a bar, but she does not acknowledge that this respect is still based on gender. "Appreciating" and "respecting" that she is "still a woman" does not grant her access into the "good ol' boys club" in the same way as her male colleagues nor does it have anything to do with how she does her job. The NBA article mentions criticism from fans and the media about her officiating (article 415), though she does not address this in her interview.

The fourth component of whether or not women should officiate in men's professional leagues is background on the training it takes for officials to become part of the regular rotation of umpires/referees in a league. Most leagues require officials attend a school or class and then pass a test to receive certification (articles 412, 415, 417). Most also scour the lower-division leagues for exemplary officials to promote to professional league officiating status (articles 415, 417, 237). Women are not excluded from either of these opportunities but are definitely few and far between because they do not want to compete in a good ol' boys league in which men are favored (articles 412, 233), are trained to cover a different type of game (e.g., hockey officials trained for international and college women's hockey, which is less about physical contact) (article 233), are not strong enough to deal with physical demands of a men's game (e.g. breaking up fights in hockey) (article 233), or are not willing to give up family/career aspirations to make officiating a full-time commitment (articles 233, 417).

The last component of articles in the series questioning whether female officials can officiate in men's leagues is varied hostility toward female officials. The NBA article mentions criticism from fans and the media about Violet Palmer's officiating (article 415). The MLB article talks about crew chiefs refusing to work with female umpires, overruling calls a female umpire made, and firing female umpires as they went too far up the ranks. Katie Sargeant, most recent MLB umpire prospect, says baseball's "glass ceiling" is in place now more than ever, exemplified in a conversation with an MLB minor league player: "Sorry, Kate, it's a fraternity, and it's going to be hard for women to be accepted in that fraternity" (article 412, ¶44-45). After all, as the author of

the article notes, “If all the women who have umpired in affiliated ball were still alive, they would fit comfortably in one large automobile” (article 412, ¶13).

Many of the same issues that emerge in articles about whether or not female athletes could compete in men’s professional leagues appear in articles about women officiating men’s professional league games. The opening to the introduction article reads, “Women continue to struggle to break in as officials at the highest levels of sports.” The “highest levels of sports,” then, are presumably male professional leagues. *espnW* presents sport as a masculine institution where women are interlopers because they cannot use physicality in the same way as men to score and win. Messner (2007) explains,

In most of our most popular sports, the achievement of goals (scoring and winning) is predicated on the successful utilization of violence – that is, these are activities in which the human body is routinely turned into a weapon to be used against other bodies, resulting in pain, serious injury, and even death. (Messner, 2007, p. 92)

Although it is often difficult to differentiate between aggression and violence in sport (Messner, 2007), one thing is clear: women cannot use their bodies in the same way men can to score and win.

Leagues claim they hire officials based on knowing the rules, having a thick skin, being impartial, and being the “best person for the job” (article 422, ¶9), all except perhaps the last of which are gender-neutral, yet most officials are still men. The introduction article to the series on whether or not women should officiate men’s games summarizes, “The difference in whether a league has women in the system seems to

come down to a professional league's willingness to attract and train prospects, then allow competition for jobs on an even playing field" (article 422, ¶18). Jim Evans, who runs a training and qualification school for baseball umpires, is referenced in article 412:

The lack of women applicants concerns Evans, who says he supports women in athletics... "I'm disenchanted and disgusted that more women don't apply," Evans said. "I don't know if it's because they have families or careers or what, but not many make the commitment to a professional school." (¶28-29)

The mentality presented in articles in this series is fallacious. A level playing field does not exist for women in sport when sport is defined by aggressive, violent masculinity.

Authors adopt a postfeminist orientation when explaining whether or not women should officiate men's professional league games. One explanation for why there are not more women officials in men's professional leagues is because more women officials are being trained to officiate women's leagues than men's leagues. Training is different because of different rules (e.g., no checking in women's hockey). Female athletes play sports in record numbers since Title IX was implemented, and female professional leagues, international leagues, and Olympic competition offer competitive opportunities for both female and male officials. espnW articles in this series assume female officials would want to officiate female league games if given a choice and even cite barriers such as religious beliefs that relegate women officials to women's leagues. Feminism is no longer needed because equal opportunities exist for women officials to work women's leagues and men's leagues. This assumes women officials have an equal opportunity to work men's games in the first place (which, as evidenced by the articles in this series,

they do not). This also implies that women *choose* to officiate women's leagues, not that they are forced to do so because of institutional barriers.

Breaking the “pink ceiling” (article 287, ¶4).

Three types of articles constitute the third theme “breaking the ‘pink ceiling’”: dedicated profiles of high-ranking women in sport business, articles about women in traditionally male-dominated professions, and female athletes who bring up gender discrimination as part of an interview/article. Question/answer articles with high-ranking women in sport business are part of espnW's Power Players series “profiling high-ranking women in sport business¹⁶. Find out how they got to where they are, where their love of sports was bred and how they manage to balance demanding jobs with everyday challenges” (article 108, ¶2). Questions and answers address the executives' specific job responsibilities, the status of females in their respective sports and respective organizations, how they got to where they are today, proudest moments in their careers, and balancing home and work life (except Kathryn Tappen, Bruins sportscaster, and Kathy Carter, president of Soccer United Marketing, are not asked about home life). Interesting threads develop when these women talk about the status of women in their professions/leagues/sports, a sports background as helpful for their professions, and balancing work and family life.

¹⁶ The series features Val Ackerman, President of USA Basketball; Kathryn Tappen, Boston Bruins sportscaster; Kathy Behrens, NBA Executive VP of Social Responsibility and Player Programs; Pam Gardner, President of Business Operations for the MLB Houston Astros; Susan Cohig, NHL VP of Integrated Marketing; Kathy Carter, president of Soccer United Marketing – the marketing arm of MLS; Stacey Allaster, WTA chairman and CEO; Wendy Lewis, MLB senior VP of diversity and strategic alliances; Bonnie Clark, MLB Phillies' VP of communications; Amy Trask, chief executive for the NFL Oakland Raiders; Lisa Baird, chief marketing officer of the USOC; Sheila Johnson, Washintgon Mystics, Wizards, and Capitals owner; Sandy Barbour, Cal's athletic director; Pamela Pitts, director of baseball administration for the MLB Oakland A's; Kathryn Olson, CEO of Women's Sports Foundation; Melanie Lenz, MLB Rays' VP of development; Chrysa Chin, NBA's VP of player development; and Kim Williams, COO of the NFL Network.

One type of gender equality enacted in media that suggests a transition from feminist politics to postfeminist culture is the celebration of women who succeed in traditionally male working environments (Tasker & Negra, 2007). Male traditionalist ideological rubrics are used to valorize female achievement, though this assumes success is universally shared by and universally accessible to women of all identities (Tasker & Negra, 2007). There is no critique of sexual politics in instances in which gender discrimination is brought up because the women profiled show that success is possible if one tries hard enough, even in a historically masculine institution. Patriarchy can be subsumed enough that individual women can rise to the top of their professions and overcome what gender discrimination exists on an individual basis. The flipside of this is that failure to reach these levels can be attributed to individuals, as well, rather than looking at institutional sexism, for example. espnW presents this perspective in dedicated profiles of high-ranking women in sport business.

In question/answer articles as part of espnW's Power Players series, most executives said the status of women in their professions/leagues/sports is not an issue and that gender is irrelevant. Susan Cohig, NHL VP of Integrated Marketing, says "what's it like being a female senior executive in such a male-dominated field? 'I'm fortunate in that I get to work with a number of talented people, male and female, so it really isn't an issue or consideration'" (article 70, ¶6). Nancy Lieberman, former coach of D-League Texas legends, Dallas Mavericks' affiliate and now new assistant general manager of Texas Mavericks, was asked, "What was it like being first and only female to coach a professional men's basketball team?" (article 411, ¶12) to which she responds,

An honor and a privilege to be quite honest. It's actually very normal for me to be in a work environment with guys. I've been doing it my whole life, whether it was while I was playing or working for ESPN. (article 411, ¶13)

espnW prompts Lieberman with another question, "Did you ever have a bad experience with a player on your team accepting you as a female coach?" (article 411, ¶18), to which Lieberman responds,

From Day 1, it's been so normal. There's never been a day when there were any issues. Players from other teams would even call to say I'd love to play for you. I get texts from my players all the time saying they're just checking in to see how I'm doing. They want me to meet their wives. On my birthday, every one of my players texted me. Do you think the big NBA coaches are getting texts saying we love you and miss you? (article 411, ¶19)

Lieberman does not acknowledge, however, that many of the practices she cites as different from her male colleagues are rooted in traditional standards of femininity and heterosexuality. "Normal" player-coach behavior in a sport environment traditionally defined by aggressive masculinity does not include "just checking in to see how I'm doing," meeting "wives," or "getting texts saying we love you and miss you." If sport is defined as masculine, discourse in articles like these deter readers from taking Lieberman seriously as a coach.

Postfeminism relies on a general rejection of sexual politics because of the assumption that feminism has addressed major gender barriers (Stacey, 1993). Executives in the "Power Player" series claim gender is irrelevant in their respective positions, exhibiting postfeminist ideology. The history of sport as a masculine

institution and the composition of executive leadership in sports organizations¹⁷ dictate gender as important, whether the executives acknowledge it or not.

Val Ackerman, first female president of USA Basketball and adjunct professor at Columbia University, branches off from postfeminist discourse when she brings up systematic issues of discrimination in her “Power Players” article and in an article about gender and leadership in sports organizations. She does not elaborate on root causes of why sports leagues are typically dominated by male executives, however. Ackerman reflects on a course she co-teaches at Columbia on gender and leadership in sports organizations: “our curriculum is gender-neutral...I’ve deliberately made gender a non-issue with our students, choosing instead to focus on personal qualities...core competencies...and substance...that would work for any and all” (article 4, ¶2). Postfeminism relies on a general rejection of sexual politics because of the assumption that feminism has addressed major gender barriers (Stacey, 1993). She acknowledges that advancement of women through executive ranks of the sports business is most clearly a work in progress:

the women who have risen through the ranks tend to be the ones who genuinely love sports, are really good at what they do, have winning personal skills and roll with the punches when they need to...a woman who lacks the toughness, directness and humor needed to handle the many strong personality types you encounter – or to keep from getting derailed (and dispirited) by the air of exclusion that sometimes seeps into the space. (article 4, ¶4)

¹⁷ Women make up 18%, 43%, 49%, 27%, and 48% of professional staff positions in MLB, the NBA, the WNBA, the NFL, and MLS, respectively (Lapchick, 2009).

“Strong” personality types and an “air of exclusion” are a result of the institution of sport defined as masculine.

A second thread in the lower-order theme “breaking the ‘pink ceiling’” is that a sports background is helpful for being a sports executive. Each interviewee in the “Power Players” series is asked about past athletic involvement and current athletic pursuits. Kathy Carter, president of Soccer United Marketing, says,

for any woman coming through business that's had the benefit of playing a sport at any level, you learn the idea of teamwork and all the great lessons that come from playing sports. There are so many correlations between sports and business. (article 326, ¶15)

WTA chairman and CEO Stacey Allaster says,

my playing days taught me how to deal with failure and how to restart and re-strategize on how I should have played a match. If you correlate it to business -- you didn't close a deal, a situation happened you wish you'd perhaps managed differently -- you can then reflect upon that situation and, again, re-strategize to think how would I do this differently to be more effective. (article 448, ¶3)

Pam Gardner, President of Business Operations for the MLB Houston Astros, is an avid runner and biker who ran 1,400 miles last year (article 220).

A third thread running through the lower-order theme “breaking the ‘pink ceiling’” is balancing work and home life. Most executives admit that a balance is tricky but that they have lots of support and that their children get perks other kids do not. Pam Gardner, President of Business Operations for Houston Astros Major League Baseball team says,

You know what, that's hard...to balance the two [jobs] is tough. My kids are 25 years old. Meaghan always says, "why was I the first one dropped off at the Y in the morning and the last one picked up?" On the other hand, my kids got to grow up coming to baseball games. At dinnertime, I'd run home and pick them up and bring them to the stadium...There are tradeoffs. (article 220, ¶22)

Kathy Behrens, NBA Exec. VP of Social Responsibility and Player Programs, echoes, It's challenging. I have tremendous support at home and great support at work. The NBA is a place that strives to make it possible to balance families with our demanding jobs. Finding the right balance is something we take seriously. No one's perfect at it, but we try. (article 115, ¶39)

espnW also reflects neoliberal characteristics in this series of articles. Female executives in the "Power Player" series have accomplished feats of which any individual – woman or man – would be proud. However, these women are free to be league executives and powerful women in sport as long as they fulfill expectations of league executives, which have been historically male (and potentially even more because they may have to prove themselves more worthy to do the job because women have not historically occupied their positions). Lisa Baird, chief marketing officer for USOC, notes, "It's 24/7, it's a lot of physical work, you're going to be working weekends and late nights and traveling an awful lot" (September 21, ¶9). Other executives profiled talk about their job responsibilities and what a typical day for a person in their position is like, and readers get a sense that these positions require long hours, odd hours (e.g., being at a ballpark when a game starts at 7 p.m.), work from home as well as work from the office, extensive travel, commitments to serve on boards outside of the organization for which

they work, and distinguishing themselves from other employees through “hard work.” “Hard work” comes in the form of personal responsibility and entrepreneurial initiative to maximize private interest and personal profit (McChesney, 1998). Private interest and personal profit no doubt benefit the realm of sports, which is a \$410-\$425 billion per year industry (Plunkett Research, 2011). McRobbie (2009) argues “post-occupational socialities” where women work in traditionally male-dominated arenas seem to give women more freedom but actually are a way to re-instate masculine domination and subvert feminism.

Not performing femininity and being stretched to the limit for male definitions of job expectations may obscure frustrations many women experience balancing work and home life. Postfeminist themes in popular culture assert that women who manage home, time, work, and commodity choices have a more authentic, intact, and fulfilled self (Negra, 2009). Many executives claim this comes from support from colleagues, family members, and partners. Sheila Johnson, owner of the Washington Mystics, Wizards and Capitals, claims “Being the mother of two wonderful kids” (August 22, ¶30) is her proudest accomplishment, a list of which includes serving on Obama’s President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, raising millions of dollars for a variety of organizations, being an accomplished violinist, and sewing her own wedding dress (August 22) but acknowledges her staff helps her manage a busy schedule:

I’ve got really great people who take care of me. They help me with my scheduling, they travel with me to make sure I’m not being taken advantage of. I have to give them 100% credit for that. They watch my back. I’ve got about 1,100 employees. I keep my thumb on everything that’s going on. I meet with

them all about once a week. I make sure there's great communication and that we're collaborating. (August 22, ¶22)

Few women executives acknowledge that balance is unattainable. Wendy Lewis, MLB's senior VP of diversity and strategic alliances, notes,

The key about work/life balance is ... I don't know if I ever really got there. I can't honestly say I ever felt that I really had it figured out. Everybody had to get tough. I had to get tougher, my daughters had to get tougher because they had to become much more mature, much more responsible, and spread ourselves thinner than we had anticipated ... I could not have become a great mom without them being great daughters, there just wasn't enough time. (October 10, ¶13)

Interestingly, Lewis is also the only single mother identified in the "Power Players" series.

Mothers are especially in a unique position as parents because of the ideological meanings of motherhood played out in accessibility and happiness (Swanson & Johnston, 2003). Motherhood is subject to cultural pressures to be available at every moment of the day physically, psychologically, emotionally, and intellectually to children (Vancour, 2005). Undergirding this assumption is that mothers derive happiness from fulfilling this role, which often constricts them from pursuing identities that could compromise their abilities to be good mothers (Douglas & Michaels, 2004; Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001). Termed "new momism" (Douglas & Michaels, 2004), these ideals are presented and re-presented via media such as magazines, television, movies, and advertising (Kinnick, 2009). Female sports executives interviewed for the espnW "Power Players" series justify raising their children in particular ways to uphold ideals of "new momism."

Support from colleagues, family members, and partners ensure they can balance demanding careers while still being good parents.

The second type of article in lower-order theme “breaking the ‘pink ceiling’” profiles women in traditionally male-dominated professions. Authors of these articles directly address gender discrimination using quotations from the women themselves.

Anna Chatten, front-end mechanic for rookie JR Hildebrand and the only female mechanic in the Izod IndyCar Series, says she still faces

subtle snubs and obnoxious comments, however occasional, continue to underscore the work left to do for gender acceptance...”there’s always going to be one a----- in the bunch. It gets less and less, but I don’t think I can say it’s ever really gone away. You always have to do just a little bit more.” (article 77, ¶5, ¶7)

Zoe Hart, one of nine female mountain guides in the American International Federation of Mountain Guide Associations, comments,

gender was never a barrier, but more of a challenge...I never really saw myself as different when it came to sports, so why should climbing be any different? I wanted to be a mountain guide. The fact that there weren’t many women didn’t really make me think it would be unique or more difficult to attain, I just thought it would be a cool job. (article 112, ¶7)

Athletes in both of these articles comment on the importance of getting girls involved at young ages and the importance of pioneer women in their respective fields who act as mentors.

The third type of article in the lower-order theme “breaking the ‘pink ceiling’” comprises athletes who bring up gender discrimination as part of an interview/article focused on a different topic. An article profiling International Tennis Hall of Fame inductee Peachy Kellmeyer, the youngest female player to participate in the tennis U.S. Open in the 1950s, notes that Kellmeyer spearheaded a lawsuit that ultimately dismantled a rule prohibiting athletic scholarships from being awarded to female college athletes (article 414). A question/answer format article between espnW and Danica Patrick’s mother addresses sexism in European racing leagues: “‘Anything the boys could do, she couldn’t do. It was just two different sets of rules. They were very, I feel, behind us as far as male chauvinism’” (article 83, ¶15). An article by Val Ackerman on the success of the Women’s World Cup soccer tournament also mentions cultural restraints like athletic attire, money going to male programs, and few women in leadership positions of international sport as an element holding women’s sports leagues back from their full potential (article 192).

espnW presents articles on female executives and athletes breaking traditional gender barriers in sport from a postfeminist standpoint. McRobbie (2004) suggests postfeminism is sustained by a “double entanglement” (p. 4) of neoconservative values of gender, sexuality, and family undergirded by hegemonic values of choice and feminism. One type of gender equality enacted in media that indicates a transition from feminist politics to postfeminist culture is the celebration of women who succeed in traditionally male working environments (Tasker & Negra, 2007). Male traditionalist ideological rubrics such as hierarchy or income and are used to valorize female achievement, though

this assumes success is universally shared by and universally accessible to women of all identities (Tasker & Negra, 2007).

Most executives in the “Power Players” series said the status of women in their professions/leagues/sports was not an issue and that gender was irrelevant. Pitcher Tiffany Brooks “wants to be signed for her slider, not her sex” (article 276, ¶8). Rachel Heal, directeur sportif of Colavita/Forni d’Asolo Pro Cycling Team, was asked if she encountered any skepticism when she started her position because the job is almost exclusively held by men (article 253). She answered, “I was probably someone skeptical myself, but I’ve been in a male-dominated environment my whole life, being an engineer, so I wasn’t intimidated by a job that’s held mostly by men” (article 253, ¶10). There is no critique of sexual politics in instances in which gender discrimination is brought up because the women profiled show that success is possible if one tries hard enough, even in a historically masculine institution; patriarchy can be minimized enough that individual women can rise to the top of their professions and overcome what gender discrimination exists on an individual basis.

For female executives in the “Power Player” series, not letting gender be a factor in their jobs is tied to proving that they are hard workers who do not *allow* gender to be a factor. Kim Williams, COO of NFL Network, says:

In my experience, bad experiences in the workplace are not reserved for women. I have been blessed by working for organizations and people for whom the fact that I was a woman didn't matter (and, by the way, hopefully I played a role in not giving anyone a reason to have it matter). There were times early on in my career where either my gender or my age or a combination of both made me feel

uncomfortable, even unworthy, but with the benefit of hindsight I recognize that that was mostly my own insecurity rearing its ugly head. (June 11, ¶14)

Amy Trask, chief executive for the NFL Oakland Raiders, also believes she controls whether or not her gender affects how she is perceived:

I've long believed that if I don't want my gender to be an issue, then the last thing I should do is make my gender an issue. If I want to walk into a meeting or walk onto the field or walk out to practice and not have anyone focus on my gender, then the very last thing I should do is focus on my gender. My gender has always been irrelevant to me and that's the path I've chosen to take. It is my firm hope and belief that if my gender is irrelevant to me, my gender will be irrelevant to all those with whom I work. (September 27, ¶5)

For these women, showing femininity in a traditionally masculine environment is showing weakness. Although not explicitly stated, not making gender an issue means *not* performing femininity so members of sports organizations take these women seriously.

Normal and lovely girls. (article 126, ¶3)

The fourth theme in the section “direct confrontation with issues of gender in the institution of sport” is “normal and lovely girls” (article 126, ¶3). The issue of using sex to sell female athletes has historically divided sport scholars and professional female athletes, which is why I include this lower-order theme, though only six articles from my sample directly address the issue. Articles debate whether or not athletes should use their looks as marketing tools. An author presents Danica Patrick as an example of an athlete who has used her looks to become the most popular driver in the IndyCar series for the last six years (article 266). The author claims,

Talent isn't enough. As Patrick well knows. So how could a race car driver with one victory and no championships in several years of competition become an icon?... If you're a woman? You sell a little bit of your soul and a lot of your skin. (article 266, ¶7-8)

This author presents marketing skin as tactical in a culture that prizes beauty:

it's also a valuable lesson for young women about the world we live in. Why deny it?...is she a sellout? Only if it goes against her nature...Patrick is where she is because she dressed provocatively. Oh, yeah, and because she can drive a race car, too. (article 266, ¶16, ¶17)

An article about German soccer players posing in Playboy to show that soccer players are “normal and lovely girls” (article 126, ¶3) echoes the sentiments of the Patrick article. The author claims, “whether we like it or not, society views women first as objects of beauty, with other qualities or skills viewed through a veil of sexuality” (article 126, ¶6). She acknowledges that male athletes' photo shoots depict these athletes demonstrating athletic skills and that female athletes' photo shoots are about femininity and sexuality off the field but follows up with,

The truth is, many women want to be respected for their talent but also appreciated for their beauty. Young girls who grow up wanting to compete but fear they'll be viewed as tomboys can look up to women like Candace Parker or Hope Solo to see that feminism and athleticism can co-exist. (article 126, ¶10)

Other articles about whether or not female athletes should be sexualized support the practice as a way to make money and to raise awareness of women's sports. An article on marketing tactics taken up by U.S. soccer stars Hope Solo and Abby Wambach

shows Solo as a player using her feminine appearance to garner television appearances and magazine covers and Wambach garnering more athletic endorsers because of her less feminine appearance. Solo advocates using appearance to change images about femininity and athleticism, and Wambach says players should “exploit their natural resources” (article 440, ¶18) to maximize personal income and improve the profile of women’s soccer. Sexuality plays an interesting role in the argument in this article, with rumors that Wambach is lesbian (though she is not publically out).

Other authors are not as supportive of using sex to sell female athletes. An article written by guest columnist and elite cyclist Kathryn Bertine criticizes a poll published by *Bicycling Magazine* asking “Who’s the hottest female cyclist?” In response to the poll, Bertine profiles the top 13 women in cycling in her poll “The 10 Super Female Watties of Road Cycling, where physical power *is* beauty” (article 308, ¶5), using cyclist nicknames like “Jeannie ‘Did you call me old? I can’t hear you way back there’ Longo (FRA)” (article 308, ¶6). Bertine still includes some references to non-athletic demeanors like “Humble, gracious, ego-free and approachable, Vos has the ability to domestique for her teammates as well as dominate as a champion” (article 308, ¶15) but notes, “we can change one thing: We female athletes can make our own lists, ranks, and polls of what really matters, and we can live by those standards ‘til the rest of the world catches up” (article 308, ¶33).

Commentary¹⁸ on these articles is where the debate really flares up. Most readers comment that marketing is about using all assets an athlete has in his/her arsenal.

[Richard@jadesdad.com] comments,

¹⁸ I present quotations as they are written on espnW, complete with errors. Because errors are so numerous, I chose not to recognize each with a [sic] because doing so significantly breaks the flow of the comments

All in all, Danica is just following the American pattern. You use everything you possess to make the bucks, and anyone who has ever tried to make it in any field on talent or expertise will acknowledge (maybe with a little chagrin) that a pretty or handsome face, neat hair, a great \$@%, an ability to kiss-up, or whatever, really helps to make talent or expertise more appreciated. (article 266, ¶23)

Comments after an article about Yani Tseng's British Open victory spur discussion about how Asian players want to win and American players want television exposure. For example, [stemid29] says,

These American kids aren't into winning. They are into the commercials. When all you saw was Tiger on tv, at least he was into winning tournament.s. The Asian ladies are trying to WIN. Some of the older American ladies seemed to want to win. The youngsters- Creamer, Gulbis, , just want to see themselves on tv. (article 216, ¶23)

[frogger2005] responds,

That's because the attractive American lady golfers know that they *win* by appearing on TV. They don't need to win golf tournaments to succeed. The Yani Tseng's of the world need to win a lot to get noticed due to average looks (article 216, ¶24)

Articles addressing the sexuality of athletes exhibit aspects of postfeminism, especially those that justify athletes using femininity and sexuality as a marketing strategy. Many claim that presenting themselves in sexualized ways is 1) a way to show off all the hard work they have done to get the body they have, 2) a way to earn sponsorship dollars to keep earnings on par with men, 3) a way to present more positive

and potentially distracts readers from my argument.

images than waif-like models presented in mainstream media for young girls. Whatever the reason, the athletes position themselves as having a *choice* to present femininity/sexuality because patriarchy has been eradicated by feminism and therefore women are free to embrace traditional modes of beauty. Athletes use media and consumer culture as a way to gain recognition in popular culture; this ties into postfeminist culture, especially endorsing products that enable women to enact a postfeminist sexualized self.

Women are not the only athletes who are sexualized in media; however, male athletes' sexiness comes from how they play, how many athletic skills they display, and how powerful they are when they participate in their respective sports (Hardin & Whiteside, 2010; LaVoi & Kane, 2011; Media Education Foundation, 2005; Webster, 2009). Female athletes are not presented as sexy because of how they engage in their respective sports but for how they look off the field (Hardin & Whiteside, 2010; LaVoi & Kane, 2011; Media Education Foundation, 2005; Webster, 2009). Media are the vehicles for dissemination of these images, and gender becomes a performance used to garner particular rewards.

Another phenomenon similar to post-feminism is enlightened sexism, although Douglas (2010) disavows its connection to post-feminism because she claims (well-disguised) sexism and patriarchy – not feminism – is the root of the practice. The difference between post-feminism and enlightened sexism is that enlightened sexism promotes beautifying faces, bodies, attire, and sexuality according to traditionally feminine ideals as the only way to secure true *power*. Power is manifest through securing the attention of men and making other women jealous in the process (Douglas, 2010).

These views are disseminated in the media and are more commercialized for young women in the “millennial” generation (born in the late 1980s and 1990s) who are encouraged to find power in shopping, buying logoed apparel, and being “hot” (Douglas, 2010). Levy (2005) cautions, however, that “hot” means two things when it pertains to women: fuckable and salable.

Power from taking back what feminism categorized as demeaning is a *fantasy* of power rather than actual power: “slithering just below the shiny mirage of power is the dark, sneaky serpent of sexism” (Douglas, 2010, p. 6). The perception is that women have the same sexual freedom as men, so being sex objects is liberating (Douglas, 2010). Herein lies the crux of the issue: if re-claiming sexist practices is truly about choice because women had achieved equality, post-feminism would be easier to stomach. Economic justice, identity politics, LGBTQ issues, motherhood, reproductive health, violence, and law, however, are only a few structures that produce, enable, and constrain everyday life experience where women and girls still experience discrimination (Douglas, 2010). Postfeminist ideologies that reclaim sexist practices would also be easier to accept if the reclaimed practices did not align so closely with the sexist practices denounced by feminists. The necessity of feminism, regardless of form, is still vehemently needed.

Commentary from readers as a way to protect “our house.”

Comments from readers on articles in my espnW sample are relatively sparse. Statistics show readers did not comment on 239 of 447 (53.4%) articles, posted 1-5 comments on 148 of 447 (33.1%) articles, posted 6-10 comments on 23 of 447 (5.1%) articles, posted 11-15 comments on 13 of 447 (2.9%) articles, and posted over 15 comments on 24 of 447 (5.4%) articles. Comments are salient in the way readers

position male and female athletes, however. Comments on articles center on five topics: 1) looks/beauty of female athletes, 2) the accuracy of an article, 3) reaction to a game/sport, 4) controversial issues, and 5) defending men's place in sports as superior. Comments are a hotbed for racism (e.g., article 218 against Asian players in the LPGA), sexism (e.g., article 226 disparaging the WPS as a league), and bantering (e.g., a comment in article 142: "I bet your mother still dresses you each morning"). The most comments appear in articles about controversial subjects that are linked via the ESPN.com main page.

The first type of comment prevalent after espnW articles is about the looks/beauty of female athletes. Most comments of this type are off-the-cuff remarks after articles that have little to do with appearance. One article reports Yani Tseng as the youngest player to win a fourth major tournament. [philski] comments, "She isn't very good looking, so unfortunately she probably won't get a lot of love from the general public, but Yani is a hell of a good player with a great swing, great putting stroke, and great personality" (article 151, ¶51). [alphredbino] responds, "What are you talking about cpurdy561? I think philski was being kind. I mean she's ugly. Not like Anne Ramsey mind you...but ick. The muffin top doesn't help either" (article 151, ¶47). Another article recaps LPGA Solheim Cup play. [choirboy20] comments, "some of those blonde Euro's we're looking good except for the blonde fat one. Good for the Euro's but it was a classic choke fail by the US team" (article 350, ¶29), to which [earlygiant] replies, "I agree but with the big red nasty lipstick on the usa team as in wie they were nothing but ugly" (article 350, ¶31). These comments appear among other comments praising or criticizing athletes' play in a particular contest.

The second type of comment that appears after espnW articles questions the accuracy of information in an article (e.g., articles 162, 301, 203). Comments to male authors seem to be less harsh than comments to female authors, though other factors such as topics of the article probably temper this. For example, [31dalcowboysfan41] comments to a male author, “Excellent story, except only two of the seniors from last years team (Blair and Ari) could be considered 4-year starters. But minor inaccuracies aside, excellent read” (article 273, ¶36). After an article written by a female author on the importance of a woman judge deliberating about whether or not to lift the NFL lockout, [Playa629] comments,

This was the same person who likened rooting for the Celtics to supporting Hitler, right? The same person who said Steve McNair should not be judged by his extra-marital affair, but Rick Pitino should quit and never coach again due to him having an "alleged" affair with a gold digger? The same person who joked about the Holocaust in reference to Kelly T's remarks? Just wanted to make sure it was the same race baiting, man hating person who wrote all those terrible articles referenced above. You should include an ESPN Racism, that way she could write five articles a week between that and ESPNW. (article 33, ¶23-25)

The third type of comment is in response to the actual game/sport reported on in the article (e.g., articles 170, 313, 189). For example, in a preview of the Serena Williams-Caroline Wozniacki match-up in the tennis U.S. Open tournament, readers comment on how dominant Serena is, how “Woz” does not have a chance against her, and how people underestimate Serena’s mental tenacity in favor of her power game (article 313). In another article, readers praise Abby Wambach’s performance throughout

the soccer Women's World Cup and commend her for being a great player and a great person (article 186).

The fourth type of commentary in espnW articles is in response to controversial issues such as marketing strategies that use sexualized images of athletes or how much women should exercise while pregnant. Sexuality comes up in the article about Hope Solo and Abby Wambach marketing themselves differently after the Women's World Cup. [SpleenFiend] comments that Wambach is an "out butch lesbian who, in all likelihood, wasn't offered the same type of endorsement deals that were offered to Solo" (article 440, ¶42). [[BernBrothers](#)] replies,

Anyone that has been paying attention at all understands that the issue here is the same one that women up to the highest levels of women's athletics in the United States refuse to discuss in public. The disproportionate participation of lesbians in women's sports in the U.S. as compared to the distribution of lesbians in the general population. Wambach is an out butch lesbian and isn't ashamed to be public about it...if anyone is confused about why Wambach isn't getting the endorsements it comes down to the fact that frankly for most companies that just isn't a target market. (article 440, ¶45)

Sixty-five comments on an article about a woman who ran a marathon 39 weeks pregnant are about whether or not running so far was safe for the baby, that the mother did it for publicity, that the author should not care what the woman does in her private life, and the role of the father of the baby in encouraging or discouraging the woman to run. Readers offer chauvinistic comments such as [GoNavyBeatArmy02], "The more important questions is what is she doing out of the kitchen?" (article 384, ¶36) and comments in

response to reader comments about whether or not a responsible husband would “let” his wife run the race. In response to criticism of the husband for not discouraging the woman to run, [Doc Warsaw] says,

better than being a lazy fat \$@%, eating little debbie’s 24/7 and bitchin’ all the time; better than the pregnant white trash (and black trash and other trash) that I see drinking and smoking so as to exponentially increase the risk that something will get screwed up in their unborn child. Everyone bad-mouthing this woman is either jealous, lazy, or both. (article 384, ¶69)

The fifth and most prevalent type of commentary is about defending men’s place in sports as superior to women. These comments came most in response to the series of articles about female athletes participating in men’s leagues (216 comments/responses total) and in response to the series of articles about female athletes officiating in men’s leagues (125 comments/responses total). Five themes emerge within commentary on these articles: 1) defending women’s place as players/officials, 2) affirmative action-related debates, 3) physical limitations of female athletes, 4) sexist comments about women in general, and 5) claiming the series are pointless and that ESPN should be investigating more important issues.

The first theme in commentary defending men’s place in sports as superior to women is readers sticking up for female athletes/officials (articles 32, 36, 38, 169, 237, 412, 422). Readers post both for and against most issues brought up in comments, often bantering back and forth in heated debates. For example, in response to a debate about whether or not female athletes can compete in professional leagues (article 32), [ssrieske] says,

Sports tend to be entertaining when the games are competitive and well played. NCAA men's basketball is nowhere near as quality as the NBA, but we enjoy it none-the-less. Why should women's sports have to compete with men's in order to be enjoyable? (article 32, ¶45)

[Chieflliniwek4Life] comments,

I've got not problem at all with the concept of female officials. I just think that wfemale officials as a whole are going through a phase of brakeaking down barriers right now, and they need a few brave soulds to get it done. Once they find a few more women brave enough to stick it out, and break through, the floodgates will likely open. (article 422, ¶32)

Most other comments in this theme mention a specific player or coach who exemplifies the "best of" her sport or cite instances where integrating female athletes into a men's league would go more smoothly, like a knuckleball pitcher in MLB.

The second theme in commentary defending men's place in sports as superior to women takes the form of an affirmative action-related debate. Readers advance athletes should be judged on qualifications, not on identity markers (articles 32, 412), and that women should be happy with equality in employment and leave the realm of sports alone, such as a comment by [jcaliri17]: "why can't men have anything be their own anymore? why is it wrong when men want to keep an institution or sport strictly for men?" (article 36, ¶38). Other readers say ESPN should forego the gender debate to focus more on race (e.g., why there are no black kickers in the NFL – article 412 or why there are no Latino umpires in MLB – article 36). Still others claim that if female athletes are allowed to

participate in men's leagues, then male athletes should be able to participate in women's leagues to avoid discriminating against men:

So according to raditzzzz it is OK discriminate against Men today since Women have been discriminated against in the past. Like I said before most people who make arguments for women's equality do so while completely ignoring the same rights of Males. It's a pathetic double standard. ([DudeMcNabb], article 32, ¶62)

Some readers do not use terms specific to affirmative action but invoke language reflecting the practice: "My fear is that the eagerness to advance women into the pro ranks becomes an agenda driven, bean counting initiative simply as a diversity power play" ([cspxo_brown], article 422, ¶37).

The third theme in commentary defending men's place in sports as superior to women is about physical limitations of female athletes/officials. These readers claim "God-given" (article 422, ¶76) biological differences between women and men are the reason female athletes cannot and should not compete with male athletes. A rather heated debate about cultural constructions of body types and the "reality" (article 422, ¶85) of biology ensues in the introduction article about whether female athletes could compete in men's professional leagues (article 422). Biological differences lead to women getting hurt unless they are "big nasty bulldaggers" ([mac0611], article 422, ¶56). [donohuejay] recalls,

i remember in high school my rugby team played against a team and they had a girl on theirs...at one point she had the ball and a teammate of mine tackled her as gently as possible to the ground...when they got up she was screaming at him to "HIT ME! DONT TAKE IT EASY ON ME! COME ON HIT ME!" next play she

had a concussion and a broken collar bone left the field in tears and we later found out she stopped playing rugby...there is nothing wrong with having females playing sports.....but playing with men is just stupid and a reach for "equality" men and women are both awesome but so completely different...women wanting to play in mens sports is like men wanting to be pregnant; it just shouldnt and cant happen. (article 32, ¶39)

The fourth theme in commentary defending men's place in sports as superior to women is sexist comments about women in general. Most of these comments are not in relation to the topic of the article on which the reader is commenting but seem rather to assert traditional sex roles. Most of these comments are followed up with sarcastic remarks from other readers about how ridiculous they are. [abbott1729] comments, "When will women start paying for dates? After all, it's all about equality, right?" (article 422, ¶43), to which [ishbiacherry] replies, "The same day they start opening doors for men" (article 422, ¶44). Three comments later, [HerbieHusker14] retorts, "YOu are blaming society's expectations of gender roles on women. Society's expectations say men should open doors for women ... most of the women I know do not care at all about his., and young girls are not being taught that this is the norm. Here is another thing to consider women make 75cents to every dollar a man makes for doing the exact same job. Perhaps if we saw some equality in the pay scale, you'd see many more women 'paying for dates'" (article 422, ¶47). In other threads, [Regreg13] says, "They can only ref naked" (article 422, ¶55) and [jcaliri17] says, "when women start being eligible for the military draft and stop hitting from the ladies tees, then you can continue your quest for 'equality.' until then, shut your mouth and get back in the kitchen" (article 36, ¶38).

Five fans “liked” [jcaliri17]’s post and the next nine comments support the reader’s sentiments.

The last theme in commentary defending men’s place in sport as superior to women is readers asserting that the issue in the article is “pointless” (article 422). These comments usually advocate for ESPN to switch the focus of the article from gender representation to representation of all-male identity categories such as race in male leagues. [Abdul2268] comments, “another pointless article. The world is gonna end if there isnt a woman reffing a football game ppl just love to point out the little things they dont like whats next there aren’t any black kickers in the nfl?” (article 422, ¶81). [tbone8282] says, “Hahahahahahaha! What is ESPN going to report on next, unicorn racing?” (article 38, ¶44).

Other topics readers refer to in comments include advancing which positions/leagues in which women might be able to compete, personal experiences playing against girls/women or playing in a game with female officials, commentary on women’s forays into men’s sports, women-only leagues as non-revenue-producing entities, questioning the competence of referees in general, and claiming players in professional women’s leagues could not beat college men’s teams (or, in one reader’s opinion, high school boys’ teams).

Commentary after other articles in my sample echo sentiments expressed after the series articles on whether or not women could/should compete in men’s leagues and whether or not women could/should officiate games in men’s leagues. After an article recapping the WNBA’s first 15 years, [[r_u_gellin](#)] says, “this is not basketball. this should be called women's fitness. maybe women's activity. haha definitely not

basketball” (article 142, ¶19). A later article outlining “five things we learned from the WNBA finals” includes comments such as, “Didn’t even know this was going on...who cares” ([kylecahill89], article 378, ¶28), “seriously though, the talent difference between the men and women is embarrassing. Women’s bball is essentially unwatchable to a true bball fan” ([chrisgerarde22469], article 378, ¶20), and “congrats to the Lynx for winning the sandwich making championships... oh wait, that’s not what this is?” ([JBomb6666], article 378, ¶19). Other readers defend women’s basketball and question why the “haters” are reading the article in the first place if they are so disinterested in the WNBA. The fact that the “haters” infiltrate the commentary in the first place with juvenile comments not related to article content undermines positive media content about female athletes.

Internet discussion forums exhibit specific characteristics that fuel the types of comments espnW readers post. Forums are characterized by participation of large groups of individuals in a largely unregulated environment (Lewinski, 2010). Forums can exist both as avenues for deliberation (e.g., “virtual Habermasian public spheres,” “electronic Athens,” “electronic commons”) and as deterrents to deliberation, depending on how sites are designed (Landert & Jucker, 2011). Landert and Jucker (2011) identify three axes present in online discussion forums: context, topics, and language. Context ranges from a non-public context where information is inaccessible to a public context where information is accessible (Landert & Jucker, 2011). Topics range from private topics, which are topics that only affect single individuals or very small groups of people, to non-private topics, which are topics that affect large numbers of people (Landert & Jucker, 2011). Language ranges from language of immediacy, characterized by slang and

colloquialism that make up simple syntax, and language of distance, which is formal, scientific vocabulary with complete syntax (Landert & Jucker, 2011).

Typically, sports discussion forums are used for pre-game trash talk/hype (Cavanagh, 2010), post-game gloating (Cavanagh, 2010), and can create a community-building function for readers (Sanderson, 2010; Trice, 2010; Wilson, 2007). Wilson (2007) found discussion boards provide a way for MLS fans in the United States to create tradition and identity for a sport that does not receive much mainstream media coverage. Knowledge about sports culture offers social capital to those who know particular information well, and discussion boards also offer a way to demonstrate knowledge (Trice, 2010). These factors emerge in my analysis of comments on espnW articles, where public context, a variety of private and non-private topics, and language of immediacy characterize discourse. Collective criticism on espnW discussion forums is most often vertical criticism, which targets a single argument, uses an intensive mode of criticism (specific objections), and a subordinative (chain) mode of defense rather than horizontal criticism, which results in a more complex argumentation structure (Lewinski, 2010).

Anonymity is an important factor in comments made on discussion boards. In an analysis of how fans use computer-mediated communication to discuss allegations of racism in American Division I College Football hiring practices on espn.com, Sanderson (2010) found anonymity and immediacy of discussion boards facilitate more “politically incorrect” and “less socially censored” comments than might be expressed in an interpersonal interaction. Additionally, fans can “shout” back and forth using an informal textual style that conveys emotion in ways previously unique to speech (Trice, 2010).

Pseudonyms are used more than contributors' names, and tracing the identities of contributors is virtually impossible on most sites (Yun & Park, 2011). Therefore readers who comment on espnW articles may be more likely to offer destructive criticism because they know their identity is hidden.

These comments serve to circle the wagons around sport to try to maintain its masculine hegemony. Readers who criticize female athletes rely on traditional gender roles of men as masculine and women as feminine to criticize female athletes for competing in what has traditionally been conceived of as a masculine institution. Derogatory comments about the looks/beauty of female athletes and controversial issues are ultimately about defending men's (and, concomitantly, masculinity's) place in sports as superior and defending "our house."

Conclusion

Postfeminist, neoliberal conceptions of female athletes obscure the pervasiveness of masculinity as privileged in the institution of sport. Representations are predicated on postfeminist "difference" arguments where men and women are dissimilar physically, psychologically, and emotionally (Stacey, 1993). Difference arguments reduce complex ideological constructions to basic biological contrasts between women and men. In an institution where aggression and masculinity are privileged, women can never be viewed as contenders if difference arguments prevail, both on the professional level and on the amateur level.

Postfeminist, neoliberal configurations of sports journalism are significant for feminist and media research. Under postfeminist ideology, feminism is no longer needed because social inequities have been addressed. Any issues individuals have are based on

their own situations and are not rooted in broader social structures. The danger of this conception, however, is that sport is still far from inclusive of women (Coakley, 2009). Statistics show female athletes are consistently underrepresented in media accounts and that girls do not receive the same opportunities as boys do to participate and flourish in sports. Postfeminist, neoliberal coverage of female athletes marginalizes and trivializes their accomplishments *as athletes*. Therefore, female athletes remain in second place, and their status affects funding decisions/priorities in sports organizations. Worse, postfeminist, neoliberal coverage perpetuates the conception that female athletes and fans do not take sports as seriously as male athletes and fans. If sport is intertwined with governments, educational systems, mass communication, businesses, and other pivotal institutions in our culture (Coakley, 2009), women do not have a chance to be equal to men.

In chapter five, I examine political economic aspects of espnW, focusing specifically on its position as part of The Walt Disney Company and partnerships with other corporate sponsors. I argue obligation to shareholders taints the ability of the site to offer information on how sports and physical activity can procure health and wellness and achieve physiological, mental, and emotional goals.

Chapter 5

In a post on the Sports Executives Association website, Katrina Galas (October 11, 2011), MBA student at the University of Oregon and 2011 espnW Women + Sports Summit attendee, reveals the purpose of espnW presented at one of the 2011 Summit panels:

The tipping point in espnW's initiation was recognizing that this is not just the right thing to do; it's the smart thing to do and makes *good business sense*. Thus, espnW was born and is growing quickly everyday. (¶2, italics inserted)

Carol Stiff, vice president of programming and acquisitions at ESPN, does not hide that ESPN created espnW because "This [women] is an underserved demographic. It's a new set of eyeballs...It makes a lot of business sense. Women spend all the money in the household. Why wouldn't we go after that?" (McBride, December 26, 2011, ¶23).

espnW is a consumer-oriented women's sports website that facilitates profit maximization for The Walt Disney Company and for those entities that advertise on the site. Privileging profit, however, deters from a rich media environment rooted in principles of free press and democracy (Winseck, 2011) where media provide open access, scientifically-based information on how sports and physical activity can procure health and wellness to achieve physiological, mental, and emotional goals.

Corporate obligation: Shareholders.

espnW is owned by one of the largest corporations in the world: The Walt Disney Company. Corporations are legally obligated under corporate law to make decisions that will garner the most dividends for shareholders (Legislative Counsel of California, n.d.). Executives at espnW are interested in securing an audience who has disposable income

that will ultimately benefit The Walt Disney Company and its affiliates. To illustrate the pervasiveness of the Walt Disney Corporation, I profile ESPN, Inc. to illustrate its influence on media coverage of sports. It controls media content for the most professional sports leagues and represents the strongest online presence of any sports media organization in existence.

The Walt Disney Company's ability to influence popular culture is enabled by its corporate structure. The Walt Disney Company is a "leading diversified international family entertainment and media enterprise" (The Walt Disney Company, n.d.a, ¶1) comprised of four business segments: media networks, parks and resorts, studio entertainment, and consumer products (The Walt Disney Company, n.d.a). The company employs about 156,000 people and reports \$40.9 billion in revenue¹⁹ and \$4.08 billion in net income²⁰ for 2011 (The Walt Disney Company, n.d.b). espnW is an affiliate of ESPN, Inc. and is part of the Media Networks segment, which comprises both domestic and international broadcast, cable, radio, publishing and Internet businesses²¹ such as Disney-ABC Television Group, ESPN Inc., Walt Disney Internet Group, and ABC-owned television stations (The Walt Disney Company, n.d.b). Media networks' revenue was \$18.7²² billion and the segment's net income was about \$6.15²³ billion in 2011 (The Walt Disney Company, n.d.b).

¹⁹ Revenues increased 7% (\$2.8 billion) from 2010 to 2011 (The Walt Disney Company, n.d.b).

²⁰ Net income is income minus expenses. The Disney Company's net income increased 21% (\$844 million) from 2010 to 2011 (The Walt Disney Company, n.d.b).

²¹ Businesses include international and domestic cable networks as well as the company's broadcasting business: a domestic broadcast television network, television production operations, domestic and international television distribution, domestic television stations, domestic and international broadcast radio networks, domestic radio stations, and publishing and digital operations (The Walt Disney Company, n.d.b).

²² Revenue is composed of \$8.79 billion in affiliate fees, \$7.60 billion in advertising, and \$2.33 billion in "other" revenue (The Walt Disney Company, n.d.b).

²³ Operating income is calculated by deducting operating expenses of selling, general, administrative and

espnW is part of The Disney Corporation’s “multimedia, multinational sports entertainment company” ESPN, Inc. ESPN, Inc.’s primary business entities include television (ESPN on ABC – broadcast; cable networks; regional, syndicated, pay subscription packages), radio (ESPN Radio, ESPN Deportes Radio, syndicated radio in 11 countries), online (ESPN.com, ESPN Deportes.com, market-specific sites), multi-screen network (ESPN3), publishing (e.g., *ESPN The Magazine*, ESPN Books), wireless (ESPN Mobile Properties – scores, headlines, video highlights, games), event management (X and Winter X Games, ESPYs, college bowls and basketball games, high school competitions), multiplatform businesses (espnW, ESPNHS), location-based businesses (ESPN Wide World of Sports complex, ESPN Zones), and corporate outreach (e.g., Team ESPN, The V Foundation for Cancer Research) (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.d). Ninety-nine percent of Americans have heard of the ESPN Brand, and ninety-five percent claim to be familiar with it (ESPN Customer Marketing and Sales, 2011).

The reach of ESPN, Inc. is vast. In television, ESPN, Inc. houses eight 24-hour sports networks²⁴, five high-definition television simulcast services, and the ABC Television Network (The Walt Disney Company, n.d.b). The company owns, has equity interests in, or distribution agreements with 47 international sports networks that reach households in more than 200 countries/territories in 16 languages across all 7 continents (The Walt Disney Company, n.d.b). In addition, ESPN, Inc. retains broadcasting rights for many professional and college sports leagues, including the NFL, NBA²⁵, WNBA²⁶,

other; depreciation and amortization; and adding equity in the income of investees (The Walt Disney Company, n.d.b).

²⁴ ESPN’s main cable network pulls in an estimated 99 million subscribers, and its cable affiliates ESPN2, ESPNNEWS, ESPN Classic, and ESPN U garner 99 million, 73 million, 33 million, and 72 million subscribers, respectively (The Walt Disney Company, n.d.b).

²⁵ Contracted through 2020 (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.c).

²⁶ Contracted through 2015 (Dixon, July 15, 2007).

NASCAR²⁷, MLB²⁸, and WTA²⁹; and SEC, ACC, and Pac 12 college football and basketball conferences³⁰ as well as other notable sporting events³¹ (The Walt Disney Company, n.d.b). As of October 1, 2011, 994,425 shareholders support ESPN, Inc. (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.d) and its 3,900 domestic and 2,600 international employees (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.c). ESPN, Inc. is controlled 80% by ABC, Inc. (an indirect subsidiary of The Walt Disney Company) and 20% by the Hearst Corporation (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.d).

ESPN.com boasts 3.9 billion minutes viewed per month³² with a 79% male demographic whose median age is 30.4 and median income is \$80,815 (ESPN Customer Marketing and Sales, n.d.). The site is rated number one for time spent in the sports category³³ and male composition among the top 100 websites and brings in an average of 42.6 million unique visitors per month (ESPN Customer Marketing and Sales, n.d.). ESPN Mobile web represents 62% of mobile sports market apps³⁴ (Nielsen, n.d.), and users have downloaded ESPN products over 18 million times (ESPN Customer Marketing and Sales,

²⁷ Contracted through 2014 (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.c).

²⁸ Contracted through 2013 (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.c).

²⁹ Contracted through 2015 (Pagliaro, October 23, 2011).

³⁰ Broadcast rights for Pac-12 football and men's and women's basketball as well as ACC football and men's basketball are in contract through 2024; broadcast rights for sixteen SEC sports are in contract through 2027; ESPN also supports an eight-year multi-platform agreement with the Big 12 conference and a ten-year agreement with the Big Ten conference (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.c).

³¹ Other broadcasting rights for specific events include 24 NCAA championships through 2023-24; *Monday Night Football*, NFL studio programming, the NFL Pro Bowl, NFL Draft, and 3D and enhanced international and highlight rights both televised and online through 2021; the Indianapolis 500 and four other IndyCar races through 2018 (broadcast on ABC); exclusive live coverage of Wimbledon through 2024; 64 FIFA World Cup matches (ESPN 3D); TV and radio rights in Argentina for the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games and the London 2012 Olympic games and pay television rights in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay (ESPN International); 15 BCS games including national championship games in 2011, 2012, and 2013; the British Open through 2020; USTA US Open; multiple men's and women's World Cup events; and the NCAA women's basketball tournament (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.c).

³² This is an increase of 10% from 2010-2011 (ESPN Customer Marketing and Sales, 2011).

³³ Ranked number five for males ages 18-34 in average minute audience behind Google, Facebook, Yahoo! and Microsoft (ESPN Customer Marketing and Sales, 2011).

³⁴ The top five mobile phone sport apps are ESPN (62%), NFL Life (18%), Yahoo! Sports (17%), MLB.com (16%), and Fox Sports Mobile (13%) (Nielsen, n.d.).

n.d.). ESPN.com attracts an average audience of 107,878 individuals in any given minute during any given day throughout the year (Fisher, October 12, 2011).

espnW is one of two multiplatform businesses³⁵ within ESPN, Inc. The entity operates solely as a digital presence with a website, streaming online video, online content for mobile phones, a Twitter feed, and a Facebook page. Multiplatform means “the secure delivery of rich media, information and applications to any device, regardless of transport, distribution system or user interface, providing the consumer with seamless, integrated and interactive access and management of their entertainment and communication services” (CTAM, n.d.). espnW utilizes content from multiple ESPN platforms such as ESPN.com, *SportsCenter*, and *ESPN The Magazine*.

Having control over broadcast rights of so many professional leagues and so many major sporting events grants ESPN, Inc., an opportunity to shape the sport media landscape more than any other commercial entity, which is what earns them the spot as the number one media brand in sports and the number four overall brand (behind NFL, Nike, NBA) in sports (ESPN Customer Marketing and Sales, 2011). Almost \$41 billion in revenue shapes what viewers and users see every day. Instead of focusing on altruistic reasons for deciding content, however, ESPN, Inc., is required by corporate law to do what will garner the most dividends for its shareholders. Therefore, even though espnW “connects female fans to the sports they love and follow” (espnW, n.d.a, ¶1), “aim[s] to

³⁵ The other multiplatform business within ESPN, Inc. is ESPNHS, formerly ESPN RISE. The description on the ESPN, Inc. site states, “ESPNHS is a multiplatform business which serves high school student-athletes and high school sports fans. It provides high school student-athletes with recognition, resources, information and inspiration to improve their skills and achieve their goals, while offering fans compelling content across platforms. ESPNHS assets include *ESPNHS GUY and GIRL* magazines, ESPNHS.com; mobile and social media products (facebook.com/ESPNHS and facebook.com/ESPNHSGirl; Twitter: [@ESPNHS](https://twitter.com/ESPNHS)); and more than 160 high school events including ESPNHS Games, Elite 11, Elite 24, National High School Invitational, Area Code Baseball and Nike Football Combines and Nike Football Training Camps. ESPNHS is uniquely positioned to provide high school student-athletes and their fans with compelling high school sports content across multiple ESPN platforms” (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.e).

provide an engaging environment where women are an integral part of the sports conversation” about both men’s and women’s sports (espnW, n.d.a, ¶1), and is women’s “primary destination for women's sports” (espnW, n.d.a, ¶1), creation and maintenance of the site is ultimately about securing an audience with disposable income that benefits the Walt Disney Company and its affiliates. The company chooses to attract audiences by emphasizing commercial spectator sports.

Commercial spectator sports.

Commercial spectator sports are played for profit and depend on revenue streams like gate receipts, sponsorships, and selling media broadcasting rights (Coakley, 2009). Sports most likely to be commercialized are those watched, played, or used for profit by individuals who influence economic spending in our culture³⁶ (Coakley, 2009). Elite, organized, competitive, commercial sports define most of the sporting world (Coakley, 2011) and the content of espnW follows suit. Professional sports account for 228/311 (73.3%) photographs of female athletes and 54/63 photographs of male athletes (85.7%) on espnW. Professional sports also dominate espnW article content, the topic of 237/305 (77.7%) articles about female athletes and 50/56 (89.2%) articles about male athletes. The top four most popular sports presented in photographs and articles (female and male athletes) on espnW are basketball, soccer, tennis, and golf, all of which are affiliated with professional leagues whose games or major events are showcased on some entity or affiliate of ESPN, Inc.

³⁶ For example, golf is a major commercial sport even though it is not the most ideal for commercial presentation (e.g., slow play, not a lot of action and excitement) (Coakley, 2009). Golfers are wealthy and powerful individuals who decide which products their families, and their businesses, and themselves consume, therefore they are important to the commercial entities who advertise and sponsor sporting events (Coakley, 2009).

Privileging commercial spectator sports grants cultural significance to those sports that emphasize heroics instead of aesthetics (Coakley, 2009). A heroic orientation is correlated with a high need to entertain an audience and emphasizes danger and excitement of movement, style/mastery of dramatic expression, willingness to go beyond limits, and a commitment to victory and success of a team and/or sponsor (Coakley, 2009). An aesthetic orientation is correlated with a low need to entertain an audience and emphasizes beauty and pleasure of movement, ability and mastery of technical skills, a willingness to explore limits, and commitment to staying active and involved as a participant (Coakley, 2009). Interestingly, heroic orientations correlate with those sports that require strength, speed, and aggressiveness rather than technical skill. The former are typically attributed to male athletes because of corporeal advantages, as outlined in a previous chapter of this dissertation. Therefore, focusing on commercial spectator sports ultimately privileges male athletes.

In addition to its gender rigidity, ESPN, Inc. uses espnW to perpetuate a conceptualization of sport grounded in consumerism that benefits powerful corporations. They do this through partnerships with site sponsors, their executive leadership team/advisory panel, and individuals who attend the Women + Sports Summits.

Partnerships.

Founding partners of espnW are Nike and Gatorade as the site's official "training partner" and "nutrition partner," respectively. Proctor & Gamble, specifically Venus razors and Secret deodorant, joined soon after the site's launch. Optics company Oakley was also added as the official "optics partner" of espnW in February 2011. Employees with Nike and Gatorade write content for espnW [Laura Gentile, Vice President of

espnW, (video file) in Lynch, April 25, 2011] and Oakley enjoys quarterly social media partnerships and photo galleries, on-site promotion at espnW-affiliated sports events, sponsored photo galleries, and a four-part web series with Oakley's star female athletes (Hudak, February 2, 2012). Additionally, espnW is branching out to partner with Colavita, an Italian olive oil company, to co-sponsor a women's cycling team (Hudak, March 21, 2012). Laura Gentile, vice president of espnW, says, "Working closely with Colavita, a company committed to supporting female athletes in such a tangible way, is important to espnW...It's a great opportunity to support the development of women's cycling while expanding espnW's reach in a creative way" (Hudak, March 21, 2012, ¶2).

espnW tries to pull in consumers by partnering with brands that have established themselves deep in the commercial sport landscape³⁷. When individuals affiliated with these organizations provide content for the site, however, they act in the best interest of the corporations they represent and not necessarily the users of the site or athletes. For example, in a July 20, 2011 espnW article titled "how to stay cool during warm-weather workouts," Lisa Esposito, MS, RD, CSSD, LDN, suggests, "Consuming a sports drink that contains electrolytes, particularly sodium, will help you to absorb and retain the fluids you consume" (¶12). Later, she explains, "Figuring out your sweat sodium concentration is a little more complicated than figuring out your sweat rate. It requires specific equipment found in specialized labs such as the Gatorade Sports Science Institute (GSSI)" (¶14) and that for those individuals with low sweat concentration, "the sodium

³⁷ Nike, Inc. 2011 revenues were \$24.128 billion (Nike, Inc., n.d.a) and the company employs over 35,000 employees in more than 160 countries across six continents (Nike, Inc., n.d.b). They directly or indirectly employ almost one million people through Nike, Inc. employees, suppliers, shippers, retailers, and other service providers (Nike, Inc., n.d.b). Gatorade is a part of the PepsiCo America's Beverages division of PepsiCo. The PepsiCo America's Beverages division revenue for 2011 was \$22.418 billion, which reflects a 10% increase from 2010 to 2011 (PepsiCo, n.d.a). PepsiCo's 2011 revenues were \$60 billion and the company employs over 285,000 employees (PepsiCo, n.d.b).

concentration in sports drinks, such as Gatorade, should be adequate” (§14). It turns out that in addition to holding a Master of Science in Foods, Nutrition, and Dietetics; being a Registered Dietician; a Board Certified Specialist in Sports Dietetics, the premier professional sports nutrition credential in the U.S. (Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, n.d.); and a Licensed Dietician/Nutritionist, Esposito is also employed by the Gatorade Sports Science Institute. In reality, water works just as well as sports drinks as a hydrating agent for most individuals³⁸ (Cohen, July 19, 2012). espnW acts in the best interest of its own parent corporations and those corporations that support the site financially.

espnW leadership.

Examining the work history of executives in charge of espnW reveals they are no strangers to working in the best interest of corporations and ESPN, Inc. Laura Gentile, vice president of espnW, worked as a Senior Partner, Management Supervisor at Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide on the IBM account before joining ESPN, Inc. (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.f). The team with whom she worked earned the 2002 GRAND EFFIE for advertising effectiveness, the first in the history of Ogilvy’s campaigns (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.f). She joined ESPN, Inc. in 2003 as Director of Advertising and Marketing and worked on projects such ESPN25, a 25th anniversary campaign to celebrate sports fans and ESPN’s first online fan communities, the development of “ESPN on ABC,” and strategic marketing for partners such as the NFL, NHL, The ESPY Awards, and ESPNEWS

³⁸ A recent study in the *British Medical Journal* shows the “science” dedicated to hydration actually often comes from companies who have hired scientists to promote their products (Cohen, July 19, 2012). These scientists advise sports medicine organizations and entities like the European Food Safety Authority on the “dangers of dehydration” (Cohen, July 19, 2012, ¶2). Pepsico owns Gatorade and has paired science with creative marketing so, “What started life as a mixture of simple kitchen food stuffs has become an ‘essential piece of sporting equipment’” (Cohen, July 19, 2012, ¶8).

(ESPN Media Zone, n.d.f). Before being promoted to vice president of espnW, Gentile worked directly with George Bodenheimer, President of ESPN, Inc. and ABC Sports, as Vice President, Office of the President (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.f). ESPN, Inc. designated the vice president of espnW as a woman with a work history rooted in strategic marketing and advertising, which provides the site's commercial orientation from its inception.

Content of espnW is also inevitably affected by Editor-in-Chief Tina Johnson's employment history. Johnson is the founding vice president and editor-in-chief of *Women's Health* (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.g). Under Johnson's leadership, employees at the magazine tripled its readership (from 400,000 in 2006 to 1.35 million in 2009), earned the number one spot on Ad Week's "Hot list" and the number two spot on Ad Age's "A-List" for advertising in 2008, introduced seven international editions of *Women's Health*, and produced five fitness DVDs and two branded books (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.g). Johnson also redesigned the *Women's Health* website and increased unique visitors by 82% and page views by 100% (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.g). Additionally, Johnson regularly appears on the *Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, and *CBS Marketwatch* to discuss nutrition, diet, fitness, lifestyle and fashion (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.g). Before starting *Women's Health*, Johnson served as the executive editor of *Teen People* and supervised multiple projects for Hearst Magazines in partnership with Wal-Mart, Procter & Gamble, Nike, Nivea, and McDonalds (ESPN Media Zone, n.d.g). Placing espnW in the hands of two women with such an extensive work history catering to major corporations explains part of why espnW perpetuates a conceptualization of sport grounded in consumerism that benefits ESPN, Inc. and its corporate partners. The espnW advisory panel and contributors show similar connections (see Appendices J and

K for descriptions of advisory panel members and contributors). Many of these individuals were part of espnW Women + Sport planning summits to strategize about the content of espnW.

espnW planning retreats.

espnW planning retreats are another method by which ESPN, Inc., shapes the discourse of espnW to enrich both The Walt Disney Company and those entities that advertise on the site. The purpose of the retreats is to “help set the female sports agenda. We’ll begin cultivating a sports conversation for women, highlighting the important role of sports in shaping their lives” (espnW, n.d.b, ¶1) as a means to plan content for espnW. The tone of the planning retreats is uplifting, but participants whose interests lie in the success of corporations and the commercial sports landscape tempers inspiration.

Discord exists in the mission and vision of espnW and panels and presentations at the retreats and corporate influence of attendees. The vision page for the 2010 Summit outlines the purpose of espnW:

There are precious few places that recognize and cheer for women who achieve great things in sports. Even fewer that directly aim to inspire improvement and greater future achievement – and that can offer up the tools, tips, advice, role models, event experiences and that priceless spark of inspiration to make it happen. espnW celebrates female athletes – because we are athletes. Whether that means competing in an Olympic arena, in a high school gym, or in a 5K against your neighbor, we carry the athlete gene in our DNA. As we like to say, ‘Once an athlete, always an athlete. And once an athlete, always a fan.’ We are champions of a female sports culture. We are passionate about cultivating a

national sports conversation for women. We will celebrate the athlete icons of today who inspire girls and women to do great things, and we'll introduce you to the next generation of sports heroes. We will show girls how to channel their love of sports into the skills and opportunities that will make them strong, successful, confident women. We will motivate women to never rest until they've achieved their personal best. In short, we've dreamed up a whole new world for female athletes and fans, and it's by women, for women. It's espnW. (espnW, n.d.b)

Another page lays out the mission of the site:

To serve, inform and inspire the female athlete and fan. By cultivating an inclusive female sports culture of respect and empowerment, espnW will become the primary destination for the sports-minded woman who is both an athlete and a fan. espnW is 1) respectful, inclusive, informed and authentic, 2) sports defined in a holistic, multidimensional way, 3) a digital business at its core - .com, mobile, social. (espnW, n.d.b)

Yet another page delineates the audience as

Sports-minded women. There are approximately 50 million current and former female athletes (18-49) who consider themselves sports fans. They lead busy, demanding lives, and remain highly competitive. We will be *the* female-focused sport media entity to give them a voice and a role in the sports conversation. (espnW, n.d.b; italics in original)

On the retreat webpage, the vision is spliced among running video site headers with empowering photographs of female athletes eyeing up a putt on a golf green, throwing a tennis ball up in the midst of a serve, getting ready to serve a volleyball, rowing a kayak,

doing yoga, and walking along the beach with surfboards. These pages are inspiring and, when I first encountered them, gave me hope that espnW was a site that would finally celebrate female athletes *as athletes* instead of reporting on other trivial aspects of their lives. Scrolling through “conversational work sessions” and “intimate workshops”³⁹ on topics such as, “reaching women and girls around the world through sports,” and “the importance of powerful role models: leveraging sports to make an impact” inspired me even more.

My enthusiasm waned when I discovered retreat activities and looked at who was granted access to the espnW planning retreats. Sports activities for the 2010 retreat were Roxy Surf Camp, Lululemon Yoga, a nature walk, Harley Davidson Learn-to-Ride, LaJolla Sea Kayaking or a trip to the spa⁴⁰. Participants enjoyed similar activities at the 2011 retreat, all “fueled by Gatorade.” espnW characterizes the 124 invitation-only 2010 retreat participants as “influential men and women in sports – athletes, business

³⁹ Other 2010 planning retreat panels/presentations include “The many dimensions of a world-class athlete,” “No limits: having the courage to dream,” “The future: the Journey to becoming a world-class athlete,” “sex, bodies and beauty: perceptions of women in sports,” “women in sports journalism,” “motivating and inspiring women: issues of self-confidence and self-esteem,” “women as fans: facts, misperceptions, and opportunities – are we really that different?,” “advancements in women’s sports medicine and injury prevention,” “a global look at women in sports,” “female dynamics and the role of sports,” “mind-body training. The secret to women’s success in sports,” and “the business of women’s sports.” Retreat planning presentations from 2011 include “The multi-dimensional nature of a world-class athlete” (Michelle Kwan, Lisa Leslie, Jessica Mendoza, Summer Sanders; moderated by Sage Steele), “Olympic Q&A” (Jessica Long interviewed by Michelle Beadle), “The landscape of women in sports: Facts, figures, and observations” (Dr. Richard Lapchick, Nancy Hogshead-Makar), “Reflections on the impact and evolution of women’s sports” (Robin Roberts, Billie Jean King, Julie Foudy), “Progressing women’s sports: Reflections from a rookie” (Laurel Richie, Carolyn Peck), “Sports in perspective and aspiring to a different model,” “Technology and community building among women” (Danielle Tiedt, Tanya Maslach, Lisa Stone, Kristen Shine), “A league roundtable: women as fans,” “Olympics: Why the Olympic Games resonate with women and how to apply these learnings more broadly,” “Making women’s sports relevant,” “Mentorship: How women inspire each other to greatness,” “women in the executive (sports) suite,” “A woman’s perspective: Journalism and content,” “Setting the bar ever higher: Cutting edge techniques and training,” and “The marketing and promotion of female athletes: Does sex sell?”

⁴⁰ Attendees also received gift bags with products such as Mission skincare samples, a water bottle with the espnW logo, a Nike bag, a Nike gift card for free shoes, a Nike sports bra, an iPod touch with a new app for athletes, aLuLu Lemon yoga mat, an espnW canvas bag, a book by Billie Jean King, and a Jewel CD (she performed the first night) (WomenTalkSports, n.d.)

executives, doctors, nutritionists and coaches.” Gentile addresses them in her opening remarks as “people who are at the true heart of women's sports. Whether it's as competitors, executives, marketers, teachers, mentors – everything” (espnW, October 4, 2010, ¶2). Informal analysis of the attendees⁴¹ shows most are media executives/professionals⁴², corporate executives/professionals⁴³, or professional athletes⁴⁴. About a quarter of attendees were directly employed by ESPN, Inc. Corporations represented are entities like Lululemon Athletica, Nike, Burton Snowboards, Cisco, Gatorade, Hampton Hotels, Harley-Davidson, Coca-Cola, Under Armour, Oakley, Pfizer, Champion, and Wilson Sporting Goods. The 2011 retreat participants are characterized as “a range of experts in business and advertising, professional sports, collegiate athletics, health and fitness, and representatives from the pro-social and educational arenas.” Informal analysis⁴⁵ of the 174 participants again shows mostly corporate executives/professionals, media executives, and media industry

⁴¹ I determined attendee count by going through attendee descriptions on the retreat website and categorizing. Counts include 40 corporate executives/professionals, 36 media executives/professionals, 20 professional athletes, 10 league executives [WTA, WNBA (2), WPS, NBA, NCAA, AAU, USOC, CAA Hockey], 6 representatives from non-profit organizations, 6 sports medicine professionals, 4 college coaches, and 2 representatives in sports management. Thirty-one of these individuals are employed by ESPN, Inc.

⁴² Individuals are categorized as media executives/professionals if their positions are solely media-related. Examples: Lucy Danzinger, editor-in-chief of *SELF* magazine; Jane Schonberger, Managing Partner for Pretty Tough Sports, “a media and lifestyle brand developed to empower young female athletes.”

⁴³ Many of these individuals have “marketing,” or “public relations” in their titles and are affiliated with agencies that work for espnW or partner brands (Nike, Gatorade). Examples include Susanna Earnest, Group Director of Strategy at OMD Chicago running the Gatorade business and Andrea Fairchild, Vice President of Brand Marketing for Gatorade.

⁴⁴ Sports represented: triathlon, hockey, ultra-marathon, boxing, snowboarding (2), golf, basketball, softball, soccer, skiing. Big names: Laila Ali, Gretchen Bleiler, Tamika Catchings, Skylar Diggins, Jennie Finch, Lolo Jones, Jessica Mendoza, Angela Ruggierio, Annika Sorenstam.

⁴⁵ I determined attendee count by going through attendee descriptions on the retreat website and categorizing. Counts include 57 corporate executives/professionals; 48 media executives/professionals; 21 media industry workers (e.g., writers, TV analysts); 14 professional athletes (Olympic – 2, snowboarding, soccer – 4, track, softball, paralympic swimmer, basketball, skiing); 13 non-profit, government, or international organization employees (e.g., Awista Ayub, former Education and Health Officer at the Embassy of Afghanistan); 10 sports medicine professionals (trainers, neuropsychologist, sports psychologist); 4 students; 3 college athletic directors; 2 academics; and 2 coaches.

workers. About a third of the attendees are employed by ESPN, Inc. and corporations represented⁴⁶ include entities like Coca Cola, Getty Images, Oracle, Adidas, and Under Armour.

Participants at espnW planning Summits were charged with “help[ing] set the female sports agenda” (2010 retreat materials) by “cultivating a sports conversation for women, highlighting the important role of sports in shaping their lives” (2010 retreat materials). Participants were supposed to “SHARE-LEARN-INTERACT-NETWORK-EXPLORE-INSPIRE” (2011 retreat materials) to “Be a part of our team. Be inspired. Be here – and help shape the future of Women + Sports” (2011 retreat materials). Participants “Come together to strengthen the Women + Sports community” (2011 retreat materials) and “Explore the keys to future success” (2011 retreat materials) through “Two days of ideas and inspiration” (2011 retreat materials). Using participants directly tied to corporations that are legally obligated to make money for shareholders tempers the inspirational nature of these summits. espnW includes major stakeholders in the world of women’s sports such as professional athletes, but “influential men and women in sports” are mostly influential men and women in *the commercial sports landscape* tied to ESPN, Inc. and its corporate partners. Influential men and women in the commercial sports landscape are obligated to act in the best interest of their employers, so espnW is primarily about making money for corporations, including The Walt Disney Company, and (at most) secondarily about recognizing, cheering for, aiming to inspire improvement, or greater future achievement for female athletes, as executives charge in the opening paragraph of the 2010 Summit materials. If it provides content that does any

⁴⁶ Other corporations represented: United Soccer Marketing, Gatorade, Nike, Proctor & Gamble, Oakley, Fox Sports. Leagues represented: NBA (2), USA Hockey, WNBA (3), US Olympic Committee (2), NASCAR, NHL, NFL (2), NCAA (2), WPS.

of these things, it is in the context of a commercial sports website that makes decisions based on monetary gain. The company certainly puts up a front that the site is all about empowering athletes; however, this is but an exercise in branding to garner an audience who will financially support ESPN, Inc. and its corporate partners.

Branding

espnW “sets the female sports agenda,” but in a very particular way that presents the ESPN brand as inclusive of women. In reality, ESPN’s history of discrimination toward women taints its efforts and espnW deters from a rich media environment rooted in free press principles and democracy (Winseck, 2011) where portrayals of female athletes emphasize health and wellness as a way to achieve physical, mental, psychological, and emotional goals. espnW is an exercise in brand management, not in advancing women’s sports.

Brand management is about guiding the investments and affect of consumers (Arvidsson, 2006). ESPN wants its brand integrated into consumers’ lives so that consumers produce a feeling, social relation, or experience connected to their brand (Arvidsson, 2006). In her opening remarks at the 2010 espnW planning Summit, vice president Gentile explains,

There is no one sports media outlet for us "W's" that speaks to our many roles as athletes, fans, organizers, dreamers, doers, leaders, matriarchs. There is no one global commons. More importantly, we want women to fall in love with sports all over again, being fit in every sense. We believe the power of ESPN can help ignite this effort. (espnW, October 4, 2010, ¶7)

Later in her remarks, she claims,

espnW will help bring you together with your heroes, your friends, your children, and your family through the connectivity and social currency of sports. Above all, we will help show girls how to channel their love of sports into the skills and opportunities that will make them strong, successful, confident women. We will motivate women to never rest until they've achieved their personal best.

YOUR personal best. (espnW, October 4, 2010, ¶19)

espnW positions itself as a community where women who feel alienated from ESPN.com can go to read and watch behind-the-scenes access to athletes. Feel-good stories on the site and the history of ESPN as the most popular brand in sport media promote an emotional connection with ESPN the brand. These emotions lead to a relationship with ESPN the brand, which eventually positions ESPN as the premier brand in sports and the premier way to cover sports⁴⁷. ESPN, Inc.'s motivation is to secure an audience who will *consume* sports via ESPN, Inc. products.

ESPN has historically been very protective of its brand and pursues a business opportunity only when it directly benefits their fans (Smith, 2009). In the 1990s, when ESPN was acquiring business and experiencing unprecedented growth, then-president Steve Bornstein quipped, “there were a lot of things we didn’t do. My point to my guys was that the day I see the shoeshine guy outside of Grand Central Station wearing an

⁴⁷ Gobé (2009) defines emotional aspects of a brand as, “*how a brand encourages consumers on the level of the senses and emotions; how a brand comes to life for people and forges a deeper, lasting connection*” (Gobé, 2009, p. xviii; italics in original). Gobé (2009) advances the “ten commandments of emotional branding” to illustrate the difference between traditional branding and emotional branding: 1) from consumers to people: consumers buy; people live; 2) from product to experience: products fulfill needs, experiences fulfill desires; 3) from honesty to trust: honesty is expected, trust is engaging and intimate; 4) from quality to preference: quality for the right price is a given today, preference creates the sale; 5) from notoriety to aspiration: being known does not mean that you are also loved – must convey something that aligns with the customer’s aspirations to be loved; 6) from identity to personality: identity is recognition, personality is about character and charisma; 7) from function to feel: the functionality of a product is about practical or superficial qualities only, sensorial design is about experiences; 8) from ubiquity to presence: ubiquity is seen, emotional presence is felt; 9) from communication to dialogue: communication is telling, dialogue is sharing; 10) from service to relationship: service is selling, relationship is acknowledgment.

ESPN T-shirt is the day I know we've failed” (Smith, 2009, p. 135). Attracting consumers to the ESPN brand is about securing an influential demographic with money to spend (typically young, white, affluent males), and apparently the “shoeshine guy outside of Grand Central Station” does not fit. My analysis suggests that perhaps the chief reason the company decided to create espnW is because it sees an untapped demographic in women as an audience and pursuing them makes “good business sense.”

In the 2010 planning Summit opening remarks, Gentile charges participants to, “Take your energy back to your workplace, to your friends, to your community and get people involved and engaged with our brand. Actually, think of espnW as *YOUR* brand” (espnW, October 4, 2010, ¶23). Executives identify the audience for espnW as “women 18+. It's women who once played organized sports and are passionate, competitive, and consider themselves sports fans” (espnW, October 4, 2010, ¶13) but in other outlets note that this target market is different than that composed of those women who visit ESPN.com for raw statistics and game scores. ESPN research spanning “athletes, coaches, moms, industry insiders, [and] journalists” (espnW, October 4, 2010, ¶11) shows women want more behind-the-scenes access to players (Lynch, April 25, 2011). Discourse surrounding espnW positions this type of sports coverage as decidedly different from traditional male-centered sports coverage, however.

The issue is not that ESPN is reporting more behind-the-scenes access to athletes on espnW. A HERoics documentary on a group of grandmothers and senior citizens in their 70s and 80s from Jerez, Spain, tied to coverage of the Women's World Cup is inspirational. The problem is that this type of access, “storytelling,” is tied to how *women* as a demographic view sports. If we concede that ESPN is “the worldwide leader

in sports,” espnW is different than/not “the worldwide leader in sports” and women are not sports fans in the same way men are fans. Gentile claims,

We are creating a home for women athletes and fans - THE place for sports-minded women to go and stay. Let's face it...men and women communicate in different ways⁴⁸. We are creating digital content that attracts women and holds their attention. (espnW, October 4, 2010, ¶9)

If “men and women communicate in different ways” and sport still operates as a masculine institution, then, women can never be taken seriously as sports fans while the current conception of sport as masculine is privileged. George Bodenheimer, president of ESPN, Inc., echoes these sentiments in his opening remarks at the 2011 espnW planning Summit:

You are here this week because you believe women provide a unique and influential voice in the larger picture of sports and the sports conversation that we live every day. And of course you're right. And we're going to reward your participation in this with a continued growth and a continued vehicle for you in whatever angle you have within the wonderful world of sports and women in sports in particular. (Bodenheimer, September 27, 2011, video file)

This, of course assumes women are not part of “the sports conversation that we [men] live every day” or the “wonderful world of sports” already. Similarly, titling the 2011 espnW planning retreat a “Women + Sports” Summit assumes these are two separate entities.

⁴⁸ Academic research shows that this truism is simplistic and ultimately untrue. Barnett and Rivers (2004) survey eight years of research covering over 1,500 studies from researchers in biology, primatology, psychology, anthropology, sociology, genetics, and managerial behavior that show individuals' situations determine behavior far more than their genders do. Cultural norms supersede biology in determining behavior (Barnett & Rivers, 2004).

Considering humans to be blocs of consumer data is malicious. espnW wants to “involve, mentor, coach, and guide the next generation of our young women” (espnW, October 4, 2010, ¶5) and “help show girls how to channel their love of sports into the skills and opportunities that will make them strong, successful, confident women” (espnW, October 4, 2010, ¶19) *so it can make money from them*. Branding is the connection between what espnW says it wants to do (empower female athletes) and what corporate law dictates it must do (earn profit). Executives want readers to feel good about what they read on the site so that readers establish a relationship with espnW and then buy products to support their company and its sponsors.

In actuality, *sports need no brand*. Participating in sports should be about the physiological, psychological, and social benefits. The sheer elation of scoring a goal, holing a putt, or running further than you ever have before is difficult to replicate in many other circumstances. Individuals acquire skills applicable to all aspects of life through sports and should have the opportunity to engage in physical activity as a way to achieve physical, mental, psychological, and emotional goals without having to “obey your thirst” (Gatorade slogan), “just do it” (Nike slogan), “reveal the goddess in you” (Venus razor slogan), or by using products that are “strong enough for a man but made for a woman” (Secret deodorant slogan). Let sport be about physical activity, not about a brand.

ESPN, Inc. is no stranger to a dichotomous perspective of sex. The history of discrimination tied to ESPN, Inc. in the 1990s and coverage of women’s sports on *SportsCenter* undergirds the premise of espnW.

ESPN's history of discrimination against women

ESPN, Inc. has a history of discrimination against women. In the early years of the company, the number of women employees with ranks above production assistant could be counted on one hand (Miller & Shales, 2011). Women employees also endured sexual harassment ranging from propositions and groping in the newsroom to being followed home by male staffers interested in sexual relations (Miller & Shales, 2011). Although public reports of these issues have waned, the company is still associated with incidents like ESPN baseball analyst Steve Phillips being suspended and later fired for having an affair with production assistant Brooke Hundley in 2009 (Mangan, February 24, 2010). ESPN's "Pardon the Interruption" host Tony Kornheiser was suspended for two weeks because of derogatory retorts about *SportsCenter* Hannah Storm's outfit in early 2010 (Mangan, February 24, 2010). ESPN veteran broadcaster Ron Franklin was fired in early 2011 for calling sideline reporter Jeannine Edwards "sweet baby" and later an expletive after she tried to defend herself (Farhi, January 5, 2011). Even more recently, a contact form on the ESPN website included a category on the drop-down menu called "commentators – dislike female commentators" (Ryan, February 7, 2012) (see Appendix L for screenshot of menu). Although ESPN, Inc. executives have treated recent incidents more seriously than they used to by, for example, firing the culprits in the midst of such a climate of sexual harassment, creating a website dedicated to anything related to women seems like an obvious attempt at distraction, or, perhaps more generously, an act of contrition.

In his speech at the 2011 espnW "Women + Sports" Summit, George Bodenheimer remarks,

espnW just represents the latest step in ESPN's more than 30-year commitment to women's sports. Women in sports, on-air personalities, behind the camera, in the executive suites. You name it; we have women [trails off]. Our company would not be such a success without the wonderful women that we have employed at our company. We're going to continue to adopt and embrace all the diversity that Dr. Lapchick talked about this morning, whether it's women, gender, racial. ESPN is a diverse company and it will continue to be that and benefit businesses like espnW going forward. (Bodenheimer, September 27, 2011, video file)

The opening headline on the 2010 espnW planning summit retreat webpage reads, "There are precious few places that celebrate women's achievements in sports." Ironically, ESPN has had an atrocious 30-year commitment to women's sports and is definitely not one of the "precious few places that celebrate women's achievements in sports." ESPN's *SportsCenter* covered women's sports for 2.2% of its total air time in 1999, 2.1% of its total air time in 2004, and 1.4% of its total air time in 2009 (Messner & Cooky, 2010). *ESPN The Magazine* featured only five female athletes on 168 covers from 2004-2009, and all of these covers portray athletes in (skimpy) street clothes rather than athletic gear (LaVoi, November 19, 2010) (see Appendix M for cover photographs). A more recent cover from November 2010 features Lindsey Vonn, record-holder for most World Cup victories by a U.S. skier ("Lindsey Vonn," n.d.), first American skier to win three discipline titles in a single season ("Lindsey Vonn," n.d.), and first American woman to win a gold medal in the Downhill at the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games ("Lindsey Vonn," n.d.), in a Sharon Stone *Basic Instinct* look-alike pose (see Appendix N for cover

photo). espnW executives' purpose for espnW and statistics on how the company covers women's sports do not add up⁴⁹.

Gentile expects the growth of espnW to lead to more coverage of women's sports on ESPN stations⁵⁰ (Thomas, October 15, 2010), though only time will tell if this is true. Earlier this year, the NCAA women's basketball page on ESPN.com was "rebranded" to espnW.com to "drive its mission of establishing espnW as the premier brand for coverage of women's sports" (Chong-Adler, February 11, 2012, ¶6) leading up to the March Madness tournament (Chong-Adler, February 11, 2012). espnW executives claim,

we're giving fans, male and female, more of a good thing. We're doubling our coverage so every region will be covered from the start, and we're striving to give fans more of a behind-the-scenes look at the athletes they enjoy watching on the court...bottom line, espnW wants to elevate athletes beyond the big stage of the tournament. They deserve the same coverage and platform as their male counterparts, and the NCAA tournament is just the beginning. (Chong-Adler, February 11, 2012, ¶9)

Instead of elevating coverage and matching a platform for women's basketball to men's basketball on ESPN.com, executives moved both to espnW.com. Instead of addressing the issue of why women's basketball does not receive the same coverage as men's

⁴⁹ The general climate of sports reporting may affect ESPN's perspective. In 2008, Lapchick (June 26, 2008) analyzed leadership at more than 378 Associated Press websites and newspapers and found 94% of sports editors were male, 90% of assistant sports editors were male, 93% of columnists were male, 91% of reporters were male, and 84% of copy editors/designers were male. Women in league executive positions are also not on par with men, with women holding 18%, 43%, 49%, 27%, and 48% of professional staff positions in MLB, the NBA, the WNBA, the NFL, and MLS, respectively (Lapchick, 2009).

⁵⁰ Perhaps ESPN is changing its tune a bit. On September 28, 2010, the 9:00 a.m. first edition and noon second edition of *SportsCenter* were each anchored by two women (Hannah Storm and Linda Cohn; Chris McKendry and Sage Steel), a first in the company's history (Miller & Shales, 2011). Additionally, television coverage of the women's NCAA March Madness tournament is comparable to coverage of the men's NCAA March Madness tournament (LaVoi, March 25, 2012).

basketball on ESPN.com, they transfer coverage to a site *affiliated with* ESPN.com, not the *real* ESPN.com. Providing extensive coverage on women's basketball leading up to the most important tournament of the year is admirable. However, relegating it to a new site that cannot attract the number of viewers ESPN does (specific numbers are not available) sends the message that women's basketball is not as important as men's basketball, which is covered on ESPN.com, "the worldwide leader in sports."

Profit ≠ a rich media environment

Bob Costas, sports reporter for NBC television, questions the relationship between broadcasting and sports: "Money has always had an impact on the way sports and television do business, and today with networks paying billions to leagues like the NFL, how much do the dollars determine the way sports is covered?" (Smith, 2009, pp. 208-209). Privileging profit in the form of commercial sports that benefit male athletes deters from a rich media environment rooted in free press principles and democracy (Winseck, 2011) where health and wellness facilitate individuals achieving physical, mental, psychological, and emotional goals. Entities are obligated to make decisions that procure the greatest return on investment for shareholders instead of producing content that advances representations of both male and female athletes *as athletes*. Branding is the link between corporations and consumers.

Brands have the power to govern individuals' conduct. Practical knowledge advanced using espnW as a technology of the self perpetuates the "conduct of conduct" of how readers perceive sport (Bröckling, Krasmann, & Lemke, 2011). ESPN, Inc. is more visible than any other brand in sport media, but its presence implores readers to use it as a "platform for action" (Arvidsson, 2006, p. 248) for interpreting sport discourse as a

commercial enterprise. ESPN is part of a “social factory where the informational environment (of which the brand itself is a part) functions both as a commonly available means of production and a ubiquitous means of surveillance and governance” (Arvidsson, 2006, p. 130). ESPN, Inc. guides readers to interpret sport from a commercial standpoint that benefits its parent company and ESPN, Inc. affiliates. Emotional branding is the tool corporations use to ensure remain an integral part of our daily lives.

ESPN, Inc. controls most commercial media discourse about sport and has the power to shape how viewers perceive athletes. espnW could be using its tremendous influence to promote women’s sports in empowering ways. For example, they could use their social media presence to enact change about issues such as compliance with Title IX using tactics similar to the recent Facebook “sarcasm-bombing” of Kansas Republican governor Sam Brownback and Virginia state senator Ryan McDougle (Curry, March 16, 2012). In the Brownback/McDougle case, users posted intimate details about their reproductive health protesting anti-abortion legislation as a response to the two politicians “caring so much about women and our[women’s] bodies!” (Curry, March 16, 2012, ¶3). The tactic made national news and pulled a group of individuals together who may not have pursued the issue otherwise. Instead, executives at espnW take advantage of the “groundswell of participation and interest in sports” (espnW, October 4, 2010, ¶13) in the first generation to reap the benefits of Title IX to make money for The Walt Disney Corporation and its affiliates.

Conclusion

At the 2010 espnW Sport Summit, espnW vice president Laura Gentile exhorted the group with the following, “There has been a void for too long in creating a true

culture that supports, embraces and celebrates female athletes and fans. Let's work together to fill that void" (espnW, October 4, 2010, ¶24). espnW is part of the The Walt Disney Corporation, and therefore they are obligated to shareholders to make money. When Gentile says she wants Summit attendees to create a culture that supports, embraces, and celebrates female athletes and fans, she is obligated to do so with profit in the forefront of her mind.

In his opening remarks at the 2011 Women + Sports Summit, ESPN, Inc. president George Bodenheimer says, "when our company, and our people, many of whom are here today, get behind something, we tend to make it a success, and we take a lot of pride in that" (Bodenheimer, September 27, 2011). Here is the scary part: if espnW succeeds, a postfeminist, neoliberal conception of female athletes and female fans prevails. A vision of fans and athletes as consumers who benefit The Walt Disney Company and other site sponsors prevails. The vision and practice of female athletes as athletes does not prevail. In chapter six, I revisit the most important implications of my analysis.

Chapter 6

Media outlets convey many cultural ideals about sports. Media organizations produce content that serves as entertainment, inspiration, and cultural capital for viewers (Coakley, 2004). In communicating information about people and events and providing entertainment to consumers, media outlets also affect social, political, and economic discourses (Kraft & Brummett, 2009) and have the potential to promote social integration (promoting shared values) and social change (Gantz, 2011). Media showcasing sport are no exception.

Girls and women deserve accessible, scientifically-based information on health and wellness that helps them achieve physiological, psychological, and emotional goals. Sport is a tool that empowers girls and women (and all individuals) in myriad ways. Benefits are hampered, however, when ESPN, Inc. discourse about female athletes is postfeminist and neoliberal and maintains the context of sport as a masculine institution. In this chapter, I argue discrimination toward female athletes can be minimized by persuading athletes to use new media as a tool to create more empowering portrayals of female athletes rather than relying on traditional media to provide content. I also argue that getting women physically active so they take advantage of the social, psychological, and physiological benefits of participation may translate into more interest in how female athletes like them are presented in the media. Third, I argue that the institution of sport needs to evolve to include and celebrate sport performance not tied to masculinity.

Benefits for Girls Who Participate in Physical Activity and Sport

Studies show that women and girls derive physiological, psychological, and social benefits when they participate in physical activity and sport. Physiological benefits

include improved heart function, aerobic power, and cardiovascular endurance; increased lean muscle; and enhanced sports performance (Nichols, Pettee, & Answorth, 2007; DeBate, Pettee, Zwald, Huberty, & Zhang, 2009). Long-term health benefits of physical activity include preventing or delaying the development of high blood pressure (Zapata, et al, 2008), a decreased chance of developing breast cancer, and lower levels of blood sugar, cholesterol, and triglycerides (Women's Sports Foundation, 1999). Specifically, for girls, high impact activity can also enhance bone mineral density and maintain healthy joints (DeBate, et al, 2009; Nichols et al, 2007; Zapata, Bryant, McDermott & Hefelfinger, 2008). Adolescent female athletes are also less likely to get pregnant than adolescent female non-athletes (5% versus 11%, respectively) (Women's Sports Foundation, 1999).

Curbing obesity is another benefit when women and girls engage in physical activity and sport (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.; Office of the Surgeon General, n.d.; Zapata, et al, 2008). The increase in obesity among Americans in the last 30 years is staggering, especially among children. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (n.d.) report increases in overweight children from 1974 to 2006 in all age groups: 5% to 12% in children ages 2-5, 4% to 17% in children ages 6-11, and 6% to 18% in adolescents aged 12-19. To counter these trends, the Office of the Surgeon General (n.d.) recommends children accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week and that families engage in activities that provide exercise and enjoyment. Physical activity and sport offer an opportunity for girls to fulfill this requirement.

Psychological benefits derived when women and girls participate in physical activity and sport include increased self-esteem and independence. Self-esteem, defined as believing in, feeling good about, and valuing oneself, is influenced by participation in physical activities (DeBate, et al, 2009; Wiese-Bjornstal & LaVoi , 2007; Women's Sports Foundation, 2008). Esteem is heightened if the activity centers on physical competence, not on judging other participants based on how well they score/win; and if coaches and other leaders create high quality, positive experiences (DeBate, et al, 2009; Wiese-Bjornstal & LaVoi, 2007). Further, increased self-esteem gained from physical activity or sport often translates to positive body image (DeBate, et al, 2009). Zimmerman and Reavill (1998) claim the most important keys to increase self-esteem are that children feel good about themselves by progressing, becoming better, succeeding where they had previously failed, and overcoming obstacles. When women and girls compete with this perspective, they often acquire life lessons like sacrifice, commitment to a greater good, and responsibility to others (Zimmerman & Reavill, 1998).

A psychological benefit of specifically girls participating in sport is an opportunity to exercise independence. Zimmerman and Reavill (1998) state that girls can make choices, take risks, be assertive, and be independent within a safe setting while participating. Other means by which girls may choose to assert independence as adolescents such as underage drinking, smoking, or sexual activity, can be risky. Sport offers a positive opportunity to exercise qualities that facilitate maturation to adulthood.

Social benefits for women and girls who participate in sport revolve around teamwork and the opportunity to develop critical skills necessary for success in future professions. Camaraderie, making friends, and cooperating with others are all hallmarks

of physical activity and sport experiences (Duncan, 2007). These experiences require working hard, improving athletic performance, communicating support, and fostering relationships to achieve both individual and team goals (Cooky, 2009; Holt, Black, Tamminen, Fox, & Mandigo, 2008). In a study of a girls recreational league in Los Angeles, Cooky (2009) found girls preferred to partake in sport under a “participation-model,” which focuses on engaging in sports for play, enjoyment, connections with others, and competing as a team instead of focusing solely on winning/losing. Teamwork is an important skill to foster in physical activity and sport because this competence transfers well to other domains of women’s and girls’ lives (Holt, et al, 2008).

In addition to teamwork, physical activity and sport offer opportunities where women and girls can gain critical skills necessary for success in future professions. Playing sports teaches goal setting, strategic thinking, pursuit of excellence in performance, math skills, and leadership skills (Women’s Sports Foundation, 1999). Athletes can also learn to manage conflicts with teammates and opponents during the season (Holt, et al, 2008).

Girls are taking advantage of opportunities to engage in physical activity and sports as evidenced by participation rates at an all-time high. The Tucker Center for Research on Women and Girls in Sport (2007) cites girls ages 6 to 17 make up 11.4 million sports team members in the United States, which equates to 44% of the total sports team member population. An additional 4.75 million girls participate in physical activities not dubbed “organized team competition” (Tucker Center for Research on Women and Girls in Sport, 2007).

Language→Culture→Power

Girls and women cannot fully realize the benefits of participating in sport when discourse about sport relegates them to second place. ESPN, Inc. uses espnW to control language about women's sports and therefore wields power over how individuals perceive women's sports (Coakley, 2009). Discourse influences how individuals in our culture think about, behave towards, and support/do not support women's sports.

Language is a principle activity by which ideology is circulated and reproduced:

“representation through language is therefore central to the processes by which meaning is produced... Meanings also regulate and organize our conduct and practices – they help to set the rules, norms and conventions by which social life is ordered and governed”

(Hall, 1997, p. 1, p. 4). Language choices are strategic in that every utterance represents an epistemological agenda simply by the words chosen to represent a particular idea (Johnstone, 2002). Individuals' thinking can therefore be manipulated by grammar, style, wording, and other aspects of language (even what is *not* talked about) (Johnstone, 2002).

Ideological discourse that is created and distributed by the most powerful entities in our culture such as corporations control how readers think about female athletes and women's sports. These entities invoke power to control most media about female athletes and women's sports. Citizens consult this media to access information about sports. Therefore, ideologies that support the entities' (financial) interests reign supreme as the primary means by which citizens interpret female athletes and women's sports. Prevailing discourse normalizes oppression as the basis for hegemony.

Hegemony ensures that the interests of dominant groups such as corporations, sports media organizations, and sports leagues are protected by manipulating political,

ideological, and social norms to the extent that these norms are viewed as the status quo (Gramsci, 1971; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). Production of ideology is directly related to formation of hegemony because ideology facilitates the cultural forms, meanings, rituals, and representations that make up social norms (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003). Linguistic/discursive power is the way language is used to construct the world according to standards of regulation and domination surrounding what can and cannot be said, who can speak with authority and who cannot, and which social constructions are valid (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003).

Hegemony ensures ESPN, Inc. has a stake in defining sports for the U.S. public. Hegemony is visible in initiatives like the Global Sports Mentoring Program, a new partnership between the State Department and espnW. Earlier this year, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton announced the collaboration, “to celebrate the many benefits that sports and athletics can bring to the lives of women and girls” (ESPN, n.d.b). In such initiatives, government is intimately connected with espnW as an “expert” on women’s sports. ESPN, Inc.’s reach goes beyond the commercial sports landscape to influence what should be uncorrupted institutions that govern citizens’ lives.

Postfeminism and neoliberalism are problematic because they represent only one way to conceptualize sport and produce stilted views of athletes and athletics. U.S. culture, especially sport culture, is most certainly not in a position to plausibly argue that feminism is no longer needed. Statistics show that up to 80% of schools are not in compliance with Title IX (Women’s Sports Foundation, n.d.b). Mainstream media that do cover female athletes rarely focus on their athleticism (Media Education Foundation, 2005). Girls and women deserve access to information that helps them use sports and

physical activity as tools to attain their own personal health and wellness goals. This information should be derived from uncorrupt (read: not corporate-sponsored, like the Gatorade Sport Science Institute, for example) empirical evidence at no cost.

The Future of Sport

Sarah Spain, espnW contributor at the espnW planning retreats, reflects, We're all in this together, all trying to find the best ways to serve female fans, promote and support female athletes and build and grow female sports leagues. And unlike so many times before, when we speak up about pay inequalities or sexist advertising or underserved female athletes, we're not one tiny voice in a room full of doubters, we're one of many voices, all of whom get it -- and want to fix it. (Spain, September 28, 2011)

“Fixing” discrimination toward female athletes and fans from espnW’s perspective supports ESPN, Inc. and its corporate sponsors as its paramount goal because the site operates under the laws of a corporation. I argue that instead of espnW’s “fix,” discrimination toward female athletes should be addressed in other ways like encouraging athletes to use new media to generate more positive content than traditional media, getting more women involved in sport, and changing the institution to be more inclusive and celebratory of sport performance not linked to masculinity.

New media/social media.

New media are “highly accessible publishing techniques [e.g., websites, video games, DVDs] that use internet and web-based technologies; places where people create and collaborate” (LaVoi, 2009, video file). Social media are,

activities, practices, and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media. Conversational media are Web-based applications that make it possible to create and easily transmit content in the form of words, pictures, videos, and audio. (Safko & Brake, 2009, p. 6).

Some of these applications include blogs, forums, message boards, picture-sharing sites, video-sharing sites, user-generated sites, wikis, and podcasts (Weinberg, 2009). New media and social media as interactive technologies have the potential to change the modern landscape of how female athletes are presented because users decide what content is circulated, not media conglomerates interested in making profit.

One way professional athletes use social media is to promote themselves, according to Amy Martin, the founder of a company called Digital Royalty that advises athletes on how to use social media (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010). An article in the *Pittsburgh-Tribune Review* echoes her sentiments, citing Nick Swisher of the New York Yankees as a player who “is not on the Cooperstown track” but who has used social media to gain popularity with fans, earning him the “fan’s choice” spot in the 2010 MLB All-Star game. Another social media exemplar is Shaquille O’Neal, who Martin claims uses social media to keep fans interested and to coordinate all his media outlets (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010). Digital Royalty created a campaign called “random acts of Shaqness” where Shaq tweets his exact location, fans find him, and then he gives the first fans who find him tickets to that night’s game. A company called Active8Media has used similar scavenger hunt tactics with their clients, staging basketball players in strategic places to give out tickets to post-season games (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010).

Shaq promotes other outlets like his TV show *Shaq Vs.* using social media, too. Martin claims that fans who had not been basketball fans before become fans because of Shaq's social media techniques (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010). Female athletes could use similar techniques to shape at least part of their media image.

Access is another reason athletes cite for using social media. Angela Ruggiero (2009), three-time Olympic medal winner in ice hockey, claims social media offers her the opportunity to connect with fans like families and young girls not targeted by traditional sports media, who typically try to attract males ages 18-34. She connects with these girls after appearances or when she meets them on the street and says she appreciates the opportunity to offer her own conception of what female athletes are instead of what mainstream media present (Ruggiero, 2009). Ruggiero also mentions that she is originally from California, where ice hockey is not very popular, so media coverage of the sport is minimal at best. Social media offer her the opportunity to promote her non-traditional sport in positive ways, bypassing reliance on mainstream media.

Connecting with fans is another positive way to use social media cited by athletes. Natalie Coughlin, Olympic swimmer, explains that she enjoys talking to fans during downtime at meets in between warm-ups, drug testing, and warm-downs (PBS, 2009). Coughlin adds that there is definitely a balance for how much an athlete should share but that athletes' discretion will determine what is appropriate (she learned quickly not to tweet where she would be because one time a fan showed up at a coffee shop and wanted to hang out with her) (PBS, 2009). Donny Robinson, professional BMX biker, also

appreciates being able to connect with fans on a level that athletes have not been able to before (PBS, 2009).

Social media is different than marketing in this context because social media requires two-way communication; athletes are talking *with* fans instead of *to* them (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010). From a fan perspective, social media has been shown to be most effective for humanizing athletes, providing unprecedented access fans do not receive with traditional media (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2010). Fans note it is important that athletes are authentic, both in what they post about and the nature of their posts, however, and that a public relations person should not write for the athletes (PBS, 2009). If female athletes represent themselves in ways that inspire female athletes to use their bodies for what they can do rather than for how they look, discourse can sidestep the images media conglomerates whose primary goal of making money present.

Not all new media/social media have positive potential for female athletes, however. Hardin (2009) presents a bleak picture of the potential for the sports blogosphere to change the landscape of how women are portrayed in media. She queried over 200 sports bloggers and found trends from traditional media penetrating the blogosphere. Less than 10% of the sports bloggers were women, and the majority of the bloggers polled believed that women's sports would never compete on a level playing field with men's sports and that Title IX was detrimental to men's sports. The attitudes of younger journalists were even *more* sexist, which does not provide much hope for this medium to improve gender portrayals in the future. One of the reasons it is so difficult to induce systematic change using blogs is because traditional media co-opt the best bloggers to work for sites like Yahoo or ESPN (Hardin, 2009).

Hardin (2009) argues that social media are merely the tools for changing the perception of women's sports and that two things need to change before these technologies can be used to truly improve the media landscape: 1) more women need to be involved in the conversation about sports, and 2) we need to find common agendas around which more women can coalesce. Womentalksports is an aggregator for women's sports blogs that is a beacon of hope for getting more women involved. The site houses over 100 contributors (adding more all the time) and clocked over 29,000 unique visitors per month during 2009 (Billings, 2011). Covering sports at the high school level (or even younger) was also something Hardin (2009) believes could get more women involved, though she cautioned that this would require much unpaid volunteer time because traditional media outlets likely do not see the value in covering these athletes.

Getting more women involved.

Confidence gained from participating in sport is addictive. The sheer joy of booming a drive down the fairway, charging past an opponent to score a lay-up, or crashing the net to score a goal instills confidence like few other activities can. If girls and women are given the opportunity to participate in sports and feel this elation, perhaps they will also rise up and demand that the media they use to enhance their skills is about health and wellness and achieving physiological, psychological, and emotional goals; not about profit for corporations.

Positive change.

Girls and women cannot take full advantage of benefits of participating in sports when the institution of sport privileges masculinity. Media contribute to the image of sport as masculine by under-representing female athletes as compared to total

participation and by focusing on anything but athleticism in accounts of female athletes (Media Education Foundation, 2005). ESPN, Inc. uses language in articles on espnW to create female athletes and fans as postfeminist and neoliberal. Language contributes to ideologies that reflect who has the most power and benefits from participating in sport.

When the institution of sport is revolutionized to be more inclusive and more celebratory of sport performance not linked to masculinity, positive portrayals of female athletes will follow. This can be difficult, however, because change needs to happen while working within the institution of sport yet simultaneously challenging most of its ideologies (Hardin, 2009). Powerful players such as corporations and professional leagues have a stake in maintaining sport as a masculine institution and protect ingrained, outdated gender roles. Sport influences all aspects of our culture and has the power to shape institutions all of us encounter every day, so redefining sport to be more inclusive of performances not linked to masculinity is imperative.

Future Research

One of the biggest challenges of this dissertation was limiting the scope of my analysis to a feasible yet representative sample of espnW. In the future, I plan on delving more into the qualitative themes I did not present in this paper, especially as they connect to ideas of discourse and power for mainstream media organizations. I am also interested in the espnW website as a whole, beyond photographs accompanying feature articles and feature articles. Third, connections to the ESPN RISE (now ESPNHS) initiative, ESPN's content dedicated to high school athletes, as a "feeder" for espnW would be useful to analyze, especially because ESPN produces two versions: ESPNHS (boys' high school

sports news, rankings, recruiting information, and training tips) and ESPNHS GIRL (a blog within the ESPNHS site).

I would also like to examine initiatives within espnW such as ESPN, Inc.'s microsite called "The Power of IX" to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Title IX for three months in 2012 on espnW. The microsite features reflections from female athletes on how the law has changed their lives, profiles of nine rising stars who represent the next generation of female athletes, opportunities to post a photo to join the "largest mosaic of female athletes ever," reflections from columnists like Julie Foudy, descriptions of who ESPN, Inc. views as the top 40 athletes of all time, and a video of President Obama reflecting on Title IX. Gentile claims, "Our commitment to female fans AND elevating women's sports makes espnW.com the natural digital hub for the company's 40th anniversary of Title IX effort" (Lynch, March 26, 2012, ¶2). Carol Stiff, vice president of Programming and Acquisitions for ESPN, Inc., echoes,

It is so apropos that ESPN celebrate the Title IX 40th anniversary. We celebrated the 30th, the 35th, and now 40 years later we're here, standing strong. It's so important that we celebrate this anniversary because it means more than just what we're doing in college athletics and the professional world of women's sports. I'm so proud of ESPN, because we're recognizing that there's a desire, there's a need, there's an appetite for women's sports and our coverage of women's sports. And the fact that we've acknowledged that, we've launched a new business called espnW to bring a new demographic to our networks is just fantastic news. [Stiff (video file) as quoted in Lynch, March 13, 2012]

As with espnW, I am skeptical that ESPN's *microsite* is truly "celebrating" female athleticism (why "micro?" - why not put this content on the main page?) or that the ways they "celebrate" are beneficial for changing the institution of sport to be more inclusive of all genders (what does a mosaic do to change attitudes/beliefs/behaviors?). If President Obama sanctioned his view to be part of the site, to what degree are ESPN, Inc. and the office of the President intertwined? I am also curious how ESPN, Inc.'s celebration differs from the celebration organized by an entity like the Tucker Center for Research on Women and Girls in Sport. Ultimately, my analysis of six months of espnW photographs and articles has generated more questions than answers and more pessimism than optimism about digital media's potential for improving construction of women's sports.

Concluding Thoughts

espnW vice president Laura Gentile and I agree on the state of women's sports in the United States. In her opening remarks at the 2010 planning Summit, she says,

It is truly a remarkable time to be both a female athlete and a part of women's athletics. There has never been more participation in sports for both our young girls and women--across the board. There have never been so many media assets devoted to sports. And there has never been this little thing called "the internet" to connect us all in real time, across the country, across the globe, to exchange stories, to exchange information, to exchange inspiration. And if we are to continue the momentum women's sports has gained, there has never been a more important time for us to involve, mentor, coach, and guide the next generation of our young women. (espnW, October 4, 2010, ¶5-6)

We differ on how we should “involve, mentor, coach, and guide the next generation of young women,” however. espnW is a tool for women and girls that relies on postfeminist and neoliberal ideology to earn profit for its parent corporation – The Walt Disney Company – and other site sponsors. I believe girls and women deserve open access, scientifically-based information on health and wellness that helps them achieve physiological, psychological, and emotional goals. In the words of Gentile, “There has been a void for too long in creating a true culture that supports, embraces and celebrates female athletes and fans. Let's work together to fill that void” (espnW, October 4, 2010, ¶27) by rejecting a postfeminist, neoliberal conception of female athletes and a definition of sports fandom as gendered in favor of creating alternative discourse about female athletes that celebrates their athleticism.

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APPENDIX A

Note: First, I only report the results that directly impact my research questions, so numbers may be off (e.g., for “game situation” variable for articles, I report total articles that focus on a game situation/do not focus on a game situation and the male athlete/female athlete breakdown but do not report ambiguous sex categories “both” and “N/A (article is not about an athlete)” and ambiguous game/non-game reporting categories “articles on training” and “N/A (e.g., article about equipment),” and “not sure.” Second, when I report categories on “female athletes” and “male athletes” separated from “total athletes,” these numbers indicate the number/percentage of the total athletes for that category who are female/male, not the number/percent of the total sample of female/male athletes. For example, for femininity/masculinity, 50/437 athletes exhibit femininity/masculinity. Of these 50, 39 (78.0%) are female athletes and 6 (12%) are male athletes. I do not report these statistics as a percent of the total female/male athletes, which, in this case, would be 39/311 (12.5%) and 6/63 (9.5%), respectively.

Results of Quantitative/Qualitative Analysis

In this appendix, I report results from quantitative and qualitative analysis of feature photographs and feature articles on espnW for the first six months (April 26, 2011 – October 26, 2011) after the site existed as a full-fledged website (as opposed to the initial espnW blog). First, I address what type of athlete(s) are featured in photographs accompanying feature articles on espnW based on frequency statistics related to sex of athlete(s), sport depicted, level of participation, and team/individual sports. In this section, I also report statistics on number of athletes in uniform, on the playing surface, and in action. Second, I turn to feature articles on espnW and report the same frequency statistics as photographs but add statistics on how contributors write about athletes using statistics related to game/non-game reporting, reference to athleticism, and references to psychological/emotional strengths/weaknesses. I also report statistics related to athletes’ non-sporting lives (e.g., physical appearance, family roles, personal relationships) referenced in espnW feature articles. Third, I outline main themes and sub-themes from qualitative analysis of feature articles on espnW. Quantitative results are presented in list-form and qualitative results are in prose form.

Results of Quantitative Analysis of Photographs

The quantitative coding schema I used for this analysis is derived from past research on media representations of athletes. The schema I used to code photographs on espnW is adapted from analyses of photographs on covers of collegiate media guides by Kane and Buysse (2005) and Buysse and Embser-Herbert (2004). I used SPSS version 17.0 to calculate frequency and cross-tabulation statistics as well as to compute Pearson Chi-square analyses for appropriate variables in the study.

General statistics.

Total photographs coded: 437
April/May: 99
June: 55
July: 61
August: 87

September: 62

October: 73

Photographs associated with lead story articles: 118/437 (27.0%)

Photographs associated with “side articles,” or all articles besides lead articles: 319/437 (73.0%)

Focus of photographs is athlete(s) only: 343/437 (78.5%)

Focus of photograph is head coach: 4/437 (0.9%)

Focus of photograph is a combination of athlete(s) and a head coach: 16/437 (3.7%)

“Other” [photographs of other individuals or objects (e.g., agents, league executives, game balls, trophies) besides athletes, teams, or coaches]: 74/437 (16.9%)

Sex of athlete.

	Female athletes	Male athletes	Both female and male athletes
Total photographs	311/437 (71.2)	63/437 (14.4)	13/437 (3.0)
Lead story photographs	84/118 (71.2)	20/118 (16.9)	2/118 (1.7)
Side story photographs	227/319 (71.2)	43/319 (13.5)	11/319 (3.4)
Photographs with athlete(s) only	280/343 (81.6)	51/343 (14.9)	N/A
Photographs with only head coach	3/4 (75.0)	1/4 (25.0)	N/A
Photographs with combination of athlete(s) and head coach	12/16 (75.0)	4/16 (25.0)	N/A

Note: Actual count of photographs appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Athletes not featured in photographs: 50/437 (11.4%) (mostly league executives or family members of athletes)

Frequency of sports.

Sport	Frequency
Basketball	89 (20.4)
Soccer	65 (14.9)
Tennis	44 (10.1)
Golf	39 (8.9)

Baseball	28 (6.4)
Football	25 (5.7)
Ironman/triathlon/Ultraman/marathon/ wind surfing/rock climbing/Orienteering/adventure racing	22 (5.0)
Multiple sports	15 (3.4)
Gymnastics	12 (2.7)
Softball	11 (2.5)
Not sure	11 (2.5)
Bicycling	11 (2.5)
Swimming/diving	10 (2.3)
Racecar driving - IndyCar circuit	9 (2.1)
Track and field	7 (1.6)
Hockey	6 (1.4)
Ice skating	5 (1.1)
Volleyball	4 (0.9)
Extreme sports (e.g., snowboarding, street skating)	4 (0.9)
Horse racing	3 (0.7)
Lacrosse	3 (0.7)
Skiing	2 (0.5)
Boxing	1 (0.2)
Mixed martial arts	1 (0.2)
Poker	1 (0.2)
Rugby	1 (0.2)
Cheerleading	1 (0.2)
Polo	1 (0.2)
Roller derby	1 (0.2)
Yoga	1 (0.2)
Rowing	1 (0.2)
Competitive eating	1 (0.2)
Fencing	1 (0.2)
Sumo wrestling	1 (0.2)
<hr/> Total	<hr/> 437

Note: Actual count of photographs appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Female and male athletes by top five most popular sports presented in feature photographs on espnW

Sport	Female athlete(s)	Male athlete(s)	Both female and male athlete(s)	N/A – photo not of athlete	Total
Basketball	71 (79.8)	10 (11.2)	0 (0.0)	8 (9.0)	89
Soccer	54 (83.1)	1 (1.5)	0 (0.0)	10 (15.4)	65
Tennis	36 (81.9)	5 (11.4)	3 (6.8)	0 (0.0)	44
Golf	34 (87.2)	5 (12.8)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	39
Baseball	3 (10.7)	17 (60.7)	0 (0.0)	8 (28.6)	28

Note: Actual count of photographs appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Levels of sport.

Level of sport	Frequency
Recreational	51/437 (11.7)
High school	2/437 (0.5)
College	41/437 (9.4)
Professional	321/437 (73.5)
Olympics	20/437 (4.6)
Paralympics	2/437 (0.5)
Not sure	2/437 (0.5)

Note: Actual count of photographs appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Female and male athletes by level of sport presented in feature photographs on espnW

Level of sport	Female athlete(s)	Male athlete(s)	Both female and male athlete(s)	N/A – photo not of athlete	Total
Recreational	32 (62.7)	2 (3.9)	6 (11.8)	11 (21.6)	51
High school	0 (0.0)	2 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2
College	33 (80.5)	4 (9.8)	1 (2.4)	3 (7.3)	41
Professional	228 (71.0)	54 (16.8)	4 (1.2)	35 (10.9)	321
Olympics	16 (80.0)	1 (5.0)	2 (10.0)	1 (5.0)	20
Not sure	2 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2

Note: Actual count of number of photograph appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Pearson chi-square test shows significant differences ($\chi^2(1) = 16.21$, $p = .003$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex categories of “both” and “N/A (photograph not of athlete)” and ambiguous level of sport category “not sure.” Statistical significance is most reflected in the recreational level of sport category, where recreational sports comprise 10.4% of all photographs featuring only female athletes and only 3.2% of all photographs featuring only male athletes.

Team versus individual sports.

	Total athletes	Female athletes	Male athletes
Team sports	241/437 (55.1)	159/241 (70.0)	46/241 (19.1)
Individual sports	184/437 (42.1)	151/184 (82.0)	17/184 (9.2)
Both team and individual sports	1/437 (0.2)	N/A	N/A
Does not explicitly feature a sport	11/437 (2.5)	N/A	N/A

Pearson chi-square test shows significant differences ($\chi^2(1) = 9.98$, $p = .002$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex categories “both” and “N/A (photograph not of athlete)” and ambiguous team versus individual sports categories “both team and individual sports,” and “unsure.” Statistical significance is reflected in team sports representing 73.0% of all photographs featuring only male athletes and 51.3% of all photographs featuring only female athletes. Individual sports represent 27.0% of all photographs with only male athletes and 48.7% of all photographs with only female athletes.

Uniform presence.

	Total athletes	Female athletes	Male athletes
In uniform	337/437 (77.1)	274/337 (81.3)	53/337 (15.7)
Not in uniform	41/437 (9.4)	30/41 (73.2)	8/41 (19.5)
Unsure if in uniform	3/437 (0.7)	N/A	N/A
Photograph not of athlete	56/437 (12.8)	N/A	N/A

Pearson chi-square test does not show significant differences ($\chi^2(1) = .574$, $p = .45$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex categories of “both” and “N/A (photograph not of athlete)” and ambiguous

uniform presence categories “unsure if athlete is wearing a game uniform (including warm-ups)” and “N/A - photo is not of an athlete.”

Pose presentation.

Pose presentation is measured by whether athletes in photographs are exhibiting an active skill they might exhibit during their sport/game/practice (e.g., shooting, passing, running) or a passive skill not required to actually play a sport/game/practice (e.g., talking to a teammate during a timeout, standing for a team photograph) .

	Total athletes	Female athletes	Male athletes
In action	206/437 (47.1)	173/206 (84.0)	28/206 (13.6)
Not in action	175/437 (40.0)	134/175 (76.6)	33/175 (18.9)
Photograph not of athlete	56/437 (12.8)	N/A	N/A

Note: Actual count of photographs appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Five (2.4%) active pose presentation photographs feature both female and male athletes. Eight (4.6%) passive pose presentation photographs show both female and male athletes.

Pearson chi-square test does not show significant differences ($\chi^2(1) = 2.24$, $p = .134$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex categories “both” and “N/A (photograph not of athlete)” and ambiguous pose presentation categories “unsure” and “N/A - photo is not of an athlete.”

Court location.

Court location was coded for whether athletes were on or off the court/field/pitch where the game/match/tournament they play is held.

	Total athletes	Female athletes	Male athletes
On the court	322/437 (73.7)	263/322 (81.7)	49/322 (15.2)
Off the court	50/437 (11.4)	37/50 (74.0)	9/50 (18.0)
Unsure of athlete location	9/437 (2.1)	N/A	N/A

Photograph not of athlete	56/437 (12.8)	N/A	N/A
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Note: Actual count of photographs appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Both male and female athletes are pictured together on the court 9 of 321 (2.8%) times. Both female and male athletes are pictured together off the court 4 of 50 (8.0%) times.

Pearson chi-square test does not show significant differences ($\chi^2(1) = .440$, $p = .507$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex categories “both” and “N/A (photograph not of athlete)” and ambiguous court location categories “unsure of athlete’s location” and “N/A (e.g., cartoon of athlete).”

Thematic presentation: True athleticism.

In this analysis, true athleticism is measured according to definitions advanced by Buysse and Kane (2005) in their analysis of intercollegiate media guides. For a photograph to exhibit true athleticism, athletes must be in uniform, engaged in their sports, and depicted on the actual court/field/pitch.

	Total athletes	Female athletes	Male athletes
Exhibits true athleticism	202/437 (46.2)	170/202 (84.1)	27/202 (13.4)
Does not exhibit true athleticism	178/437 (40.7)	136/178 (76.4)	34/178 (19.1)
Unsure if athlete exhibits true athleticism	1/437 (0.2)		
Photograph not of athlete	56/437 (12.8)		

Note: Actual count of photographs appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Both female and male athletes pictured together make up five of the two-hundred-two (2.5%) true athleticism photographs and eight of the two-hundred-two (4.0%) photographs where true athleticism is not exhibited.

Pearson chi-square test does not show significant differences ($\chi^2(1) = 2.61$, $p = .106$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex categories “both” and “N/A (photograph not of athlete)” and ambiguous true athleticism categories “unsure” and “N/A.”

Thematic presentation: Posed athleticism.

Posed athleticism is also a category derived from Kane and Buysse's (2005) analysis of collegiate media guides. For a photograph to show posed athleticism, there must be some indication that the individual(s) featured are athletes (e.g., uniform, athletic equipment) but they are presented in a non-game situation (e.g., posing for a team photo).

	Total athletes	Female athletes	Male athletes
Exhibits posed athleticism	133/437 (30.4)	104/133 (78.2)	25/133 (18.8)
Does not exhibit posed athleticism	247/437 (56.5)	202/247 (81.8)	36/247 (14.6)
Unsure if athlete exhibits posed athleticism	1/437 (0.2)	N/A	N/A
Photograph not of athlete	56/437 (12.8)	N/A	N/A

Note: Actual count of photographs appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Pearson chi-square test does not show significant differences ($\chi^2(1) = 1.09$, $p = .296$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex categories "both" and "N/A (photograph not of athlete)" and ambiguous posed athleticism categories "unsure" and "N/A."

Femininity/masculinity.

In this analysis, femininity/masculinity is present when some component of the photograph identified with traditional "feminine" or "masculine" roles and/or appearances and/or fashion (e.g., for femininity, hair let down, visible make-up; for masculinity, athlete wearing a tuxedo or suit).

	Total athletes	Female athletes	Male athletes
Exhibits fem./masc.	50/437 (11.4)	39/50 (78.0)	6/50 (12.0)
Does not exhibit fem./masc.	331/437 (75.7)	268/331 (81.0)	55/331 (16.6)
Photograph not of athlete	56/437 (12.8)	N/A	N/A

Note: Actual count of photographs appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Of the 50 photographs where athletes exhibit femininity/masculinity, 5 (10.0%) show female and male athletes together. Of the 331 photographs

where athletes do not exhibit femininity/masculinity, 8 depict female and male athletes together.

Pearson chi-square test does not show significant differences ($\chi^2(1) = .390$, $p = .532$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex categories “both” and “N/A (photograph not of athlete)” and ambiguous femininity/masculinity categories “unsure” and “N/A.”

Sexual suggestiveness.

In this analysis, sexual suggestiveness is measured by athletes exhibiting any sexually “provocative” pose, theme, and/or fashion (e.g., a “come hither” facial expression).

	Total athletes	Female athletes	Male athletes
Exhibits sexual suggestiveness	3/437 (0.7)	3/3 (100.0)	0/3 (0.0)
Does not exhibit sexual suggestiveness	378/437 (86.5)	304/378 (80.4)	61/378 (16.1)
Photograph not of athlete	56/437 (12.8)	N/A	N/A

Note: Actual count of photographs appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Of the 378 photographs where athletes are not shown in a sexually suggestive way, 13 (3.4%) are photographs of both female and male athletes together.

Pearson chi-square test does not show significant differences ($\chi^2(1) = .601$, $p = .438$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex categories “both” and “N/A (photograph not of athlete)” and ambiguous sexual suggestiveness categories “unsure” and “N/A.”

Results of Quantitative Analysis of Feature Articles

The schema I used to code articles on espnW is derived from, Mondello, and Vincent’s (2009) analysis of Internet coverage of the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s March Madness basketball tournament. These authors base their categories on a comprehensive analysis of what has been used in previous content analyses of sport. I used SPSS version 17.0 to calculate frequency and cross-tabulation statistics as well as to compute Pearson Chi-square analyses for most variables in the study.

General statistics

Total articles coded: 447

April/May: 99

June: 56

July: 64
August: 87
September: 69
October: 73

Lead story articles: 114/447 (25.5%)

“Side articles,” or all articles besides lead articles: 333/447 (74.5%)

Focus of article is athlete(s) only: 354/447 (79.2%)

Focus of article is head coach: 4/447 (0.9%)

Focus of article is a combination of athlete(s) and a head coach: 26/447 (5.8%)

“Other” [articles about other individuals (e.g., agents, league executives) besides athletes or coaches]: 63/447 (14.1)

Sex of athlete.

	Solely female athletes	Solely male athletes	Both female and male athletes
Total articles	305/447 (68.2)	56/447 (12.5)	42/447 (9.4)
Lead story articles	81/114 (71.1)	20/114 (17.5)	6/114 (5.3)
Side story articles	224/333 (67.3)	36/333 (10.8)	36/333 (10.8)
Articles about athlete(s) only	276/354 (78.0)	42/354 (11.9)	
Articles about only head coach	3/4 (75.0)	0/4 (0.0)	1/4 (25.0)
Photographs with combination of athlete(s) and head coach	21/26 (80.8)	2/26 (7.7)	2/26 (7.7)

Note: Actual count of articles appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Athletes are not featured in 44 of 447 (9.8%) articles. Individuals in this category are mostly league executives and family members of athletes.

Frequency of sports.

Sport	Frequency
Basketball	85 (19.0)

Soccer	65 (14.5)
Tennis	44 (9.8)
Multiple sports (e.g., article on food or equipment)	40 (8.9)
Golf	39 (8.7)
Ironman/triathlon/Ultra man/marathon/etc.	28 (6.3)
Baseball	27 (6.0)
Football	23 (5.1)
Softball	13 (2.9)
Gymnastics	12 (2.7)
Bicycling	10 (2.2)
Racecar driving - IndyCar circuit	8 (1.8)
Hockey	7 (1.6)
Ice skating	6 (1.3)
Swimming/diving recreational exercise (e.g., running on treadmill)	5 (1.1)
Horse racing	3 (0.7)
Lacrosse	3 (0.7)
Track and field	3 (0.7)
Volleyball	3 (0.7)
Racecar driving - NASCAR Cup	2 (0.4)
Extreme sports	2 (0.4)
Boxing	1 (0.2)
Mixed martial arts	1 (0.2)
Poker	1 (0.2)
Rugby	1 (0.2)
Skiing	1 (0.2)
Snowboarding	1 (0.2)
Cheerleading	1 (0.2)

Polo	1 (0.2)
Roller derby	1 (0.2)
Yoga	1 (0.2)
Rowing	1 (0.2)
Competitive eating	1 (0.2)
Fencing	1 (0.2)
Sumo wrestling	1 (0.2)
Total	447 (100.0)

Note: Actual count of articles appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Female and male athletes by top five most popular sports presented in feature articles on espnW

Sport	Female athlete(s)	Male athlete(s)	Both female and male athlete(s)	N/A – photo not of athlete	Total
Basketball	66 (77.6)	9 (10.6)	5 (5.9)	5 (5.9)	85 (100.0)
Soccer	58 (89.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	7 (10.8)	65 (100.0)
Tennis	37 (84.1)	2 (4.5)	5 (11.4)	0 (0.0)	44 (100.0)
Multiple sports	8 (20.0)	3 (7.5)	14 (35.0)	15 (37.5)	40 (100.0)
Golf	34 (87.2)	4 (10.3)	1 (2.6)	0 (0.0)	39 (100.0)

Note: Actual count of number of articles appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Levels of sport.

Level of sport	Frequency
Recreational	53/447 (11.9)
High school	2/447 (0.4)
College	37/447 (8.3)
Professional	334/447 (74.7)
Olympics	19/447 (4.3)
Paralympics	2/447 (0.4)
Not sure	0/447 (0.0)

Note: Actual count of articles appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Female and male athletes by level of sport presented in feature articles on espnW

Level of sport	Female athlete(s)	Male athlete(s)	Both female and male athlete(s)	N/A – photo not of athlete	Total
Recreational	22 (41.5)	0 (0.0)	15 (28.3)	16 (30.2)	53
High school	0 (0.0)	2 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2
College	28 (75.7)	4 (10.8)	2 (5.4)	3 (8.1)	37
Professional	237 (71.0)	50 (15.0)	23 (6.9)	24 (7.2)	334
Olympics	16 (84.2)	0 (0.0)	2 (10.5)	1 (5.3)	19
Paralympics	2 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2
Not sure	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0

Note: Actual count of number of articles featuring level of sport appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Pearson chi-square test shows significant differences ($\chi^2(1)=19.257$, $p=.002$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex categories “both” and “N/A (article is not about an athlete)” and ambiguous level of sport category “not sure.” Similar to photographic representation, the statistically significant difference was in articles about recreational athletes, where only female athletes are featured as 7.2% of all articles on only female athletes and male athletes are featured in 0.0% of all articles on only male athletes.

Team versus individual sports.

	Total athletes	Female athletes	Male athletes
Team sports	239/447 (53.5)	157/239 (65.7)	47/239 (19.7)
Individual sports	179/447 (40.0)	143/179 (79.9)	8/179 (4.5)
Both team and individual sports	23/447 (5.1)	N/A	N/A
Does not explicitly feature a sport	6/447 (1.3)	N/A	N/A

Note: Actual count of articles appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Pearson chi-square test shows significant differences ($\chi^2(1)=20.860$, $p=.000$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex

categories “both” and “N/A (article is not about an athlete)” and the ambiguous team versus individual sport categories “both individual and team sports” and “not sure.” Statistical significance is most prevalent in the individual sport category, where 47.7% of all articles about only female athletes are also about individual sports compared to only 14.5% of all articles about only male athletes also about individual sports. Articles about team sports comprise 52.3% of all articles about only female athletes and 85.5% of articles about only male athletes.

Game/non-game reporting

I measure game/non-game reporting quantitatively by coding whether the overarching theme of an article reports on events that occurred during a game or in if the topic is a non-game situation (coaching, contract, suspensions, etc.). I also include a third category of articles related to training (fitness, injuries, diet for training) to differentiate game situations from training tips.

	Total athletes	Female athletes	Male athletes
Game events	88/447 (19.7)	72/88 (81.8)	11/88 (12.5)
Non-game events	294/447 (65.8)	227/294 (77.2)	38/294 (12.9)
Training	24/447 (5.4)	4/24 (16.7)	0/24 (0.0)

Note: Actual count of articles appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Pearson chi-square test does not show significant differences ($\chi^2(1)=.062$, $p=.804$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex categories “both” and “N/A (article is not about an athlete)” and ambiguous game/non-game reporting categories “articles on training” and “N/A (e.g., article about equipment),” and “not sure.”

Athletic prowess/strength

Athletic prowess/strength refers to general athletic ability or skill rather than specific statistics or accolades related to the sport (Kian, et. al, 2009). An example of reference to athletic prowess is, ““But she doesn’t miss a lot. It’s just tough to keep the same level as her...I mean, nobody hits as hard as her. Nobody. Not even her sister”” (article 289, ¶8).

	Total athletes	Female athletes	Male athletes
Athletic prowess/strength mentioned	320/447 (71.6)	254/320 (79.3)	32/320 (10.0)
Athletic prowess/strength	77/447 (17.2)	49/77 (63.6)	16/77 (20.8)

not mentioned

Article not about an athlete	50/447 (11.2)	N/A	N/A
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Note: Actual count of articles appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Both male and female athletes together are the focus of 29 of 320 (9.1%) articles that mention athletic prowess/strength and 10 of 77 (13.0%) articles that do not mention athletic prowess/strength.

Pearson chi-square test shows significant differences ($\chi^2(1)=8.09, p=.004$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex categories “both” and “N/A (article is not about an athlete)” and ambiguous athletic prowess/strength category “N/A (e.g., article about equipment).” Articles including some reference to athletic prowess/strength comprise 83.8% of all articles solely about female athletes and 66.7% of articles solely about male athletes. Articles that do not reference athletic prowess/strength comprise 16.2% of all articles solely about only female athletes and 33.3% of articles solely about only male athletes.

Athletic weakness/limitations

Athletic weakness/limitations refers to general athletic ability or skill rather than specific statistics or accolades related to the sport. An example of athletic weakness/limitations is, “Wozniacki’s serve was broken in the first game of the first set. It was a harbinger, even though Kuznetsova struggled on serve as well” (article 300, ¶9).

	Total athletes	Female athletes	Male athletes
Athletic weakness/limitation mentioned	160/447 (35.8)	120/160 (75.0)	21/160 (13.1)
Athletic weakness/limitation not mentioned	237/447 (53.0)	183/237 (77.2)	27/237 (11.4)
Article not about an athlete	50/447 (11.2)	N/A	N/A

Note: Actual count of articles appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Both male and female athletes together are the focus of 15 of 160 (9.4%) articles that mention athletic weakness/limitations and 24 of 237 (10.1%) articles that do not mention athletic weakness/limitations.

Pearson chi-square test does not show significant differences ($\chi^2(1)=.296$, $p=.586$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex categories “both” and “N/A (article is not about an athlete)” and ambiguous athletic weakness/limitations category “N/A (e.g., article about equipment).”

Positive skill level/accomplishments

Positive skill level/accomplishments are specific statistics or accolades of the athlete rather than his/her general athletic prowess. An example of positive skill level/accomplishments is, “At 22, Tseng is the youngest golfer – man or woman – to win five majors” (article 218, ¶1).

	Total athletes	Female athletes	Male athletes
Positive skill level/accomp. mentioned	303/447 (67.8)	245/303 (80.9)	35/303 (11.6)
Positive skill level/accomp. not mentioned	94/447 (21.0)	58/94 (61.7)	13/94 (13.8)
Article not about an athlete	50/447 (11.2)	N/A	N/A

Note: Actual count of articles appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Both male and female athletes together are the focus of 21 of 303 (6.9%) articles that mention positive skill level/accomplishments and 18 of 94 (19.1%) articles that do not mention positive skill level/accomplishments.

Pearson chi-square test does not show significant differences ($\chi^2(1)=1.619$, $p=.203$) between male and female athletes excluding the ambiguous sex categories “both” and “N/A (article is not about an athlete)” and ambiguous positive skill level/accomplishment category of “N/A (e.g., article about equipment).”

Negative skill level/failures

Negative skill level/failures are specific statistics of the athlete rather than his/her general athletic weakness/limitations. An example of negative skill level/failures is, “Yesterday the Prince, who was projected to be a top pick, slipped to No. 19. Bowers, who was slated to go anywhere from No. 33 to 40, got snatched up by Tampa Bay at No. 51” (article 11, ¶11).

	Total athletes	Female athletes	Male athletes
Negative skill level/failure mentioned	92/447 (20.6)	68/92 (20.6)	15/92 (16.3)
Negative skill level/failure not mentioned	305/447 (68.2)	235/305 (77.0)	33/305 (10.8)
Article not about an athlete	50/447 (11.2)	N/A	N/A

Note: Actual count of articles appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Both male and female athletes together are the focus of 9 of 92 (9.8%) articles that mention negative skill level/failures and 30 of 305 (9.8%) articles that do not mention negative skill level/failures.

Pearson chi-square test does not show significant differences ($\chi^2(1)=1.780, p=.182$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex categories “both” and “N/A (article is not about an athlete)” and ambiguous negative skill level/failure category “N/A (e.g., article about equipment).”

Psychological strengths/emotional strengths

An example of psychological strengths/emotional strengths is, “Even when your quivering legs tell you otherwise, chances are you’ve got one more rep in you. Imagine that. Literally...’When you visualize an action, your brain develops a model of how it will go in the real world. This allows you to recruit the muscles you need and perform more effectively and efficiently when you actually do it...it’s a testimony to the power of the mind-muscle connection” (article 14, ¶2).

	Total athletes	Female athletes	Male athletes
Psych./emotional strengths mentioned	116/447 (26.0)	91/116 (78.4)	8/116 (6.9)
Psych./emotional strengths not mentioned	281/447 (62.9)	212/281 (62.9)	40/281 (14.2)
Article not about an athlete	50/447 (11.2)	N/A	N/A

Note: Actual count of articles appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Both male and female athletes together are the focus of 16 of 116 (13.8%) articles that mention psychological strengths/emotional strengths and 23 of 281 (8.2%) articles that do not mention psychological strengths/emotional strengths.

Pearson chi-square test does not show significant differences ($\chi^2(1)=3.656, p=.056$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex categories “both” and “N/A (article is not about an athlete)” and ambiguous psychological strength/emotional strength category “N/A (e.g., article about equipment).”

Psychological weaknesses/emotional weaknesses

An example of psychological weaknesses/emotional weaknesses is, “If the thought of freestyling through open, unlined, even murky water with 800 other athletes makes you queasy, rest assured: You’re not alone” (article 19, ¶1).

	Total athletes	Female athletes	Male athletes
Psych./emotional weak. mentioned	36/447 (8.1)	27/36 (75.0)	3/36 (8.3)
Psych./emotional weak. not mentioned	361/447 (80.8)	276/361 (76.4)	45/361 (12.5)
Article not about an athlete	50/447 (11.2)	N/A	N/A

Note: Actual count of articles appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Both male and female athletes together are the focus of 6 of 36 (16.7%) articles that mention psychological weakness/emotional weakness and 33 of 361 (9.1%) articles that do not mention psychological weakness/emotional weakness.

Pearson chi-square test does not show significant differences ($\chi^2(1)=.375, p=.540$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex categories “both” and “N/A (article is not about an athlete)” and ambiguous psychological weakness/emotional weakness category of “N/A (e.g., article about equipment).”

Physical appearance, sexuality, attire

An example of a reference to physical appearance is, “Ordinarily, Victoria Asarenka’s blue eyes sparkle. Sitting on her changeover chair in Arthur Ashe Stadium, they were dead as she stared vacantly into the yawning void” (article 296, ¶1). An example of reference to sexuality is, “‘COME ON!!!!!!’ McIlroy tweeted as his girlfriend, Wozniacki, labored to avoid the upset. Six exclamation points –so you know the relationship between the two must be getting serious” (article 306, ¶2). An example of reference to attire is “from Tracy Austin's pinafores to Serena Williams' catsuit, they can help define who the player is. In this era of big money, ratings and stadiums, clothes can establish a connection with the crowd” (article 311, ¶7).

	Total athletes	Female athletes	Male athletes
Appearance, sexuality, or attire mentioned	126/447 (28.2)	97/126 (77.0)	12/126 (9.5)
Appearance, sexuality, or attire not mentioned	269/447 (60.2)	204/269 (75.8)	36/269 (13.4)
Article not about an athlete	50/447 (11.2)	N/A	N/A

Note: Actual count of articles appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Both male and female athletes together are the focus of 14 of 126 (11.1%) articles that mention physical appearance, sexuality, or attire and 25 of 269 (9.3%) articles that do not mention physical appearance, sexuality, or attire.

Pearson chi-square test does not show significant differences ($\chi^2(1) = 1.006, p = .316$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex categories “both” and “N/A (article is not about an athlete)” and ambiguous physical appearance, sexuality, attire category of “N/A (e.g., article about equipment).”

Family role, personal relationships

An example of “family role, personal relationships” is, “For many of these boys-turned-men overnight, their moms may become increasingly important sources of guidance and stability” (article 13, ¶2).

	Total athletes	Female athletes	Male athletes
Family/personal relationships mentioned	168/447 (37.6)	128/168 (76.2)	21/168 (12.5)
Family/personal relationships not mentioned	229/447 (61.2)	175/229 (76.4)	27/229 (11.8)
Article not about an athlete	50/447 (11.2)	N/A	N/A

Note: Actual count of articles appears in chart next to percentage in parentheses.

Both male and female athletes together are the focus of 17 of 168 (10.1%) articles that mention family roles or personal relationships and 22 of 229 (9.6%) articles that do not mention family roles or personal relationships.

Pearson chi-square test does not show significant differences ($\chi^2(1)=.038$, $p=.845$) between male and female athletes excluding ambiguous sex categories “both” and “N/A (article is not about an athlete)” and ambiguous family role, personal relationships category of “N/A (e.g., article about equipment).”

Results of Qualitative Analysis of Feature Articles

Qualitative analysis examines meanings of concepts presented in text rather than quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency of variables like in quantitative analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Thematic coding was a three-step process. The first step was open coding, in which I organized the notes I took into themes based on similarities and differences in content (Flick, 2006). I read through each of the 447 espnW articles in my sample once, made notes on general themes, and documented specific quotations that illustrate these themes recurring throughout the text. Open coding revealed 18 general themes. Next, I used axial coding to refine and differentiate these themes into main themes and sub-themes (Flick, 2006), re-reading each article to clarify connections between the themes. Axial coding produced ten main themes and fifteen sub-themes. Last, I selectively coded themes using a higher level of abstraction than axial coding (Flick, 2006), focusing on connections between main themes and sub-themes. Selective coding results reported here do not reflect all main themes and sub-themes from my analysis. I include the three most prevalent themes in initial results and will present other themes in future research.

The three most prevalent themes in my analysis of articles from the first six months of espnW are 1) “‘behind-the-scenes’ access on the field,” 2) “‘behind-the-

scenes' access off the field," and 3) "in the stands." Main theme "'behind-the-scenes' access on the field" houses sub-themes 1) "game plan," or behind-the-scenes access to athletes as they prepare for or reel from specific events, and 2) "across the board," or behind-the-scenes looks at athletes' careers or more than one event. Main theme "'behind-the-scenes' access off the field" houses sub-themes 1) "team players," or direct references to heterosexuality and/or romantic relationships, and 2) "cover all of one's bases," or parents' role in athletes lives and athletes/executives parenting. Main theme "in the stands" houses sub-themes 1) "in our league," advice for watching/attending sporting events, 2) "the inside track," what fans are like at big events, and 3) "know the score," or previews and summaries of big sporting events.

Main theme #1: "behind-the-scenes" access on the field.

Articles granting readers "behind-the-scenes" access to what players/teams/coaches were thinking and experiencing during games compose the most popular theme in feature articles on espnW in the six months I analyzed. Readers are given an inside look into how players/teams/coaches prepare for or reel from specific events or are privy to untapped information about an athlete's/team's/coach's athletic career.

Sub-theme #1: Game plan.

"Behind-the-scenes" access to athletes as they prepare for or recover from specific events informs articles for the sub-theme "game plan." Professional female athletes who play tennis (WTA), golf (LPGA), soccer (WPS), and basketball (WNBA) are those most profiled in this type of article, and content is about preparation for and highlights from big tournaments/games like the U.S. Open (tennis and golf), Solheim Cup (golf), Women's World Cup (soccer), and WNBA Playoffs (basketball). Athletes in these articles are the "superstars" of their leagues based on season statistics, anomalies in a league (e.g., Taj McWilliams-Franklin as the oldest player in the WNBA), members of an elite team competing in an elite tournament at an elite level, or players who scored the winning point/goal of a tournament/game. Content of the articles is not usually play-by-play highlights of an athlete's/team's contribution to a game; rather, authors focus more on "behind-the-scenes" access to players in relation to a particular event.

Articles in the "game plan" sub-theme are typically written about a big win/accomplishment in a game/league, overcoming adversity to compete/come back, or preparation for big games/tournaments. Articles about big wins/accomplishments in a game/league cover what went well athletically, emotionally, cognitively (or some combination of the three) from the athlete's perspective, integrating quotations from the athlete him/herself, the coach of the team, and other players reflecting on that athlete's performance. Some account of the celebration resulting from the big win/accomplishment is also included. Article 118 profiles Dallas Escobedo, the first freshman pitcher to win a college softball World Series as part of the Arizona State Sun Devils softball team. Author Pat Borzi documents, "Escobedo struck out only five but limited the Gators to four hits, three of them singles" (article 118, ¶11), but also provides insight into a conversation between Arizona State coach Clint Myers and Escobedo:

Myers likes to describe himself as a growling taskmaster, tough to play for and quick to bark when he's mad. But there was no barking in this conversation. Instead, Myers said something to Escobedo that had nothing to do with softball, something that touched her heart. "He told me to smile," Escobedo said. "He

said that yesterday I didn't smile the whole game, and he wanted me to smile. It was sweet." So she did. And then Escobedo got out of the jam, as Aja Paculba lined softly to shortstop Katelyn Boyd. (§2-4)

A typical celebration ensued after the game when "Catcher Kaylyn Castillo, all 5-feet-2 of her, jumped into Escobedo's arms after Kelsey Bruder struck out to end it, and the rest of the Sun Devils quickly surrounded them" (§6). The article details the win with a combination of game statistics complemented with "behind-the-scenes" access to players and coaches.

Guest columnists are another avenue for espnW readers to get "behind-the-scenes" access to preparation for big events or commentary about events as they happen. Jayne Appel, center for the WNBA San Antonio Silver Stars, is a popular contributor, covering topics such as Team USA training camp (article 61), coming back from a knee injury (article 103), or what it is like to be on the road for games (article 230). Christina McHale, 19-year-old rookie competing in the U.S. Open tennis tournament, reflects on her match in round two, on traffic getting to the venue where the tournament is held, and receiving an early start time for her next match (article 290). espnW articles in October follow the Stanford Cardinal women's basketball team:

This season, espnW will spend time with the Stanford Cardinals and their Hall of Fame head coach [Tara Vanderveer], getting behind-the-scenes access to the players. Come to espnW every Friday throughout the season to get to know the Cardinals and how they live their lives off and on the court, from the start of practice to the last game of the season in March and, perhaps, into April. (§1)

As part of this feature, team photo shoot day is covered in article 395, and two players who are injured are covered in article 435. Guest columnists are less common than gaining the perspective of players/coaches via interviews but offer "behind-the-scenes access to female athletes across the globe" (espnW, n.d.a, §1) that espnW promises in its mission.

Articles in the "game plan" sub-theme are also about athletes/teams/coaches overcoming adversity to compete or recovering from being cut from a team or from an injury. Content of these articles includes what the athlete/team/coach had done in the past to be at the top of his/her game, what he/she is doing to change his/her performance after faltering, and what events he/she is preparing for in the upcoming months. Commentary is from "experts" related to that particular case, like the athlete him/herself, coaches working with him/her, or important figures in that sport rather than opinions of the espnW author. Article 222 profiles Ana Ivanovic, a professional tennis player who won the 2008 French Open and was ranked number one in WTA point standings at the age of 20. Author Viv Bernstein chronicles, "Ivanovic has never come close to living up to those expectations or winning another Grand Slam event, and has drifted down to No. 18 in the rankings" (article 222, §2). Ivanovic claims that she has started to address her downswing, however, by "working with Nigel Sears, the former head of women's coaching for the British Lawn Tennis Association, two weeks ago. She is also working once again with fitness trainer Scott Byrnes" (article 222, §3). In the last part of the article, Bernstein gives readers a glimpse that Ivanovic is preparing for four consecutive tournaments in advance of the US Open. Ivanovic comments,

"I think there is a lot of good things that are coming out from these last couple weeks we've been working together, so I really want to apply them in my matches

and put it together, and it's very hard to say how far I can reach and so on"... Many times I expected myself to do really well or win events when I wasn't in shape to do so"... But I've learned a lot, and actually last two years have been kind of a good experience for me and now I can appreciate certain things more and I don't take wins for granted." (§7, §7, §9)

Fourth, articles in the "game plan" sub-theme are about athletes/teams/coaches preparing for big games or tournaments. The focus of these articles is how the athlete/team/coach is training and practicing to prepare for such a big event contextualized with information about the event or information about the athlete's/team's/coach's career. Training and practicing is about hard work and preparation both physically and mentally. For example, in article 172, espnW author Michelle Smith writes about the U.S. women's soccer team preparing for the semi-final game of the Women's World Cup in July. Smith talks about team trainer Dawn Scott, whose philosophy is to push players physically even into tournament play instead of tapering physical conditioning; education on nutrition and hydration; and "recuperative states" (article 172, §14) involving ice baths and cooling sessions. U.S. forward Abby Wambach comments,

players, young and older, know how to take care of their bodies. "Everybody knows what's best for their bodies," Wambach said. "We get massage and treatment and drink recovery shakes and have more food and drink. We don't approach this any different." (§21-22)

The author says these approaches will be helpful going into the WWC semi-final game because, in its previous match, the U.S. team played more than 120 minutes of soccer before the game was decided on penalty kicks.

Sub-theme #2: Across the board.

"Behind-the-scenes" looks at athletes' careers or more than one event constitute the sub-theme "across the board." Articles cover how the athlete(s) became involved with the sport; support growing up from parents, coaches, or teammates (or a combination of the three); success in the sport in terms of statistics or accolades earned; exemplary skill demonstrated in the sport; and adversity endured and overcome that demonstrates how good they are at their sports. Athletes profiled are either superstars in a league, up-and-coming athletes, or players with some sort of "unique" characteristic (e.g., 17-year-old Ryann O'Toole picked for LPGA Solheim Cup team despite lack of experience; O'Toole was picked because of her "spunky" personality – article 334).

Superstars in a league featured in articles spanning athletes' careers are not always the "usual suspects" such as WNBA star Candace Parker or LPGA star Yani Tseng that typically receive increased media attention because of their playing ability or statistics. Instead, espnW covers athletes like Sedef Koktenturk, an Olympic windsurfer (article 120); Gevvie Stone, an aspiring Olympic rower (article 137); or Mariah Stackhouse, a 17-year-old prodigy in women's golf (article 195). The format for these articles is why athletes' chose their sports, what makes them such exemplary athletes, accolades earned throughout their careers, and ways their contribution to the game elevate standards for other athletes who play. Sunny Hale, "the most impressive, decorated athlete you've never heard of" (Article 24, §1), is a pioneer in the sport of polo. She became involved in the sport because of family connections, specifically a mother who "broke the gender barrier when she played with the boys in a 1972 tournament"

(Article 24, ¶9). Hale played in (and won) her first tournament when she was ten years old and now carries a five-handicap rating, which is better than 96% of polo players in the world, male or female (Article 24). espnW profiles Hale simply because she is one of the best players in her sport, not because the organization is profiling a specific polo event.

Up-and-coming athletes like Alison Crocker, an orienteering amateur trying to qualify to represent U.S. in international competition (article 94); Missy Franklin, a 17-year-old swimmer trying to qualify for the Olympics (article 410); or Jordyn Wieber, 16-year-old gymnast competing in first senior nationals in U.S. Gymnastics Championships (article 255) are also featured in “across the board” articles. These articles account how athletes came into their sports, accolades earned early in their careers, and what makes them so exemplary compared to other athletes their ages. For example, Coryn Rivera is a 16-year-old cyclist who grew up riding a tandem bicycle with her father around Southern California (article 87). When she turned 11, she started racing in and winning junior girls’ races at both regional and national levels, racking up 32 national titles and a berth onto the Peanut Butter & Co. TWENTY12 professional cycling team (Article 87). Jim Miller, USA Cycling director of athletics, comments, “Coryn is ushering in a new and a very talented generation of young American women...Coryn is beyond her years in regards to tactics and skill set. She has a great feel for race dynamics and has always set high personal expectations” (article 87, ¶11, ¶11). In early 2011, Rivera crashed during the Tour of Qatar, suffering a concussion, abrasions, and road rash (article 87). She has since recovered and is back cycling, earning the respect of her teammates: “Coryn is a star both on and off the bike, She is a team player. Whatever her role may be in a race, she gives 100%. Whether she is asked to sprint to win or asked to work on the front, she takes her job seriously” (article 87, ¶23).

“Unique” players’ careers are also highlighted in espnW articles covering entire careers, such as the article on Kelly Cobb, a freshman forward Duke women’s soccer player who hails from Alaska. The format of these articles mirrors the previous two themes with the athletes’ unique characteristics most prominent in the text. Cobb’s article (article 305) talks mostly about Alaska as a unique place to grow up playing soccer because playing opportunities are sparse, Cobb being ready for winter so North Carolina feels more like home, quotations from teammates on her skill, and how she has done in games so far. Cobb notes, “Alaska need not be a soccer wilderness. You just need a little ingenuity and a dad raised on Woody Hayes who now channels Pep Guardiola” (article 305, ¶5). Cobb uses skills garnered in youth leagues in her college career at Duke: “‘She can shoot really well with both feet,’ Duke teammate Laura Weinberg said. ‘She’s strong. She can hold people off...I think she’ll add a lot to our team. I think she’s going to score a lot of goals’” (article 305, ¶12, ¶12). Other unique players featured are athletes like Austin Hatch, a high school basketball player committed to Michigan State who was critically injured in a plane crash that killed his father and stepmother (article 228) or Liz Cambage, a 19-year-old Australian who came to the U.S. to play for WNBA Tulsa Shock (article 282). The article chronicles Cambage’s experiences transitioning to American basketball, her outgoing personality, using her status as the tallest player in the league to play physically, and not growing up with many hardships (article 282).

Articles in the main theme “‘behind-the-scenes’ access on the field” are about athletes’/teams’/coaches’ experiences preparing for or coming off of big events or about entire athletic careers. Main theme #2, “‘behind-the-scenes’ profiles off the field,” is more about how these individuals balance high-profile careers with romantic relationships and/or parenting duties.

Main theme #2: Behind-the-scenes profiles off the field.

Behind-the-scenes access to players/teams/coaches off the field is the second-most prevalent theme in my analysis of espnW articles. Sub-themes “‘team players,” direct references to heterosexuality and/or romantic relationships, and 2) “‘cover all of one’s bases,” parents’ role in athletes lives and athletes/executives parenting, are the most common ways life outside of sport is referenced.

Sub-theme #1: Team players.

Direct references to heterosexuality and/or romantic relationships are prevalent in my analysis of articles on espnW. As reported in quantitative results, 37.6% of articles reference some sort of personal relationship or romantic relationship. About half of these references come from the author of the article referencing a partner in an athlete’s life and about half of these references come from the athletes themselves in quotations and/or in response to question/answer segments. Partners mentioned are heterosexual in every reference. The relationships are not typically the focus of the articles except in the instance of analyzing whether or not the partnership between Caroline Wozniacki (tennis) and Rory McIlroy (golf) is beneficial for performance in their respective sports (article 292).

References to romantic partners most often happen in articles profiling athletes (e.g., articles 25, 125, 180, 264) or in articles where authors or athletes casually mention a partner in the context of another topic (e.g., 5, 37, 78, 113, 180, 207, 322). An profile of Courtney Vandersloot, point guard for the WNBA Chicago Sky, includes, “‘I’m single and ready to mingle,’ she laughs, as teammate Epiphanny Prince calls her out as the ‘biggest flirt’ on the team. She continued, with a twinkle in her eye, ‘The shy ones are the ones that get you’” (article 125, ¶13-14). Reader [CoffeesForClosersOnly] comments,

Date me dangit!!!! I’m attracted to talent, specifically athletic talent, in women. And you definitely have that. You single-handedly got me interested in Gonzaga women’s basketball (Been a fan of the men’s teams for about 10 years). Though I’m not in Chicago. Sheesh, it’s times like these that I wish Charlotte still had a WNBA team ☹ R.I.P Charlotte Sting. P.S. I’m gettin’ your jersey!!!! (article 125, ¶18)

Article 264 is an “off the mat” interview with Shannon Miller, the most decorated gymnast of all time. The author notes, “Miller, 34, is now married and has a son who turns two in October” (article 264, ¶1).

Casual references to romantic partners are when authors or athletes mention partners in an article on another topic. For example, in an article about what pro triathlete Terra Castro eats in a day, she says, “My husband and I usually sit down around 6:30” (article 97, ¶9). Courtney Jones, UNC soccer player, talks about her success at UNC and “taking in her teammates” when “Jones and her boyfriend cooked for almost 30 teammates and friends” (article 322, ¶14).

Partners are also mentioned as integral to athletes' success in their respective sports (e.g., articles 63, 90, 92, 143, 227, 253, 356, 409), though this is not typically the focus of the entire article. Esther Vergeer, tennis Paralympian, talks about her boyfriend, who is also her physical trainer (article 20). Danny Dreyer says his wife Katherine helped him invent Chi running (article 63). The author of an article about Dan Wheldon, winner of the Indy500, comments,

another woman – one *without* a fire suit – was a central figure in this year's memorable Indianapolis 500. "People shouldn't forget what a great job my wife has done," said Wheldon. "It's very easy [for outsiders] to just think that you can come back and win. But it's not the case. There's times when you do doubt yourself a little bit. Through all of this, she's been incredibly supportive and she understands that this is all I've ever done. She knows that racing creates the personality in me that she loves. So she was desperate to get me back out of the house and in a race car." (article 90, ¶18-19)

Rachel Heal, directeur sportif of Colavita/Forni d'Asolo Pro Cycling Team, credits her boyfriend for helping her secure her job:

My last season, I rode for the team. The DS at the time knew she was leaving at the end of the year so she was looking for someone to take over. My boyfriend was doing some work for the team as a mechanic. He's been a cyclist for 20 years. She saw that between the two of us, the partnership would work really well for the team. (article 253, ¶16)

The third way partners are mentioned are as a part of athlete-athlete relationships. An article on U.S. Open tennis quarterfinalist Flavia Penetta talks about her former boyfriend Carlos Moya, the 1998 French Open champion (article 304). An article on the top 57 World Series of Poker finalists profiles "WSOP's first couple" Erika Moutinho and David "Doc" Sands (article 190). The relationship between WTA tennis player Caroline Wozniacki and PGA golfer Rory McIlroy is a popular reference in articles with snippets about tennis events (articles 179, 213, 249, 292, 306, 314, 362). In an article about the U.S. Open match between Wozniacki and Svetlana Kuznetsova, espnW author Viv Bernstein speculates Wozniacki's relationship with McIlroy is heating up:

"COME ON!!!!!!" McIlroy tweeted as his girlfriend, Wozniacki, labored to avoid the upset. Six exclamation points –so you know the relationship between the two must be getting serious...McIlroy and Wozniacki were tweeting back and forth again Tuesday, with Wozniacki congratulating McIlroy for reaching No. 4 in the golf rankings and McIlroy...gushing back, "@CaroWozniack thank you! Only trying to keep up with you ;) still 3 more places to go!" (article 306, ¶2, ¶19)

Sub-theme #2: Cover all of one's bases.

Parenting is another way athletes'/teams'/coaches' non-sporting lives are referenced in my sample of espnW articles. Parents' role in athletes lives and athletes/executives parenting shows up in articles about parents guiding athletes along to keep them on the right path, balancing professional and home life and the sacrifices that go with being in a high-profile profession, and children mentioned as part of an article on a different topic.

Some articles are about parents guiding athletes along to keep them on the right path (e.g., articles 13, 75, 83, 147). One article is about Kevin Durant's mother and how she keeps him humble as an NBA Oklahoma Thunder player (article 75). Another is a

question/answer-format article profiling how IndyCar/NASCAR driver Danica Patrick's mother handled Danica's early rise to fame in the European driving circuit (article 83). Another profiles JuJuan Johnson, Purdue basketball player whose mother monitored his grades throughout college to ensure he would be the first person in his family to graduate (article 147). Yet another talks about the important role mothers of NFL draftees play in ensuring their sons are not tempted by the life of fame and fortune that often comes with a professional athletic career: "It's what kind of relationship you have with your son in the first place," she [Wilma McNabb] said. "Be the mother, not the friend. You need to be the biggest critic. Keep him focused and grounded" (article 13, ¶20).

Balancing professional life and a high-profile athletic career is also the focus of articles in my sample. Most female executives interviewed as part of the "Power Players" series "profiling high-ranking women in sport business" (article 108, ¶2) talk about some aspect of balancing their jobs and motherhood (articles 70, 115, 142, 220, 411). Val Ackerman, USA Basketball president, comments,

For me, the blur of that first year was compounded by the high-wire act of being a working parent. My daughters were 4 and 2 at the time, and the WNBA's relentless demands on my time and energy frequently clashed with my daily attempts to be a responsible mom. Were it not for the "village" of Charlie [dad], our full-time babysitter, my executive assistant and my girls' two doting grandmothers, who fortunately lived nearby, I'm not sure I would have been able to do my job, or even make it to opening day. (article 142, ¶9)

Author of an article on Juli Inkster, LPGA Solheim Cup assistant captain, says, For Inkster, balancing multiple roles is nothing new. In nearly 30 years on the LPGA Tour, the LPGA and World Golf Hall of Fame member has spent the majority of that time finding a balance between being a mom and a player. (article 317, ¶20)

Sacrificing time with family also pervades this theme. Nancy Lieberman, assistant general manager of the NBA D-League Texas Mavericks comments,

He'd [her son T.J.] say, "Hey Mom, are you coming to my game tonight?" I'd say, "I'm sorry honey, we play tonight," but he never made me feel guilty. Since I made my decision [to stop coaching to spend more time with T.J.], I've gotten texts and tweets from a lot of people in the sports world supporting my decision. Guys who are on their second and third marriages said, "I missed out on my kids growing up, like going to my son's football games, but I'm not going to miss out on this stuff with my next family." I don't want to go through that coulda, woulda, shoulda in my life...he's the most important thing. I live for him every day. I want to be T.J.'s hero and his role model. (article 411, ¶4, ¶5)

The third way parenting comes up in articles in my sample is as part of an article on another topic. Penny Palfrey, the woman who set a world record for the longest, unassisted, open-ocean swim from Little Cayman to Grand Cayman Islands is "a mother of three and a grandmother of one" (article 143, ¶8). In an article on whether or not women should compete on the PGA Tour, Annika Sorenstam is described as "an entrepreneur and full-time mom" (article 169, ¶17). Another article talks about Alex Bogomolov Jr., ATP tennis player, returning to tournament play after going through a divorce and a surgical procedure on his left wrist. The author of an article on his comeback notes, "The 28-year-old has put an early marriage to fellow player Ashley

Harkleroad behind him and now has a happy family life with girlfriend, Luana, and their 18-month-old son Maddox” (article 145, ¶10).

Articles in main theme #2 cover aspects of athletes’/teams’/coaches’ lives off the field, mostly mentioning romantic relationships or how these individuals balance high-profile careers and parenting. The third main theme switches gears to focus more on sports fandom rather than the athletes/teams/coaches themselves.

Main theme #3: In the stands.

Main theme #3, “in the stands,” is about sports fandom rather than athletes/teams/coaches. Sub-themes are 1) “in our league,” advice for watching/attending sporting events, 2) “the inside track,” what fans are like at big events, and 3) “know the score,” previews and summaries of big sporting events.

Sub-theme #1: In our league.

The third most prevalent theme in espnW articles I analyzed is sports fandom. The first theme of sports fandom is watching/attending sporting events. A series of articles during the start of the NFL season talks about fantasy moves to make each week the season progresses (articles 321, 336, 352, 425). Another article talks about healthy food choices at MLB ballparks throughout the country (article 29), followed up with a list of MLB minor league ballparks to visit based on food, stadium amenities, and cost (article 52). Two other articles offer stances from authors on which city boasts the best female fans. The author who claims Boston takes this honor laments “pink hatters,” women who wear pink athletic gear and come to games despite not knowing or caring what is going on, criticizes bandwagon fans who only follow Boston sports teams because they are doing well and because the stadiums in which the teams play are marketed as tourism destinations, and claims Boston fans are better than New York fans because they are fans of the sport, not of the gossip associated with the players. The author claims “knowledge, passion and authenticity reign supreme in Boston” (article 354, ¶16), where

Truth be told, most Patriots fans can’t stand the Hollywood Brady. We’re a sloppy, dysfunctional group who relate far more to Belichick’s cut off sweatshirt than Brady’s Euro man-bangs. There’s a reason why ‘Real Housewives of Boston’ doesn’t exist. And a reason why showing up at halftime of a game (sorry, L.A.) sounds almost criminal. (article 354, ¶23)

A related article from an author claiming Chicago has the best female fans appears a day later in espnW. The author notes fans have to be tough to be Chicago fans because teams are never very good and because fans watch games in tenuous weather conditions (article 386). The author also trash-talks Boston and New York fans because their teams are too good and therefore too easy to like, quipping Chicago players have, “no fluff, no flash, just big hearts and a willingness to do anything for a win. We don’t want a 100-foot scoreboard screen or stadium sushi. An Old Style, a scorecard and a hundred years of memories will do” (article 386, ¶16).

Sub-theme #2: The inside track.

The second theme of articles about sports fandom are about what fans are like at big events such as the NFL Draft or the soccer Women’s World Cup. Two articles live-blog how fans react to picks (e.g., which get booed) and “insider information” like what happens in the green room, lack of wireless internet access for media personnel, and special armed forces guests who announce picks at the 2011 NFL Draft (articles 8, 11).

Women's World Cup articles talk about how many U.S. fans were in attendance at the games, when the fans cheered and when they did not, Twitter homage to the U.S. team (even from President Obama), videos and photographs of fans watching the games, and a series of blog posts from "Sydney from Seattle," a 10-year-old girl who traveled to the tournament with her family (articles 152, 188, 191). Another article interviews IndyCar/NASCAR driver Danica Patrick on signing autographs for fans at races (article 400). Articles are not uniform in format, though most cover the significance of the event, how fans react to important calls, and how athletes react to fans in attendance.

Sub-theme #3: Know the score.

The last theme of articles about sports fandom covers previews and summaries of big sporting events typically under the frame, "five things to watch" or "five things we learned." These articles are much more diverse than any other in terms of sports represented and cover events like the NHL semifinals, the NBA Playoffs, soccer Women's World Cup, tennis women's U.S. Open, WNBA Playoffs, LPGA British Open, U.S. gymnastics nationals, gymnastics worlds, NCAA Softball Regionals, NCAA soccer season, NCAA volleyball finals, NCAA women's soccer, and Skate America (articles 10, 16, 22, 53, 57, 60, 67, 80, 95, 165, 173, 175, 189, 205, 211, 247, 251, 252, 256, 260, 270, 275, 289, 291, 299, 320, 324, 353, 360, 376, 378, 402, 432). Word count is less than other articles and coverage is more actual game reporting than other articles.

APPENDIX B

Example of website units of analysis and quantitative coding schema

The screenshot shows the ESPN W website homepage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the ESPN W logo, "FOUNDING PARTNER Secret", and "espnW: WOMEN + SPORTS SUMMIT". A search bar and "SIGN IN | ESPN.COM" are also present. Below the navigation bar are links for "WNBA FINALS", "COLLEGE SPORTS", "OLYMPICS", "MORE SPORTS", "COMMENTARY", and "ATHLETE'S LIFE". A large banner for "Secret PROTECTION THAT OUTLASTS YOUR DAY" is displayed. The main content area features a grid of articles:

- FACING THE WORLD**: Meet the U.S. gymnastics team
- WNBA FINALS**: Lynx take Game 2 over Dream
- BODY ISSUE**: Behind the machines
- STARTING FRESH**: Makeover has Cardinal looking younger

Below the "FACING THE WORLD" article is a photo of the U.S. women's gymnastics team. A caption reads: "The Americans are favored to win big at the world gymnastics championships, which start Friday in Tokyo. Here's who you'll want to know." To the right, a "HEADLINES" section lists several news items, including "Alicia Sacramone not in U.S. lineup at worlds after injuring Achilles" and "Johnson: Allowing Lexi Thompson to play a smart move".

Box around articles: feature articles

This screenshot shows a feature article on the ESPN W website. The article is titled "Makeover has Cardinal looking younger" and is dated "Oct 6 | By Michelle Smith". It includes social media sharing options (Like, Send, retweet) and a "More From espnW" sidebar with several related articles:

- Atlanta adapts to Erika de Souza's absence**: Sep 26 | By Adena Andrews
- ATHLETE'S LIFE: Lisa Raymond's victory daze**: Sep 19 | By Lisa Raymond
- ATHLETE'S LIFE: Can these sneakers "fix" your gait?**: Aug 19 | By Amanda MacMillan
- JOURNEYS & VICTORIES: Ultimate power playlist**: Aug 15 | By Patricia Lee

The main article features a photo of a basketball game. A caption below the photo reads: "Senior Nhemkaal Ogwumike will have to be the leader on a young Stanford team." Below the photo is a text box with the following content:

This season, espnW will spend time with the Stanford Cardinal and their Hall of Fame head coach, getting behind-the-scenes access to the players. Come to espnW every Friday throughout the season to get to know the Cardinal and how they live their lives off and on the court, from the start of practice to the last game of the season in March and, perhaps, into April.

PALO ALTO, Calif. — There are seasons when you rebuild a program, seasons when you reload the roster and seasons, like the one about to unfold at Stanford, when you remake your identity, carve out something new.

Box around photo: Photograph accompanying feature article

Box around text: Feature article (only partially shown in this image)

APPENDIX C

Definitions of terms used in the study

Photographs accompanying feature articles: photographs that appear when links to feature articles are accessed

Feature articles: articles that appear “above the fold”; usually four articles on each webpage

Lead photograph/article: photograph/article appearing first in the list of feature articles

Side photograph/article: photograph/article appearing after first photograph/article in list of feature articles

Uniform presence: team uniform worn by the athletes for participation purposes in specific sports, which includes warm-up clothing; coded as in or out of uniform

Pose presentation: active or passive pose

- active pose means actual simulation of the sport appears to be performed
- passive pose means the athlete is not performing an actual skill associated with the sport (e.g., team photograph with members standing, sitting, kneeling or lying down)

Court location: whether or not the athlete appears on the actual playing area of the sport (e.g., a basketball court for basketball); coded as on or off the court

Thematic presentation: true athleticism or posed athleticism

- true athleticism is when the athlete is presented in uniform, actively engaged in the sport, and on the actual court/playing surface
- posed athleticism is when the athlete is in uniform, in a non-action pose, and without other themes involved

Femininity: some component of the photo can be identified with traditional “feminine” roles and/or appearances and/or fashion (e.g., hair let down, visible make-up)

Sexual suggestiveness: any sexually “provocative” pose, theme, and/or fashion (e.g., “come hither” facial expression)

APPENDIX D

Coding schema for photographs accompanying feature articles and feature articles
For the purposes of this study, photographs accompanying feature articles and feature articles on espnW from April 26, 2011, to October 26, 2011, are examined using quantitative content analysis.

Section A: Photographs accompanying feature articles

A-1) Publication date: Enter the month and day the feature photograph was published. Please enter a single or double digit for the month (e.g., 1 for January, 10 for October). For days of the month, please do the same (e.g., 1 for the first day of the month, 10 for the tenth day of the month).

A-2) Lead photograph or side photograph: Enter (1) if the photograph corresponds with the lead story on the site. Enter (2) if the photograph does not correspond with the lead story on the site.

A-3) Sport: Enter the number that corresponds with the sport that is the primary sport featured in the photograph: (01) baseball, (02) basketball, (03) boxing, (04) bowling, (05) cross country, (06) football, (07) golf, (08) gymnastics, (09) hockey, (10) horse racing, (11) ice skating, (12) lacrosse, (13) mixed martial arts, (14) poker, (15) racecar driving – NASCAR Cup, (16) racecar driving – IndyCar circuit, (17) rugby, (18) skiing, (19) snowboarding, (20) soccer, (21) softball, (22) swimming/diving, (23) tennis, (24) track and field, (25) volleyball, (26) wrestling, (27) cheerleading, (28) recreational exercise (e.g., running on a treadmill), (29) polo, (30) multiple sports (e.g., article on food or equipment), (31) bicycling, (32) roller derby, (33) yoga, (34) rowing, (35) Ironman/triathlon/Ultraman/marathon/wind surfing/rock climbing/Orienteering/adventure racing, (36) competitive eating, (37) extreme sports (e.g., snowboarding, street skating), (38) fencing, (39) sumo wrestling, (40) not sure.

A-4) Team vs. Individual sport: Enter (1) if the sport featured in the photo is a team sport, (2) if the sport is an individual sport. If multiple sports that are both individual and team are featured, enter (3). If unsure, enter (4). If the photo highlights individual events in a team sport (e.g., gymnastics or track), mark as individual if the article associated with the photo talks about those individual events rather than the team.

A-5) Level of sport: Enter the number that corresponds with the level of sport featured: (1) recreational, (2) high school, (3) college, (4) professional, (5) Olympics, (6) Paralympics, (7) not sure.

A-6) Sex of athlete/coach featured in photo: Enter the number which corresponds with the sex of the athlete(s)/coach featured: (1) for female athlete(s)/coaches, (2) for male athlete(s)/coaches, (3) for both, and (4) for N/A (photograph not of athlete).

A-7) Focus of the photograph: Enter the number indicating the focus of the feature photograph: (1) athlete(s) only, (2) head coach, (3) combination of athlete(s) and head coach, (4) other (e.g., athlete and agent or parent or equipment).

A-8) Uniform presence: If the feature photograph focuses on athlete(s), coded (1) or (3) or (4) in A-7, then the presence of a uniform on the athlete should be coded. Enter the number which corresponds with uniform presence on the athlete: (1) game uniform (including warm-ups) worn by athlete(s), (2) game uniform (including warm-ups) not worn by athlete(s), (3) unsure if athlete is wearing a game uniform (including warm-ups), (4) N/A - photo is not of an athlete.

A-9) Pose presentation: If the feature photograph focuses on athlete(s), coded (1) or (3) or (4) in A-7, then the pose presentation of the athlete should be coded. Enter the number which corresponds with the athlete(s) pose: (1) athlete(s) exhibiting an active skill he/she might exhibit during his/her sport game or practice (i.e., shooting, passing, running, etc.), (2) athlete(s) exhibiting a passive activity he/she would not practice in a sport game or practice (i.e., clapping, celebrating, crying, etc.), (3) if unsure, or (4) N/A - photo is not of an athlete.

A-10) Court location: If the feature photograph focuses on athlete(s), coded (1) or (3) or (4) in A-7, then the athlete court location should be coded. Enter the number which corresponds with the location of the athlete: (1) on the court/field/pitch where the game he/she plays is played, (2) off the court/field/pitch where the game he/she plays is played, (3) unsure of athlete's location, or (4) N/A (e.g., cartoon of athlete).

A-11) Thematic presentation - true athleticism: If the feature photograph focuses on athlete(s), coded (1) or (3) or (4) in A-7, then thematic presentation – true athleticism should be coded. If the athlete(s) is presented in uniform, actively engaged in his/her sport in a game situation, and is depicted on the actual court/playing surface of his/her sport, enter (1). If the athlete does not fulfill all of these criteria, enter (2). If unsure, enter (3). If N/A, enter (4).

A-12) Thematic presentation - posed athleticism: If the feature photograph focuses on athlete(s), coded (1) or (3) or (4) in A-7, then thematic presentation – posed athleticism should be coded. If there is some indication that the individual(s) featured are athletes (e.g., uniform, athletic equipment) but they are presented in a non-game situation (e.g., posing for a team photo), enter (1). If the athlete(s) do not fulfill these criteria, enter (2). If unsure, enter (3). If N/A, enter (4).

A-13) Femininity/masculinity: If the feature photograph focuses on athlete(s), coded (1) or (3) or (4) in A-7, then femininity should be coded. If some component of the photo can be identified with traditional “feminine” roles and/or appearances and/or fashion (e.g., hair let down, visible make-up) or traditional “masculine” roles and/or appearances and/or fashion (e.g., in a tuxedo, hair styled), enter (1). If the athlete in the photo does not exhibit these characteristics, enter (2). If unsure, enter (3). If N/A, enter (4).

A-14) Sexual suggestiveness: If the feature photograph focuses on athlete(s), coded (1) or (3) or (4) in A-7, then sexual suggestiveness should be coded. If the athlete(s) in the photos exhibit any sexually “provocative” pose, theme, and/or fashion (e.g., “come hither” facial expression), enter (1). If the athlete(s) in the photo does not exhibit sexual suggestiveness, enter (2). If unsure, enter (3). If N/A, enter (4).

Section B: Feature articles

B-1) Publication date: Enter the month and day the feature article was published. Please enter a single or double digit for the month (e.g., 1 for January, 10 for October). For days of the month, please do the same (e.g., 1 for the first day of the month, 10 for the tenth day of the month).

B-2) Lead article or side article: Enter (1) if the article is the lead story on the site. Enter (2) if the article is not the lead story on the site.

B-3) Sport: Enter the number that corresponds with the sport that is the primary sport featured in the article: (01) baseball, (02) basketball, (03) boxing, (04) bowling, (05) cross country, (06) football, (07) golf, (08) gymnastics, (09) hockey, (10) horse racing, (11) ice skating, (12) lacrosse, (13) mixed martial arts, (14) poker, (15) racecar driving – NASCAR Cup, (16) racecar driving – IndyCar circuit, (17) rugby, (18) skiing, (19) snowboarding, (20) soccer, (21) softball, (22) swimming/diving, (23) tennis, (24) track and field, (25) volleyball, (26) wrestling, (27) cheerleading, (28) recreational exercise (e.g., running on a treadmill), (29) polo, (30) multiple sports (e.g., article on food or equipment), (31) bicycling, (32) roller derby, (33) yoga, (34) rowing, (35) Ironman/triathlon/Ultraman/marathon/wind surfing/rock climbing/Orienteering/adventure racing, (36) competitive eating, (37) extreme sports (e.g., snowboarding, street skating), (38) fencing, (39) sumo wrestling, (40) not sure.

B-4) Team vs. Individual sport: Enter (1) if the sport featured in the article is a team sport and (2) if the sport is an individual sport. If the article features both individual and team sports, enter (3). If unsure, enter (4). If the article highlights individual events in a team sport (e.g., gymnastics or track), mark as individual if the article talks about those individual events rather than the athlete’s contribution to the team.

B-5) Level of sport: Enter the number that corresponds with the level of sport featured in the article: (1) recreational, (2) high school, (3) college, (4) professional, (5) Olympics, (6) Paralympics, (7) not sure.

B-6) Sex of athlete featured: Enter the number which corresponds with the sex of the athlete(s) featured in the article: (1) for female athlete(s), (2) for male athlete(s), (3) for both, and (4) for not sure.

B-7) Focus of the article: Enter the number indicating the focus of the article: (1) athlete(s) only, (2) head coach, (3) combination of athlete(s) and head coach, (4) other (e.g., athlete and agent or parent or equipment).

B-8) Game/non-game reporting: Enter the number which corresponds with the overarching theme of the headline article: (1) game reporting- the main focus of the headline article is reporting on events that occurred during a game, (2) non-game reporting, a headline article focusing on non-game reporting topics (coaching contracts, suspensions, etc.) deemed newsworthy for publishing on the website, (3) articles on training (fitness, injuries, diet for training, etc.). Enter (4) if N/A (e.g., article about equipment), and (5) if not sure.

B-9) physical appearance, sexuality, attire: Enter (1) if the article mentions anything about the athlete's/coach's/team's physical appearance, sexuality, or attire in any capacity. Enter (2) if these are not mentioned in the article. Enter (3) if N/A (e.g., article about equipment). An example of a reference to physical appearance is, "Ordinarily, Victoria Asarenka's blue eyes sparkle. Sitting on her changeover chair in Arthur Ashe Stadium, they were dead as she stared vacantly into the yawning void" (article 296). An example of reference to sexuality is, "'COME ON!!!!!!' McIlroy tweeted as his girlfriend, Wozniacki, labored to avoid the upset. Six exclamation points –so you know the relationship between the two must be getting serious" (article 306). An example of reference to attire is "from Tracy Austin's pinafores to Serena Williams' catsuit, they can help define who the player is. In this era of big money, ratings and stadiums, clothes can establish a connection with the crowd" (article 311).

B-10) athletic prowess, strength: Enter (1) if the article mentions the athletic prowess or strength of the athlete(s)/coach/team featured. Enter (2) if athletic prowess or strength are not referenced. Enter (3) if N/A (e.g., article about equipment). An example of athletic prowess, strength is, "But she doesn't miss a lot. It's just tough to keep the same level as her...I mean, nobody hits as hard as her. Nobody. Not even her sister" (article 289).

B-11) athletic weakness, limitations: Enter (1) if the article mentions anything about the athletic weakness or limitations of the athlete(s)/coach/team featured. Enter (2) if athletic weakness or limitations are not referenced. Enter (3) if N/A (e.g., article about equipment). An example of athletic weakness, limitations is, "Wozniacki's serve was broken in the first game of the first set. It was a harbinger, even though Kuznetsova struggled on serve as well" (article 300).

B-12) positive skill level, accomplishments: Enter (1) if the article mentions any information about positive skill level or accomplishments of the athlete(s)/coach/team featured in the article. Positive skill level, accomplishments are specific statistics or accolades of the athlete rather than his/her general athletic prowess. Enter (2) if the article does not mention positive skill level or accomplishments of the athlete(s)/coach/team. Enter (3) if N/A (e.g., article about equipment). An example of positive skill level, accomplishments is, "Yani Tseng, 22, came from two shots back to win the RICOH Women's British Open and make news as the youngest player -- male or female -- to capture five major titles" (article 218).

B-13) negative skill level, failures: Enter (1) if the article mentions any information about negative skill level or failures of the athlete(s)/coach/team featured in the article. Negative

skill level, failures are specific statistics or accolades of the athlete rather than his/her general athletic prowess. Enter (2) if the article does not mention negative skill level or failure of the athlete(s)/coach/team. Enter (3) if N/A (e.g., article about equipment). An example of negative skill level, failures is, “Pavlyuchenkova had reached the quarterfinals of the French, only to lose to Sciavone after leading, 6-1, 4-1” (article 301).

B-14) family role, personal relationships: Enter (1) if the article mentions any information about family roles or personal relationships of the athlete(s)/coach/team featured in the article. Enter (2) if the article does not mention family roles or personal relationships of the athlete(s)/coach/team. Enter (3) if N/A (e.g., article about equipment). An example of family role, personal relationships is, “For many of these boys-turned-men overnight, their moms may become increasingly important sources of guidance and stability” (article 13).

B-15) psychological strengths, emotional strengths: Enter (1) if the article mentions any information about psychological or emotional strengths of the athlete(s)/coach/team featured in the article. Enter (2) if the article does not mention psychological or emotional strengths of the athlete(s)/coach/team. Enter (3) if N/A (e.g., article about equipment). An example of psychological strengths, emotional strengths is, “Even when your quivering legs tell you otherwise, chances are you’ve got one more rep in you. Imagine that. Literally...’When you visualize an action, your brain develops a model of how it will go in the real world. This allows you to recruit the muscles you need and perform more effectively and efficiently when you actually do it...it’s a testimony to the power of the mind-muscle connection” (article 14).

B-16) psychological weaknesses, emotional weaknesses: Enter (1) if the article mentions any information about psychological or emotional weaknesses of the athlete(s)/coach/team featured in the article. Enter (2) if the article does not mention psychological or emotional weaknesses of the athlete(s)/coach/team. Enter (3) if N/A (e.g., article about equipment). An example of psychological weaknesses, emotional weaknesses is, “If the thought of freestyling through open, unlined, even murky water with 800 other athletes makes you queasy, rest assured: You’re not alone” (article 19).

B-17) humor: Enter (1) if the author attempts to interject humor in the article about the athlete(s)/coach/team featured in the article. Enter (2) if the author does not try to interject humor in the article about the athlete(s)/coach/team. Enter (3) if N/A (e.g., article about equipment). An example of humor is, when article (307) talks about the Chicago vs. Los Angeles WNBA game at a time in the season where both were out of playoff contention: “(That game should produce a real mausoleum-type atmosphere.)”

B-18) Number of comments: Enter (1) if no comments were posted by readers at the end of the article, (2) if the comments number 1-5, (3) if the comments number 6-10, (4) if the comments number 11-15, and (5) if the comments are over 15.

APPENDIX E

Paradigm positions on selected practical issues (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011); also mentioned in Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006).

Item	Postpositivism	Critical Theory et. al.
Inquiry aim: the goals of research and the reason why inquiry is conducted. What are the goals and the knowledge we seek? (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).	Explanation: prediction and control	Critique and transformation; restitution and emancipation
Nature of knowledge: how researchers view the knowledge that is generated through inquiry research (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).	Nonfalsified hypotheses that are probable facts or laws	Structural/historical insights
Knowledge accumulation: how does knowledge build off prior knowledge to develop a better understanding of the subject or field? (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).	Accretion – “building blocks” adding to “edifice of knowledge”; generalizations and cause-effect linkages	Historical revisionism; generalization by similarity
Goodness or quality criteria: How researchers judge the quality of inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).	Conventional benchmarks of “rigor”: internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity	Historical situatedness; erosion of ignorance and misapprehension; action stimulus
Values: what do researchers seek as important products within inquiry research? (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).	Excluded – influence denied	Included – formative
Ethics: The interaction and relationship between the researcher and the subject as well as the effect inquiry research has on populations (Schwandt, 2007).	Extrinsic: tilt toward deception	Intrinsic: moral tilt toward revelation
Inquirer posture: The point of view in which the researcher operates. How does the researcher approach the inquiry process? (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).	“disinterested scientist” as informer of decision makers, policy makers, and change agents	“Transformative intellectual” as advocate and activist
Training: how are	Technical; quantitative and	Resocialization; qualitative

researchers prepared to conduct inquiry research?	qualitative; substantive theories	and quantitative; history; values of altruism, empowerment, and liberation
Accommodation: What needs are provided by the inquiry research? (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).	Commensurable	Incommensurable with previous two
Hegemony: The influence researchers have on others. Who has the power in inquiry and what is inquired. Presenting definition of reality (Kilgore, 2001).	Statistical analysis of reality will produce data from which decisions can be made. Ultimately, the researcher is in charge of the inquiry process (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 194).	Research demonstrates the interactions of privilege and oppression as they relate to race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, and age (Kilgore, 2001).

Basic beliefs of alternative inquiry paradigms (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011); also mentioned in Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006

Issue	Postpositivism	Critical Theory et al.
Ontology: the worldviews and assumptions in which researchers operate in their search for new knowledge (Schwandt, 2007, p. 190)	Critical realism – “real” reality but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehensible	Historical realism – virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values; crystallized over time
Epistemology: the process of thinking. The relationship between what we know and what we see. The truths we seek and believe as researchers (Bernal, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lynham & Webb-Johnson, 2008; Pallas, 2001)	Modified dualist/objectivist; critical tradition/community; findings probably true	Transactional/subjectivist; value-mediated findings
Methodology: the process of how we seek out new knowledge. The principles of our inquiry and how inquiry should proceed (Schwandt, 2007, p. 190). What is the	Modified experimental/manipulative; critical multiplism; falsification of hypotheses; may include qualitative methods	Dialogic/dialectical

process of research? (Creswell, 2007)		
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APPENDIX F

Brief history of neoliberalism:

Foucault analyzed government intervention across many historical contexts, most notably pastoral authority in early Christianity and Greek philosophy, state police in early Modern Europe, early liberalism in the 18th century, and neoliberal thought throughout the U.S., Germany, and France post-World War II (Nadesan, 2008). Each of these is entwined with the others (Nadesan, 2008), but the most important in terms of governmentality is liberal governmental rationality as leading into neoliberal government rationality. Liberal thought was primarily concerned with regulating a population while remaining cognizant of the proper limits of how to exercise and rationalize power (Grieverson, 2009). Central to the exercise of power was presenting citizens as free subjects who were autonomous individuals (Binkley, 2007; Grieverson, 2009; Nadesan, 2008), though in reality, citizens were still “governed” because they were encouraged to operate as free subjects in specific realms like politics, economics, civic membership, and families (Binkley, 2007). A crucial component of this was the idea of freedom as “slippery,” so “mechanisms of security (for example social welfare, the regulation of popular cultures, the more recent creation in the USA of a ‘Department of Homeland Security’ amidst increased surveillance of populations)” (Grieverson, 2009, p. 181) were established to ensure citizens remained free to choose how they wanted to live among the choices granted to them by the government (Grieverson, 2009). “Mechanisms of security” were complemented with technologies of the self that helped maintain the freedom granted to citizens. Supported by the premise of free subjects, citizens eventually learned to govern themselves by adopting governmental initiatives in order to support what they perceived was an autonomous social order, and neoliberalism emerged (Grieverson, 2009; Rose, 1996).

Neoliberalism operates as a mode of governmentality. Foucault identifies three main elements that led to U.S. neo-liberalism: 1) the New Deal and Keynesian policy emerging from criticism of the New Deal under President Roosevelt from 1933-34, 2) the Beveridge plan and what Foucault called “social pacts of war,” economic and social interventions developed during the World War II, and 3) programs addressing poverty, education, and racial segregation that required intervention of the state and simultaneously expanded the federal administration under the Truman administration through the Johnson administration (Foucault, 1979/2004a). Neoliberalism is premised on grafting market values on public institutions and into social relations (Brown, 2005; Foucault, 1979/2004b) so subjects become enterprising citizens who seek to empower themselves using private entities delegated as authorities to ultimately uphold the best interest of the State (Ouellette & Hay, 2008). The perception of citizens as self-governing subjects is essential for neoliberalism to play out because power is dispersed across many sites rather than concentrated under sovereign rule (Burchell, 1996; Rose, 1992).

APPENDIX G

Examples of divergent dialogues in espnW articles

(334) LPGA player Ryann O'Toole picked for Solheim Cup team even though she's only competed in 7 events; why captain Rosie Jones picked her (she's a firecracker, has spunk), how she got to the Tour, how she works out, what she did growing up (extreme sports); "At the time of U.S. captain Rosie Jones' surprise at-large pick a month ago, O'Toole, a 24-year-old blonde from Southern California with a firecracker personality, had played in a grand total of seven LPGA tournaments... What O'Toole seems to lack in experience, accomplishment and profile, she counters with old-fashioned fire. She speaks of competition with the same zeal Glenn Beck preaches conservatism. She carries the confidence of a gunslinger and a self-assuredness that cannot be learned"

(225) Courtney Vandersloot – WNBA rookie – out with friends demeanor, "average 22-year-old, gabbing about boys and TV"; one paragraph about helping team to playoffs at end of the article ("Chicago Sky rookie Courtney Vandersloot will be checking in periodically with espnW contributor and Chicago native Sarah Spain as the point guard plays her first season in the WNBA and learns the ins and outs of the windy city");

Vandersloot = only Division I player in history to amass 2,000 points and 1,000 assists

(316) Lynx vs. San Antonio for WNBA playoffs: "The ponytailed point guards in this matchup will need to play to their strengths"

(68) how to train for hot-weather races such as the Lavaman triathlon in Hawaii

(language: cooling inner temperature – stock an ice cube in your sports bra; "On long runs, Weiskind often carries a small sponge to douse in cold water and stuff down the front of her top between stations")

(73) Simona de Silvestro – Indy car driver; how she became involved in driving, how she has been qualifying in races this year, how she's a part of the Indy 500, crashes/burns she's endured – showed fans she's tough; started the article about how she threw a tantrum at her dad because he wouldn't buy her a go-kart at age 4; finally got one at age 5 ½; end of article: "They'd better. Because she's not getting out of the car until she gets her way."

(171) WWC – England loses to France on PKs – "renewed wave of strength," "deflated on the field," "White, who was clearly distraught"

(225) Courtney Vandersloot – WNBA rookie – out with friends demeanor, "average 22-year-old, gabbing about boys and TV"; one paragraph about helping team to playoffs at end of the article

("Chicago Sky rookie Courtney Vandersloot will be checking in periodically with espnW contributor and Chicago native Sarah Spain as the point guard plays her first season in the WNBA and learns the ins and outs of the windy city"); Vandersloot = only Division I player in history to amass 2,000 points and 1,000 assists

(72) all about Vandersloot first moving to Chicago – the "big city" atmosphere, how she's afraid of thunderstorms, training camp, going to a Bulls playoff game (only basketball-related information: 4-5 lines of the entire article: "She seemed ready for the big leagues in her first exhibition game, recording seven assists in Monday's 84-45 win over China, but we'll see how tough she is when she comes face to face with the ladies of Wieners Circle")

(289) summary of tennis U.S. Open – focus on Serena, 3rd round matches; Stephens – American – also advancing – says she wants to buy a car with the prize money; mom wants her to buy a truck

(406) LPGA – how players dealt with rain delays, having to play 36 holes in a day; quotations “just so hard,” how much rain delays hurt players

(296) Serena vs. Victoria Azarenka in U.S. Open 4th round: “Ordinarily, Victoria Asarenka’s blue eyes sparkle. Sitting on her changeover chair in Arthur Ashe Stadium, they were dead as she stared vacantly into the yawning void” (ESPN.com author); “She chased down Azarenka’s lasers with impressive ease. Late in the second set, when she failed to catch up with a ball, Serena did a breathtaking, Clijsters-like full split that left spectators wincing. ‘If that were me,’ said CBS analyst John McEnroe, ‘I’d be out for a year—life.’”; “Serena turns 30 later this month, but she seemed in vintage form Saturday, serving well and striking a wicked down-the-line backhand”; rest of article is positive sports writing about Serena’s accomplishments

(297) Serena vs. Azarenka re-cap again; “Listen to Azarenka describe how it felt to stand across the net from Williams during her superb start: ‘What’s it like? It’s painful,’ said Azarenka, who won eight points in those opening five games. ‘To have somebody just going at you like that, it’s a little bit painful.’”; Serena – showed off her fitness with the splits and racing over to the blue sign near the stands to smack a forehand winner

(299) five storylines from week 1 of tennis U.S. Open – “bubbly effusiveness of Sloane Stephens is a welcome contrast to the occasionally dour and jaded demeanor of women’s tennis. Fortunately, Stephens hasn’t been around long enough to be unduly influenced by such glumness”

(306) tennis U.S. Open – Wozniacki vs. Svetlana Kuznetsova – Wozniacki came from behind to win; article talks about her relationship with Rory McIlroy: “‘COME ON!!!!!! McIlroy tweeted as his girlfriend, Wozniacki, labored to avoid the upset. Six exclamation points –so you know the relationship between the two must be getting serious...McIlroy and Wozniacki were tweeting back and forth again Tuesday, with Woxniacki congratulating McIlroy for reaching No. 4 in the golf rankings and McIlroy...gushing back, ‘@CaroWozniack thank you! Only trying to keep up with you ;) still 3 more places to go!’”

(308) [Kathryn Bertine, guest columnist and elite cyclist] *Bicycling Magazine* came out with a poll on “Who’s the hottest female cyclist?” but rarely cover women’s cycling at other times; author provides list of “10 Super Female Watties of Road Cycling, where physical power *is* beauty”; profiles top 13 women in cycling with nicknames like “Jeannie ‘Did you call me old? I can’t hear you way back there’ Longo (FRA)”; still includes some references to non-athletic demeanors like “Humble, gracious, ego-free and approachable, Vos has the ability to domestique for her teammates as well as dominate as a champion” and “topping it all off, she’s a happy person with a great smile. Even when destroying her competition.”; “While the world will continue to rank women on their looks, magazines will continue to poll athletes on their faces instead of feats and female athletes will continue to struggle for equality, we can change one thing: We female athletes can make our own lists, ranks, and polls of what really matters, and we can live by those standards ‘til the rest of the world catches up.”

(294) and (311) fashion in sport (tennis) articles

(67) 5 things to watch at French Open women's draw – preview of who does well on clay courts, etc. (language: “Short on matches or not, if Clijsters is in the draw, she's a natural to win the title” “All eyes will be on defending champion Schiavone and 2010 finalist Stosur to see if they can rekindle last year's French Open magic.”)

(68) how to train for hot-weather races such as the Lavaman triathlon in Hawaii (language: cooling inner temperature – stock an ice cube in your sports bra; “On long runs, Weiskind often carries a small sponge to douse in cold water and stuff down the front of her top between stations”)

(73) Simona de Silvestro – Indy car driver; how she became involved in driving, how she has been qualifying in races this year, how she's a part of the Indy 500, crashes/burns she's endured – showed fans she's tough; started the article about how she threw a tantrum at her dad because he wouldn't buy her a go-kart at age 4; finally got one at age 5 ½; end of article: “They'd better. Because she's not getting out of the car until she gets her way.”

(143) Penny Palfrey, set world record for longest, unassisted, open-ocean swim from Little Cayman to Grand Cayman Islands; 67 miles took 41 hours; talks about her mental toughness, her ailments (swollen tongue, legs, face, etc.); she wanted chocolate ice cream in the last 7 hours because she couldn't eat anything else (tongue too swollen); first 4 paragraphs: the chocolate ice cream (how she ate it, how they got it, why she needed it); “A mother of three and a grandmother of one,” quotations from husband Chris; talked about conditions of swim (currents) but then “Palfrey was wobbly as she waded ashore. Her face was unrecognizable, puffed up to twice its normal size...’It wasn't easy,’ Palfrey said of her record-breaking effort. ‘I had to dig very, very deep.’ And not just to the bottom of her ice cream cup, we're assuming.”; spent two days in a hospital room recovering from dehydration, blistering of the mouth, bruising, swelling of face, legs, trapezium muscles and tongue, took 3 days to feel well enough for an interview

(145) Bethanie Mattek-Sands wore a crazy jacket to play her first-round match at Wimbledon, took it off before warm-ups; assured Whytcross, Grand Slam Supervisor, that she wouldn't be playing in it, Whytcross says it was “quite creative”; designed by Alex Noble, who does fashion for Lady Gaga; then about Alex Bogomolov Jr. being ready to play after going through a divorce, failing to file paperwork for asthma medication, and a surgical procedure on his left wrist

(175) 5 things to watch in semifinals of WWC – “But the question lurks: What's going to be left in their physical and emotional tanks for the semifinals?”; “Japan is the Mighty Mouse team that slays the giants. The Japanese are the shortest team left, standing an average of 5-foot-4, but that doesn't stop them from playing big.”; “Will nerves and anxiety grip France and Japan? Or will they ride the wave of enthusiasm and not succumb to the big moment?”

(183) France vs. Sweden for 3rd place in WWC; all about red card given to Oqvist (Sweden) and not Bompastor (French), so crowd booed Bompastor every touch thereafter; French coach says this isn't the men's game and there shouldn't be that kind of behavior from the crowd; recap of highlights of the game

“After a tough challenge between Oqvist and French defender Sonia Bompastor near the endline in Sweden's offensive side of the field, the two players fell on top of each other near the endline. While play continued in the penalty box, Bompastor kicked at Oqvist, who then retaliated with a stronger kick to Bompastor's stomach. U.S. referee Kari Seitz

issued a straight red card to Oqvist for the retaliation, but Bompastor did not receive any penalty. "I'm sorry for her because I didn't want to get her a red card. It's not good. I think the referee only saw the end of the action," Bompastor told reporters after the match. Loud boos and whistles rained down on Bompastor every time she touched the ball after that, as many fans had seen that she initiated the contact with Oqvist and also might have thought she had oversold how hurt she was by the kick. After the match, French coach Bruno Bini was upset with the fans' reaction. "At one point, the spectators starting behaving as if this were a men's match," Bini said through a translator. "We had boos and whistles for Sonia. It's unbelievable. She really didn't deserve that. The spectators behaved like this was a men's game, and I don't like this type of football. This destabilized the whole team." Bompastor, however, said she wasn't concerned with it. "I'm just disappointed about the loss. I don't care about the fans whistling," she said."

(195) Mariah Stackhouse: 17-year-old prodigy playing in women's golf U.S. Open; only African-American player in 156-woman field; article talks about father giving up his recreational golf dreams to carry her bag, how she qualified for U.S. Open; Dad and her advise to not think about race – will face challenges far greater than your blackness; "With tremendous parental support and personal drive, Stackhouse will have a future as bright as the multicolored Nike Dri-FIT T-shirt she sported during our interview that read 'Can't Stop Me.'"

(415) women officials in NBA – NBA seems to be the best league in recruiting and training refs for officiating, only problem is that they're largely in the WNBA and D-league, not NBA; Violet Palmer is NBA's lone female referee; Palmer: "players respect her as a strong maternal figure, and she receives no guff from fellow officials. 'I have 60 or more of the most respectful, most wonderful men as co-workers in my life,' she said. 'They open doors for me. If I go to the bar, I don't pay for drinks. They call me Queenie. When we go out, it's 'Queenie, what do you need?' I'm in the good ol' boys club, and they appreciate that I'm still a woman and they respect that"; media hasn't been as favorable – reaction from one player: "get back in the kitchen"

(242) Serena wins Canadian Rogers' Cup; big deal because she's won two of the four tournaments she's played since being sidelined with a foot injury and blood clots for 49 weeks; "The mighty Williams, wearing the emerald green shirt and black skirt she'd been sporting all week, had Stosur on her heels throughout the match," "Toronto rapper Drake was among fans in the almost-full Rexall stadium, and Williams bristled in the post-match news conference when asked to respond to rumors about their relationship. 'Oh man, really?' Williams said. 'So much speculation. It's unbelievable. Shocking, really. It's too much. It's really too much. We're really good friends. I guess you can't be too close of a friend nowadays.'"

(258) Taj McWilliams-Franklin: oldest player in WNBA (Lynx); knee pads – old school (3 paragraphs about them); leagues she's played in; averages; how she trains, stays fit, and eats because she's so old; "Before games, McWilliams-Franklin can be found painting her nails or stitching a dress she designed"; talking about her daughter Maia and teammate Maya Moore

(285) Venus pulls out of U.S. Open because of autoimmune disease; "When Williams left the site shortly before 5 p.m., wearing a white sweater and purple shorts,"

[Associated Press article]

(316) Lynx vs. San Antonio for WNBA playoffs: “The ponytailed point guards in this matchup will need to play to their strengths”

(318) Lauren Jackson, WNBA Seattle Storm player, coming back from hip surgery; Seattle has won 8 of 9 games she’s been back for; most of article about her as a “free spirit” but really smart (went back to school during injury rehab); player testimonials all really positive

- “Jackson has to be considered one of the most eclectic, dynamic personalities in the WNBA. She is warm and funny and intensely competitive. The 6-foot-5 three-time MVP and seven-time All-Star has moved through her professional career with a variety of hair colors, tattoos, piercings, a distinct sense of fashion and a reputation as a young woman who loves life and a good party. Jackson said that might have been true 10 years ago. "I think there was part of me that was untouchable. I thought I could rule the world," Jackson said. "But reality sets in and things happen and you change and you grow up. I love my life and having a good time, I love having a good glass of wine with friends and doing nice, low-key things. Being in a nightclub until 5:30 a.m. and those crazy things? I just can't do it anymore." No, instead the grown-up version of Lauren Jackson has turned into a homebody, a bookworm and activist, taking classes, earning diplomas. She has studied business management and developmental psychology. She's working on her degree in gender studies from Macquarie University in Sydney.”

(344) Solheim Cup – results after the first day – who did well, who didn’t; “The Americans were dressed in red and navy, the Europeans in green and black shirts”; solidish sports reporting – starter calling wrong name, European captain “jumped in the air with joy” after Europe won final match

APPENDIX H

2011 fan statistics: percent female based on online consumer survey of 67,641 individuals ages 13+; 2009 statistics based on consumer mail survey of 12,000 individuals ages 16+

Sport league	Attendance	TV viewership	Digital market – total electronic devices (computer/laptop/netbook, tablet, smartphone)	Social media profile – Facebook	Social media profile – Twitter	Sports logo apparel purchases
MLB (baseball)	37.8 (-4.9)	39.8 (-1.8)	31.7	37.5	33.0	38.0 (-6.1)
NBA (basketball)	41.4 (-1.9)	37.8 (+2.6)	30.4	39.3	32.2	37.2 (-7.4)
NFL (football)	35.5 (-3.3)	42.6 (+1.1)	28.5	40.1	32.4	43.4 (+1.7)
PGA (golf)	31.2 (2009)	39.0 (2009)	online computer viewing: 15.0; online mobile viewing: 19.6 (2009)	N/A	N/A	22.1 (2009)
NHL (ice hockey)	39.8 (+0.9)	37.6 (+2.7)	49.5	39.7	33.6	43.4 (+8.9)
MMA (martial arts)	43.4 (2009)	30.3 (2009)	online computer viewing 22.4; online mobile viewing: 30.3 (2009)	N/A	N/A	37.4 (2009)
IndyCar	25.5 (-11.3)	31.2 (+0.6)	16.0	28.7	10.1	29.8 (+0.5)
NASCAR	38.4 (+2.6)	34.6 (-5.9)	19.6	44.5	33.5	44.7 (-2.3)
MLS (soccer)	37.1 (-9.0)	40.0 (+5.6)	30.4	35.7	23.8	39.8 (-8.1)
Tennis	40.6 (2009)	43.1 (2009)	online computer viewing: 43.1; online mobile viewing: 17.6 (2009)	N/A	N/A	32.1 (2009)
WNBA	53.9 (2006)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
College basketball	37.9 (-5.5)	36.7 (+2.8)	27.6	40.0	31.5	32.6 (-10.3)

Source: Sport Business Research Network (2012)

Note: percentages in parentheses show changes from 2009 statistics to 2011 statistics; 2011 percentages are not compared to 2009 percentages in columns where matrices of measurement are different for the two studies (e.g., “digital market”); N/A = not available.

APPENDIX I

Examples of references to romantic partners in espnW articles

- Not typically focus of the article, except (292) Catherine Wozniacki (tennis) and Rory McIlroy (golf) dating – whether the relationship will help/hurt their games, past athlete-athlete relationships (Christ Evert and Jimmy Connors)
- (25) Rosie Napravnik -6th woman to jokey in Kentucky Derby – engaged to assistant trainer – July 2012 wedding
- (2) Alicia Shay – U.S. Olympic marathoner – husband died (her voice)
- (5) Nick Blackburn and wife (former basketball and softball coach) and kid have season tickets to OK Thunder (his voice)
- (12) William and Kate wedding gifts – donation to charities, one of which is a sports charity
- (13) NFL draftees mom article – Anita Jordan – mom of Saints DE Cameron Jordan, wife to Steve Jordan, former Vikes TE and six-time pro-bowler
- (15) Ryan Succop – 2009 Mr. Irrelevant – got to take his girlfriend and a couple of buddies out for events that week (his voice)
- (18) Ryan Dempster and his wife Jenny and three kids – Dempster Family Foundation
- (20) Esther Vergeer – tennis Paralympian – “fun is my boyfriend,” who is also her physical trainer (her voice)
- (28) Annika left golf in 2008 to marry Mike McGee and start a family
- (37) Phillies first baseman Ryan Howard – heroine = fiancé Krystal Campbell, 2nd grade teacher (his voice)
- (46) U Florida coach Amanda O’Leary on transferring from Yale to UF: “easy decision for me and my family”
- (63) Danny Dreyer with help of wife Katherine invented Chi running (like tai chi)
- (105) Pamela McGee – former WNBA player – divorced, baby daddy left
- (112) Zoe Hart – alpinist – fiancé Maxime Turgeon – future plans – balance of having a family and continuing climbing ambitions (her voice)
- (113) Rachel Buehler – what athletes really eat – “my boyfriend and I really love to cook” (her voice)
- (115) Kathy Behrens – NBA Executive VP of Social Responsibility and Player Programs – “husband and I have four-year-old twins” (her voice)
- (225) Courtney Vandersloot – “your average 22-year-old, gabbing about boys and TV” (author words)
- (125) Vandersloot – “I’m single and ready to mingle,” she laughs, as teammate Epiphany Prince calls her out as the ‘biggest flirt’ on the team. She continued, with a twinkle in her eye, ‘The shy ones are the ones that get you. I’m working on making [Prince] my wingman. Salt and pepper!’ Before the duo can take their show to the nightlife scene, they’ve got some work to do on the hardwood.” Comment from [CoffeesForClosersOnly]: “Date me dangit!!!! I’m attracted to talent, specifically athletic talent, in women. And you definitely have that. You single-handedly got me interested in Gonzaga women’s basketball (Been a fan of the men’s teams for about 10 years). Though I’m not in Chicago. Sheesh, it’s times like these that I wish Charlotte still had a WNBA team ☺ R.I.P Charlotte Sting. P.S. I’m gettin’ your jersey!!!!”

- (227) Jennifer Pharr Davis – overall speed record on Appalachian Trail – “my husband, Brew, re-supplied,” next: “focus on my family...husband has worked so hard and been so selfless and hasn’t gotten much credit”
- (231) Leanda Cave – world famous triathlete – “useful to have my husband around,” most valuable possession: her wedding ring
- (299) five storylines from week 1 of tennis U.S. Open – Rory McIlroy didn’t show up to watch girlfriend Caroline Wozniacki because he’s playing golf
- (304) U.S. Open tennis quarterfinal – Angelique Kerber (German) vs. Flavia Penetta (Italy); profile of Penetta: “Good company: No, we’re not talking about her former boyfriend, Carlos Moya, the 1998 French Open champ.”
- (306) tennis U.S. Open – Wozniacki vs. Svetlana Kuznetsova – Wozniacki came from behind to win; article talks about her relationship with Rory McIlroy: “COME ON!!!!!! McIlroy tweeted as his girlfriend, Wozniacki, labored to avoid the upset. Six exclamation points –so you know the relationship between the two must be getting serious...McIlroy and Wozniacki were tweeting back and forth again Tuesday, with Wozniacki congratulating McIlroy for reaching No. 4 in the golf rankings and McIlroy...gushing back, ‘@CaroWozniack thank you! Only trying to keep up with you ;) still 3 more places to go!’”
- (314) “Wozniacki has spent most of the last year as No. 1 and has a new boyfriend – golf’s Rory McIlroy. But McIlroy is the only one in this pairing who will finish the year as a U.S. Open champion...”
- (78) yoga as beneficial for athletes; Jermy Horgan-Kobelski, professional mountain bike racer, Subaru/Trek Mountain Bike team (and husband of fellow mountain bike racer Heather Irmiger); Heather Irmiger, professional mountain bike racer, Subaru/Trak Mountain Bike team (and JHK’s wife)
- (84) Kara Lawson – 9th season in WNBA; “husband and I have kicked around the idea of giving up meat for quite awhile”
- (88) French Open – last Americans standing (out in 3rd round); updates on the tournament – who’s in quarterfinals, Nadal wanting a shorter season, Patty Schnyder retiring; “Schnyder is probably most remembered for following an extreme orange juice diet in the late 1990s at the urging of self-proclaimed ‘natural therapist’ Rainer Harnecker, whom she also dated. Her parents eventually hired a private investigator, Rainer Hoffman, to help remove their daughter from Harnecker’s influence. Schynder ended up marrying Hofmann in December 2003”
- (90) how the four women drivers fared in the Indy500; focus on Danica Patrick and what happened for her (had to conserve fuel) to end up in 10th place; quotation from Dan Wheldon, winner: “According to Wheldon, another woman – one *without* a fire suit – was a central figure in this year’s memorable Indianapolis 500. ‘People shouldn’t forget what a great job my wife has done,’ said Wheldon. ‘It’s very easy [for outsiders] to just think that you can come back and win. But it’s not the case. There’s times when you do doubt yourself a little bit. Through all of this, she’s been incredibly supportive and she understands that this is all I’ve ever done. She knows that racing creates the personality in me that she loves. So she was desperate to get me back out of the house and in a race car’”
- (92) Li Na, first Chinese player to reach a Grand Slam singles final at Australian Open, went downhill after that; decided to change coaches: “The problem to her solution: Her

husband, Jiang Shan, was her coach. The sixth seed said she could never just say to her hubby, 'You're fired.' 'I would never say that,' she said, smiling. 'I mean, it's tough. You know, the husband/coach. We need a break.'

(97) post from Terra Castro, pro triathlete, on what she eats in a day: "My husband and I usually sit down around 6:30"

(127) twin brothers Americans Bob and Mike Bryan – tennis players who have won 10 Grand Slams in their careers; idea of happiness (Bob): "Being with the person I love, my wife. Playing music every day and having a beautiful family"; Greatest extravagance (Bob): "The engagement ring I bough Michelle was huge. It was over three carats, so it set me back a lot."

(142) Val Ackerman on the WNBA's first 15 years; getting everything ready; throwing inaugural jump ball; balancing motherhood and work; comparing WNBA to NBA; talks about husband Charlie, mother-in-law sitting next to her courtside for first game at Madison Square Garden

(143) Penny Palfrey, set world record for longest, unassisted, open-ocean swim from Little Cayman to Grand Cayman Islands; quotations from husband Chris

(145) second part of article about Alex Bogomolov Jr. being ready to play after going through a divorce, failing to file paperwork for asthma medication, and a surgical procedure on his left wrist; "The 28-year-old has put an early marriage to fellow player Ashley Harkleroad behind him and now has a happy family life with girlfriend, Luana, and their 18-month-old son Maddox"

(179) Lauren Cheney – midfielder for U.S. WWC team – "Cheney's cheering section in Germany consists of her parents, Rita and George; her aunt; her boyfriend, Philadelphia 76ers point guard Jrue Holiday; and Holiday's brother and cousin. Cheney said Holiday knows little about soccer but is enjoying the games"

(180) interview with Kristine Lilly: "I got married in 2006, had a baby girl in 2008 and am going to have another one in September."

(190) 2011 WSOP's first couple – two players left in the top 57 of World Series of Poker; how she got into it (met boyfriend while touring Australia), moving in together, hanging out with top players and learning the game; ESPN article: "Erika Moutinho's odyssey through the 2011 World Series of Poker main event has been a triumph of love, and yes, you're reading this on ESPN.com. You came here for blood, sweat and tears, and you're getting this mushiness instead... Bear with me, tough guys." Erika Moutinho and David "Doc" Sands

(196) what athletes really eat – soccer gold medalist Lori Chalupny, Kate Rutherford – professional rock climber, Caroline Queen – member of U.S. national kayaking team; breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks; Rutherford: "My boyfriend and I have a deluxe camper van that we stay in when we're at Yosemite"

(207) 10 female athletes to keep your eye on in advance of London 2012 Games, one year out; Federica Pellegrini, Italy, swimming – dated former fiancé of French rival Laure Manaudou; Misty May-Treanor: married to Matt Treanor, currently a catcher for the Royals

(213) women's tennis updates: Wozniacki and McIlroy relationship (two lines)

(409) Shannon Kelly – triathlon participant who received a heart transplant; "Kelly's husband of 13 years," "Despite her limitations, she got a Chesapeake Bay retriever

named Chester, fell in love, got married and became a marketing developer and graphic designer”

(424) Kate Pallardy, pro triathlete and ultra-marathoner, and the raw foods diet she adopted; “her husband, Mike, also started eating raw in the hopes of slashing his Ironman time...’I wish I could be like my husband and throw down an entire watermelon and run 13 miles at a six-minute pace, but I’d end up vomiting”

(417) women reffing in MLS: commentary from Kari Seitz, one of just two female FIFA referees from the U.S. – worked third place WWC game and is only official to work 4 world cups; “She was married for 17 years before she and her husband took a two-week non-work trip together in 2009” (demands of the job on vacation times because can’t afford to do full-time)

(245) Lauren Davis, 17yo, earned a wild-card spot at the U.S. Open tennis tournament; reference to other players who have been in her spot and haven’t made it: “Not every junior champion becomes a pro star. Among the largely forgotten is Amber Liu, who won the 2001 junior title and went on to become a two-time singles champion at Stanford but never ranked higher than 241 in the world. She is now better known as the wife of retired tennis star Michael Chang and is recognized as a donor at the Barnes Tennis Center in San Diego”

(249) Wozniacki and McIlroy’s Twitter relationship

(253) Rachel Heal, directeur sportif of Colavita/Forni d’Asolo Pro Cycling Team; how she secured the job: “My last season, I rode for the team. The DS at the time knew she was leaving at the end of the year so she was looking for someone to take over. My boyfriend was doing some work for the team as a mechanic. He’s been a cyclist for 20 years. She saw that between the two of us, the partnership would work really well for the team”

(262) Stacy May-Johnson playing in the National Pro Fastpitch playoffs for the Bandits; training for World Championships; “May-Johnson has clearly earned a place on that team if she wants it, but the eight-year-old in her still has some lobbying to do. ‘I have to have a very candid conversation with my boss and my husband about tryouts in January, whether or not I can commit to another summer of this,’ May-Johnson said. ‘And if they give me the OK, and I feel like that’s what I want to do, then I’m committed to trying out if they want me back.’ If it’s all the same to the University of Iowa and her husband, softball wouldn’t mind at least one more year with her.”

(264) “Off the mat” with gymnast Shannon Miller; most decorated gymnast of all time; “Miller, 34, is not married and has a son who turns two in October”

(287) article about potential impact of Danica in NASCAR; other women in NASCAR; “Erin Crocker let go of her dream, too. Five years ago, Crocker was the ‘it’ girl in NASCAR when she was a development driver for Evernham Motorsports. She was touted as perhaps the top female prospect in the mid-2000s, the one who would break through. But the window on her career closed quickly when she lost sponsorship. It all worked out in the end, of course. Crocker married team owner Ray Evernham and moved on with her life”

(322) Courtney Jones, UNC soccer player, daughter of former 49ers tight end, and her success at UNC; “Jones and her boyfriend cooked for almost 30 teammates and friends...’I feel like a mother,’ Jones joked of taking in her teammates. ‘But I love all of them.’”

- (356) Kara Lawson, former Tennessee women's basketball player, talking about her experience finding out about Pat Summitt's dementia diagnosis; who she talked to in order to get details, all the interviews she was solicited for, running in a marathon to benefit the Alzheimer's Association; mentioned Damien, husband, three times in article
- (362) Colleen Whealdon-Haught, woman who died from breast cancer, and her journey using cycling to take control of her body during chemo and radiation treatments; mentions her husband training with her and racing by her side; he continues to race in her honor and raise money for cancer research
- (363) Amanda Rykoff, espnW columnist, writes about game 2 of the World Series; talks about former Yankees pitcher Andy Pettitte: "After his wife Laura performed a serviceable rendition of the national anthem"
- (447) Rachel Flatt – update on her travels, where she's competing, where she's attending charity skates, what college life is like (managing homework, making friends, attending games, "becoming popular with a group of young men thanks to her skating connections")

APPENDIX J

espnW advisory panel as of June 26, 2012

Val Ackerman – president of USA Basketball, adjunct professor at Columbia University and serves as the U.S. representative to FIBA

Gretchen Bleiler – professional athlete - snowboarding

Donna Carpenter – Burton Snowboards co-owner

Tamika Catchings– professional athlete – basketball

Kerry Chandler – Senior VP of Human Resources for ESPN

Christine Driessen – ESPN Executive VP and CFO of ESPN

Ann Meyers Drysdale – VP of Phoenix Mercury and Phoenix Suns (basketball HOF)

Sue Enquist – former UCLA softball coach (retired in 2006; now a motivational speaker; 11 natl. titles)

Julie Foudy– former professional athlete - soccer, correspondent for ESPN

Ilana Kloss – commissioner of World Team Tennis; former tennis pro

Leslie LaFronz – head field hockey coach at Kean University

Dr. Nicole LaVoi – Assistant Director of the Tucker Center at University of Minnesota

Dr. Richard Lapchick - Founder and Director of the Institute for Diversity and Ethics In Sport

Lori LeBas - Senior Vice President, Strategy & Business Operations for ESPN

Jessica Mendoza– professional athlete - softball

Dr. Jordan Metzl – sports medicine physician - NYC

Alana Nichols - Paralympic wheelchair basketball player and alpine skier from the United States

Susan O'Day - Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer, Walt Disney Company

Russ Rose – Penn State women’s volleyball head coach

Summer Sanders - sports commentator and reporter, TV show host, actress and retired Olympic gold medalist in swimming

Amy Stanton – Gretchen Blieler’s (snowboarding) agent

Carol Stiff – VP, programming and acquisitions for ESPN

Dr. Kevin Stone – orthopedic surgeon – San Francisco

Hannah Storm - American television sports journalist, serving as co-anchor of ESPN's SportsCenter Monday–Thursday mornings

Judy Sweet – former NCAA executive – first woman to be NCAA president

John Walsh - ESPN executive VP, Editorial director of espn.com

APPENDIX K

espnW contributors – descriptions taken directly from espnW, n.d.

Contributors**[Val Ackerman](#)**

Val Ackerman served as the WNBA's first president for eight years, before becoming the first female president of USA Basketball in 2005. During her term with USAB, both the men's and women's U.S. teams won gold at the Beijing Olympics. A graduate of UCLA's law school, she's currently an adjunct professor at Columbia University and serves as the U.S. representative to FIBA. She and her husband have two daughters.

[Adena Andrews](#)

Adena is a writer for espnW. She worked at ESPN the Magazine and NBA.com for three seasons before joining espnW. A proud USC grad, she also edits for Nike Women and Nike Running. You can follow her on Twitter [@adena_andrews](#).

[Kathryn Bertine](#)

Kathryn Bertine is an elite cyclist and the author of two sports memoirs, *As Good As Gold* (ESPN) and *All the Sundays Yet to Come* (Little, Brown). She can be reached through her site www.kathrynbertine.com.

[Gretchen Bleiler](#)

Gretchen Bleiler is a four-time winner of the Winter X Games Halfpipe competition and a 2006 Winter Olympic silver medalist.

[Tamika Catchings](#)

Tamika Catchings was a four-time All-American for Tennessee. A six-time WNBA All-Star and four-time Defensive Player of the Year for the Indiana Fever, Catchings is also a two-time Olympic gold medalist.

[Joanne C. Gerstner](#)

Joanne C. Gerstner is a staff writer with espnW. She is an award-winning sports writer, having covered the Olympics, NBA and college sports. Her work has regularly appeared in the New York Times, USA Today and Detroit News. You can follow her on Twitter [@joannecgerstner](#).

[Monica Gonzalez](#)

Monica Gonzalez is a native of Dallas and played college soccer at Notre Dame before becoming founding member of the Mexican national team in 1999. She was captain of the Mexican team from 2003-07 and was named to the FIFA World All-Star team in 2007. She currently works for ESPN as an analyst and sideline reporter.

Graham Hays

Graham Hays writes for Page 2 and contributes to ESPN.com's women's basketball, softball and soccer coverage. Hays began with ESPN in 1999. He's now an editor for ESPN.com's SportsNation.

Kate Fagan

- Joined espnW in Jan. 2012
- Spent three seasons covering the 76ers for the Philadelphia Inquirer
- Played women's basketball at University of Colorado from 1999-2004

Julie Foudy

During her stellar 17 years on the U.S. national soccer team, Julie Foudy won two World Cups and three Olympic medals (two gold, one silver). Foudy captained the national team for 13 years. A 2007 inductee into the U.S. National Soccer Hall of Fame, Foudy now works as an analyst for ABC/ESPN and for NBC Olympics. She is also director of the Julie Foudy Sports Leadership Academies, a motivational speaker, and proud mother of Isabel and Declan.

Melissa Jacobs

Melissa Jacobs is founder of the award-winning NFL site, TheFootballGirl.com. Previously, she was a producer for ESPN's studio shows including SportsCenter and Jim Rome is Burning.

Rebecca Lobo

Rebecca Lobo won the 1995 Naismith National Player of the Year Award after leading the University of Connecticut women's basketball team to its first national championship. She was the youngest member of the 1996 gold-medal-winning Olympic team, and now, after seven seasons in the WNBA, she covers basketball for ESPN. She lives in Connecticut with her husband, Steve Rushin, and their three children.

Jane McManus

Jane McManus has covered New York sports since 1998 and began covering football just before Brett Favre's stint with the Jets. Her work has appeared in Newsday, USA Today, The Journal News and The New York Times

Jessica Mendoza

Jessica Mendoza is a softball player for the National Pro Fastpitch team the Florida Pride, a two-time Olympic medalist, former Women's Sports Foundation president, mother, an ESPN color analyst, athletic ambassador for Team Darfur and a board member of the National Education Association Foundation.

Elizabeth Merrill

- Senior writer for ESPN.com
- Formerly at "The Kansas City Star" and "The Omaha World-Herald"

[Amanda Rykoff](#)

Amanda Rykoff (aka The OCD Chick) is a NYC-based sports fan and TiVo junkie. She is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, a recovering attorney and previous host of the ESPN podcast "Play Ball!"

[Summer Sanders](#)

Summer Sanders won two gold, a silver and a bronze medal in the butterfly in the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. Currently a correspondent for Good Morning America, The Rachael Ray Show and NBC's Universal Sports Network, she's also a proud wife, mother and an avid runner.

[Michelle Smith](#)

- Based in the San Francisco Bay area
- Has covered pro and college sports for AOL Fanhouse and the San Francisco Chronicle
- Founder of leftcoasthoops.com which covers women's basketball on the West Coast

[Sarah Spain](#)

Sarah Spain is a SportsCenter Anchor for Chicago's ESPN1000 and a reporter for ESPNChicago.com. She's a proud Cornell alum and a huge Chicago sports fan

[Mechelle Voepel](#)

- ESPN.com women's basketball/college sports writer
- 28 seasons covering women's college basketball
- Covered 19 Final Fours

[all from espnW, n.d.a)

APPENDIX L

Example of ESPN's discrimination against women: category "commentator – dislike female commentators" on the ESPN website contact page

hold 'Ctrl' key to select multiple networks.

*Satellite/Cable Provider:
Comcast Cable

*Category:
TV Sports Event Coverage

*Item:
College Basketball - Men's

*Topics:

- ✓ --Select Item--
- ACC Blackout
- Bands/Halftime Performance
- Camera Angles
- Commentator/Announcer
- Commentator – dislike female commentators**
- ESPN Full Court
- ESPN Buzzer Beater
- Graphics/Bottom Line
- How to get ESPNU/ESPNUHD
- National Anthem
- Other
- Overall coverage
- Schedule
- Story Idea
- Team selection
- Technical – Audio/Video
- Tape request

Source: <https://twitter.com/msois/status/166986643125977088>

APPENDIX M

ESPN The Magazine cover photographs featuring female athletes



APPENDIX N

November 2010 *ESPN The Magazine* cover of Lindsey Vonn