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Abstract

In my dissertation, "Sporting Bodies: The Rhetorics of Female Athletes," I interrogate how female athletes are represented in the media, trace the dominant cultural images and discourses associated with these representations, illustrate how female athletes use venues such as *ESPN The Magazine* as a vehicle to represent themselves even as they are represented by ESPN in ways that are not entirely within their control, and examine how female athletes' self-presentation in the Body Issues can be interpreted as strategic, rhetorical acts. This project begins by investigating how historical discourses have influenced women's athletics and female athletes. Rhetorically examining historical discourses about female athletes and women's bodies demonstrate how patterns of marginalization have developed and continue to function in contemporary sports and American culture. I then build out these discourses in our contemporary setting, specifically focusing on arguments made by my feminist sports scholars and women's sports advocates, which call for the media to solely focus on the athleticism of female athletes. I also offer the critique that an important limitation of these arguments is the lack of discussion about the economic pressures that greatly influence professional athletes.

Additionally, a main focus of this dissertation is my rhetorical analysis of the visual and textual representations of female athletes in *ESPN The Magazine's* Body Issues. I argue that we should resist interpretations of the representations of female athletes that position their sexual, racial, and feminine appearances as something to be ignored and devalued *or* as something that should be the focus of attention in themselves. The central goal in this project is to demonstrate how female athletes engage in rhetorical acts, via the representations of their bodies, that are complicated and often contradictory. A rhetorical analysis of the female athletes in the Body Issues is especially provocative because it offers a way to look at the representations of these athletes', to look at their multiple subjectivities, and consider how they use their bodily

appearances, pose types, and interviews in order to maintain the structures of the sporting world, or to survive and/or to gain visibility, economic security, public recognition, and the power to speak. Ultimately, I argue that their collective rhetorical activity demonstrates how athletes use the Body Issues as a vehicle to work within and against the male-dominated sporting world and propel themselves, their sport, and the larger organization of women's athletics into positions of power.

Sporting Bodies: The Rhetorics of Professional Female Athletes

by

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B.A., Pepperdine University, 2009
M.A., San Diego State University, 2012

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in *Composition and Cultural Rhetoric*.

Syracuse University

May 2017

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Acknowledgements

I'd like to start by thanking the people who have advised and supported me through this process. I wouldn't be here to defend my dissertation today without the vast efforts of my dissertation chair, Lois Agnew. Lois, you have tirelessly listened to my numerous stressed out ramblings and guided me through this rocky and challenging thing of writing a dissertation. Thank you for continually highlighting where and how I can be a more thoughtful researcher and writer. It's a testament to your mentorship that I produced a project that I'm proud of. Thank you to Eileen Schell for your constructive feedback and for pushing me to complicate my ideas. You always had resource recommendations at the ready for me and I'm grateful for how you have helped enhance my research. Thank you to Collin Brooke, who has always been a calm, steady, insightful force in my life since the moment I join this program. Collin, thank you for teaching me how to actually write a dissertation and for giving me strategies to negotiate the complicated sections of this project. Thank you to Krista Kennedy for your continued support throughout my time at SU and for generously allowing me to write about crafting the body in your course. Your mentorship and advice helped me to arrive at this project. And finally, thank you to the powerful scholarship of Barry Brummett whose research on rhetoric and sports undergirds this dissertation.

During my first semester here at SU, I took a class with Minnie Bruce Pratt on Feminist Narratives: Theory and Practice, and Minnie Bruce pushed me to clarify to myself why I'm interested in women's bodies and representations and performances of gender and sexuality. Through numerous narrative writing prompts where our class was asked to write our stories and the histories that shaped us, and I came to realize the profound significance sports, specifically water polo and swimming, have had on my life in terms of shaping my identity and how I

perceive and engage the world around me. Ultimately, Minnie Bruce's class and the crystalizing of this tension between female athletes and representations and perceptions of their bodies led me to this project. Therefore, I owe a big debt of gratitude to Minnie Bruce for pushing me to realize the importance of researching female athletes and women's sports.

Additionally, I want to honor my coaches who helped shape and mold me into an athlete and the woman I am today. Specifically, I want to acknowledge Andrea Castro for offering me the opportunity to get in the pool and play with her team and for being one of the best English teachers I've ever had. You helped me discover my love for waterpolo and my love for writing. To that end, I'd also like to thank my swim coach, Peter Tragitt who taught me how to find joy in competition and practice as well as the true meaning of hard work and dedication to one's passion. Thank you both for always showing up for 5am practice, for your mentorship, for you weird jokes, and for always, always supporting me as an athlete, a student, and a person.

Waterpolo gave me a way to make sense of myself, my mind, my identity, and my body, which had always seemed too much in one way or another. This connection with sports is one I have often heard repeated by my fellow teammates, girls I have coached, and most recently, by the women who came before me, whose histories and experiences are detailed in this dissertation. Thus, I want to acknowledge these amazing girls and women who have sweated alongside me, competed against me, or who paved the way so that young girls and women like myself will always have abundant opportunities to play sports.

I'd also like to say thank you to my friends and family. Erika, you continually teach me how to be a lady boss and own my awesomeness. You have been with me and loved me through every major and minor up and down during graduate school, and I do not have enough words to tell you how grateful I am to have you in my life. Thank you for the late night calls, ridiculous

texts, cross-country trips, numerous beer/wine dates, and for putting a spa mask on my face after my first semester in my Phd program. You are my sister and bestie in every way. I love you. I have also been blessed with amazing community here in Syracuse. Matt and Tara Waldby and Stephen and Becca Rusinko, thank you for “kidnapping” me four years ago and opening your homes and hearts to a stranger and becoming my second family. I’m truly touched to be a part of your lives and honored to call you friends. Thank you to Simeon, Josh, Jeremy, Suzie, Laura, and Abbey and Jon Mahoney for celebrating every single obstacle I’ve overcome, no matter how small or insignificant, for always reminding me to laugh and not take life too seriously, and for your continued prayers and encouragement. Most of all, thank you to my partner and best friend, Ryan. You have stood by me even when I spilled wings down the front of your shirt and pants after my comp exams; you took care of details such as feeding me during the entire month of February so that I didn’t have to take time and energy to grocery shop and so that I could finish my dissertation and graduate on time; you never complained when I showed up late because I lost track of time while working; and you always express how much faith you have in me and my ability to do this research and finish this project. Thank you for your prayers, your delight in my weirdness, your support, your encouragement, and your love.

And lastly, I would not be who I am or where I am today without my family. Thank you to my brother Josh for always playing games and sports with me, for never making me feel less because I am girl, and for making sure I was living on more than peanut butter and wheat thins during my Masters. I learned to love watching and playing sports because of you and because you always made sure I was included. Mom and Dad, you have sacrificed so much to help get me here. You found someone to teach me to swim, you took off work to come to every single game and tournament I’ve played in, you’ve listened to me talk through my ideas and offered

feedback when I asked; and the list can go on and on and on. Thank you for teaching me how to have faith and take risks, to believe I have every right to chase after my goals and dreams, and to know it's okay to fail and breakdown from time to time. Thank you for calling me out when I've been half-assing it, for being my truest and long-standing sounding boards, and for instilling within me the understanding that "this is supposed to be hard, the hard is what makes it great." I'm continually amazed and honored by your genuine interest in and support of my work. This project and this degree are dedicated to you both. Truly, my dissertation and doctorate are a testament to your great love, friendship, sacrifice, and faith. Thank you and I love you!

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Chapter 1

Twirl For Me: Women Athletes, Performance, and Identity

During the January 2015 Australian Open, a male reporter asked 20 year old Canadian tennis player, Eugenie Bouchard to “twirl” and “show off her outfit” instead of asking her about her victory that advanced her to the next round of competition. This televised request immediately caused an uproar on social media that can be traced through the hashtag “Twirlgate.” When asked to comment on the reporter’s offensive request at the tournament press conference Bouchard stated, “You know I’m fine with being asked to twirl if they ask the guys to like flex their muscles and stuff,” and “personally I’m not offended. No, I think it was an in-the-moment thing and it was funny” (Caple).

In July of 2015, *The New York Times* published the article “Tennis’s Top Women Balance Body Image with Ambition” (2015) by freelance reporter Ben Rothenberg, which discusses how the bodies of different professional female tennis athletes visually compare to one another. In an attempt to suggest that part of Serena Williams’s success is based on how she conditions her body to athletically perform—which Rothenberg attributes to the size of her muscles—and that part of the reason other players have not had as many victories as Williams is because they do not bulk up like she does, Rothenberg presents an article that negatively targets Williams’s body and harmfully evaluates her physique alongside other white female players in the Women’s Tennis Association:

Williams, who will be vying for the Wimbledon title against Garbiñe Muguruza on Saturday, has large biceps and a mold-breaking muscular frame, which packs the power and athleticism that have dominated women’s tennis for years. Her rivals could try to emulate her physique, but most of them choose not to.
(Rothenberg)

Later in the article Rothenberg notes that “Despite Williams’s success — a victory Saturday would give her 21 Grand Slam singles titles and her fourth in a row — body-image issues among

female tennis players persist, compelling many players to avoid bulking up.” To support this claim Rothenberg quotes Tomasz Wiktorowski, the coach of Agnieszka Radwanska, who states, “It’s our decision to keep [Radwanska] as the smallest player in the top 10...Because, first of all she’s a woman, and she wants to be a woman.” Rothenberg concludes his article by raising Maria Sharapova up as the quintessential example of a successful female athlete since she is “a slender, blond Russian who has been the highest-paid female athlete for more than a decade because of her lucrative endorsements.”

On Sunday March 20th, 2016 the BNP Tennis Paribas Open tournament director Raymond Moore presented highly controversial opinions about the Women’s Tennis Association and its female tennis players.¹ In a press conference before the tournament finals he told reporters, “In my next life when I come back I want to be someone in the WTA because they ride on the coattails of the men. They don’t make any decisions and they are lucky....If I was a lady player, I’d go down every night on my knees and thank God that Roger Federer and Rafa Nadal [leading male tennis players on the pro tour] were born, because they have carried this sport” (espn.com). Moore continues this line of commentary by giving his opinion on the attractiveness of the WTA players: “I think the WTA have a handful -- not just one or two -- but they have a handful of very attractive prospects that can assume the mantle....They are physically attractive and competitively attractive. They can assume the mantle of leadership once Serena decides to stop” (espn.com). Moore immediately received backlash, and that evening he made a formal, written apology stating that his “comments about the WTA were in extremely poor taste and erroneous,” and he resigned as CEO of the WTA (espn.com).

¹ Moore is a 69-year-old former touring pro from South Africa and as the director he oversees the \$7 million tournament which features the men’s and women’s tours.

During the 2016 Summer Olympic Games, three-time Olympian trapshooter Corey Cogdell won her second bronze medal. *The Chicago Tribune* did not report Cogdell's name when publicizing her victory, but instead reported, "Wife of a Bears' lineman wins a bronze medal today in Rio Olympics." Also, when Hungarian swimmer Katinka Hosszu won a gold medal in the 400-meter individual medley, NBC cut to her coach/husband and referred to him as "the man responsible" for Hosszu's victory (Stubbs). Lastly, when American swimmer Katie Ledecky broke her own world record in the 400-meter freestyle, Rowdy Gaines, a NBC commentator—shared the observation that "a lot of people think she swims like a man" (Cauterucci).

These four events, representative of myriad examples and varying levels of the degradation of women athletes, illustrate a multifarious discourse comprised of sexism, racism, and misogyny—as well as the more subtle act of crediting men for female athletes' victories—directed at female athletes' bodies, which constructs a complicated system of marginalization in women's sports. The prominence of this multifaceted rhetoric in the sporting world highlights the complex public perceptions of female athletes, their bodies, and their embodied identities as well as suggests that professional female athletes must strategically negotiate this network of discourse, representation, and public perception in order to survive and succeed in the sporting world. Recently, I had the opportunity to reflect on these discourses and how I identify with my research subjects. During a generative conversation with a colleague about my stake in this research project I was asked how my body has been read as a female athlete. Upon reflection, I explained that when I was younger I was sometimes perceived as masculine or as a lesbian, even though I did not identify with either position. At that point in time, I did not understand why this seemingly arbitrary, cultural assumption—that females who are athletes are also lesbians and/or

masculine—existed; however, I did understand that this cultural logic circulated to minimize and diminish female athletes. Moreover, nicknames such as Lurch, a reference to the extremely tall, male, yet affable monster from the Adams family, and metaphorical descriptions, such as plays like a beast, made it clear to me that I was too tall (or monstrous) and I played too aggressively in too aggressive of a sport to ever be read as a fully feminine, human, body.

As a female athlete, I have often wondered about public reactions to my body and identity as well as the treatment of the bodies and identities of my fellow sportswomen because these treatments suggest that we fall outside the social norms of acceptable embodied subjectivities and physical appearances. Fortunately, my position as a scholar of rhetoric has enabled me to critically research and understand these reactions and even relieve these tensions. Taken together, the four moments shared above, as well as my personal experiences as an athlete, call attention to cultural discourses that reduce the female body to narrow, limited subjectivities—a flattening of difference via oppression that relegates female athletes to spaces where they are read as feminine and sexualized, lesbians, or freaks/monsters. And these embodied positions are not separate, but intertwined—pushing, pulling, and overlapping as female athletes pivot back and forth to negotiate the resistance to their bodily presence on and off the field of play. I share this self-reflection to showcase my positionality to this study as both a female athlete and a researcher with “passionate attachments” to this project (Royster 280).

Explanation of the Project and Rationale

In American culture, sports are a leading economic industry as well as one of the pivotal sites for making, producing, circulating, and consuming social identities. Furthermore, because sports are performative, they are constantly in relationship with the general public. Indeed,

professional sports are nationally televised and reported on via print and digital media, and thousands of spectators routinely flock to stadiums or athletic arenas to watch athletes compete. Also, audiences do not simply gaze at athletes and their performances: They give dollars to have a front row seat; they buy their favorite jerseys to support their chosen team and players; they purchase, wear, and/or use the products athletes endorse; they pay to play the sports themselves and buy equipment, field space, and time to practice; they sign their children up for t-ball, swim lessons, and pee-wee hockey. We are a society that walks hand in hand with sports in a symbiotic relationship. Just as athletes and sports organizations perform for and sell to us, we watch, consume, participate, and try to embody and reproduce these identities and performances via the purchasing and wearing of products like Air-Jordan tennis shoes or physically training our bodies to move like our favorite athletes.²

Given this long-standing and intense relationship the American public has with its sports, the vast visibility sports and athletes maintain in our society, and the identity creation and production we witness and experience via athletes' performances, I submit that sports are one of the most significant spaces where cultural discourses about subjectivities and power circulate. Articulating this point, communication scholars Barry Brummett and Rachel Kraft argue that sport and games are inherently rhetorical because they function as persuasive communications that "influence the social and political attitudes held by the public" (11). Sport is a major way people form personal and social identities, and because sport is highly performative, it is then through performative dimensions that sport rhetorically affects culture. To that end, I extend Lorin Shellenberger's argument that the study of athletes, specifically female athletes, holds particular significance for the field of rhetoric because "elite athletes, much like politicians and

² Air-Jordans were a line of tennis shoes produced by Nike and endorsed by pro basketball star, Michael Jordan.

celebrities, hold a privileged place in society and help establish how women are perceived in the public sphere,” and visual representations of their bodies as well as their on and off the field performances of their identity have “important implications for cultural and societal values” (30).

This dissertation attends to how female athletes’ bodies, and images of their bodies, play a vital role in the formation and embodiment of their multiple subjectivities. I begin this project by delineating the long history of marginalization in women’s sports, which includes diminishing women’s bodies via sexualized, racist, and/or gendered discourses, that influences how female athletes work within and against the male-dominated sporting world to exert agency. I then turn to discuss feminist sports scholars’ and women’s sports activists’ responses to this history and the arguments they use to fight against this marginalization. I discuss how feminist sports scholars and women’s sports advocates have often disregarded female athletes’ bodily appearances and performances in favor of solely focusing on their athleticism so as to avoid perpetuating the devaluing of sportswomen and undermining the institution of women’s sports. However, a main claim of this project is that the polarizing tension created by the oppressive, historical discourses and feminist sports scholars’ argument for a lone focus on women’s athleticism divides female athletes’ multiple subjectivities and prevents the evolution of a fuller, more inclusive rhetoric about women’s athletics and their bodies. In response to feminist sports scholars’ argument, I address how scholars and athletes who came of age before the passing of Title IX had to battle for the opportunity and the right to play whereas scholars and athletes who came of age after the passing of Title IX grew up in a world where our right to play was rarely, if ever, in question and, usually, opportunities to play *certain* sports were abundant. The difference in these experiences slightly alters the exigent drive in women’s athletics today, thus slightly altering how current professional female athletes fight against and interpret marginalization—

e.g. via media representations that showcase their other subject positions—in the larger sporting world.

In addition to addressing feminist sports scholars and sportswomen's varying interpretations and treatment of the visual representations of female athletes, I argue that an important limitation of feminist scholars and sports activists' arguments is the lack of discussion about the economic pressures that greatly influence professional athletes. Endorsement deals are a significant way female athletes augment their relatively small income for their athletic performances, and female athletes often secure endorsement deals through *both* their on and off the field performances. Thus, any discussion about professional female athletes and (re)presentations of them must account for the relationship between professional athletics and our capitalistic economy so to understand the nuanced choices guiding their rhetorical actions. This conglomeration of issues begets the question: what possibilities for women's sports and athletes become evident if we rhetorically contemplate female athletes' multiple subjectivities simultaneously? Accounting for the value and possibilities this kind of rhetorical activity reveals for women's sports and for rhetoric, my rhetorical analysis of the visual and textual representations of female athletes in *ESPN The Magazine's* Body Issues dating from 2009-2015 endeavors to connect the multifaceted subjectivities embodied by female athletes and propose a middle ground that counters treatments of their identities, especially their sexuality, race, and gender, as neither something that should be the focus of attention in itself nor as something that should be denied, denigrated, or ignored in favor of focusing on their athleticism.

My choice in selecting the Body Issues for study is three-fold. First, the magazine is a rich site of embodied discourse that can augment the study of the body as inseparable from rhetoric, discourse, and power. In this way, my project connects to and extends rhetorical

research that instates the body as an integral part of rhetorical study and rhetorical production. Second, the Body Issues are a corpus of mediated visual and textual representations of athletes that function as a legitimate, representative sample of the wider media coverage of sportswomen; they annually present images and text that highlight the dominant patterns and ways of racializing, gendering, sexualizing, and/or othering women's bodies as well as the complicated ways of valorizing these same bodies; and they showcase how female athletes choose to represent themselves in the sporting world. Ultimately, the Body Issues allow me to pursue the broader purposes of this dissertation—to understand how women athletes are represented, trace the dominant cultural images and discourses associated with these representations, illustrate how female athletes use the magazine as a vehicle to represent themselves even as they are represented by ESPN in ways that are not entirely within their control, and examine how female athletes' self-presentation in the Body Issues can be interpreted as strategic, rhetorical acts.

Finally, the magazine explicitly presents the Body Issues as a form of epideictic rhetoric, and in doing so, it uniquely demarcates itself from other media outlets and acknowledges the magazine as intentionally shaping, reinforcing, and potentially creating new public values about women's sports. As a rhetorical scholar and an athlete, I am particularly interested in how ESPN constructs the magazine as epideictic and what public values they create and/or reinforce since these values have the social power to maintain marginalizing discourses or transform these values to be more inclusive and accepting of female athletes' bodies and varied subject positions in women's sports. Moreover, as a multi-media conglomerate, and as one of the leading sports media outlets, ESPN has an immense amount of power when it comes to deciding how and what discourses about athletes they will produce, market, and circulate, which sparks questions about how these bodies are celebrated; which bodies are celebrated; what type of public is brought into

being through the magazine's "celebration of athletes' amazing bodies"; and how this type of rhetoric influences discourses about female sporting bodies and female bodies in general. The exigency for this project emerges out of incidents such as the ones described at the beginning of this chapter, which speak to the marginalization that still circulates in women's sports, and attention to this marginalization guides me to interrogate the subtle and varied ways in which women at different historical moments have fought against these historic patterns of oppression in order to legitimize themselves as athletes and as women.

This project studies the visual and textual discourse on female athletes' bodies to enhance our knowledge of what rhetoric can be and do. To quote Jay Dolmage, "studying any culture's attitudes and arguments about the body always connects us intimately with attitudes and arguments about rhetorical possibility" (4). My study of female athletes and women's athletics, then, illuminates the historical, cultural, and institutional representations of the female body in the sporting world. In this project, I bring together three current conversations in the field—rhetoric and sports, rhetorical and performance analysis, and feminist rhetoric. My work advances the connection between rhetoric and sports and forwards for the field the importance of studying athletics as it can inform our knowledge of gendered, raced, and sexualized dynamics in American culture. Second, my research expands the field's knowledge of the application of rhetorical analysis to visual and textual representations of the female body. Finally, a rhetorical study of female athletes, women's sports, and the relationship between rhetoric and sports augments the field's expansive growth in the areas of embodiment and materiality as well as its dedication to the study of oppressive discourses and histories that account for the marginalized other.

Embodiment, Materiality, and Performance

My dissertation builds on rhetorical scholars' research on embodiment and materiality. In their work with material and embodied rhetoric, scholars disrupt our understanding of what a text is and how it is impacted by its rhetorical situation. For example, Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley raise a central question that guides much of the scholarship in embodied rhetorics: "How would a material rhetoric permit us to rethink what is, and what is not, the province of rhetoric...In what ways is rhetorical theory tied to the circumstances of physical embodiment?" (10). Carol Blair aptly addresses this issue in her chapter "Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric's Materiality." She argues that "rhetoric is itself, material, just as substantial and consequential as any element of its setting" (16), and she proposes that "we must ask not just what a text means but, more generally, what it does; and we must not understand what it does as adhering strictly to what it was supposed to do" (23). In response to this guiding question in embodied rhetorics, I ground my research in Barbara Dickson's conceptualization of material rhetoric, which "as a mode of interpretation, reads the way persons inscribe on their corporal bodies the culture that produces them and that they mutually produce" (298). Adjusting our frame of analysis to consider the materiality of a text and investigate what that material text does provides the space to contemplate the body—the female athlete's body in this case—as a culturally produced rhetorical, material text.

Advancing the rhetorical study the body as a material text, Jay Dolmage's *Disability Rhetoric* and Debra Hawhee's *Bodily Arts* examine how rhetoric is both circulated through and embodied within disabled bodies' (Dolmage) and athletic bodies (Hawhee). Dolmage critiques definitions of rhetoric for often denying and denigrating the body. He instates the body as an integral part of the study of rhetoric, and redefines rhetoric as the "study of the circulation of

discourse through the body” (5). To establish the body’s vital place in the study of rhetoric, Dolmage calls for a fuller understanding of the body’s role in shaping and multiplying the available means of persuasion (3). In this reconceptualization of rhetoric, the body becomes inseparable from discourse, and the production and circulation of discourse becomes inconceivable without the body. Positioned alongside this understanding of embodied rhetoric, the study of rhetoric and athletics, according to Hawhee, “enables a view of rhetoric as a bodily art rather than strictly a cerebral endeavor, and traces the way in which rhetoric and athletes mutually shape and struggle with each other—conceptually, practically, and culturally” (14). I submit, then, that embodied rhetoric, as it pertains to the body and discourses of power, names a network of rhetorical practices that are used for varying purposes—such as negotiating or surviving oppressive systems of power—by different types of performing bodies. Understanding embodied rhetoric and the study of rhetoric and athletics in this way distinctively positions my analysis to consider how female athletes engage in rhetorical performances off the field of play and for what purposes. My dissertation, then, looks to Hawhee’s work as a starting point and then turns to examine how the contemporary female athlete’s body functions as a material text that both produces rhetoric and is influenced by rhetoric as it circulates through the body. I “look at cultural practices articulated through and by the body and how the body combines the visible with the articulable,” by analyzing the visual and textual representations of female athletes’ bodies and multiple subject positions (Hawhee 6).³

³ Because the study of the body, especially the athlete’s body, is still a new endeavor in the field of rhetoric, this project also draws on scholarship in communication and sport studies, specifically, Barry Brummett’s *Sporting Rhetoric: Performance, Games, and Politics* (2009); Barry Brummett and Andrew W. Ishak’s *Sports and Identity* (2014), Leslie Heywood and Shari L. Dworkin’s *Built to Win: The Female Athlete as Cultural Icon* (2003); Jean O’Reilly and Susan K. Cahn’s *Women and Sports in the United States* (2007); and Jamie Schultz’s *Qualifying Times: Points of Change in U.S. Women’s Sport* (2014).

To initiate this research, I collected the images of and interviews with the female athletes in all of the seven Body Issues, catalogued them according to sport, race, and the type of pose, and traced patterns and relationships between these three elements. Given the vastness of the sporting world and the diversity of the culture that varies from sport to sport, it is necessary to select a small number of sports to study in this project; specifically I selected Basketball, Tennis, and Soccer—the three sports most often featured throughout the issues—and the athletes who play these sports for my sites of analysis. Then, to address the complex and fraught nature of female athletes’ embodied practices and their relationship to media outlets such as *ESPN*, I analyze the visual and textual representations of the athletes. I include performance theory as a component of my rhetorical analysis because attending to the relationship between the body and performance offers a lens through which to consider the “materiality of the physical body” as well as the body’s capacity to signify meaning (Shellenberger 12-13). Moreover, a focus on rhetoric and performance enables me to account for female athletes’ complicated and bodily practices as they are represented via the static images in *ESPN’s* Body Issues. At the intersection of rhetoric and performance, then, “power works in part through discourse and it works in part to produce and destabilize subjects” (Butler 202). Here, rhetoric locates how discourses of power circulate through the body (Dolmage) and how these discourses are enacted through and influenced by the posed, performing body.

Additionally, given the complex representations of female athletes, I also draw on Michel Foucault’s reverse discourse theory, Jacqueline Rhodes and Jonathan Alexander’s queer rhetorical analysis of counter-logics, and Judith Butler’s and José Muñoz conceptualizations of disidentification as a mode of performance. This rhetorical and performance framework, rooted in reverse discourse theory, queer counter-discourse, and disidentification, manifests how these

bodies perpetuate, disrupt, and/or evolve cultural expectations of female athletes and women's bodies. Through this framework I illuminate the complex relationship between rhetoric and contemporary female athletes and how that relationship particularly informs cultural ideals about gender, sexuality, race, and identity in society. Furthermore, a rhetorical analysis of the visual and textual representations of female athletes is especially provocative because of the negotiation between marginalizing, normative discourses of race, gender, and sexuality and athletes' strategic efforts to represent themselves as maintaining, subverting, and/or surviving these discourses in the sporting world. Subsequently, my research positions the body as inseparable from rhetoric, discourse, and power, and in this way, the body is further established as an integral part of rhetorical study and production in our field.

Feminist Rhetorical Research

Aligned with feminist principles of research in the field of rhetoric and composition, this project commits to analyzing “how social, historical, and cultural factors shape the research site as well as [the research subjects'] goals, values, and experiences,” and “correct[ing] androcentric norms by calling into question what has been considered ‘normal’ and what has been regarded as ‘deviant’” (Kirsch 4-5 qtd. in Schell 9). Indeed, this dissertation revolves around the historical, social, and economic discourses influencing and informing normative ideals that exclude and/or diminish women in the sporting world. Because the rhetorical study of athletics and athletes is relatively uncharted territory, this research required that I look to other fields such as sports sociology, women and gender studies, and disability studies to ground and enhance my research. As Eileen Schell aptly describes in her chapter “Researching Feminist Rhetorical Methods,” I experienced a “feminist right of passage,” as I worked through my research that “required a

mobility, flexibility, adaptability, and awareness of terms, concepts, and power relations,” as well as some borrowing and struggling (6). A feminist project of this nature needed interdisciplinary methods that “required that I learn something about history, [science, education, law,] economics, politics, and the social context of women’s lives” (Royster 251). To that end, my greatest struggles during this project were in coming to understand the complex relationship between capitalism, dominant-normative discourses about power, gender, race, and sexuality and working through my “passionate attachments” to and my dis/identifications with the female athletes I studied. As Royster explains, “There is a constancy in the need for negotiation, beginning with the uncomfortable questions of how much I actually do share identities with women I study and how much I do not” (271).

Certainly, my embodied identity as an athlete led me to study sportswomen’s bodies and to critically interrogate how cultural discourses of gender and sexuality address my experiences of marginalization. However, this attachment and desire to understand my experiences as an athlete required vigilance so as to avoid privileging my experience over those of the subjects in my research; that is, I routinely paused to acknowledge my position as the researcher and write my experiences out of these chapters—a constant process of self-reflection—while I analyzed and rearticulated the experiences of the female athletes in my dissertation. Royster’s “afrafeminist-methodology” informed my research practices as I negotiated all of these issues (Bizzell 122). I grounded my practices in her methodology to maintain “careful analysis” of the history of women’s sports as well as the images of the athletes; “acknowledgement of [my] passionate attachment” to women’s sports and the female athletes in my research; “attention to ethical action” in my scholarship, especially how I theorized my claims and represented the athletes’ actions and experiences; and my “commitment to social responsibility” as I consider the

“social consequences of the knowledge” I generate and use here (Royster 279-81, Bizzell 122). Ultimately, my research practices in this dissertation align with feminist rhetoricians’ difficult and vitalizing work of reclamation and rearticulation, labor to advance the way rhetorics of embodiment illustrate the intersections between gender, race, sexuality, and culture, and I present women’s sports, female athletes, and women’s bodies, in general, as sites in need of continued feminist rhetorical research.

Research Questions

To achieve these goals I employ a dual line of inquiry that 1) addresses how the images of the female athletes in the Body Issues can be traditionally interpreted according to historical—and often marginalizing—embodied sport discourses, especially when they are presented via the media, and 2) studies how these images might be alternatively analyzed so as to account for the various ways female athletes use their bodies to exert rhetorical agency through vehicles such as the Body Issues. Within this dual line of inquiry, I pursue central questions about the historical and contemporary landscape of women’s sports in my study of the visual and textual representations of female athletes. I begin by investigating how historical discourses of marginalization and the contemporary economy have influenced women’s athletics, female athletes, and their rhetorical acts. Specifically I question, what rhetorical and embodied conditions have shaped women's participation in the sporting world? And, how has race, gender, and sexuality influenced these conditions? These questions enable me to construct a rhetorical history of women’s sports that accounts for female athletes’ experiences and the marginalizing discourses that continue to influence contemporary women’s athletics. After addressing these issues, I then move to query, how have scholars, athletes, and advocates of women’s sports

argued for female athletes' participation, social identity, and equality in the sporting world and general society? My pursuit of this question allows me to delineate feminist scholars' arguments about women's athletics and their interpretations of female athletes on and off the field performances. Finally, my research culminates with the following three questions that ultimately guide my broader dissertation project: what possibilities for women's sports become evident if we rhetorically contemplate female athletes' multiple subjectivities—their athletic identity, sexuality, gender, and race—simultaneously; how do female athletes work to exert agency within and against oppressive systems of power in the sporting world; and what are the challenges and limitations of this rhetorical work?

Chapter Outline

The core chapters begin by contextualizing for readers the rhetorical history of women's sports that informs contemporary athletics today. For example, Chapter 2, "A Fractured History: A Rhetorical Account of the Discourse that Excluded Women from Sports," argues that historically, men's near-exclusive hold over the sporting world relegated women to the margins of athletics. I present a rhetorical history of the gendered, sexual, and raced conditions that shaped women's entrance into the sporting world and their professional advancement as female athletes; trace the male-dominated cultural discourses that excluded and/or marginalized women in athletics; and examine women's ways of arguing for participation and inclusion in sport. I begin with a timeline that illustrates the long and fraught history of women's involvement in athletics. Extending the work of feminist sports historian Jennifer Hargreaves, I focus on women's athletics beginning in the mid to late 1800s with the rise of physical education and with the invention of the safety bicycle, which enabled women to move into the public sphere where

they engaged in acceptable, physical activity. Put simply, the safety bicycle both marks the emergence of women's athletics and serves as the catalyst for this emergence. I then examine women's athletics from the 1900 through the 1950s and delineate the social discourses about feminine-appropriate sports, the philosophy of moderation, and the proliferation of homophobia. Lastly, I study women's sports from the 1970s-2000s which includes the effects of the passing of Title IX on the general sporting world. These three eras reflect the cultural and social attitudes that influenced how women participated in sports and/or how they were excluded from sports. Furthermore, the social attitudes and cultural assumptions perpetuated throughout this history demonstrate how issues of gender, race, and sexuality intersect in the sporting world and influence women's arguments for inclusion. In addition to constructing a rhetorical history of women's athletics, this chapter also functions as a review of the rhetorical arguments and discourses influencing women's sports to further situate this study within the field.

I then move to provide a contemporary perspective of the cultural landscape of women's sports and account for how the relationship between professional sports and our economy affects professional athletes. To that end, Chapter 3, "The Contemporary Landscape of Women's Sports," builds out the discourses presented in chapter two and specifically focuses on the contemporary rhetorics influencing and informing women's sports. I begin by returning to and analyzing the four contemporary events involving female athletes shared at the beginning of this chapter to illuminate how the marginalizing discourses circulate and affect women's athletics today. I then elucidate how in response to a history that marginalizes female athletes via sexualized, raced, and/or gendered discourses, feminist sports scholars and activists advocate for a discourse that solely focuses on the athleticism of women. They also argue that female athletes should visually represent themselves only as sportswomen in the media. However, I assert that

this view of sportswomen neglects the circumstances of economic precarity female athletes face if they completely disregard the economic pressures informing the sporting world, and it overlooks the types of affordances female athletes have discovered to work within and against oppressive systems of power. I posit that we resist interpretations of representations of female athletes' bodies that position their sexual and feminine appearances as something to be ignored, devalued, or as something that should be the focus of attention in themselves. To support this argument, I examine how the implementation of Title IX and economic pressures influence the sporting world. The commodification of the body through product endorsement has played a crucial role in the popularizing of female athletes and women's sport. The embodied rhetoric produced and circulated by these corporeal forms highlights the complicated and often contradictory stances women assume to legitimize their presence as athletes and as women in and out of the sporting world. I ultimately suggest that female athletes can work within and against a male-dominated system to exert rhetorical agency.

Chapter 4, "Encountering Female Athletes: A Rhetorical Analysis of *ESPN The Magazine* Body Issues 2009-2015," focuses on the Body Issues to elucidate my argument in chapter three—that female athletes can work within and against these structures to exert rhetorical agency through my presentation and analysis of the Body Issues. I consider the total selfhood of female athletes as I present my examination of Body Issues, which is a case study of the embodied rhetoric produced by professional female athletes. I begin with a discussion of *ESPN The Magazine* and my reasoning for selecting the Body Issues as a site of analysis. Next, I discuss my approach to this study that combines both quantitative and rhetorical analysis as well as the rhetorical framework that informs my analysis. I then analyze how female athletes can work within and against male-dominated structures, as delineated in chapter three, to exert

rhetorical agency and the challenges and opportunities that arise in venues such as *ESPN The Magazine*. Lastly, I examine the magazine's economic and epideictic mission and discuss the type of public called into being through the magazine's representations of female athletes' bodies. From the perspective of the epideictic, the rhetoric produced by the Body Issues suggests that the magazine oscillates between reinforcing discourses of marginalization and cultivating alternative, empowering discourses about female athletes and women's sports. Additionally, I question how female athletes can help surpass the traditional, patriarchal category of woman and embody new identities and arguments about women's potentiality, making visible a wider range of performances of women's selfhood. Viewed rhetorically, I argue, the visual representations of women's bodies have the power to transform their positions as inconsequential, marginalized, financially depressed, and/or invisible athletes into known, financially solvent, and influential athletes and women in American culture.

The final chapter, "ESPN's Commercialized Rhetoric: Reinforcing and Rupturing Oppressive Discourses in Women's Sports," discusses this project's implications for the field and suggests that significance rests in the fact that as female athletes cultivate effective means of presenting themselves rhetorically in spaces like *ESPN The Magazine*, male-dominated social constructions of athleticism, gender, race, and sexuality show evidence of fracture. Additionally, I discuss the evident trends in the most recent Body Issue and how these trends maintain and/or complicate the representations of athletes analyzed in the previous chapter, and the implications of its difference from the 2009-2015 issues. Lastly, I address areas for future research such as a rhetorical history that primarily accounts for the experiences of female athletes of color and disabled athletes and a rhetorical analysis of the language of sports and the social implications of this language as it circulates in the sporting world and general public.

We live in a society where “... race, class, gender, [sexuality, power,] and culture matter”; the way women embody and perform these subjectivities matter, and the female athletes in this study, as well as the larger collective of female athletes in our society, “...have been not only innovative but also bold and courageous” as they move through our society (Royster 14). Additionally, their creative use of their bodily appearances and performances speaks to feminist rhetors’ tradition of discovering the alternative, inventive “available means of persuasion” women employ to cultivate agency. In this way, my dissertation complements the work of feminist rhetorical scholars by locating female athletes “...squarely within rhetoric” and “acknowledge[ing] that their presence demands that rhetoric be reconceived” (Richie and Ronald xvii). The ultimate goal of this dissertation, then, is to advance feminist rhetorics by situating female athletes as provocatively using their bodies and bodily appearances as unconventional, available means of persuasion.

Chapter 2

A Fractured History: A Rhetorical Account of the Discourse that Excluded Women from Sports

Historically, men's near-exclusive hold over the sporting world relegated women to the margins of athletics, creating a patch-worked and, at times, fractured history of female athletic participation and women's pursuit for equality in sports. This history demonstrates a long and fraught tradition of both men and women explicitly prohibiting female athleticism, implicitly deriding females for their athletic participation, and denying women opportunities for athletic play and competition. Yet, despite resistance to the formation of women's sports, female athletes and sporting women maintained a constant fervor for athletic participation. This dedication to arguing and advocating for opportunities to play undergird important moments of inclusion and breakout performances that served to gradually erode the American public's culturally pervasive resistance to women's sports. Situated in a larger cultural framework of exclusion and gender discrimination, a rhetorical examination of the history of women's sports reveals complex social discourses that shaped the landscape of women's athletics. These rhetorical discourses continue to inform contemporary women's sports and can help us understand where and how current debates about women's athletics and female athletes' bodies emerged.

According to the timeline "125 Years of U.S. Women in Sports," women have participated in sports and challenged the male-dominated sporting world for longer than most realize; events span from 773 BCE to 2009 (O'Reilly and Cahn, xxiii-xxx). These events distinguish impressive achievements where women broke new ground in the sporting world, such as hosting four Women's Olympic Games starting in 1922, Eunice Kennedy Shriver founding the Special Olympics in 1968, dubbing the 2012 Olympic Games the Women's Olympics because women athletes outnumbered the men, and recently, 25.4 million viewers

tuning in to Fox 1 to watch the Women's World Cup for soccer in the summer of 2015, making it the most-watched soccer game in U.S. history. As much as the timeline of events demarcate moments of success, it also speaks to the recurrent cultural backlash against women's sports, female athletes, and their continual fight for power and agency. For example, in 1914 the American Olympic Committee formally opposed women's athletic competition and later implemented gender testing that consisted of looking between the legs of female athletes to verify their sex which was a humiliating process for many female athletes. Such testing eventually led the IOC implement chromosomal testing in 1968 at the Winter Games in Grenoble, France. One of the more recent examples of this testing is the case of Caster Semenya, the 2009 world champion in the eight hundred meters, which resulted in the International Association of Athletic Federation publically publishing about Semenya's sex. Ultimately, Semenya walked away from competing even though she held the world record and would likely win the gold medal in the coming Olympics.⁴ From a rhetorical perspective, gendering testing and the publicity of such testing, in this athletic context, functions to both invalidate female athletes as real women and discredit these women as legitimate athletes. The rhetoric undergirding gender testing, as I will elucidate in this chapter, is steeped in male-dominated cultural discourse about traditional gender roles and the fear of unsexing women.

Additionally, female athletes of color are largely unaccounted for, or only briefly discussed,⁵ in histories of women's sports, and similar to the rhetoric latent in the IOC's gender-testing, the rhetoric about female athletes of color, particularly black women athletes, emanates out of both gendered and racial discourses that position these athletes as "animalistic" and/or "as

⁴ For more discussion on Caster Semenya, see Ariel Levy's article "Either/Or Sports, Sex, and the Case of Caster Semenya" (2009) published in *The New Yorker*.

⁵ As Cahn notes in her history of women's athletics, "The most striking feature of the historical record on black women athletes is neglect" (126).

less womanly or feminine than white women” (Cahn 112, 127).⁶ Thus, despite the increasing presence of black female athletes in the early twentieth century, the lack of acknowledgement of these women in the sporting world and, consequently, in histories of women’s sports, is the result of the marginalization these athletes experienced due to “segregation laws, inferior resources, limited competitive opportunities, discriminatory sports agencies, and tremendous barriers to participation” (Cahn 139) as well as powerful rhetorical discourses about race and gender.⁷

Ultimately, the history of women’s sports swings like a pendulum, moving back and forth between moments of significant advancement and moments of severe marginalization. To account for such an uneven history of women’s sport, I draw on the work of rhetoric scholars Debra Hawhee and Carol Mattingly, communication scholar Barry Brummett, and sports sociologist Jennifer Hargreaves. In the fields of sports history and sports sociology, much has been done to recover the history of women’s athletics. Hargreaves, for example, marks the late 1800s, the early 1900s through the mid-1940s, and the mid-1950s through the 1990s as three major eras in the history of women’s sport, specifically in the UK and Europe in her manuscript, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in History and Sociology of Women’s Sports*. However, histories such as this one do not account for how the gendered rhetoric in American society fostered and perpetuated a culture of resistance to women’s sports and female athletes nor how women’s rhetorical action creates an alternative narrative to that dominate discourse. In addition, the field of rhetoric also lacks an account of women’s athletic history in the United States, due in part to the limited research on the connection between sports and rhetoric. While Hawhee and

⁶ As I discuss later on, women’s athletics and the history of women’s athletics predominantly presents the ideal of the female athlete as feminine and white (Cahn 138).

⁷ My discussion of race and gender, as I will explicitly address in chapter three and four, is grounded in the work of Patricia Hill Collins and her theoretical develop of Kimberle Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality in . Feminist sport historian, Susan K. Cahn, who’s work I often cite in this chapter, not only draws from Collins’s work, but also from black feminist scholars such as Paula J. Giddings’s text, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in American* (1984).

Brummett have done much to establish the link between rhetoric and athletics, continued research is needed to explore how women have strategically negotiated their path to participation and inclusion and the social climate that influenced these negotiations.

In her monograph, *Bodily Arts: Rhetoric and Athletics in Ancient Greece*, Hawhee provides explicit and theoretical connections between rhetoric and sports as she examines the intersectionality between athletic and rhetorical practices. Similar to Hawhee, Brummett and scholar Rachel Kraft, in their article “Why Sports and Games Matter: Performative Rhetorics in Popular Culture,” argue that sports are inherently rhetorical because they function as persuasive communications that influence the public’s social and political beliefs. They contend that sports is a major way people form personal and social identities, and because sports is highly performative, it is then through performative dimensions that sports has rhetorical effects on culture. While Mattingly’s monograph, *Appropriate[ing] Dress: Women’s Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America* (2002), does not address athletics, it does advance the relationship between rhetoric, the body and its performative dimensions by establishing women’s use of their bodies and the “performative value associated with their bodily presentation” (xv) as strategically and rhetorically effecting gendered discourses and public perceptions of acceptable roles and activities for women. Building on Hawhee’s and Brummett’s claims that sports and athletic performances are intrinsically rhetorical thereby impacting culture and Mattingly’s research that illustrates women purposely using their dress to achieve rhetorical effectiveness, I trace the rhetorical discourses, starting in the nineteenth-century, that shaped the creation of women’s athletics and public perceptions of female athletes and similar to Karyln Kohrs Campbell’s argument that nineteenth-century women speakers “were constrained to be particularly creative because they faced barriers unknown to men” (8) and Carol Mattingly’s

point that for women rhetorical invention is “a careful and creative choice and adaptation of materials” (4-5), I posit that female athletes have had to be creative in how they engage and embody rhetorical stances so as to legitimize their presence as sportswomen and so as to challenge the power hierarchy and gender inequality that exists in the sporting world. These women position their bodies as both subject and object directly engaged with rhetorical discourse, and as such, their bodies construct wider, alternative narratives about their capacities and identities as women and as athletes.

This chapter aims to add to a feminist history of rhetoric that seeks to understand how women “(re)appropriated their own bodies, so often used against them, in order to challenge a hierarchy of power” (Mattingly 5), and incorporate visual (re)presentations of female athletes as corporeal forms into the corpus rhetorical strategies available to women. In doing so, I adhere to Jessica Enoch’s call in the 2011 *Octalog* for scholarship that “interrogates the rhetorical work that goes into creating and disturbing gendered distinctions” (Agnew 115) by documenting how the ideal of femininity, homophobia, and the broad fear that women’s sports might undermine a male-dominated culture informed the commonplace cultural discourse on women’s sports and the rhetoric about female athletes’ bodies in today’s society. I begin this chapter by presenting three different eras of women’s sport—originally discussed by Hargreaves—that reflect the cultural and social attitudes that influenced how women participated in sports and/or how they were excluded from sports. Additionally, I attend to the ways in which women resisted and negotiated these discourses—through their dress, written texts, publicized athletic competition, and bodily appearance—so as to, at times, maintain public perceptions of their ethos and, at others, to disrupt these perceptions with broader visual presentations of their self that included their womanhood, sexuality and athletic capacity. Lastly, as I noted earlier, much of the history

about women's athletics neglects the experiences of female athletes of color and assumes that women athletes were predominantly white females. This chapter acknowledges this limitation, and while it certainly speaks to the history of women's sports, it predominantly accounts for the historical, cultural discourses that rhetorically influence and inform women's athletics today. As such, I present the prevailing discourses which are largely rooted in white male-dominated notions of traditional gender roles and heterosexuality, and they often precluded women of color from participation in and recognition for their athletics in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century. Thus, this chapter is in a state of tension because it largely focuses on the experiences of white female athletes due to the nature of these discourses even as it acknowledges the necessity of accounting for the experiences of female athletes of color.⁸

From Ideals of Womanhood to the Safety Bicycle: Women's Sports in the Mid to Late 1800s

The Victorian era was heavily influenced by the concept of "true womanhood," a phrase often used in women's magazines during the mid-nineteenth-century that referred to the nature of the ideal woman. In her article "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," historian Barbara Welter analyzes the ideal of the true Victorian woman by surveying almost all of the women's magazines published for more than three years from 1820 to 1860. Welter's extensive study establishes four fundamental components of true womanhood—piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity—and this combination of attributes rhetorically functioned as an evaluative tool to assess the ethos or true woman-ness of the females in society.⁹ The pervasiveness of

⁸ I fully address issues of race in the contemporary setting in chapter three and four as well as call for further rhetorical research on the history of female athletes of color in the conclusion of this project.

⁹ For further discussion and critique of this concept see Betty Freidan's *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedman argues that the notion of "True Womanhood" diminishes the "fulfillment" of the twentieth-century woman.

conservative, religious discourse, which stressed womanly piety and purity in society, enabled the concept of true womanhood to become and circulate as a rhetorical ideal, because it persuaded women to conform to strict gender social roles. However, as Welter emphasizes, “real women often felt they did not live up to the ideal of True Womanhood” which is not surprising given the restrictions it placed on women in terms of acceptable social roles and activities (174). Yet, if a woman dared to throw off the mantle of true womanhood or even merely venture a “wider sphere of interest,” then both women and men were encouraged to be sharply critical of such behavior: these kinds of women were “tampering with society, undermining civilization” (172-73).¹⁰ In many ways, the concept of true womanhood was highly effective in its persuasiveness because it appealed to women’s sense of fear, specifically the fear of being ostracized in society and/or deemed unwomanly. Their feat was further compounded by the fact that women were heavily dependent on men for financial security during this period, and being labeled unwomanly threatened their very livelihood if they were not perceived as sufficiently womanly to appeal to men. Indeed, Welter traces how these women were “read out of the sex” and diminished as “semi-women” or “mental hermaphrodites” (173). Rhetorically, “true womanhood” functioned to persuade many women that athletic inclinations would have immediately suffered from such criticism and social scorn, and so they avoided engaging in sports as a way to protect themselves from scrutiny and criticism.¹¹

¹⁰ Women’s rights activists such as “Mary Wollstonecraft, Frances Wright, and Harriet Martineau were condemned in the strongest possible language” (Welter 173). While Wollstonecraft produced work in the late 1700-mid 1800s, her work greatly influenced women’s rights activist of the late 1800s. Women’s magazines found it necessary to diminish the work of such women who promoted and/or subscribed to feminist principles.

¹¹ Since sports in general were not yet valued as a professional occupation with a steady income and since women’s sports were not sufficiently established or valued for women to think they secure financial security through competition, the opportunity to play and recognition for athleticism would not have been worth the social and financial risk for women.

Fortunately, this concept was not the only ideal for womanhood during this time. Feminist historian Frances Cogan traces the “ideal of Real Womanhood” popular texts such as fiction novels, ladies magazines, and advice books in circulation during mid-nineteenth-century American. This ideal encapsulated “reform movements in health care, higher education, marriage choice, and employment” (Cogan 10), which real womanhood advocates argued were necessary for women to successfully fulfill their duties as a good daughter, wife, and mother (Cogan 83). As Cogan notes throughout her analysis of the popular novels and advice columns from that time, writers rhetorically used the ideal of real womanhood to persuade women and future generations to be “healthy, fit, and sensibly clad young women who would reshape the moral character of the nation, exercising not only their physical and moral fitness for the greater good but being mentally fit enough to participate in the greater aims of society” (61). Indeed, many writers encouraged women to engage in “sheer physical exercise, preferably out of doors in the clear, fresh air,” which was a significant component of health care (Cogan 40). For example, women activists such as Catharine Beecher, championed the importance of education and exercise for women as a means to physically, mentally, and morally attend to her family. Her work, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy for the Use of Young Ladies at Home* (1843), lamented “the deplorable sufferings of multitudes of young wives and mothers” (5), which she asserted were the results of the “lack of sensible exercise, fitness, and diet” (Cogan 37). She thus endorsed the idea that education and exercise should work hand in hand to improve both the bodies and minds of young women, a concept that she further developed and supported with her instructional text, *Physiology and Calisthenics for Schools and Families* (1956), that detailed an exercise program for women.¹²

¹² However, it wasn't until the 1880s and early 1890s that a small number of normal schools began to offer courses in women's physical education (Davies 95; Verbrugge 47-62).

Whereas the real womanhood ideal offered progressive rhetorical discourse that championed women's education and exercise, the true womanhood ideal produced a rhetorical discourse that provided the public with a rationale for maintaining traditional, gendered social roles that excluded women from educational and athletic spaces: "the denial of access to higher education and vigorous exercise was believed to protect young women from the possibility that they would not achieve 'true womanhood'" (Davies 152). To be sure, true womanhood was not monolithic given the wide circulation of real womanhood in popular texts; however, real womanhood fell out of vogue in the 1880s and 1890s as it "gave inadvertent rise to the 'New Woman,'" a concept I will address later on in this chapter, and its ties to "turn-of-the-century-feminism, thus losing its popular and widespread base of support" (Cogan 257). True womanhood, on the other hand, "being less dynamic" than real womanhood, "continued to survive fully articulated and clearly defined as a popular alternative that was ostentatiously 'feminine' in its values" (Cogan 257).¹³ As the ideal of real womanhood and a rhetorical discourse that approved of women's exercise and athletic activity dissolved, the rhetoric of true womanhood prevailed, and its discourse about the appropriate nature and activities of women left little room for women's athletics.

Unfortunately, the concept of true womanhood was not the only rhetorical discourse to limit women's opportunities in this era. During this time, arguments against women engaging in any physical activity primarily emerged from the fields of natural and social sciences which deemed athletics unhealthy for women. Medical arguments, such as "constitutional overstrain,"

¹³ As Cogan explains, real womanhood espoused the belief that women's "most important natural goals" was "the softening and refining of the society around her... Women could make a direct appeal to—and have a direct influence on—husbands, sons, and brothers" (89). As such, health and education were important for women because it helped them physically and morally achieve these goals. However, exercise and education should only be pursued for the purpose of bettering society and the family—not for the feminist notion of independence or personal fulfillment (Cogan 258). Thus, the real womanhood ideal "may have trembled, then dissolved under the strain [of newly developing feminist ideals such as independence]" (Cogan 100).

presented the claim that women were too feeble and delicate to participate in tasks that would stress their bodies, and such arguments conflated the social construction of womanhood with the biology of the female body.¹⁴ Additionally, physicians commonly questioned whether or not women were capable of undergoing the same continuous intellectual rigor as well as endure the same strains of a professional life as men (Rowold xix). For example, in his 1873 bestselling book, *Sex in Education: A Fair Chance for Girls*, physician Edward Clarke used nineteenth-century physiological arguments to claim that women's menstruation was a loss of energy for women, and therefore women should be restricted from being educated in the same manner as men because the use of their intellect would reduce the stores of energy women need during their cycles. Clarke's text reflects many of historical, widespread medical opinions "about women's bodies, aspects of which are still relevant today" in terms of women's physical abilities and capabilities to engage in certain types of sports, particularly more strenuous physical activities such as running (Hargreaves 105). As a result of these medical assessments, women and young girls were strongly discouraged from engaging in strenuous physical and intellectual activities. However, of note is the fact that many working class women and girls engaged in farm and factory labor as well as had strenuous jobs as washerwomen, maids, and other physical occupations, so while these medical assessments were pervasive throughout society, they were not absolute, nor did they capture the experiences of a wide population of women.¹⁵ Nevertheless, by providing the impetus for the "the imprint of evolutionary science on traditional concepts of female difference and female subordination," which in turn shaped the conception of women's social roles in the nineteenth-century, physiology and evolutionary theory especially influenced the

¹⁴ Arguments about constitutional overstrain were also often used against women in terms of education and politics. See Wendy Hayden's, monograph *Evolutionary Rhetoric* for discussion of this topic.

¹⁵ For more on women's work during this time see Cogan's chapter, "Employment and the Real Woman" (197-256).

restriction of women's physical activities, (Erskine 117).¹⁶ In the late 1800s Charles Darwin published *The Descent of Man* (1871) which was followed by *Origin of Species* (1880). These seminal texts did much to inform social thought about the inferiority of women. Women had to contend with the belief that they were less evolved than men thus making them the physically, mentally, and intellectually lesser sex. The concept of the "survival of the fittest" was quite widespread and medical practitioners, social theorists, educators, and politicians took up arguments for Darwin's evolutionary theory to position childbearing and raising as "the highest function of womanhood" (Hargreaves 44). This discourse suggested that women's primary purpose in society was to produce healthy offspring, and participating in sports would surely damage women's ability to produce healthy children. In this sense, women's athletic participation was deemed unnatural as well as unhealthy for the female sex.

Similar to the ideal of true womanhood, arguments produced in the fields of evolutionary science, physiology, and medicine persuaded women to accept that sports were off limits by playing on the fear that they would fail at being "real" woman and thus fail their families and American society if they engage in sports. Amazingly, this logic was prevalent throughout the nineteenth-century and just as it was used to bar women from education and politics, it was also used to bar women from participating in athletics. However, there were also physicians and medical practitioners who argued against this logic and even proved this logic faulty, such as Dr. Dio Lewis's *New Gymnastics for Men, Women, and Children* (1863) and Catharine Beecher (who's work I previously discussed). These authors and doctors not only

¹⁶ According to Cynthia Russett, a historian of nineteenth-century scientific American history, "anatomy, physiology, evolutionary biology, physical anthropology, psychology, and sociology evolved comprehensive theories of sexual difference" and all of these fields of science played a role in defining and restricting women's social roles and activities (10). For further discussion of all of these various scientific arguments see Russett's book, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood*.

denounce these scientific claims as creating invalids and decaying women's bodies (Cogan 31), they also offer medical and/or scientific evidence that physical training and exercising "will build up the weak muscles" (Cogan 45) in women, thereby enabling them to better fulfill their duties as mothers and wives.¹⁷ While these arguments helped to cultivate a space where women could engage in exercise without fear of disapproval, they were not as widely acknowledged as the work of Clark and Darwin, and they lost traction as the ideal of real womanhood faded out of society in the 1880s. The medical and scientific arguments about women's bodies, and subsequently their social role, were highly persuasive due to the seemingly irrefutability of medical and scientific "fact." Certainly, these fields are steeped in logic, tests, and evidentiary results, which provided the basis for the persuasiveness of the above mentioned arguments; these arguments rhetorically functioned by appealing to the public's sense of reason and rationality. Additionally, in comparison to men, many women lacked the education, authority, and expertise to argue against these claims, which enabled, as Hargreaves explains, "Medical opinions...against female exercise" to take root as the foundational argument against the "the legitimization of female sports" (44). Thus, women focused on procreating healthy children for the betterment of the nation and to fulfill their "function" as women. To guarantee that women did not risk the health of their future children, and thus the future of the nation, sports participation was completely off limits.

The Safety Bicycle and Fashion Reform

While nineteenth century scientific, medical, and social discourses about womanhood and gender greatly influenced cultural attitudes that restricted women's exercise, women also

¹⁷ For further discussion of these counter arguments see Wendy Hayden's discussion of Nineteenth-century physiology in chapter three of *Evolutionary Rhetoric*.

informally participated in athletic movements during this time which helped advance the idea of the athletic woman as socially acceptable. For example, women participated in endurance walking and cycling. As historian Dahn Shaulis explains, “Endurance walkers and runners known as pedestriennes were particularly newsworthy, gaining metropolitan newspaper coverage in Britain and North America from the mid-1870s to the late 1880s” (30).¹⁸ In addition to women’s competitive walking, the introduction of the safety bicycle into society contributed to a change in the public’s attitude towards women’s exercise.¹⁹ In her monograph *Claiming the Bicycle: Women, Rhetoric, and Technology in Nineteenth-Century America* (2016), Sarah Hallenbeck considers how women writers and cyclists rhetorically advanced women’s roles in society through technical communication and bodily interactions with the safety bicycle (xxv). The safety bicycle was an improvement over the “ordinary” bicycle with its huge front driving wheel and made bicycling an activity for the masses (Bulger 94). Hallenbeck observes that “If the Ordinary had been decidedly *masculine* and the tricycle [which originally was created for women so they could sit and pedal without indecently spreading their legs] was substantially *feminine* in its orientation as an object, the Safety defied gender categorization, materializing instead a new gender order in which men and women could share similar—though not identical—experiences” (3). The safety bicycle was first introduced in Europe and quickly caught on as an “in vogue” activity in the United States in the 1880s. According to historian Lois W. Banner, bicycling became a national craze and “everyone who could afford a bicycle rode

¹⁸ For more on women’s competitive walking see Shaulis’s full article, which is published online at www.thelizlibrary.org/undelele/woa-spotlight/02-pedestriennes.html.

¹⁹ To be sure, there are several examples of women participating in public exercise, in addition to cycling and competitive walking, during the nineteenth century, but for the purposes of this chapter, I solely focus on the safety bicycle, which I offer as one example of a larger of a social phenomenon where women were informally pursuing exercises and athleticism during this time.

one, for pleasure and as a means of transportation” (26). Indeed, by the year 1900 ten million bicycles were seen on the roads in the United States (Gorn and Goldstein 169-70).

Frances Willard, leader and figure head of the largest single organization of American women in the nineteenth-century, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, famously illustrates this liberation in her widely published book, *A Wheel within a Wheel: How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle* (1895). As a one of the most significant and widely received women rhetors during the temperance movement, Willard’s endorsement of bicycle riding and physical exercise carried great rhetorical power. Here, she describes how learning to ride a bicycle in her fifties gave her a confidence and joy unlike anything she had ever experienced. Willard specifically notes that because of the bicycle revolution, medical practitioners were also moving off of their stance that physical exertion was bad for the female body,²⁰ a claim that was supported by the fact that her physician issued the mandate to “live out of doors and take congenial exercise” (16); however, as she first tries to follow this mandate she struggles with the restraint of her clothing. To that end, she expresses her loathing for women’s fashion throughout the nineteenth century because women’s clothes took the joy out of simple exercises such as walking: “from that day when, at sixteen years of age, I was enwrapped in the long skirts that impeded every footstep, I have detested walking and felt with a certain noble disdain that the conventions of life had cut me off from what in the freedom of my prairie home had been one of life’s sweetest joys” (16). Such an account is unsurprising given that ladies’ dress during this period was not designed to enable exercise since that kind of activity directly challenged traditional gender roles; moreover, women’s attire functioned to communicate female gendered character traits such as modesty, purity, and domesticity, which where were qualities found inside the home not

²⁰ According to Bulger, American women from this era were critiqued by “English visitors [who] were often critical of their poor posture and lack of energy” (88).

out in public. Accounting for this, Mattingly explains “gender, inscribed on and around women’s bodies, was constructed largely in the visual impact created by their clothing and appearance,” and it “aligned women with location, a specifically assigned ‘sphere’” (1). Addressing the restrictions women’s clothing places on women’s activities, Willard acknowledges other acceptable forms of activity, such as driving, but she dismissed these as not counting as real exercise or too expensive. After denouncing traditional physical activities and women’s fashion as restrictive, she presents the bicycle as the ultimate solution for exercise. She explains that the bicycle gave her the proper amount of exercise required for her health, it was affordable, and she found joy in riding it. As she draws the book to a close, Willard stresses that the impetus for documenting and publishing her book on learning to cycle was grounded in her desire “to help women to a wider world” (16). As the leader of the WTCU, she was aware of the fact that her actions would widely influence other women and even connect her positive perspective of women’s exercise to a much wider sense of women’s growing physical competence and freedom during the era. Willard’s endorsement of bicycling and the national circulation of images of her riding fused with the credible, womanly ethos put forth by the WCTU and melded the strong visual presence of women speakers and writers such as Willard with the everyday women cyclist.

Along with encouraging women to learn to cycle, Willard also champions a new dress fashion that frees women from their corsets and enables more physical mobility. She insists that “a bicycling costume was a prerequisite...It was a simple, modest suit, to which no person of common sense could take exception” (16). By labeling the riding attire as a prerequisite that no person could take exception, Willard champions a new form of dress that provides women with more physical and public freedom and simultaneously maintains a proper feminine ethos. This

was an important and nuanced point to emphasize because, for women, “clothing and appearance constituted a major component in the ethos women presented, an element taken for granted by men” (Mattingly 5). When the safety bicycle was initially introduced ladies’ current fashion trends hindered women from riding bicycles. The fashion world quickly reformed women’s dresses to accommodate women as they exercised so that women could participate and so that their attire would still read as feminine and womanly.²¹ Since riding a bicycle required a functional outfit, Amelia Bloomer invented “bloomers” a type of baggy pant that women could wear in 1851, and women especially started wearing this outfit while cycling so that they could be both comfortable and appropriately attired in the 1890s (Gorn and Goldstein 198). In 1893 the *Ladies Home Journal*, “the venerable organ to middle-class female opinion,” endorsed the right for women to choose “rational outfits,” and choose clothing on the basis of comfort (Banner 26), as well as “encouraged a *rhetoric of choice* that stressed the needs and desires of the individual bicyclist, while at the same time regulating the use of garments...” (Hallenbeck 45).²² Dresses were also redesigned to accommodate women as they cycled about town; now, dresses had “shortened skirts, divided skirts...bloomers or ‘rational dress’, [which] allowed women a new physical independence” (Hargreaves 92). Women’s dress “already had an established and well-defined rhetoric” and many women cyclists and clothing designers such as Bloomer “readily appropriated and capitalized on that rhetoric” to create as well as to wear outfits that achieved both a feminine ethos and new levels of freedom and power in the public sphere. Seeing the alterations in fashion as an endorsement for all women to cycle, masses of women rode their

²¹ To be sure, fashion reform did not solely occur to accommodate female cyclists. During this time, for example, women’s fashion was also changing to accommodate women’s horse riding outfits.

²² In *Appropriate[ing] Dress*, Mattingly explains that fashion periodicals and magazines such as the *Ladies Home Journal* were a “primary constructor of women’s bodily image in the nineteenth century” and “related supplementary detail with regards to women’s ‘proper’ place and role” (xiv).

bicycles in public, which ensured that anyone could see them successfully and healthily engaged in physical activity., it is also important to note that many were still resistant to women's physical activity; indeed, many thought that the bicycle would lead women morally astray. As Hallenbeck notes in her discussion of the invention of women's bicycle dress, "[women] still had to contend with the likelihood that for many observers, the garments signified immodesty, brashness, masculinity, and even a loss of spirituality" (43). Mattingly also addresses this issue discerning that "as changes in women's appearance and location required new ways of reading women's bodies, critics resisted such reading by focusing on dress [and their bodily appearance] in their disparagement of women activists [and women's public activities]" (7). Thus, many women continued to wear restrictive clothing like the corset well into the 1920s and many avoided public exercise.

That said, the national popularity of the bicycle and the new found freedom permitted by fashion did much to aid the slow entry of women into sports and helped to continue to open up new possibilities for women's athletic competition. Hallenbeck argues that "whether riding on long tours and doing local errands, these women embodied new identities and arguments about women's potentiality, making visible a wider range of performances of femininity than had been available in the preceding decades" (xiii). First, it encouraged women to reject their corsets and cumbersome skirts in favor of "rational" and comfortable outfits that enabled them to freely move (O'Reilly and Cahn xiv). Second, it directly challenged medical arguments that discouraged women's enjoyment in strenuous physical activity because

...women writers and bicyclists...posit[ed] with their pens as well as their bodies a feminine capacity for energy renewal through exercise and a wider range of ends to which their energies could be put....Drawing from their own embodied experience aboard the wheel, non-medically trained women writers authored testimonials that reframed their exertions as evidence of good health rather than exhaustion. (135)

Third, the danger of being labeled unwomanly thereby risking the loss of their livelihood, as was the issue in the middle of the nineteenth century, was not an issue for women cyclists; Hallenbeck's research reveals that "women writers played a critical role in deradicalizing the bicycle...by drawing from the rhetorical resources of many different genres" such as popular fiction and ladies magazines where they conveyed "that it was fun and modern and that it would have a beneficial, rather than detrimental, effect on a woman's commitment both to her beau and to the domestic sphere" (78); "...the bicycle girl emerges from women-authored short fiction not merely as an object of desire, but as a subject with complex motives that aid, rather than impede, her success in courtship" (87). Indeed, reinforcing a narrative that love and marriage blossom out of couples' bike rides together served to establish cycling and women's public exercise as an acceptable and favorable activity.

Lastly, due to its international popularity, the bicycle, ultimately, provided women with a way to fight for their physical liberation. Indeed, in an 1896 interview Susan B. Anthony professes that "the bicycle has done more for the emancipation of women than anything else" (Bly 9 qtd. in Hallenbeck xiii). Furthermore, the tandem proliferation of public images of women cyclists and women's dress slowly undermined the male-dominated culture of the nineteenth century; as Mattingly explains, "Disruptions in both the expected appearance of the body and the space which that body had permission to occupy exposed the fabricated nature of gender by constantly shifting play with images woman's body, its gender, its place, and its performance" (7). In due course, the safety bicycle—in addition to other forms of public exercise, such as women's participation in horseback riding, croquet, and competitive walking discussed at the beginning of this section—helped revolutionize social thought about women's engagement in physical activity which in turn initiated the gradual destabilization of cultural

assumptions about the role of women in athletics and granted women access to a new public space.

Fearing the Unsexing of Women: Women's Sports from 1900– 1950s

The New Woman

In the beginning of the twentieth century and up through World War One , American society saw the emergence of the “New Woman” who represented “the bold and energetic modern woman, breaking free from Victorian constraints, and tossing aside old-fashioned ideas about separate spheres for men and women” (Cahn 7). The New Woman was a vehicle used to drive forward the new rhetoric about American gender roles. During this time, modern America was confronted with women strongly advocating for their right to vote as well as “increased economic freedom, wider educational and employment opportunities, entree into male professions, and the right to hold public office” (Davies 95). In this light, the New Woman rhetorically functioned as a new, persuasive ideal of what women can be and how they can act by appealing to women's desires for more freedom and agency in their social and private lives. Thus the rhetoric of true womanhood lost traction in society as the concept of the New Woman became more prevalent. In addition to pursuing activities such as business, education, and politics, the New Woman was often depicted pursuing or engaging in athletic competition. This modern athletic girl played outdoor sports and enjoyed physical activities as much as men did. Indeed, popular magazines such as *Lippincott's Monthly* described this new woman as a woman who “loves to walk, to row, to ride, to motor to jump and run...as Man walks, jumps, rows, rides, motors, and runs” (565). Other print media such as *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Harpers' Bazaar*, and the *New York Times* also began publishing articles and illustrations of the New Woman. These articles often served as a resource for women to read about “techniques of

various sports and also how to dress appropriately for participation in athletic activities,” which enabled women to participate in different sporting activities with confidence (Rosoff 55). Thus, the concept of New Woman evolved into a well-known visual image, and because this image and accompanying discourse circulated in popular and *acceptable* women’s magazines and because the ideal was heralded by these magazines as an approved form of womanhood, the New Woman gained validity appealing to women’s desire for social opportunity while also complying to social norms by promoting leisure, feminine activities.

Similar to the New Woman was the advertising prototype, the “Gibson Girl,” created by popular social artist Charles Gibson in 1890 for *Life* magazine. Illustrations of the Gibson Girl often appeared in publications such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Scribner’s Magazine*. She was typically pictured as a “healthy and athletic maiden” (Banner 22) with a tennis racket or golf club in hand who enjoyed physical activities such as tennis, golf, and horseback riding (Davies 97). The image of Gibson Girl as well as the discourse surrounding it challenged Victorian rhetoric, specifically as it pertained to women’s social roles. Here, the Gibson girl purported its own rhetoric that positioned athleticism and female independence as desirable attributes for women to possess. However, this rhetoric also had undertones in regards to class status, that is, the image and discourse of the Gibson girl emphasized wealth and fashion (Gorn and Goldstein 135). Consequently, the Gibson Girl’s primary target audience was upper-class white women belonging to elite country clubs (Gorn and Goldstein 135-36; Brown 30-33; Banner 22-24; Davies 95-98). To be sure, the Gibson Girl rhetoric helped legitimize the ideal of feminine athleticism by making women’s athletics fashionable and socially acceptable, but it did so on a very limited scale. The New Woman rhetoric, on the other hand, appealed to many middle-class

women who were already used to strenuous labor and who did not have the luxury of pursuing leisure or elite activities such as horseback riding or playing tennis at private country clubs.

However, these new ideals and the rise in women's athletic endeavors did not go unchallenged. While the bicycle and the New Woman image did much to encourage women's physical activity, especially in terms of encouraging women to exercise for their health, they did not eradicate the common public opinion about women's participation in aggressive and strenuous physical activities. This viewpoint of women's sports and women who play competitive sports was epitomized by one of the most elite international sports organizations in the world – the International Olympic Committee. In her study of the history of the Modern Olympic Games, Hargreaves argues that from its inception the “modern Olympics was a context for institutionalized sexism, severely hindering women's participation” (4). Founded in 1892, the International Olympic Committee serves as the administrative authority for the games, and it has been an “undemocratic, self-regulating, and male-dominated institution” historically composed of “upper-class Anglo-Saxon men” (Hargreaves 3). Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the Modern Olympics and the central benefactor of the 1892 International Olympic Committee (IOC), denounced women's sports as “against the ‘laws of nature’ and ‘the most unaesthetic sight human eyes could contemplate’” (Hargreaves 4). Due to the IOC's perception of female athletes, women were not permitted to compete in the Olympics until the 1928 Games. In response to this exclusion, female athletes from the United States and Europe coming together in solidarity and creating their own elite, competitive sports organization, the Federation of Sportive Feminine Internationale (FSFI). The FSFI served as a protest group, and the FSFI created the Women's World Games (WWG), which was hosted in Paris in 1922. As Hargreaves explains, the FSFI “became an important pressure group for women's international athletic

competition and helped to accelerate development world-wide” (211). The FSFI functioned as a strategic and organized women’s campaign that used the WWG as both a visual and physical argument against women’s exclusion from the Olympics. The presence and success of the WWG eventually persuaded the IOC to include female athletes in the Games. The FSFI and WWG are evidence of the type of rhetorical action female athletes engaged in when faced with dominant discourse that create challenging conditions for them; to be sure, allowing women to compete starting in the 1928 Olympics was the result of female athletes’ strategic rhetorical activity and solidarity.

Unfortunately, the IOC continued to thwart women’s advancement into the sporting world and the FSFI continued to resist this exclusion by capitalizing on the performative value attached to the widespread publicizing of women competing. For example, it wasn’t be until the 1980s that the IOC allowed women to compete in physically taxing events such as the marathon. Here, the FSFI seized the opportunity undergird their arguments for inclusion with the international visibility and popularity of women’s athletic events. The rise in female athletics as a spectator event functioned rhetorically to persuade the IOC that excluding women from strenuous competition would be detrimental to the IOC’s success. Spectators have always had to pay to attend the Olympics and to pay to see athletes compete in different sporting events. Thus, if female athletics were popular to watch, then the IOC could make money off of women’s competition. Thus, the FSFI persuaded the IOC to include events such as the marathon by using “the threat of withdrawal from the Olympics,” which would result in financial loss for the IOC (Hargreaves 214). However, despite the multiple, successful protest arguments made by the FSFI, the IOC’s status as an expert authority on sports remained unchallenged. Their status and the elite nature of the games insured that the IOC’s rhetoric of sport, which maintained that

female athletes are unnatural, unsexual, and unappealing, was disseminated and ingrained in society as the ultimate discourse on women's athletics. As I will demonstrate throughout the rest of this chapter, conceiving of the female athletes as unfeminine and odd circulated beyond the immediate social context of the Modern Olympics, becoming the norm to fight against in the late twentieth and early twenty-first-century.

The concept of “feminine-appropriate” athletics evolved out of this restrictive rhetoric and developed and fused with the assumption that sports are an inherently masculine activity and enterprise. Since sports was and is a highly visible activity and at this point in time, only men were permitted to play sport, men were the only ones *seen* playing sports, which in turn fostered the assumption that sports were a masculine endeavor. This idea was further solidified by a social climate that conformed to traditional gender constructions that equated athletic ability and competitiveness with manhood. This assumption undergirded the rhetorical discourse mentioned above by suggesting that sports masculinizes women. Unsurprisingly then, *Lippincott Monthly's* 1911 article, “The Masculinization of Girls,” highlighted the emerging tension between athletics and gendered social roles while also softly advocating for girls' participation in non-competitive sports. “The Masculinization of Girls” queried if the modern woman—aka the athletic girl—could benefit from playing sports without sacrificing her femininity for the pursuit of more masculine activities. This article captures much of the social tension and ambiguity that existed between women's competitive sports and gender roles in the 1920s. According to sports historian Richard Davies, the rise of women's physical activity caused critics of women's sports to question the femininity and sexuality of female athletes. Articles such as “Are Athletics Making Girls Masculine: A Practical Answer to a Question Every Girl Asks” published in the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1911 voiced questions such as, “Did female athletes have to become

‘masculine’ in order to participate in competitive athletics? Was a finely honed competitive instinct ‘unfeminine?’ Would competitive sports unleash repressed sexual desires? Or worse, would girls become too ‘manly’ and lose their femininity” (Sargent 56-9). To be sure, the scaffold of rhetoric that emerged out of the of Victorian ideals, the IOC’s abhorrence of the idea of a female engaged in athletics, and the assumption that sports is a prevue of men continued to circulate long after the Victorian era passed and the IOC permitted women to compete in the Olympics. Certainly, this rhetoric continued to evolve and encapsulate other cultural anxieties such as homophobia. Women’s sexuality is, and continues to be, a critical point of contention in the sporting world, because historically when women’s sexuality intersects with her athletic identity the risk is that the female athlete may be perceived as abnormal, as an unnatural woman, and “worst of all,” as a lesbian. This rhetoric was effective because it appealed to the public’s sense of fear of being labeled as abnormal and fear of people who subverted social norms (who were often labeled as abnormal). Such an emotive appeal produced a level of suspicion aimed at women’s bodies and the women who wanted to play sport. Thus, women were cautioned that they would succeed only if they traded “what was seen as their natural femininity for masculine qualities of body and mind” (O’Reilly and Cahn xv). It is important to note that underlying this restrictive rhetoric was another type of fear—the fear of the erosion of traditional gendered roles in modern America, specifically the distinctness between men and women.²³ To assuage this panic, critics of women’s sports seized the discourse of feminine-appropriate activities and used it to persuade women and young girls against competition and vigorous play seeing as it could threaten the gendered social roles for women as well as damage individual reputations.

²³ It’s important to keep in mind that at this point in time, biology had been compounded with the social and gendered roles were inseparable from biological roles. That is, the physical sex of a man or women determined how they should behave socially. This would later be challenged and deconstructed by social theorist such as Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*.

Physical Education: The Philosophy of Moderation and Feminine Appropriate Sports

Female physical educators played an essential role in the protection of women's sports as well as serving to restrict women's opportunities to compete in athletic events. With their limited authority and marginal position as women physical educators, "who were just beginning to lay claim to professional status in the academic world," these women had the difficult challenge of defending women's physical activity and their own expertise in male-dominated schools where feminine-appropriate behavior was mandated (Verbrugge 14-46, Cahn 23). In an effort to combat the tension between sports and femininity, these instructors championed women's physical education by tempering their support for and the teaching of competitive sport. Such restrained action was a strategically rhetorical move on their part because it persuaded schools to keep certain sports for young women, thus securing a foothold in the athletic world (Verbrugge 49-55). However, this foothold came at the sacrifice of competitive sports. While serving as the gymnastics director and instructor of physical culture at Smith College in 1903, leading physical educator Senda Berenson published the article "The Significance of Basket Ball for Women" that explicitly expressed concern for sportswomen's loss of femininity and advocated for the moderation of women's sports to protect their femininity by only providing socially appropriate athletics. Her article circulated to the extent that it led to the philosophy of "moderation" which pressed educators to end all interscholastic sports and modify the rules of girls' athletic games to control competitive "urges." Moderation provided educators with a rhetorical strategy to establish a critical difference between women's and men's sport, and that difference provided the necessary argument to safeguard against claims that sports masculinize women. Thus, the philosophy of moderation was designed to resolve the issue of women's mannishness in sports. However, the compounding result was that nearly all competitive women's sports programs were

abolished in high schools and college during the 1920s. Thus, the philosophy of moderation persuasively assuaged anxieties about the masculinization of women by eliminating the visibility, or evidence, of women's competitiveness by shutting down women's competitive sports programs. These programs would not be reestablished for nearly fifty years. This philosophy allowed educators to advocate for the teaching of feminine-appropriate sports including activities such as dance, tennis, croquet, badminton, bowling, golf, and horseback-riding to young girls and women. However, events such as long-distance running and aggressively competitive sports—e.g. basketball and field hockey—were not allowed. While this concept was quite restrictive and provided a historical basis for arguments about which sports are inherently masculine and which sports are inherently feminine, it did allow for a certain level of female participation in the sporting world that had heretofore been unprecedented. Indeed, these educators labored to free women and young girls from the physical and social restraints of Victorian womanhood. Unfortunately, the philosophy of moderation and feminine-appropriate sports also helped to perpetuate a tradition of exclusion as well as fostering a narrative that controlled and censored the modern female body.

With the tide of opinion decidedly against competitive women's athletics, the cultural discourse of the 1920s laid the ground work for dividing the selfhood of the female athletes by placing their athleticism at odds with their womanness. Playing sports, especially competitive sports, cast suspicion on the femininity of the women playing. However, the New Woman and "feminine-appropriate" sports counter-balanced this suspicion by offering a socially acceptable, dynamic image of an athletic girl who was not bound by Victorian womanhood nor fully excluded from the male-dominated sporting world. In a strategic sense, the concepts of "feminine-appropriate" sports and the philosophy of moderation functioned rhetorically to

cultivate a space for women in the sporting world even as they created new obstacles that female athletes would have to face in the years to come. Ultimately, these concepts illustrate the rhetorically complicated and vexed arguments and positionality that women constantly negotiated.

The All American Girls Professional Baseball League

Women and girls experienced both social praise and scorn if they pursued athletic excellence or even just the opportunity to participate in athletics. This contradiction lasted well into the 1930s and 1940. Arguably, this divide between woman and athlete is one that is still prevalent today. As I will address in the following chapter, female athletes often encounter a crisis of identity as they navigate being a woman and being an athlete. The creation of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) exemplifies the mixed attitudes directed at female athletes. Founded by the Chicago Cubs owner Philip K. Wrigley and his advertising agent Arthur Meyerhoff, the AAGPBL existed for twelve seasons from 1943 to 1954. The teams comprised working-class white young women in their late teenage years and early twenties who were more than eager to be paid to play baseball. Depending on the success of their team, they earned forty-five to seventy-five dollars a week, “an amount four times what they could make at jobs traditionally reserved for women” (Gregorich 86-87). The AAGPBL was one of the first organizations to pay female athletes, and their wages rhetorically functioned to legitimize the presence of women as professional athletes because it communicated to these women and the public that female’s athletic performances were valuable labor worth paying for. A true victory in the sporting world for its visibility and success, the AAGPBL had nearly six hundred women playing professional baseball over the twelve seasons.

Sports historian Barbara Gregorich explains that the league went through many name changes over its twelve year span: “the year after its founding, it was called the All-American Girls Ball League, then the All-American Girls Base Ball League, then the All-American Girls Professional Base Ball League, and finally the American Girls Baseball League” (84). Today, the league is often referred to as AAGBL or the AAGPBL. The changes in name reflects the changes made to the games and the beliefs of the league’s owners and its coaches. When the league first began it was created as a softball league, but it “deviated from regulation softball in one important respect: stealing was permitted” (84). The game also evolved thanks to the team’s managers who mainly consisted of former male major-leaguers. These men played a pivotal role by pushing for play with a decreased ball size so that it traveled faster as well as larger fields with longer base-paths. They also advocated for the continuation of league even after the war ended. However, these men were originally hired to lend credibility and expertise to the league and to emphasize the difference between masculine expertise and authority in sports and the All-American Girls’ femininity (Cahn 149). Yet, as experts of the game of baseball, the managers argued that these women were professional athletes in their own right given their athletic ability and finesse at playing the game. To be sure, the professional and sporting ethos of these men extended to the female athletes and the league, and worked rhetorically to establish these women as legitimate, expert athletes. Ultimately, the coaches and female players persuaded the league owners that women were just as able to play professional baseball as the men—primarily through the visual evidence of their athletic performances as well as the spectator interest in female athletes—and thus they argued that women in the AAGPBL should be viewed as professional athletes playing an elite, professional sport.

While the existence and visibility of the AAGPBL smacked directly against social discourses about feminine-appropriate sports and disrupted assumptions about the risks of women engaging in competitive athletics, the league, specifically its owner, also perpetuated these social discourses and cultural assumptions. As prominent businessmen, Wrigley and Meyerhoff's aim in creating this league was to make money off of entertaining the American public while men's major league baseball was suspended during WWII (Gregorich 84). Quite possibly, if Wrigley and Meyerhoff had believed that they could profit off of the league by presenting the women as legitimate athletes whose athletic capacity was valuable and worth watching, then they may have readily promoted the athletes and the league as such. However, the political economy at the time drove their decision to promote the athletes and the league as a spectacle that highlighted the oddness and paradox of pretty, athletic women because that kind of marketing had a greater probability of making the league a financial success. Wrigley believed that sport, especially baseball, was a "masculine exercise, not a gender-neutral one, and that women who were great athletes had to counterbalance their participation in a 'masculine' endeavor by intensifying the kind of deportment that society considered feminine" (Gregorich 87). Wrigley and Meyerhoff played on the social tensions between femininity and male-dominated sports to specifically promote the league as "a dramatic spectacle of gender contrasts, presenting women's baseball as a unique combination of feminist beauty and masculine athletic skill" and persuade the public that women playing ball was a "must see" event (Cahn 148).²⁴ To be sure, the rhetoric of moderation and feminine-appropriate sports was very much still in circulation and it as well as the economic market informed the owners' decision to advertise the

²⁴ They presented the league as a "novelty" and "colorful sports show" that would continually amaze fans. In many ways, this mindset parallels the purpose behind the spectacle of freak shows (Cahn 149). Indeed, this very term was applied to these women to emphasize the oddity of their athletic skill and unnaturalness of their presence in a man's sport.

AAGPBL to the public as a freakshow-esque spectacle. Then, in an effort to highlight the supposed stark differences between men's sports and femininity, Meyerhoff created the concept of the "femininity principle," another concept that came into being in order to mandate that the recruiters for the league consider both the athletic ability and feminine appearance of the prospective players; that is, recruiters were to only select attractive women to play ball (Cahn 149-50). The rhetoric of the "femininity principle" served to restrict these women ball players to traditionally feminine and heterosexual performances on and off the field of play. Indeed, the league handbook states that it is "more dramatic to see a feminine-type girl throw...the more feminine the appearance of the performer, the more dramatic the performance" (AAGBL *Handbook* qtd in Cahn 150).²⁵ The players were also required to attend charm school, learn how to apply and wear makeup, and learn how to gracefully walk (aaggpbl.org). These women were required to play in one piece dresses with shortened skirts to emphasize their femininity and certainly persuade spectators that they were indeed watching *female* athletes compete. Unlike their male counter-parts who wore long pants, these women had bare legs during the games, a visual reminder to spectators that they were watching women, which made sliding into bases and playing in cold weather incredibly painful and miserable at times.²⁶ The athletes also followed the "Rules of Conduct," a list of 15 mandates about their behavior. This list included stipulations such as "always appear in feminine attire when not actively engaged in practice or playing ball"; "boyish bobs are not permissible"; and "lipstick should always be on" (aaggpbl.org).

²⁵ Players were heavily fined or released from their contract if they violated the "femininity principle" or if they displayed "obvious lesbianism" (Cahn 151).

²⁶ Many of the fields were full of cinders and had been burned over with gasoline and oil in order to make the field dry enough to play on (Gregorich 87). Often this would bruise and abrade the skin of players sliding into the bases. This very issue is highlighted in the popular 1992 film, *A League of Their Own*, which depicts a photographer documenting a bruise the size of a dinner plate on one of the player's outer-thighs.

While the act of paying these athletes along with providing them with professional male coaches served to lend credibility and legitimacy to female ball players, promoting the AAGPBL as a spectacle of feminine girls playing men's baseball served to perpetuate a marginalizing rhetoric that maintained traditional gender distinctions and simultaneously undercut these women's athletic credibility. And if their athletic ability and performance was too great, then their ethos as a feminine woman was threatened by their "mannish" skill. Unfortunately, the AAGPBL's rhetoric about the female athlete culturally inscribed a narrow definition of womanhood that restricted female athletes to heteronormative standards of "feminine" dress, behavior, sexual attractiveness, and "nice girl" respectability and morality. However, paying these women to play, changing the rules of the game to resemble men's baseball, and changing the league's name to acknowledge the professionalization of these women athletes did challenge the question of whether or not women could play competitive sports. Moreover, the league provided the general public with concrete, visual evidence of women successfully playing ball and thriving as athletes. Given that the league lasted over a decade and six hundred girls participated in the league, the concept of the female athlete—however fraught the concept was—became cemented in American culture.

Unfortunately, within the sporting world and in the larger American society, the rhetoric about gender and sexual divisions continued to circulate and diminish the legitimization and visibility of women as athletes. Towards the end of the 1950s, just as the AAGPBL was coming to its end, American culture retreated to a much more conservative stance in regards to gendered social roles. This stance was the result of marked economic growth in a post-WWII era that caused a manufacturing and home construction boom as well as the rise of the Cold War era, which fostered a politically conservative climate in the country. Conservatism and conformity, as

it specifically related to capitalistic America, greatly informed this time period as the public fought against the threat (and fear) of communism. Thus, the ideal of the thriving family nucleus became a major political platform in the United States. Consequently, the Victorian rhetoric of domesticity was renewed in the American public and served as a driving force persuading women to vacate the playing field so that they could properly attend to family and home life.²⁷ In her monograph *Perfect Wives in Ideal Homes: The Story of Women in the 1950s* (2015), historian Virginia Nicholson explains that for women this return to domesticity was experienced through cultural discourse that promoted being a model wife whose duty and aspirations were to tend to home and husband. Thus, the tenuous relationship between gender roles in general society and women's sports continued to influence women athletes, specifically by pressuring them to exit the sporting world and go be good wives which in turn perpetuated a culture of exclusion throughout the 1950s and well into the early 1970s,

This exclusion and invisibility was typified by American cable television and the lack of media coverage of women's sports. As a source of entertainment, sports were becoming more widely televised in the 1960s and 1970s. However, network television offered limited air-time coverage of women's sports. According to *Sports Illustrated* writers Bil Gilbert and Nancy Williamson in their three-part series on the inequality in women's sport, NBC only covered one hour of women's sports in comparison to the 365 hours of live men's sports coverage between August 1972 and September 1973. CBS covered 260 hours of live sporting events and only ten of those hours provided coverage of women's events (96). A central reason that network television did not cover women's sports was due to the lack of a viewer-base market. The professional sporting industry was quickly expanding into a multimillion dollar industry, and

²⁷ Mary M. Bell's article "Role Conflict of Women as Athletes in the United States" provides a thorough analysis of the tension between women's social roles and athletic roles in the 1970s.

endorsements and media coverage went to the athletes and sports that generated revenue and garnered attention—this consisted almost entirely of male athletes and men’s sport. In addition to the lack of media coverage and endorsements, the disparity of pay in women’s professional sports was, and still is, abysmal—which, circles back to the lack of media coverage and endorsements.²⁸ For example, in 1970 Billie Jean King became the first pro Women’s tennis player to break the one-hundred-thousand-dollar barrier in annual winnings; however, pro male tennis player Rod Laver, who won only a third as many tournaments as King, earned nearly three times the amount of money that she did in the same year (Cahn 250).²⁹ The paucity of coverage and pay produced a persuasive cultural discourse that positioned women’s sports as second rate in comparison to men’s. This discourse included claims such as the media’s lack of coverage was due to the “fact” that women’s sporting events are scarce, and they are scarce because they are less interesting than men’s sports and thus less deserving of pay and attention. In many ways, this lack of equality mirrored the lack of equality women were experiencing in the work force. Traditionally, gendered rhetoric greatly influenced how women were unequally treated and valued in many aspects of American society, and the sporting world was no exception.

The Proliferation of Homophobia in Women’s Sports

Women’s sports was also diminished through arguments about women’s sports challenging male dominance and men’s sports. Underlying the gendered rhetoric and corporeal suspicions about female athletes in the first half of the twentieth-century were the anxieties that

²⁸ The U.S. Women’s Soccer team earned two million dollars from FIFA after winning the World Cup which is a paltry amount compared to the thirty-five million paid to the men’s world cup winner (Foudy, espnW.com).

²⁹ This disparity can be seen in other sports such as women’s professional golf. In 1972 Kathy Whitworth played twenty-nine tournaments and earned \$65,000 and pro golfer, Jack Nicklaus played in nineteen tournaments and earned \$320,000.

women's sports would subvert and unravel cultural concepts about male supremacy which could completely undermine the prevailing gender and social order. Already women were destabilizing a male-dominated culture with their very presence in the sporting world, and they were proving that they could secure their own livelihood by making an independent income; at this point, spectators had demonstrated that they were willing to pay to watch women compete, which ultimately meant that if they were watching the women, they weren't paying to watch the men. Needing a new platform to disparage women's athletic and thereby assuage intensifying social anxiety over the presence of female athletes, the early twentieth century male-dominated society turned from a fear about the unsexing of women to focus on homophobia. The fear of the possibility that women might prefer and choose women over men as their sexual partners was scaffolded into an already marginalizing rhetoric of women's sports, resulted in the circulation of homophobic rhetoric in women's sports. Building on past discourses that emphasized female athletes' femininity, this discourse evolved to not only push athletes to promote their femininity for fear of appearing masculine (and unappealing to men), it also to push them to constantly reaffirm their heterosexuality for fear of being perceived as lesbian. Unfortunately, these anxieties had a deep traction in American culture, and they did not ease as women's athletics transitioned into the 1970s. Sports sociologist Pat Griffin, a leading scholar on homophobia in women's sports, explains that in the 1930s "as psychology and psychiatry became respected subfields in medicine, these doctors warned of... the 'mannish lesbian,' whose...preference for masculine dress and activity were identified as symptoms of psychological disturbance. Social commentators in the popular press warned parents about the dangers of allowing impressionable daughters to spend time in all-female environments" (193). Consequently, the all-female environment of a women's sports team was believed to be a central space where lesbians could

be found. The rhetoric of homophobia in women's sports circulated past its 1930s cultural context and took root, as Griffin explains, due to the legitimacy of medical arguments about the female mind and body. Similar to the medical and scientific arguments about constitutional overstrain mentioned earlier in this chapter, the ethos of this argument was grounded in the credibility and respect of the larger field, making homophobia in women's sports seemingly undisputable. In her interview about the league's requirement that players attend charm school, former AAGPBL player Josephine D'Angelo addresses this very issue: "I was old enough to understand what they were trying to do. They didn't want to bring a bunch of butchy people or have anybody say that one of us is a—they didn't even use the word 'lesbian' in those days, they just used the word 'queers'" (Cahn 156). D'Angelo identifies the tension that existed between their impressive athletic ability and appearances of femininity and stressed that they were pressured to overtly engage in performances of femininity on and off the field to quell homophobia.

Furthermore, Griffin elucidates that this rhetoric manifests in women's sports through "silence, denial, promotion of a heterosexy image, attacks on lesbians, and preference for male coaches" (195). By the time women's athletics reached the 1960s and 1970s, the rhetoric of homophobia in women's sports was pervasive throughout the sporting world. In their article, "Are You Being Two-Faced," Gilbert and Williamson found that public attitude towards women's sports and female athletes resembled the AAGPBL's exhibitionist goals of hyping up the femininity of female athletes to combat fears of masculine behavior. They argued that these fears are linked to "the even darker insinuation that athletics will masculinize a woman's sexual behavior" (47). Case in point, in the late 1970s members of the professional Women's Basketball League—which only existed for three years—were required to attend charm school for

lessons on performing culturally appropriate femininity (Nelson 7).³⁰ Such discourses on women's sports underscore the complex ways in which particular cultural attitudes about homophobia, ideal femininity, and the larger fear that women's sports might destabilize a male-dominated culture reinforce each other and further the marginalization of female athletes. Yet, despite rhetoric of homophobia circulating in women's sports and despite female athletes' invisibility in the sporting world and general public, two pivotal points of change occurred in the beginning of the 1970s—the passage of the Title IX Education Amendment in 1972 and the “Battle of the Sexes” tennis exhibition between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs in 1973. These events were the catalysts that initiated alterations of the gendered landscape of the sporting world at large. While women had made great strides advocating for their inclusion in athletics long before the 1970s, these two moments once again made visible to the American public the endeavors of women to participate and professionalize as athletes. More importantly, these moments insured that women's athletics and female athletes would not keep falling to the social and historical wayside of American culture.

The “Almost” Revolution: Women' Sports from 1970s—2000

During the 1960s and 1970s, the larger tide of social change emerging out of the civil rights movement and the women's movement cultivated a national discourse that championed equality, opportunity, and rights for women and ethnic minorities. The rhetoric of fairness and anti-discrimination circulated across American culture and enabled sports activists and advocates for women's athletics to ground and legitimize their arguments for athletic opportunity, and

³⁰ This phobia is best epitomized by the very public outing of Billie Jean King and media backlash as well as loss of endorsements and sponsorship that she experienced as a result of her sexual relationship with her Marilyn Barnett.

participation in the larger political and social discourses of the time. It was in this vein that a younger generation of physical education instructors was able to persuade educational administrations, specifically those at universities and colleges, to end their ban against intercollegiate competition. In 1966, the commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women was founded and was later renamed the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) in 1971. The AIAW governed and sponsored intercollegiate competition and championships for women and would serve as the sole advocate for women's athletics in the 1970s (Jensen 152, 59). As AIAW helped women secure an institutional foothold for athletics at the college level, Title IX provided women's athletics with the legal rhetoric it needed to guarantee that women's sports and athletes would be a permanent presence and participant in collegiate athletics.

Interestingly, the words athletics and sports do not appear anywhere in Title IX. The impetus behind the creation and passing of the Title IX legislation was to address issues of sex discrimination in higher education, particularly when it came to discrimination against female professors. Passed as an education amendment, Title IX reads, "Prohibition against discrimination; exceptions. No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (U.S. Department of Labor). Under this law, however, sport—an extracurricular student activity—is considered an educational program. According to the Women's Sports Foundation's document, the "Title IX Media Helper," three specific components of Title IX apply to athletics—participation, scholarships, and other benefits such as equal treatment in the provision of equipment, practice facilities, and access to tutoring ([Women's Sports Foundation qtd. in O'Reilly and Cahn 328](#)). Under participation, women are to have equitable opportunities to participate in sports; however,

this does not mean that identical sports will be available to both men and women. The scholarship component stipulates that female athletes receive scholarship money proportional to their participation. Advocates for women's sports strategically adopted Title IX as their battering ram against inequity and inequality in sports. In this way Title IX rhetorically functioned to provide women's athletics with the legal—and thus the logic and lawful—argument they needed to claim permanent space in the sporting world.

While the passage of Title IX seemed to herald the coming of a revolution for women's athletics, it also highlighted the depth of resistance and opposition to female athletes and sports activists' demands for equity. This resistance is evident in the sloth-like pace officials took to create, implement, and enforce the Title IX regulations, and in the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) powerful efforts to reverse the Title IX amendment. Although Title IX was passed in 1972, it wasn't until 1974 that the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) drafted guidelines and regulations for its implementation. After these regulations were presented, HEW received nearly ten thousand comments and complaints from the American public and as a result the regulations were severely revised (Ware, *Title IX* 50). In June of 1975, HEW finalized the guidelines for Title IX in their document, "Regulations on Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex," which included a timetable for compliance: one year for elementary schools and three years for high schools and colleges (Department of Health, Education, and Welfare 24142-43). Yet, despite the passing of these guidelines and regulations, many programs and universities fought the mandate to comply with Title IX. The NCAA, the governing institution for men's intercollegiate sport, lobbied for the Tower Amendment of 1974, which was designed to pressure HEW into excusing and protecting certain athletic departments and revenue making sports from compliance regulations, specifically football, because such sports' revenues

paid the bill for all of the other athletics (Cahn 255).³¹ Although the Tower Amendment did not pass, the efforts to protest Title IX greatly delayed its implementation.

While waiting for the enforcement of Title IX, many women's teams clamored for their dissatisfaction to educational institutions over the discrepancies between men's and women's athletics. This frustration and indignation is best captured by the bodily protest staged by the Yale Women's Crew team in March of 1976. After being denied access to shower facilities during their off-campus winter workouts, these women were required to wait on the bus for half an hour—sitting in their sweaty uniforms that were covered in frozen rain—while the men's team showered in the boathouse's only locker room. To combat this inequality as well as communicate their anger at Yale's slow response to comply with Title IX, nineteen members of the women's crew team walked into the office of the director of women's athletics, stripped off their practice uniforms, and presented their naked bodies which had Title IX written on their backs and chests (Barnett and Yale Women's Crew Team 983). Their argument for equality took an embodied form where their logic and credibility were literally contoured on and within their bodies, and their bodies persuasively, and strategically, served as a visual argument and protest. After being picked up by the *New York Times*, this bodily protest became national news, circulating beyond the university and resonating with female athletes all over the country. And it did result in the women's crew team getting shower facilities. More significantly, this kind of argument represented the much larger battle for compliance and equality for women's athletic programs across the country, and it inspired similar bodily arguments elsewhere in country. That said, it would still take seven years for Title IX to become fully enforced in all schools.

³¹ For specific articles about these arguments see Ralph Sabock's 1975 *New York Times* article, "Football: It Pays the Bills, Son" or the *Hearings before the Subcommittee on Education of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare*, U.S. Senate, 94th Cong., 1st session (September 1975).

Despite the delays in implementation and compliance enforcement, Title IX's clearly defined position against sex discrimination in intercollegiate athletics also gave amateur and professional athletes the language and momentum to advance and circulate a rhetoric of equality. During this time, few sports activists and female athletes identified as feminists nor did they join with the larger, more political feminist movement; as such, they relied on the impetus of Title IX to combat the marginalization they were facing. As noted by feminist historian Susan Ware, "most women athletes were not closely aligned with the women's movement, nor was equality in sports a high priority for second-wave feminism compared to other 'body' issues such as abortion, rape, self-defense, and sexuality" during this time period (11).³² That being said, sports advocates' efforts to fight for equal inclusion and for the end of sex discrimination were consistent with much of the feminist agenda, especially the fight for women's right to control and enjoy their own bodies.³³ Unfortunately, women's sports advocates and feminist activists never quite came together.³⁴ Pro women's tennis athlete, Billie Jean King praised the women's movement for being friendly and accepting of female athletes, but she also stressed her regrets "that the women's movement didn't include sports enough" because women's sports were becoming more visible and "could have been a great conduit for social change" (King qtd in Blumenthal 51). However, both women's athletics and the women's movement played a role in this missed connection. For academic and mainstream feminists, the sporting world proved to be

³² According to sports sociologist, [Don Sabo](#) and [Janie Victoria Ward](#), before 1980 "there was no substantive discussion of women's sports in mainstream feminist writings. Women athletes were off the radar screens of Simone de Beauvoir, Susan Brownmiller, Kate Millett, Juliet Mitchell, Mary Daly, and Betty Friedan" (3).

³³ In 1973, *Our Bodies, Our Selves* was published and received instant fame. This women-produced publication was pivotal because it offered a comprehensive, woman-positive information about healthcare for women, as well as encouraged women to enjoy their bodies.

³⁴ King ventured to critique the movement for ignoring women's sports: "I'm sorry that the women's movement didn't include sports enough. We were so visible. We could have been a great conduit for social change. But while the women's movement was very friendly, we didn't connect like we could have" (King 2 qtd in Blumenthal 51).

problematic because it encouraged competition between women.³⁵ On the other hand, women's sports activists avoided association with second-wave feminists due to their more radical goals.³⁶

However, this lack of convergence does not mean that modern feminists did not influence female athletes and the sporting world in profound ways. In professional tennis, Billie Jean King led a protest with her fellow female competitors against the inequity of pay on the pro tour. Similar to the protest campaign against the International Olympic Committee and the creation of the Women's World Games formed by the FSFI mentioned earlier in this chapter, King obtained sponsorship and endorsements from Virginia Slims to launch a women's pro circuit that visually and physically argued against the gender inequality in professional tennis. King also successfully "pressured the United States Lawn Tennis Association into equalizing prize money in the U.S. Open and organized the Women's Tennis Association to represent women on the tour" (Cahn 251). By this time, King was recognized by the general public as a tennis star and minor celebrity for her athletic success as well as for her effective advocacy for women athletes. Her prominence as a female athlete sky-rocketed across the country with her involvement in the "Battle of the Sexes" tennis match. King's performance in the "Battle of the Sexes" functioned as a bodily argument against gender discrimination in athletics and provided the American public with a "visual example, of 'women's liberation in action'" (Ware, *Game, Set, Match* 11).

In 1973, Bobby Riggs, a self-proclaimed "male-chauvinist pig" and a top-ranked American legend who won all three Wimbledon titles (men's singles, doubles, and mixed doubles) in 1939, issued a challenge to pro women tennis players, claiming because women are

³⁵ This is a frustrating perspective on sports, because athletics also promote teamwork, community, and solidarity, which were critical components of the women's movement.

³⁶ For more discussion on the strained relationship between the feminist movement and women's sport, see Susan Cahn's chapter "You've Come a Long Way, Maybe: A 'Revolution' in Women's Sport?" in her book *Coming on Strong*; Susan Ware's chapter "The Feminist Movement that Wasn't" in her book *Game, Set, Match*; or Karen Blumenthal's, *Let Me Play. The Story of Title IX, the Law that Changed the Future of Girls in America*.

inferior to men's superior athletic ability he could beat any pro female player at tennis. This was partially a financially motivated move considering the winner of the game would go home with \$100,000. Riggs first played Margaret Court, the number one ranked female player in the world. They played on May 13, 1973 and he beat her in two straight sets. After this devastating loss and embarrassment for women's tennis and women athletes, King challenged Riggs, and a match was scheduled for September 20th. Interestingly, Riggs was the major thrust behind the media stories leading up to the September match. He received a vast amount of attention because of his sexist statements about modern feminism such as, "I plan to bomb Billie Jean King in the match and set back the Women's lib movement about another 20 years" (Jares 25). He was also quoted for claiming in an interview that "The best way to handle women is to keep them pregnant and barefoot" (LeCompte 289). Then, in an assessment of women's athletic capabilities he quantified that "Women play about twenty-five percent as good as men, so they should get about twenty-five percent of the money men get" (Ephron). Riggs's comments were arguably just for show; however, they hit a nerve in the social discourse on gender roles and sparked a nationwide debate between men and women about equality, power, and gender roles.³⁷ As the date for the match grew closer and Riggs's comments became more extreme and derogatory, King came to the realization that this match was about much more than a game of tennis, her athletic performance during this match could address deep-seated assumptions about gender and women's sport. Without a doubt, her athletic performance had the power to rhetorically function as embodied persuasion and demonstrate to the American public that female athletes are women of importance who can disrupt the current gender discourse in society; and King "was willing to put

³⁷ In his interview with Ephron he admits that he doesn't know a thing about the women's movement and doesn't know that much about women. See the entirety of Nora Ephron's article, "Bobby Riggs, The Lady-Killer" for Riggs' explanation of how he only says outrageous comments to gain more hype for the match.

her hard-won credibility on the line to prove the point that women deserved just as much respect as men” on and off the field of play (Ware, *Game, Set, Match* 7).

On the day of the match an estimated 48 million Americans watched twenty-nine year old Billie Jean King play fifty-five year old Bobby Riggs. *Los Angeles Times* sports journalist Charles Maher reported that this sporting event was “the theatre of the bizarre” with a “guy who (as he likes to say) had ‘one foot in the grave’” competing against “a lady 26 years his junior. Name a nuttier confrontation than that” (43). Maher’s language suggests that this match took on a “freak show” quality—a sentiment that very much echoes the rhetoric of the promotional tactics of the AAGPBL as well as the International Olympic Committee’s rhetoric of women’s sport. That said, Maher provides a detailed narrative of the match that clearly illustrates King’s swift and impressive victory. The publicity of the “Battle of the Sexes,” including Bobby Riggs’s offensive and obviously provocative comments about women and the women’s movement highlights how this one tennis match served to connect women’s athletics to social tensions and controversies surrounding women’s social roles and the lack of equality and agency women experience in comparison to men. Ultimately, the “Battle of the Sexes” circulated nationwide in the American public as a visual, embodied argument for women’s liberation and helped make their battle for equality, equity and agency a mainstream issue for many American women.

King’s victory and new celebrity status afforded her the opportunity and authority to combat the many forms of institutionalized sex discrimination of female athletes. King went on to found the nonprofit organization The Women’s Sports Foundation in 1974. In her 1976 “Publisher’s Letter” in *WomenSports* magazine, King explains her personal reasons for creating this organization: “When I was growing up there was no organized group that said sports were just as good for girls as boys. Girls and women were on their own” and to combat the lack of

opportunity to play and compete the organization is “dedicated to encouraging women of all ages and all skill levels to participate in sports activities for health, enjoyment, and development” (4).³⁸ Once the Foundation was up and running in full force in 1979, it joined the fight to preserve Title IX. Since then, WSF has been the foremost advocate for Title IX and women’s sports.³⁹ While Title IX only had an official impact on federally funded educational institutions, its rhetoric of and demands for equality and fairness in women’s intercollegiate sports carried over into all levels of women’s athletics. As a result of these circulating demands, women’s representation at the Olympic Games went from ten percent to over twenty percent in the years between 1952 and 1976. The number of girls competing in high school sports increased 500 percent between 1970 and 1980. The combination of the publicity raised by the “Battle of the Sexes,” the formation of the Women’s Sports Foundation, and the continual circulation of female athletes’ embodied arguments for athletic equality enabled the gendered landscape of sports to slowly evolve into a more inclusive space for women.

However, this is not to say that a revolution fully occurred in women’s sports nor did it happen for all women. White women especially benefitted from Title IX, and since the 1990s there has been an influx of articles criticizing Title IX for its disregard of women of color and women who did not fit heteronormative sexual frameworks. In 1997, lesbian athlete and sports writer Lucy Jane Bledsoe published “Homophobia in Women’s Sports” in the *Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review* to address the offensive issue of calling women “dykes” to discourage them from participating in sports. While this phobia is nothing new to women’s athletics, it took

³⁸ King often made the profound point that the real goal is not to have a women’s sport foundation at all, “Because if we were really having equality, we wouldn’t need one” (4).

³⁹ According to the WSF website, today the foundation has gained such notoriety and support that it is able to offer considerable scholarships and grants to female athletes of all ages and skill levels as well as funds research, public awareness campaigns, and education programs across the country.

nearly a century before female athletes could seriously and effectively combat homophobia in women's sports. Sadly, this is an issue that still has a stronghold in sports today.⁴⁰ Along with articles addressing female athletes' sexual identities, women also began writing about the marginalization of racial minorities. Welch Suggs, a writer for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* who covered athletics for many years, published the article "Title IX has done Little for Minority Female Athletes" in 2001. This article surveys the stereotypes and experiences of minority female athletes and not only highlights the marginalization of minority women, but it also demonstrates the even larger lack of representation and participation of Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian women compared to Black women in athletics.⁴¹ Suggs reports that "nearly a third of the women shooting hoops in Division I of the National Collegiate Athletic Association are black, as are nearly a quarter of female track athletes. But only 2.7 percent of the women receiving scholarships to play all other sports at predominantly white colleges in Division I are black" (140-41). The lack of scholarships and participation opportunities afforded to female athletes of color are due to the "NCAA and the (white) women's-sports establishment promoting sports which minority athletes are unlikely to play" due to issues of access and support (Suggs 141). In support of this claim, Suggs presents his interview with Ms. Green, "the director of the Black Women in Sport Foundation and a professor of physical education at Temple University," who asserts that "most urban high schools don't have the green space needed for sports such as soccer, lacrosse, and especially golf," the three main women's sports that "colleges have been

⁴⁰ For more discussion on sexuality and women's sport see Pat Griffin's article "Changing the Game: Homophobia, Sexism, and Lesbians in Sport"; Leslea Newman's article "Less Ugly"; Susan K. Cahn's chapters, "Play It, Don't Say It: Lesbian Identity and Community in Women's Sport" and "Beauty and the Butch: The 'Mannish' Athlete and the Lesbian Threat"; and Barry Brummett and Andrew Ishak's edited collection, *Sports and Identity*.

⁴¹ For more discussion on the issue of race and the shortcomings of Title IX, see the National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education's "Title IX at 30: Report Card on Gender Equity"; Sarah K. Fields's chapter "Title IX and African American Female Athletes"; Meredith M. Bagley's article "Performing Social Class: The Case of Rutgers Basketball versus Don Imus"; Mary McDonald's chapter "The Whiteness of Sport Media Scholarship"; and Michael Lomax's monograph, *Sport and the Racial Divide: African American and Latino Experiences in an Era of Change*.

adding to comply with Title IX” since its implementation (141-42). Additionally, the president of the Women’s Sports Foundation at the time Suggs wrote the article, Donna A. Lopiano, explains that the issue with the lack of presence of female athletes of color at the collegiate and professional level is due to the fact that “the women’s movement is so focused on so many gender issues that the plight of women of color, who are in double jeopardy, is often times on the back burner” (Suggs 146).

In addition to the continued marginalization of minority women, women in administrative positions in athletics lost a lot of power and agency with the collapse of AIAW. Once the NCAA realized that they would not be able to overturn Title IX, they set out to dismantle the AIAW by wresting away control over women’s intercollegiate sports. Former AIAW president Donna Lopiano explains that “almost total control of all organizational structures associated with the development, control and conduct of women’s intercollegiate sports rest with a 95 percent male decision-maker system” (163). In 1981, the AIAW officially dissolved and the NCAA absorbed the entirety of women’s athletics. As a “peace offering,” NCAA offered women 16 percent representation on the NCAA Council; however, this gesture was mainly symbolic considering that 16 percent wasn’t enough to overcome voting blocks on the council. Subsequently, NCAA’s takeover of AIAW has had long lasting effects that extend into the sporting world today. Most coaching jobs and administrative positions in educational institutions and in the professional sporting world belong to men.

Despite what Title IX, “The Battle of the Sexes,” and the establishment of the Women’s Sports Foundation have done to claim women’s rights to equality in athletics, the marginalization of minority women, the lack of administrative power and control over women’s athletics, and the continued scrutiny of female athletes’ bodies and sexualities magnifies the fact that women’s

athletics still has a long way to go. Underlying all of these issues is the continued dissemination of a rhetoric of heteronormativity that pressures female athletes to perform as feminine, heterosexual women on and off the field. In recent years, for example, NCAA women basketball athletes recorded “get-to-know-the-players” bios that played before the final-four tournament in 2010; the content of these videos suggest that the real agenda is “to convince viewers that these players *are* actually women” (Rosin). Currently, the WNBA does not have a “Kiss Cam” during its timeouts—unlike the NBA—because of the assumption that more lesbians are spectators of the WNBA and, as such, they might offend heterosexual spectators by kissing (Rosin).⁴² The perpetuation of this anxiety is exemplified by the WNBA’s orientation for new players which include seminars on [fashion, hair, and makeup](#). WNBA president, Donna Orender, explains that the seminars are there to help “avoid the perception that it's a sports exclusively played by and marketed to lesbians—women's basketball gets packaged as a wholesome family sports replete with all-American ladies” (Rosin). To be sure, these seminars are evidence of the rhetoric of homophobia in women’s sports that originally circulated in 1930s America. Clearly, this rhetoric circulated well beyond its original cultural context, and even though it has been established that lesbianism is not the result of psychological disturbances in American culture, the fear and/or delegitimization of lesbians still influences and informs the way female athletes act on and off the field of play.

Ultimately, these heteronormative and feminine performances still occur because of the lack of equality, equity, and power women have in the sporting world as well as in society as a whole. With June 23, 2012 marking the fortieth anniversary of Title IX, sports scholar Jamie Schultz called for “retrospective, introspective, and prospective analyses” of the “tremendous

⁴² Of course the presence of the “kiss cam” anywhere is a whole other issue worth addressing in later projects.

growth of women' sport," because it serves as "a reminder to keep vigilant about persistent inequities" (187). Women's sports participation has grown by leaps and bounds as evidenced by the number of women athletes in the 2012 Olympics or even the number of women's collegiate teams. However, there are many elements of women's sports that have remained consistently stagnant or even invisible, and backlash against the development and increased support for women's sports still persists. To be sure, contemporary, sports rhetoric concerns the bodies and the selfhood of female athletes and shifts between offering a progressive ideal of women and presenting a complicated discourse that can demean women and young girls. Rhetorically examining this discourse demonstrates how these patterns have developed and continue to function in contemporary sports and general American culture. Therefore, in the chapter following this I will continue to build out these discourses, specifically focusing on the contemporary rhetorics influencing and informing women's sport. As I will argue here and in later chapters, women's sports, both historically and currently, are heavily influenced and often censured by restrictive and/or marginalizing discourses about the appearances of women's bodies and how women perform their athleticism and womanhood on and off the field of play.

Chapter 3

The Contemporary Landscape of Women's Sports

Women's sports and women's presence in the sporting world have exploded in the last three decades: in 2012 the Olympics were dubbed the Women's Olympics; in 2015 the Women's Soccer World Cup broke international records for the most watched sporting event, the Women's NBA hired its first female assistant coach,⁴³ the men's National Football League hired its first female coach and referee, and the national MMA organization recognized Ronda Rousey as the best athlete the organization has ever seen fight; and in 2016, *ESPN The Magazine* hired the first woman ever to take over as editor-in-chief, and she is also the first woman ever to head any major sports media outlet in the United States. The rise of women's sports, then, have immense potential to disrupt a male-dominated society and newly define and restructure American culture. Sports are inherently rhetorical, imbued with cultural meaning and economic power, and historically, that meaning has been gendered and governed by a male-dominated culture. This potential arises out of the female athletes' performances on and off the field of play because it is through their "performative dimension that sport and [athletes] have their rhetorical effects" on society (Kraft and Brummett 11). According to Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, gender is constituted and understood through culturally accepted practices, attributes, and acts produced and displayed by the body (*Gender Trouble* 139). These acts serve as the body's production of "cultural signification," that is, the identification of a man and masculine behavior or of a woman and feminine behavior. Performativity, then, "cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms....This repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies

⁴³ To date, the WNBA has only two female assistant coaches, Becky Hammon (San Antonio Spurs) and Nancy Lieberman (Sacramento Kings).

that ‘performance’ is not a singular ‘act’ or event, but a ritualized production” (*Bodies that Matter* 95). The very nature of athletics requires the body to engage in intense levels of physical repetition and “ritualized production” to enhance the body/mind.

Furthermore, athletic competition, especially at elite levels where there is a wide spectatorship, is primarily a performance of this repetition and ritual. Since men have been the visible and primary subjects enacting such repetition in sports, the structures of the sporting world have been gendered, raced, normalized, and coded as white, heterosexual, male, and masculine. Subsequently, the characteristics of sports—primarily physicality, muscularity, competitiveness, athletic competency, and aggression—are attributes culturally associated with (and culturally acceptable for) men and maleness, which excludes women from sports and relegates female gender constructions to associations with passivity, weakness, and submission. Consequently, the sporting world has been established as a space for creating, solidifying, and inscribing norms and ideals of white masculinity—and as its difference, white femininity⁴⁴—into American culture. Thus, when women have demonstrated qualities such as physical aggression or competitiveness on and off the field of play they have been publically perceived as odd, abnormal, or culturally unacceptable.

This traditional gender dichotomy is not exclusive to the sporting world; indeed the workforce, academics, and the military, to name a few, also are spaces that were originally gendered as male because they were dominated by men. Women’s increased visibility and power in both the public and private spheres challenge this gender dichotomy in our society and work to

⁴⁴ White femininity has been historically constructed as “a normative ideal of white womanhood that relied on an opposing image of black women as the inferior ‘other.’ Specifically, images of female sexuality, femininity, and beauty were composed along racially polarizes axes. North American and British scientists of the nineteenth century described black sexuality as lascivious and apelike...they contrasted black women’s presumed primitive, passionate sexuality to an ideal of asexual purity among highly ‘civilized’ white women” (Cahn 126; also see Collins 72). These and cultural discourses continued to “permeate American culture,” “found corollary in standards of beauty,” and influenced racial and gender discourses throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century (Cahn 126).

cultivate a wider, more inclusive understanding of gender; yet, the sporting world especially resists these changes—possibly because sports may, in some respects, exist for the purpose of establishing masculinity as discussed in the previous chapter—and its gendered state has seemingly existed as a permanent one given the exclusion and/or policing of bodily appearances of women who enter into sports. The presence and visibility of women demonstrating their athletic competency, which includes demonstrations of physical strength and endurance, power, intelligence, and capability, poses a threat to American sports and the deeply ingrained, gendered and racialized norms that inform and rhetorically influence American culture.

The concept of the female athlete, then, especially a female athlete of color, completely undermines the assumption that sports are the purview of men, perpetuating the fear that women's sports will undermine a male-dominated culture as well as the masculine gender performativity historically seen in sports. The explosive growth and visibility of women's athletic performances and female athletes' presence in the sporting world present significant challenges to traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity and even foster gender and body panic in American culture. To be sure, women's sports challenge cultural constructions of gender and push against cultural narratives that posit that female athletes are "not real women." Women's athletic bodies destabilize a racialized gender dichotomy that positions homosexuality (versus heterosexuality) and femininity (verses masculinity) as having less power and value. Additionally, this gender dichotomy places women of color in a state of double jeopardy because they are viewed as having less value than white women due to both their non-whiteness and their gender. Yet, women can be intensely competitive and aggressive while also being attractive and demure. They can have heavily muscled and powerfully strong, white and/or non-white bodies and still be overtly heterosexual. They can have a highly feminine bodily appearance and be

decidedly gay. The various identity combinations can go on and on, and these examples provide a small glimpse of the complexity and possibility of gender performativity, especially as those performances are enacted by female athletes.

Furthermore, this complexity and possibility are compounded by cultural discourses of race that devalue black womanhood and sexuality and/or mark it as deviant in comparison to white womanhood and sexuality. Sport historians Patricia Vertinsky and Gwendolyn Captain (541) and Susan Cahn (125-129) as well as black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins (72) address the marginalizing discourses about black women—and in the case of Vertinsky, Captain, and Cahn the marginalizing discourses about black female athletes—and illustrate that these discourses are rooted in black women's history as “slaves, tenant farmers, domestics, and wagers,” which as Cahn explains, “disqualified them from standards of femininity defined around the frail or inactive female [white] body....Black women were often represented in the dominant culture as masculine females lacking in feminine grace, delicacy, and refinement” (127). Fundamentally, women's athletic bodies establish that women's bodies in general—and men's bodies for that matter—do not divide up neatly into categories. Consequently, the presence of female athletes and the female athlete identity disrupt traditional categories of gender and can potentially destabilize a male-dominated culture that has historically determined what gender performativity looks like. Ultimately, female athletes' presence, their bodily appearance, and their performances on and off the field of play generate social panic and anxiety about culturally defining and controlling gender, race, and sexuality.

Wanting to maintain a traditional, patriarchal? hierarchy of gender and power, proponents of a male-dominated culture continue to promote and circulate discourses of marginalization that diminish female athletes and the identity of the female athlete as valuable and desirable and as a

way of being in American culture. Thus, despite the popularity and visibility of women's sport in contemporary society, we can see this rhetoric circulating in spaces such as the charm school of the All American Girls Professional Baseball League in the 1950s; the absence and/or lack of recognition of female athletes of color; the dropping of female athletes, such as Billie Jean King, from endorsement deals because they identify as homosexual; and most recently, in the news coverage of Olympic athletes in the 2016 Rio Games that attributed the athletes' victories to the men with whom they have a relationship.⁴⁵ These discourses originally emerged out of historical contexts that promoted the ideal of white femininity, homophobia, and the broad fear that women's sports might undermine a male-dominated culture, and while they more latently circulate in women's sports today, they do still influence public perceptions of female athletes as well as how female athletes perform on and off the field of play.

As the previous chapter illustrated, women's public and private social roles were initially limited to the home, and they were required to project modesty, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. As time went on, women could minimally access the sporting world through "feminine-appropriate" exercise and moderate play that discouraged competition; and as women's sports continued to develop, the fear of appearing masculine or lesbian restricted women from acting in the sporting world according to male-defined standards of heterosexual, white femininity. Accordingly, women originally lacked ethos as they appeared in the sporting world, because that was a space coded as masculine. This was compounded by the issue that female athletes were considered to have an insufficient womanly ethos if their bodily appearance lacked femininity, especially white femininity, and visual appeal during athletic play;

⁴⁵ King who was married and in a heterosexual relationship, was dropped by several companies such as Virginia Slims when her female hairdresser announced they had had a romantic relationship. There are athletes who willingly choose to be publically out in the sporting world today, and "coincidentally" none of them have endorsement deals.

furthermore, female athletes also lacked sexual agency because they could only access and be included in the sporting world if they were heterosexual. In these ways, the cultural circumstances of the sporting world and general society have greatly constrained female athletes' social roles and identities. In response, many athletes have rhetorically used their bodily appearance and perceived sexual appeal to negotiate how they act and socially survive as female athletes.

Unfortunately, their engagement in such rhetorical activity often results in censure from the women's sporting community because it appears to perpetuate the marginalization of women's sports rather than advance its power and agency. Similar to how feminist rhetoric scholars have largely ignored or glossed over women's sexuality in rhetorical histories, putting aside an important social, political, and economic reality of women's lives, feminist sports scholars and advocates of women's sports have often disregarded female athletes' bodily appearances and performances in favor of solely focusing on their athleticism so as to avoid perpetuating the devaluing of sportswomen and undermining the institution of women's sports. Considering the long history of men focusing on women's bodies for the purpose of marginalizing them, especially by sexualizing or trivializing their bodies, it is understandable that scholars and activists advocate for a discourse that focuses on the athleticism of women as a means to celebrate them as athletes, fight against marginalization, and establish the institute of women's sports as equal to men's. However, a rhetoric that solely focuses on women's athletic performances creates another type of restrictive rhetoric that limits the agency of individual athletes and prevents the evolution of a fuller, more inclusive rhetoric about women's athletics and their bodies.

Therefore, I question what possibilities for women's sports become evident if we contemplate female athletes' athletic performances and their sexuality simultaneously? Separating sexualization from its negative connotation frees us to newly interrogate such performances by female athletes. To echo the Women's Sports Foundation, "there is nothing wrong with portraying female athletes as feminine, physically attractive, or in ways that seek to represent an artistic study of their bodies....The question....requires an examination of context" (WSF qtd in Heywood and Dworkin 80). Accounting for the value and possibilities this kind of rhetorical activity reveals for women's sports and for rhetoric, this chapter endeavors to connect the multifaceted subjectivities embodied by female athletes, specifically their sexuality and athleticism, and proposes a middle ground that counters treatments of female athletes' sexuality as either something that should be the focus of attention in itself or as something that should be denied, denigrated, or ignored.

To be sure, my goal here is not to perpetuate a tradition of marginalizing female athletes by solely focusing on their bodily appearance and sexuality nor is it my intention to downplay their athleticism. Rather, I wish to complicate how female athletes' bodies and sexuality are documented as lacking validity, ethos, and agency. To do so, I consider in tandem female athletes' bodily appearances and athletic performances and submit that conjoining these two aspects can further illuminate the important ways women engage in rhetoric activity. Also, it is important to keep in mind that while I often refer to the general community of professional female athletes, not all professional athletes experience the history of their practice or their lives, that is, the history of marginalization and degradation of women and female athletes. Additionally, as communication scholars Lindsey J. Mean and Jeffrey W. Kassing argue in their seminal article, "I Would Just Like to be Known as an Athlete": Managing Hegemony,

Femininity, and Heterosexuality in Female Sport” (2008), “we need to...scrutinize the embedded communicative practices of people who regulate, participate in, organize, and mediatize sport,” (142). Responding to this call and building on the previous chapter’s aim of “interrogat[ing] the rhetorical work that goes into creating and disturbing gendered distinctions” (Agnew 115), this chapter focuses on contemporary female athletes’ rhetorical activity in relationship to scholarly and public perceptions of (re)presentations of their race, sexuality, and gender on and off the field of play.⁴⁶ I begin this chapter by returning to the examples of the marginalizing discourse circulating in women’s athletics today that I presented in the first chapter, and I analyze how these discourses rhetorically influence issues of gender, race, and sexuality. Then, I turn to detail the arguments made about female athletes by sports sociologists, specifically as they emerge out of the Tucker Center for Research on Girls and Women in Sport. To address the arguments put forth by the Tucker Center, I illustrate the important role the economy of sports plays in women’s athletics, a factor that heretofore has not been fully accounted for in discussions of the minimization of female athletes. Lastly, I discuss the impact Title IX has had on female athletes. Together, these elements offer an overview of the contemporary landscape of women’s professional sports as well as points to the ways female athletes engage in rhetorical activity to achieve agency.

⁴⁶ Within the network of subjectivities, race, sexuality, and gender are only three of a broad spectrum of subject positions. Due to the restrictions of time and space in this project, I have chosen to only focus on these three components. Race is especially important in this project because for athletes of color, sports has often been a lottery ticket in the sense that it was a point of access to a better, more secure livelihood. Gender and sexuality are also critical to this study because sports have historically been the purview of heterosexual men and thus play a significant role in the development of women’s sports.

Examples of the Contemporary Discourse and Media Portrayals that Marginalize Female Athletes

During the January 2015 Australian Open, a male reporter asked 20 year old Canadian tennis player, Eugenie Bouchard to “twirl” and “show off her outfit” instead of asking her about her victory that advanced her to the next round of competition. This televised request immediately caused an uproar on social media that can be traced through the hashtag “Twirlgate.” When asked to comment on the reporter’s offensive request at the tournament press conference Bouchard stated, “You know I’m fine with being asked to twirl if they ask the guys to like flex their muscles and stuff,” and “personally I’m not offended. No, I think it was an in-the-moment thing and it was funny” (Caple). This incident is a classic example of the prioritizing of female athletes’ bodily appearance over their athletic accomplishments and capacities.

Bouchard’s response is equally significant because it demonstrates her willingness to brush off these comments, which may be due to a good-natured personality, but it more importantly accounts for the fact that this kind of treatment is the reality for female athletes. While claiming offense could have brought more attention to this issue, it could also derail Bouchard’s attention to her competition and hurt her athletic performance. Unfortunately, female athletes do not have many options for responding to such treatment especially when their response is publicized.

They have to contend not just with responding to the focus on their body, they also have to consider how their response will be interpreted and portrayed in the media, how that portrayal will effect public perceptions of their character, and how public perceptions of their character can influence possible, future endorsement deals. Thus, female athletes are often rhetorically strategic in their language choice as they respond to the media. For Bouchard, downplaying the incident allowed her to get past the moment, focus on her game, and most likely, it was her hope that if she brushed away the moment, she could persuade the media to leave the incident alone

and also focus on her athletic performance. This event, while seemingly innocuous within the larger scope of women's sports, speaks to the inequality and sexism in women's sports as well as how female athletes rhetorically act to mitigate such inequality and sexism in the sporting world.

While Twirlgate illustrates a more commonplace form of marginality that many female athletes experience, this example does not capture the important role race plays in the diminishment of female athletes. To elucidate the racialized treatment of athletes, I turn to *The New York Times* article "Tennis's Top Women Balance Body Image with Ambition" (2015) by freelance reporter Ben Rothenberg. In this article, Rothenberg discusses how the bodies of the different professional female tennis athletes visually compare to one another. In an attempt to suggest that part of Serena Williams's success is based on how she conditions her body to athletically perform—which Rothenberg attributes to the size of her muscles—and that part of the reason other players have not had as many victories as Williams is because they do not bulk up like she does, Rothenberg presents an article that negatively targets Williams's body and harmfully evaluates her physique alongside other white female players in the Women's Tennis Association:

Williams, who will be vying for the Wimbledon title against Garbiñe Muguruza on Saturday, has large biceps and a mold-breaking muscular frame, which packs the power and athleticism that have dominated women's tennis for years. Her rivals could try to emulate her physique, but most of them choose not to.
(Rothenberg)

Later in the article Rothenberg notes that "Despite Williams's success — a victory Saturday would give her 21 Grand Slam singles titles and her fourth in a row — body image issues among female tennis players persist, compelling many players to avoid bulking up." To support this claim Rothenberg quotes Tomasz Wiktorowski, the coach of Agnieszka Radwanska, who states, "It's our decision to keep [Radwanska] as the smallest player in the top 10... Because, first of all

she's a woman, and she wants to be a woman." By claiming that Radwanska, in comparison to Williams, is the smallest player because she is and wants to be a woman, Wiktorowski implicitly suggests, 1) Williams does not look like a woman because of her larger physique; 2) She does not want to be a woman because she maintains a larger physique; 3) She is not a woman because she has a larger physique; and 4) She dominates *women's* tennis because she has a more masculine (bulked-up) looking body and because she cares more about winning than she does about having a more feminine looking body. Moreover, Wiktorowski's statement also highlights several complex and interconnected strands of marginalizing rhetoric that exist in women's sports, including the archaic beliefs that women should be wary of sacrificing their femininity for athletic competition since sports are historically coded as masculine; that only female athletes who visually appear more feminine possess cultural value; and that black women's athletic bodies should be read as more masculine and of lesser value than white women's athletic bodies.

Rothenberg tries to counterbalance Wiktorowski's statement and underhanded implications by noting that Williams "has appeared on the cover of *Vogue*, [and] is regarded as symbol of beauty by many women." By evoking *Vogue*, Rothenberg tries to extend the magazine's ethos as the leading authority on womanhood and female beauty to Williams and establish Williams as possessing a body of worth, a body representative of a feminine ideal in American culture. However, he immediately undercuts this promotion of Williams, stating that "she has also been gawked at and mocked throughout her career." When discussing female athletes of color, like Williams, and the marginalization they face, their "overlapping racialized and gendered identities" must be considered because they demarcate a "complicated interplay between [female athletes'] multiple subjectivities" (Schultz 348). This interplay highlights the marginalizing rhetoric in women's sports that functions along interdependent discourses of power such as race,

class, gender, sexuality, ability, ethnicity etc. (Schultz 339). Indeed, “it is impossible to disarticulate the representations of Serena Williams’s blackness from consideration of her gendered, classed, and sexualized subjectivities” as cultural studies scholar Jamie Schultz argues in her article “Reading the Catsuit: Serena Williams and the Production of Blackness at the 2002 U.S. Open” (2005).

Rothenberg’s language, which frames Williams as an oddity for her body type, power, muscularity, and dominance on the court, not only perpetuates the gendered rhetoric in women’s sports, it also maintains the racialized discourse that diminishes female athletes of color. For example, when Rothenberg discusses Williams he uses language such as “large biceps,” “muscular frame,” and “gawked at” to describe her body; yet when describing white athletes, like Maria Sharapova, he notes her “blonde” hair and “slender” body. Although Rothenberg does not explicitly discuss Williams’s race, his article does nonetheless highlight an anti-black misogynistic discourse that circulates in women’s sports.⁴⁷ Rothenberg’s observations of Williams and his comparison of Williams to her fellow competitors as well as Wiktorowski’s insinuations about Williams “demonstrate a long-standing conflation of muscularity and masculinity that particularly implicates women of color” (Schultz 347). According to Schultz, black female athletes’ bodies historically have been—and still are—culturally coded and understood through the lens of a male-dominated society:

The dominant male, white culture drew a direct correspondence between stereotyped depictions of black womanhood and “manly” athletic and physically gifted females. Their racialized notions of the virile or mannish black female athlete stemmed from a number of persistent historical myths: the linking of African American women’s work history as slaves, their supposedly “natural” brute strength and endurance inherited from their African origins, and the notion that vigorous or competitive sport masculinized women physically and sexually. (Vertinsky and Captain 541 qtd in Schultz 347; see also Cahn, 127).

⁴⁷ For more discussion on the issue of anti-black misogyny and Williams see Merlisa Lawrence Corbett’s “The Problem with Conversation Surrounding Serena Williams” (2015).

Even though Rothenberg begins the article by highlighting Williams' athletic success on the court, his decision to continually compare Williams's body to her white competitors and then conclude his article by raising Maria Sharapova up as the quintessential example of a successful female athlete since she is "a slender, blond Russian who has been the highest-paid female athlete for more than a decade because of her lucrative endorsements" reinforces a white, sexist discourse about female athletes—specifically that their bodily appearance needs to be feminine and their bodies need to read as white to others if they want to be valued and make significant money as athletes. To be sure, Williams is muscular—as are many female athletes—but, "the ways in which muscularity comes to stand in for masculinity affects cultural understandings of female athletes and particularly female athletes of color" (Schultz 347). Consequently, Rothenberg's article inadvertently suggests that despite Williams being the best female tennis athlete in history, her competitors are of more value because their white feminine appeal and financial worth mutually benefit each other so that their cultural capital will always be greater than that of black female—and other women of color—athletes.

Rothenberg's article generated a lot of criticism that was aimed at *The Times* as well as the man behind the article. In response, the editor of *The Times*, Margaret Sullivan published a letter of explanation, "Double Fault in Article on Serena Williams and Body Image" three days later. She cites several complaints they received from sports scholars such as Pat Griffin who Sullivan quotes as stating, "Sacrificing your femininity is a really old narrative in women's sports...There is a whole new narrative breaking through — that women athletes come in all sizes, shapes and forms. So presenting Serena as some kind of freak, or animal-athlete, was appalling." Griffin further stresses that Rothenberg's article "'didn't get at the sexism and racism' just under the surface, or take into account the not-so-distant history of a sport where, for

example, a lesbian tennis star like Amélie Mauresmo was derisively referred to by an opponent as ‘half a man.’” Sullivan also discusses her conversation with Rothenberg when she asked him to account for his article. She explains that he wanted the article " to be a conversation starter,” and he acknowledged that he “should have challenged the norms rather than just stated them as a given...and putting more attention on Serena Williams, had the unfortunate effect of creating a ‘Serena versus everybody else’ split” (Sullivan). As a form of an apology, Sullivan writes, “I see this article as a missed opportunity to really get under the surface of a pervasive and troubling issue in women’s sports and, particularly, women’s tennis...it’s unfortunate that this piece didn’t find a way to challenge the views expressed, instead of simply mirroring them.”

Where the Twirlgate incident with its inappropriate attention on women’s bodies is more commonplace and Rothenberg’s article and its perpetuation of sexist racism in women’s sports highlights the nuances of the racist and sexist discourse in women’s sports, the 2016 BNP Tennis Open—which hosts games for both women and men professional tennis players—features more conspicuous misogyny directed at female athletes. On Sunday March 20th, 2016 the BNP Tennis Paribas Open tournament director, Raymond Moore, presented highly controversial opinions about the Women’s Tennis Association and its female tennis players⁴⁸. In a press conference before the tournament finals he told reporters, “In my next life when I come back I want to be someone in the WTA because they ride on the coattails of the men. They don’t make any decisions and they are lucky....If I was a lady player, I’d go down every night on my knees and thank God that Roger Federer and Rafa Nadal [leading male tennis players on the pro tour] were born, because they have carried this sport” (espn.com). Moore’s comments and language differ

⁴⁸ Moore is a 69-year-old former touring pro from South Africa and as the director he oversees the \$7 million tournament which features the men’s and women’s tours.

from the comments and language used by the Twirlgate reporter and Rothenberg insofar as his language is blatantly misogynistic and sexually offensive since he derides female athletes for relying on male athletes for the progress of their sport and positions these women in a state of sexual supplication to their male counterparts.

Moore's sexualizing statement is overtly crude, and it completely dismisses female athletes as having any agency in or responsibility for the development of women's athletics. Moore continues this line of commentary by giving his opinion on the attractiveness of the WTA players: "I think the WTA have a handful -- not just one or two -- but they have a handful of very attractive prospects that can assume the mantle....They are physically attractive and competitively attractive. They can assume the mantle of leadership once Serena decides to stop" (espn.com) Moore's comment here somewhat echoes the statements published by Rothenberg in that as it assigns value to female athletes if they are white and femininely appealing to the male gaze on and off the field of play. Also similar to Rothenberg, Moore immediately received backlash, and that evening he made a formal, written apology, stating that his "comments about the WTA were in extremely poor taste and erroneous," and he resigned as CEO of the WTA (espn.com).

These three events offer evidence of the vexing discourses circulating in women's sports and the varying degrees of the severity of marginalization. Coalescing with these practices of sexism, racism, and misogyny is the practice of crediting men for female athlete's victories. Recent examples of this practice took place during the 2016 Summer Olympic Games. When three-time Olympian trapshooter Corey Cogdell won her second bronze medal, the *Chicago Tribune* did not report her name and instead reported, "Wife of a Bears' lineman wins a bronze medal today in Rio Olympics." Then, when Hungarian swimmer Katinka Hosszu won a gold

medal in the 400-meter individual medley, NBC cut to her coach/husband and referred to him as “the man responsible” for Hosszu’s victory (Stubbs). A final example—although there are many more one could cite from the 2016 Games—is when American swimmer Katie Ledecky broke her own world record in the 400-meter freestyle, and Rowdy Gaines, a NBC commentator—shared the observation that “a lot of people think she swims like a man” (Cauterucci). The complexity of this strand of discourse lies in its functionality, that is, as it acknowledges the success of female athletes, it simultaneously diminishes these women by attributing the men they are in relationship with for the women’s athleticism rather than crediting the women. Furthermore, this complexity is compounded by the significant role a coach plays in an athlete’s career. Certainly, coaches share in the success of athletes because they help train them to athletically perform at an elite level, and especially in the Olympics, the media often engages in epideictic rhetoric that celebrates both coaches and athletes. In this sense, acknowledging a coach for an athlete’s achievement is common and often expected.⁴⁹ However, the prevalence of such praise rhetoric also enables media coverage to sometimes disregard female athletes’ ownership of their own successes via a celebratory discourse that honors the coach. Thus, NBC’s decision cut to Hosszu’s husband and coach and honor him for coaching Hosszu to victory aligns with the praise rhetoric used in the sporting world, and within the language of this type of rhetoric lies a subtle act of marginalization. In Hosszu’s case, her husband/coach is “the man responsible,” the man to claim her victory. Similarly, Corey Cogdell’s bronze medal is linguistically couched in her marriage to the Bear’s lineman.

⁴⁹ To be sure, many female athletes acknowledge and credit their male coaches, teammates, husbands, friends, etc. as playing a pivotal role in their success. Indeed, such hard work and achievement rarely occurs in a vacuum. However, in these cases, it is not the women offering thanks or acknowledgement to their male counterparts, but rather is the male-dominated media attributing men with the athletic accomplishments female athletes achieve.

The coverage on Ledecky slightly differs from that of Hosszu and Cogdell in that it genders her athletic performance as a male athletic performance. In other words, Ledecky's victory is not recognized as her personal athletic style, but rather it is recognized as a male athletic style that she uses to win. Ledecky employs a leg-propelled technique called a "hitch" or "gallop" in her stroke, which is a swim technique and style used almost exclusively by male swimmers due to the physiological capabilities of men's leg muscles.⁵⁰ Thus, Ledecky's stroke looks like a man's swim stroke because historically only men employ that swim style; however, using such language as "like a man" and the cultural connotations attached to the comparison implies that Ledecky might not have won if she had raced "like a girl/woman".⁵¹ These four events, selected because these were major news stories that occurred while I conducted my research, are certainly random, but they speak to and carry traces of a multifarious discourse comprised of sexism, racism, misogyny directed at female athletes' corporeal forms, which constructs a complicated system of marginalization in women's sports. While these events point to the ways female athletes and women's sports are devalued, they also highlight important discourses that advocate for and value women's athletics. The fact that social media labeled the incident with Bouchard Twirlgate, likening it to Watergate, that *The Times* apologized for Rothenberg's article, and that Moore was forced to resign demonstrate a public and sporting community that support women's sports and actively fights against the marginalization of female athletes and their bodies. To be sure, these events demonstrate the important role women's sports play in our culture as we continue to work through issues of sexism, racism, and misogyny as a

⁵⁰ Many women haven't had the type of training that facilitated their development of this technique until recently due to advances in athletic conditioning as well as sports medicine.

⁵¹ "Like a girl" has been a phrase carrying great cultural freight in our society. Sports films such as *The Sandlot*, a movie for children about a boy's baseball team, features an iconic scene where two rival teams face off and insult one another before competition. The resounding insult is "you play ball like a girl!" Recently, *Always*, a corporation that sells women's products, produced a video #LikeAGirl to reappropriate and redefine the cultural meaning attached to "like a girl."

society. Ultimately, the evidence of the multifaceted, degrading rhetoric, as seen in these four events, suggests that they circulate in the sporting world, and they highlight the complicated public perceptions of female athletes, their bodies, and their embodied identities.

Contemporary Arguments Advocating for Women's Sports

The four contemporary examples of media portrayals of female athletes delineated above are a small sample of the discourses that marginalize female athletes in our current culture. Combatting the circulation of this discourse as well as wanting to avoid perpetuating the marginalization of female athletes, feminist sport scholars instead champion that the only thing the public and media should talk about when we talk about and (re)present female athletes is their athletic performances. Examples of this trend can be found in the articles, texts, and videos put forth by the Women's Sports Foundation and the Tucker Center, which targets the media as a leading vehicle for the continual marginalization of female athletes via traditional gender dichotomies as well as for positioning women's sports as second rate in comparison to men's sports.⁵² The Tucker Center has led the charge in research on media representations of female athletes, and it is a central source for calling the media to solely focus on female athleticism

⁵² In addition to the Tucker Center and the WSF, there are many sports scholars who also conduct research that advances this argument. To further establish evidence of this trend in sports research, please see Crouse, Karen. "Why Female Athletes Remain on Sports Periphery." *Communication and Sport* 2013; Kim, K., Sagas, M., & Walker, N. (2010). Replacing athleticism with sexuality: Athlete models in *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issues. *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 3, 148– 162; Knight, J. L., & Giuliano, T. A. (2001). He's a Laker; she's a "looker": The consequences of gender- stereotypical portrayals of male and female athletes by the print media. *Sex Roles*, 45 (3– 4), 217– 229; Krane, V. (2001). "We can be athletic and feminine," but do we want to? Challenges to femininity and herosexuality in women's sport. *Quest*, 53, 115– 133; Lynn, S., Hardin, M., & Walsdorf, K. (2004). Selling (out) the sporting woman: Advertising images in four athletic magazines. *Journal of Sport Management*, 18 (4), 335– 349; Miller, J. L., & Levy, G. D. (1996). Gender role conflict, gender- typed characteristics, self-concepts, and sport socialization in female athletes and nonathletes. *Sex Roles*, 35, 111– 122; Royce, W. S., Gebelt, J. L., & Duff, R. W. (2003). Female athletes: Being both athletic and feminine. *Athletic Insight*, 5 (1), 47– 61; Simmers, C. S., Damron- Martinez, D., & Haytko, D. L. (2009). Examining the effectiveness of athlete celebrity endorser characteristics and product brand type: The endorser sexpertise continuum. *Journal of Sport Administration & Supervision*, 1 (1), 52– 64.

because the types of incidents, such as the ones shared in this chapter, frequently occur and diminish female athletes and women's sports.⁵³ In 2002 the Center produced and published an educational documentary series designed for television and classroom instruction, *Playing Unfair: The Media Image of Female Athletes* that addresses both the underrepresentation of women's sports and "the continued misrepresentation of women who play sports – as stereotypically 'feminine' first, and athletes second" (4). *Playing Unfair* argues:

Sports, and sports media coverage, are traditionally masculine domains, and media coverage has had the effect of keeping them that way: by marginalizing or containing the increased presence and power of women in the media world of sport... While female athletics and athletes threaten to undermine the traditional equation of sport and manhood, media coverage of women's sport has worked to reinforce traditional stereotypes of both femininity and masculinity. (5)

The documentary also features interviews with prominent sports scholars Pat Griffin, Mary Jo Kane—the director of the Tucker Center—and Michael Messner who have produced touchstone texts on these issues over the past two decades.⁵⁴ In the third section of the documentary, "Out of Uniform – The Media Backlash Against Female Athletes" Kane presents the statistic that "...even though women represent 40% of participants nationwide in terms of sport and physical activity... [all of Center's studies indicate that women] represent about 3-5% of all the coverage" (4). To emphasize the dearth of coverage of women's sports, Messner explains that his initial research revealed that only five percent of airtime coverage went to women's sports, and in his most recent study, he found that women now only receive eight percent of that airtime (4). In

⁵³ The Tucker Center also conducts research in the areas of "Women in Sport Coaching," "Title IX and Gender Equity," and "Physical Activity and Girls." Its multifaceted research agendas has made the center a leading authority on girls and women in sport.

⁵⁴ See Griffin's monograph, *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport* (1998); Messner's article, "Sports and Male Domination: The Female Athlete as Contested Ideological Terrain" (1988) and his book, *Taking the Field: Women, Men, and Sports* (2002); and Kane et al.'s studies, **The Freedom to Choose: Elite Female Athletes' Preferred Representations within Endorsement Opportunities** (2014) and **Exploring Elite Female Athletes' Interpretations of Sport Media Images: A Window Into the Construction of Social Identity and "Selling Sex" in Women's Sports** (2013).

other words, from the 1990s through the 2000s there has been little change in the news attention and media focus on women's athletics.⁵⁵ To compound this paucity of reporting, these scholars demonstrate that when female athletes are discussed in the media, their bodily appearance is foregrounded, diminishing any focus on their athletic performance. According to Kane, "What you see is an emphasis, not on their athleticism and their athletic achievements, or their mental courage and toughness, but on their sexuality, their femininity, and their heterosexuality" (7).

The Tucker Center has continued to develop this research, which they present in their 2013 documentary, *Media Coverage and Female Athletes*. Here, Kane comments, "Female athletes, when compared to their male counterparts, are much more likely to be portrayed off the court, out of uniform, and in highly sexualized poses" (11:45). Kane asserts that because female athletes and women's sports demand the same status and resources as men from the institution of sports—the exclusive realm of men, historically—and because the institution of sports ultimately does not want women to have access to status and resources, they deny and contain "women's power in sports" by presenting them as "off the court sexy babes rather than highly competent athletes" (42:00). This type of focus on female athletes that prioritizes their bodily appearances over their athleticism divides the athletes' selfhood, separating their womanhood from their athletic self by pitting these subjectivities against one another, and values one aspect of a woman's identity over the other. Kane critiques this current state of the sporting world and treatment of sportswomen, positing, "When you treat female athletes in such ways, they will always and forever remain second class citizens in sport and that is a perfect way to contain their power at a time when their interest and participation is skyrocketing" (42:00). A prime example

⁵⁵ See Cooky, Messner, and Hextrum's (2013) article "Women Play Sport, but not On TV: A Longitudinal Study of Televised News Media"; Karen Crouse's (2013) article "Why Female Athletes Remain on Sports Periphery"; and Mary Jo Kane's (2013) article "The Better Sportswomen Get, the More the Media Ignore Them" for further discussion of these studies.

of this kind of discourse can be found in *Sports Illustrated* issues that feature female athletes in bikinis and in non-athletic poses, whereas the men are fully clothed, displayed in-action, and featured for their athleticism.⁵⁶

In addition to the media's lack of coverage of women's sports and the sexualized portrayals of female athletes when they are covered, the Tucker Center also positions many female athletes as perpetuating this problem, that is, many female athletes choose to promote and portray themselves in a sexualized manner. In *Playing Unfair*, Kane claims that these women "simply feed into and keep the engine going of the way in which the media portray women athletes" (8). Echoing the arguments put out by the Tucker Center and its fellow scholars, feminist sports researchers Rachael Smallwood, Natalie Brown, and Andrew Billings label these acts as the "'Danica Patrick effect,' which is when a female athlete attempts to be both a sex symbol and a respected athlete simultaneously, presumably in equal measure, finding that the sexualized image is what resonates more with the general public" (Simmers, Damron- Martinez, & Haytko 53 qtd in Smallwood et. al 4). Citing Kane's study discussed earlier, they reassert that "these female athletes are not building credibility for women's sport but are only closing the gap between being a 'female' athlete and being labeled as another pretty face" (Smallwood, Brown, and Billings 2). However, as Messner observes, these portrayals are rather complicated because the images of these athletes are paradoxical as they "both suggest empowerment for women and suggest that this media is still trying to frame women in conventionally sexualized ways" (8).

⁵⁶ In 2013 Jonetta D. Weber and Robert M. Carini, from the department of sociology at the University of Louisville, published the study, "Where are the Female Athletes in *Sports Illustrated*? A Content Analysis of Covers (2000-2011)," which reported that out of 716 issues, discounting the swimsuit issues, only 35 of them features a female athlete on the cover—4.9% of all the issues. They also note that when these athletes were featured on the cover, they were often sharing it with a male athlete.

Griffin further elucidates this perspective as she discusses past conversations with various female athletes:

A number of female athletes have argued that such representations have less to do with their disempowerment as athletes than their empowerment as individuals: that they gain power by expressing their individuality as women, their femininity, their sexuality, at the same time winning both publicity for their sport and economic power through promotional deals. (8)

Griffin, as well as Kane and Messner, also questions such decisions and critiques these athletes for focusing on themselves as individuals and disregarding the larger organization of women's sports: "I always want to say to them is it's important to look at the larger picture of pressures, that it's not just about individual choice" (8). Not wanting to issue an absolute censure of female athletes' efforts for empowerment, Griffin claims that it's the systemic power structures in the sporting world that undercut these athletes' sexual portrayals. Indeed, *Playing Unfair* stresses that "When valuable ideals like individual empowerment and expression circulate within so limited a frame [meaning a lack of coverage as well as a lack of reporting on female athletes as athletes first], the risk is that women's sports get devalued...The nature and benefit of individual power and expression need to be considered within the context of institutional dynamics and cultural consequences" (9).

However, this limited framework that *Playing Unfair* outlines is also compounded by a critical generational gap in experiences and thus a gap in how many women in both older and younger generations interpret the performances of female athletes. Kane praises the advancement of women's sport, explaining that "Title IX, by requiring institutional support, creating equal access and opportunity, and changing the way female athletes are seen and see themselves, has led to a massive increase in the number of girls and young women who play sports" (*Playing Unfair* 2). Title IX changed the nature of the fight for equity and equality in women's sport as

well as the culture of female athletics “by putting to rest traditional questions about the appropriateness of girls and women playing sports....In one generation we’ve gone from girls hoping that there is a team, to hoping that they make the team” (*Playing Unfair 2*). While this tremendous growth and change in the climate of women’s sports speaks to the vast efforts on the part of pre-Title IX scholars and athletes, it also highlights a generation divide in terms of how scholars, athletes, and advocates of women’s sports interpret and value the on and off field performances of female athletes and their bodily appearances. Scholars and athletes who came of age before the passing of Title IX had to battle for the opportunity and the right to play whereas scholars and athletes, such as myself, who came of age after the passing of Title IX grew up in a world where our right to play was never in question and, usually, opportunities to play—certain sports—were abundant. Heywood and Dworkin delineate this “generational divide” and present two polarized camps of women discussing the representation and media discussions of female athletes:

For camp 1 the position seems to be: the media is always bad, the product of evil capitalistic patriarchy, and its representation of women is the worst. For Camp 2 the position seems to be: the media is the air we live and breathe, and we manipulate it for our own ends....For the first camp. Female athlete nudity conforms to the ‘normalcy’ of heterosexuality and tries (offensively to some) to show that these babes aren’t ‘dykes’...for the second camp, the athletes have ‘worked their asses off’ for their bodies and are proud of them, as see it as their God-given, MTV-culture-driven right to exhibit them. (78)

While this assessment of the generation gap is much harsher and generalizing of the arguments of both groups—specifically that there are only two camps and then additionally arguing that Camp 1 thinks the media is evil while Camp 2 thinks the media is what we live and breathe—it does emphasize an important shift in interpretations of female athletes’ performances on and off field. Undeniably, such divide is not absolute nor does it fully apply to all scholars, athletes, and advocates of women’s sports. But this divide can result in divergent perspectives on athletes’

individual agency and the organizational agency of women's sports as well as complicate how we interpret athletes' performances on and off the field of play. Therefore, it is important to contextualize pre and post-Title IXers generational perspectives alongside the criticisms put forth by the feminist sports scholars in this section.

Furthermore, the shifting interpretations of female athletes' performances and bodily re/presentations are documented in two studies conducted out of the Tucker Center: "Exploring Elite Female Athletes' Interpretations of Sport Media Images: A Window Into the Construction of Social Identity and 'Selling Sex' in Women's Sports" (2013) and "The Freedom to Choose: Elite Female Athletes' Preferred Representations Within Endorsement Opportunities" (2014). In these studies, scholars Fink, LaVoi, and Kane, examine how elite (not professional) female athletes wish to be portrayed in the media. Both studies asked athletes to pick between images of professional female athletes in-action poses and off-court feminine or sexualized poses. These studies found that female athletes primarily chose images of athletic ability; however, both studies also emphasize that 30% of all of the athletes chose two images that combined portrayals of "both their ladylike femininity and their athleticism" (Freedom to Choose, 215). Kane accounts for this research in *Media Coverage and Female Athletes* explaining that these athletes chose a "medium image" where the athletes "looked classy" because they want to be portrayed as "more well-rounded" and not solely "as a sweaty jock." Thus, sports scholars and athletes, who came of age in a sporting world where they did not have to fight for the right or opportunity to play ball, approach negotiations for individual and organization agency differently than many of those from the pre-Title IX era. The difference in this approach demonstrates that the exigent drive in women's sports today has somewhat altered, thus slightly altering what and how female athletes fight marginalization in the larger sporting world.

Many female athletes who have grown up knowing they have the right to participate in sports therefore have different perspectives about how they can use their bodily appearances and performances on and off the field of play than many female athletes who had to continually fight for the right to participate and fight for access in the sporting world. Earlier in this section I quoted Pat Griffin stating that she had spoken with female athletes who "...don't really see [sexualized portrayals of their bodies] as compromising or an expression of concern about how people see them" (8). Maya Moore, a current professional basketball player in the WNBA, adamantly states in her interview in *Media Coverage and Female Athletes*, "I want to be seen as a beautiful person...and seen as a great basketball player" (41:20). Part of what makes Griffin's specific reference to overt sexualization of women's bodies and Moore emphasis on attractiveness complicated is that their interpretations are subjective, which highlights the fact that interpretations of female athletes (re)presentations of themselves are disproportionate and fluid rather than fixed and objective. Moreover, Griffin's and Moore's statement, as representative of common claims made by athletes and feminist sports scholars, also demonstrate how some pre-Title IX athletes view their subjectivities as divided and in either/or terms while post-Title IX females athletes experience and interpret their bodies and subjectivities in both/and terms. Thus, as Moore stresses that current female athletes don't necessarily see their off field performances as problematic even if they are sexualized ones, Griffin rebukes this line of thinking because she does view these performances, especially if they are sexualized, as problematic.

According to the Tucker Center, female athletes need to be mindful of the institution of women's sports as they make individual choices about their performances on and off the field of play. Because of the nature of the news coverage, they call for reporting and media

representations of female athletes that solely present them as athletes and only feature their athletic performances. However, this lone focus on their athleticism disregards the social, political, and economic reality of professional female athletes' lives—specifically, it diminishes and ignores their total selfhood and trades one restrictive rhetoric—the rhetoric used by the general sporting world to marginalize female athletes—for one that disregards their womanhood, especially if that womanhood is expressed via sexualized performances.⁵⁷ Furthermore, feminist scholars call understanding “The nature and benefit of individual power and expression...within the context of institutional dynamics and cultural consequences,” but they do not account how our economy influences these institutional dynamics and cultural consequences (*Playing Unfair* 9). Certainly, the Tucker Center and other scholars discussed in this section have greatly combatted the marginalization of the female athletes and women's sports, and because they have conducted this instrumental work of highlighting the lack of coverage of women's sports as well as calling for a focus on and valuing of female athletic competency, they have enabled current scholars to consider the entire selfhood of female athletes in ways that do not perpetuate the marginalization of women's sports. While I highlight the limitations of the arguments produced by these scholars, I also acknowledge that they have studied female athletes in this manner to quell traditional, patriarchal assumptions about female athletes. They call for the valuation and celebration of qualities such as women's athletic competency because these qualities are so often ignored or dismissed, and, *indeed*, women's athletic competency should be emphasized, heavily featured, and celebrated. However, the conversation about professional athletes is never just about their athletic performance because their professionalism makes visible their off-field

⁵⁷ To be clear, my use of the term “selfhood” refers to the total encompassing of all of the aspects of female athletes' identity. In other words, selfhood pushes back against concepts of that divide athlete and women or suggest that female athletes should be presented as athletes first and females second or (the more historic perspective) females first and athletes second. Both of these stances are limiting and marginalizing.

performances. Sporting figures are routinely faced with issues of sportsmanship and role model guidelines due to the visibility of their performances of selfhood both on and off the field. Moreover, critiquing athletes for their individual choices and claiming that such choices fundamentally hurt the larger organization of women's sports restricts them to a divided sense of their identity. These women continually try to claim agency as female athletes, but more importantly, they try to claim agency as both women and athletes, not solely as athletes nor solely as women. Finally, as I briefly mentioned above, a critical factor left out of the research on representations and media coverage of female athletes is how our economy influences their representations. As a system of power, the economy greatly influences professional athletes because their livelihood is based on their on and off the field performances. Thus, any discussion about professional female athletes and (re)presentations of themselves and their bodies must account for economic factors in order to understand the nuanced choices guiding their performances.

Embodied Enterprise: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Economy of Sports

The making of professional athletes began with the original Olympic Games: "In fifth-century B.C. Athens, victory in a sprint brought a man enough money to live comfortably for three years," and through professionalization, the athletic body "becomes simultaneously a source of success, site of reward, and a subject of rule" (Miller 134). The late nineteenth-century industrialization of America "mark[ed] a trend whereby bodies in motion," that is athletic bodies, enter the professional work force and permit "surveillance, spectacle, and profit" of and for their athletic displays. Here, the athlete is both subject and object—the body doing the selling and the body being sold (Miller 20). In this way, the sporting body became invested "with social

currency as an object for professional improvement and success” and imbued with the fundamentals of capitalism (Miller 49).⁵⁸ In our capitalistic state “human well-being [is] advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey 2). In the context of capitalism, the “well-being” of athletes and the sporting world are enhanced by professional athletes who, as both subjects and objects, are individual entrepreneurs who engage in the free market by commodifying their bodies to sell their sport. As a commodified entity, then, the athletic body and all that is contoured within and on the body—gender, sexuality, race, class, ability, ethnicity, etc.—becomes part of this commodity. Multiple, embodied subjectivities couched in professional competition are marketed as cultural capital to the American public; therefore, discussions about professional athletes and their performances necessitate an understanding of how our economy influences these performances—especially when we consider that such activity directly correlates to athletes’ livelihoods.

Capitalistic principles undergird our economy to the extent that capitalism is a “hegemonic mode of discourse,” which “has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world,” and “it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market” (Harvey 3). This dominant discourse, then, holds, as its central tenet, “that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade” (Harvey 7) and “responsible entrepreneurialism and self-investment [is] the model for ethical behavior” (Tomkins 4). Individual freedom, entrepreneurialism, and self-investment are key factors that

⁵⁸For further discussion of the body’s relationship to the American economy see Alison Phipps’s book *The Politics of the Body* (2014), which discusses the body its relationship to emergent consumer capitalism in the United States. Phipps explains that “in western neoliberal economics the body has become a symbol of value and identity which is largely performed and developed via the purchase of products” (Shilling 1993: Carolan 2005; Phipps 2014) and “the drive to consume in order to both express and ‘add value’ to oneself is a key aspect of contemporary consumer culture, which feeds markets that rely upon idealized representations of the body and the elevation of particular prestigious bodily forms” (Shilling 129 qtd in Phipps 10).

link professional athletes to our economy because they affect how athletes choose to market themselves and their sport. However, these individual freedoms, agency, and self-investment are also curbed by the “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” rhetoric embedded in capitalism; that is, capitalistic principles present us with a paradoxical relationship to the state wherein the individual is the problem. The state provides, but only insofar as the individual proves deserving—e.g. successful—and if the individual fails to work hard, which is undoubtedly an ambiguous, unstable standard, then the individual is solely at fault. Capitalism, then, influences the freedoms and agency of the individual, in this case, the freedoms and agency of female athletes, thereby informing their choices in how they market themselves to the sporting world and general public.⁵⁹

Additionally, endorsements and salaries directly relate to athletes’ performances—on and off the field of play—and they are dominant forces that dictate the value, ethos, and financial success of athletes. As professionals, they receive a salary for their athletic displays, and they receive additional money through endorsement deals and media promotions—often the money they receive from these corporations greatly surpasses their actual salary for playing ball.⁶⁰ For male professional athletes, the path to endorsement deals has been a relatively smooth one given that our male-dominated society maintains cultural norms that enable the sporting world and sports media to raise up male athletes as the archetype for sport and manhood. For professional female athletes, on the other hand, this road has been an uneven and treacherous one due to

⁵⁹ To be sure, I am not arguing that the individual is the problem or is at fault for how they are perceived in this context; rather, I am emphasizing the fraught nature of the economy in the sporting world and how it can negatively and disproportionately affect female athletes.

⁶⁰ Simmers, C. S., Damron- Martinez, D., & Haytko, D. L.’s article, “Examining the Effectiveness of Athlete Celebrity Endorser Characteristics and Product Brand Type: The Endorser Sexpertise Continuum” (2009) found that “many top athlete endorsers make considerably more money as endorsers than as athletes in their chosen sport. For example from June 2007 to June 2008, female professional golfer Michelle Wie earned \$12 million in endorsement money but only \$39,000 in prize money. Similarly, former professional basketball player Michael Jordan made \$45 million in endorsements, despite not having participated in his sport for many years” (52).

cultural anxiety over their legitimacy as women, as athletes, and as heterosexuals. Thus, bodily appearances and performances of femininity, sexuality, and whiteness have strong ties to the economic marketing of women's professional sports. Fundamentally, the ties between race, sex, and gender and capitalism affect how female athletes choose to exert rhetorical agency. The remainder of this section will therefore discuss these ties as they connect to the professionalization and rhetorical agency of female athletes.

As previously stated, a professional athlete's subjectivities such as their race, gender, and sexuality—to name a few—are all embodied in the commodification of their being. The racialization, gendering, and sexualizing of female athletes' bodies, "operates differently, among various levels of social formation, in direct relation to the shifting configurations of capitalism" (Mirpuri 98 qtd. in Tomkins 4). These configurations, according to Joe Tomkpins, are the result of "the structural conditions of capitalism," which prioritize a "neoliberal ethic' of self-reliance and individual [entrepreneurship]...attributing success to entrepreneurial genius and viewing those who do not succeed as 'utterly expendable' (Giroux 195 qtd. in Tomkins 6). However, the structural conditions of capitalism are informed and maintained by a white, male-dominated society that historically and culturally values whiteness, maleness, and heterosexism while it simultaneously devalues non-white, -female, -heterosexual people. Thus, the capitalistic state, as it affects the sporting world, is "a structure for 'securing privatized interests from the perceived contamination and threat of those deemed not to belong, who have little or no standing, the welfare of whom is calculated to cost too much, economically and politically'" (Goldberg 81 qtd. in Tomkins 6). According to this capitalistic "common-sense," female athletes are successful entrepreneurs with a secure livelihood in professional sports as well as being perceived as culturally valuable if they market their performances and bodily appearance as white, feminine,

and heterosexual; conversely, female athletes who do not market themselves according to these cultural norms threaten the economy and are rendered unsuccessful entrepreneurs, deemed politically, economically, and socially expendable, and thereby cut off from institutionalized power and left to endure economic hardship.

Within the sporting world, then, there exists an embodied rhetoric of racial, gendered, and sexualized entrepreneurialism that persuades female athletes that their public ethos as a professional athlete and woman relies on responsible enterprise and self-investment that align with the cultural norms of a male-dominated society. For example, in terms of racial and gendered entrepreneurialism, the economic gap between female athletes like Maria Sharapova and Serena Williams highlights how the economy affects female athletes and influences their on and off the field performances. For example, in *Forbes Magazine*'s article, "The Worlds' Highest Paid Female Athletes 2015" staff writer Kurt Badenhausen reports that Maria Sharapova is the world's highest-paid female athlete for the eleventh straight year. Similarly, during the few years preceding Sharapova, Anna Kournikova—a white, blonde, traditionally feminine looking woman—reigned as the "most highly sponsored female athlete in the world" (Schultz 346). Paradoxically, Serena Williams is "arguably the greatest female athlete of all-time" in professional tennis while Sharapova is ranked fifth and Kournikova never won a professional tennis tournament; however, in comparison to Sharapova and Kournikova, Williams has made millions less in prize money and endorsements over the years. The financial success and public appreciation of athletes like Sharapova and Kournikova in comparison to the financial success and public "appreciation" of Williams indicates a gendered and racialized rhetoric in women's sports that socially and economically favors female athletes' bodies that read as white and feminine over bodies, like Williams's, that read as black and masculine (Schultz 346). To this

end, Badenhausen notes that “Williams’ skin color [and] muscular body type...have all been blamed by pundits for the endorsement gap between Williams and Sharapova.” Indeed, under the framework of capitalism, Williams is less successful because her bodily appearance and performances do not align to cultural norms that value white femininity, and thus she fails, somewhat, as a professional. Williams’s skin color and body type are embodied features; fundamentally, then, the racialized and gendered tenets of capitalism constrain Williams’s rhetorical agency and how she can rhetorically appear and perform.

Yet these claims of racist treatment towards Williams and gendered discussions about her body often fall to the wayside in the face of her significant athletic success and prize money; that is, although she earns less money as a professional athlete than some of her white competitors, she still earns a considerable amount of money thus securing her livelihood as a professional athlete. Her significant earnings further compound the gendered, sexualized, and racialized rhetoric affecting female athletes of color because “the success and visibility of...Williams, in tennis and consumer culture, obscures [her] racialized exceptionality, extending the myths of color blindness and equal opportunity in U.S. sport and society” (Schultz 340). Expounding on this point, Schultz explains that Williams’s financial and professional “accomplishments conceal the social and economic factors that hinder other African Americans’ participation in tennis” as well as other female athletes of color participation in professional sports (340). Dismissal of racism in women’s sports ignores the stratification of financial obstacles Williams and other female athletes of color face; denies these athletes’ multiple subjectivities; collapses these racialized issues into a gendered discourse that stigmatizes and marginalizes the bodies of female athletes of color; and obfuscates the ways capitalism disproportionately affects perceptions of female athletes’ rhetorical agency.

Similarly, in women's sports, sexualized and gendered entrepreneurial activity positions performances of heterosexuality and feminine bodily appearances as a means to obtain economic security. Within the structure of sexualized and gendered entrepreneurialism, female athletes who engage in homosexual performances and/or have masculine bodily appearances are perceived as a threat to the economy because they disrupt the cultural norms of a male-dominated society; consequently, they are considered by that society as having little to no value, and their welfare "is calculated to cost too much, economically and politically" (Tomkins 6). For example, the public outing of tennis star Billie Jean King resulted in the stripping of her endorsements and financial security. In 1981, King's former partner and employee Marilyn Barnett sued King for her Malibu, California beach house that King and her husband had bought and Barnett had been living in. Barnett and King had separated in 1975, yet Barnett continued to live in the house until King formally asked her to leave in 1979. However, Barnett refused to leave and filed a lawsuit against King. The lawsuit immediately went public and King learned of the lawsuit when a reporter asked for her statement while she was at a pro tournament in Florida. News of the lawsuit and King's homosexual relationship quickly spread across the country. Barnett continued to give public interviews, which coercively and brutally outed King. Forced to publically address her affair with Barnett, King held a press conference where she admitted to the affair, labeled it a mistake, and asked for the public's understanding as she and her husband worked on their marriage.

King was acutely aware of the homophobic stigma working against women's sports and how her affair with Barnett worked to perpetuate that stigma.⁶¹ King's outing subsequently resulted in a loss of "\$1.5 million in endorsements, including the cancellation of a \$500,000

⁶¹ See Pat Griffin's seminal monograph, *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport* (1998).

contract with Murjani jeans and another \$300,000 deal with Illingworth-Morris to bring out a Wimbledon-themed line of clothing. Income from television commercials, corporate appearances, and coaching dried up” (Ware 198). Unfortunately, King had to forgo her plan to retire and instead continued to play in tournaments to essentially pay the bills and save money for her retirement. In many ways, corporate America’s reaction to King’s sexuality served as a warning for fellow and future professional female athletes—if you want to make money playing sports, you better perform according to traditional gender norms both on and off the field of play. As King described it, “The decade of the 1980s was characterized by the ‘feminization of women's tennis’” meaning that women’s tennis purposely cultivated a more feminine, heterosexual image of female athletes (Festle, 243). Thus, female athletes like King or Navratilova—who was publically gay—suffered the economic consequences for subverting these norms despite their athletic accomplishments. Conversely, players such as Chris Evert—who engaged in feminine performances on and off the field and who, admittedly, was an excellent tennis player—achieved great popularity and financial success for her on the court victories as well as for her normative, heterosexual, feminine performances (Spencer 375). Similar to the nineteenth century rhetors Carol Mattingly writes about in *[Re]appropriating Dress*, Evert and athletes such as Sharapova and arguably, Williams and other female athletes of color, use women’s fashion to rhetorically construct bodily appearances and performances that feature their femininity on and off the field of play. This rhetorical activity enables female athletes to persuade the public of their heterosexual, feminine ethos which in turn begets financial gains.

This material reality and the way female athletes negotiate this reality is especially relevant to feminist sports scholars’ discussions about and criticisms of sportswomen’s self-

representations. A consideration of economic structures of the sporting world not only helps contextualize these representations, they also point towards the creative ways female athletes rhetorically act. Put simply, our capitalistic economy influences both men and women, and as such, the marginalization in the sporting world is encompassed by economic conditions that are the same for both men and women. With the passing of Title IX, which lawfully established women's right to play and have a presence in the sporting world, many female athletes have shifted how they respond to and negotiate these conditions. Thus, while female athletes' self-representations can be seen as conforming to cultural norms and financial pressures, such actions can also be understood as strategic rhetorical acts that female athletes deploy to work within and against the structures of the sporting world. Indeed, viewed as rhetorical acts, female athletes' heterosexual, feminine appearances and performances have the potential for subversion, where their appearances and performances distract attention away from the fact that they are propelling themselves to a place of individual and professional agency. Additionally, given that women's fashion is inextricably linked to consumerism, what female athletes wear on and off the field of play adds a further dimension to "the commodification and commercial potential of professional [female] athletes" (Schultz 342). For example, corporations consider how well the athlete fits the endorsed product. In their article "Examining the effectiveness of athlete celebrity endorser characteristics and product brand type: The endorser expertise continuum" (2009), Simmers et al explain that in western marketing and consumer culture, the success and/or effectiveness of promoting a product is largely determined by the combination of "expertise and trustworthiness" and "similarity, familiarity, and liking" of the endorser (53). In our capitalistic culture today, a professional athlete, whether male or female, must have an established cultural ethos that appeals

to target consumers to obtain an endorsement deal.⁶² Thus, these athletes' performances as well as their bodily appearance work in tandem to secure their public ethos and product endorsements, thereby securing a livelihood, and work within and against limitations to their rhetorical agency.

This gendered and sexualized entrepreneurial activity (and/or rhetorical activity) female athletes engage in as governed by the capitalistic state of the sporting world often results in the criticism from proponents of women's sports. As a commodity, an athlete is a product to be endorsed for the sake of bringing attention to their sport. For female athletes in particular, this type of endorsement and advertising can result in the sexualization and/or feminization of her body; however, such sexualization can be seen as "selling out," and, indeed, this type of censoring rhetoric exists in women's sports and in the academy as I discuss in the above section. From this perspective of selling out, "gender remains the primary categorization of women athletes, re/producing female athletes as women who play sport rather than as athletes first and foremost" (Meân and Kassing 127). Thus, the rhetoric of "selling out" blames the female athlete for perpetuating the marginalization of women's sports and the systemic structures that enable this marginalization. However, this blame rhetoric ignores the larger socio-economic factors at play here such as the "common-sense" capitalistic logic that purports individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade (Harvey 7) as well as that self-investment and individual enterprise are the model for ethical behavior (Tomkins 4). Raised in a capitalistic society, professional athletes are instilled with this logic; they operate as an individual to increase their gains, and they perceive such entrepreneurialism as ethical. Indeed, as I earlier

⁶² Here, I am using cultural ethos to refer to a combination of the athlete's expertise and credibility as well as similarity, familiarity, and liking to consumers. This ethos bound up in discourses of power, social norms, and identity.

quoted from Pat Griffin's observation, "a number of female athletes have argued that [sexualized and/or feminine] representations have less to do with their disempowerment as athletes than their empowerment as individuals" (8).

However, when female athletes' individual "freedoms" are tempered by the cultural norms of a male-dominated society then their individual enterprise and choices are limited. To this end, feminist sport scholar Nicole M. LaVoi, the Associate Director of Tucker Center, emphasizes, "when you are your choice is, I can make money and be portrayed in sexualized ways or I can be portrayed and make no money—that's a difficult choice" (*Playing Unfair* 27:13). Embedded in these observations are subjective assessments that label sexual or feminine representations of athletes' bodily appearances and performances as bad; the question underpinning these comments is how do we objectively make distinctions between empowered and disempowered representations of female athletes and their bodies when the collective of women's athletics comprises people with varied viewpoints of sexuality, femininity, sexual expression, and objectification? Unfortunately, I do not have the answer to this dilemma nor am I trying to solve such a fraught and complex issue in this dissertation. Certainly, the rhetoric of selling out circulates to combat a tradition of sexually objectifying female athletes in ways that marginalize them, but it also carves out a discursive space in which to diminish those who conduct themselves according to the dominant codes of sexualized, racialized, and gendered capitalism. Ultimately this space fails to acknowledge the circumstances of economic precarity female athletes face if they completely disregard the sporting world's capitalistic systems of power, and it overlooks the types of affordances female athletes have discovered to work within and against these systems, such as using their bodily performances and performances as

rhetorical acts; this space also places these athletes in a double-bind where their struggles to exercise rhetorical agency are at odds with the organizational goals of women's sports.

I suggest we resist interpretations of representations of female athletes' bodies that position their sexual and feminine appearances as something to be ignored, devalued, or as something that should be the focus of attention in itself. Female athletes can acquire a measure of power economically and rhetorically by figuring out how to accommodate social norms in a way that is to their advantage despite the constraints that emerge out of the amalgam of our male-dominated society, the economy, and criticisms from feminist sport activists and scholars. Indeed, to read female athletes' on and off the field performances as only a reflection of the values, social hierarchies, and economy in American culture or to read their performances of whiteness, femininity, sexualized femininity, and hetero/sexuality as only as a means of marginalization would greatly limit any consideration of the rhetorical strategies at play in female athletes' visual representations and performances of their bodily appearance. I submit that we look at how these representations may provide female athletes provocative ways to exert agency. For example, when a female athlete purposely uses her bodily appearance and/or on/off the field performances for a specific outcome, such as persuading the public to perceive her body as feminine, and "the utility of 'performance' as a functional and constitutive term quickly unveils the political stakes in cultural performances" (Bell 176). These socio-political stakes, which occur in the form of corporate endorsements, media coverage, public ethos, and academic criticism and/or support of athletes' bodies and identities, are continually made visible through female athletes' bodily appearances and their on and off the field performances of femininity, sexualized femininity, and hetero/sexuality because they highlight female athletes as both

subjects and an objects who seem to perpetuate cultural norms of sex and gender as well as challenge them.

According to performance scholar Elizabeth Bell, “Performance is ultimately about transformation; and cultural performances even as they maintain the status quo through unerring reflections of cultural values—are always threatened by the potential for radical and reflexive ways of performing anew” (190). In this sense, then, female athletes’ performances can be interpreted as rhetorical acts that can acquiesce to social demands and subversively play with culturally dominant ideals of what gender and sexuality are and how they can be enacted in American culture; and, their performances of femininity and sexuality have the power to transform their positions as inconsequential, marginalized, financially depressed, and/or invisible athletes into known, financially solvent, and influential athletes and women in American culture. Case in point, in her recent open letter to young girls and women striving for excellence, Serena Williams denounces the gendered treatment of athletes, the demeaning language used to suppress female athletes’ prowess, and the lack of equal pay for women in the sporting world. Williams’s letter, written for *Porter's Magazine Incredible Women Of 2016* issue and published online by *The Guardian*, has been widely circulated by media outlets such as *CNN*, *Forbes*, *Times*, *The New York Times*, and *ESPN*—to name a few—that retweeted, reposted, or reported on her letter. Such circulation and attention to her letter as well as the publication of the letter itself features a significant moment where a female athlete exerted rhetorical agency. Given that Williams has often been ostracized and belittled for the combination of her athletic success, race, and bodily appearance, her publicity and the wide circulation of her letter suggest that professional female athletes can rhetorically negotiate the constraints of a capitalistic economy, acknowledge the

cultural norms that inform this economy, and accommodate them to propel themselves to a place of agency and influence where they have the power to speak and be heard.

To be sure, the male-dominated cultural values—such as valorizing whiteness, masculinity, and heterosexuality—that determine what sells in our society create particular challenges and/or opportunities for women to exert rhetorical agency through their bodily appearances and performances especially as they are represented through a venue such as *ESPN The Magazine* Body Issues. Such performances illuminate these challenges and opportunities because performance, “whether socially sanctioned or culturally condemned, creates and maintains order through the control of sex. Against this necessary backdrop of control, performance is always imbued with transformative possibilities, for it both maintains the cultural status quo and contains the potential for change” (Bell 173). Likely, female athletes have used their bodily appearance and public perceptions of their femininity and/or sexuality in mediated venues such as ESPN in order to gain economic security, public visibility and recognition, and the power to speak and circulate as a female athlete in the sporting world and general society. Traditionally, female athletes who operate within the approved social and gendered dynamics in the sporting world and general society are not scrutinized for their sexuality nor does their athletic identity pose a threat to gendered norms because it is couched in a male-defined sense of womanhood. Accordingly, many female athletes have enacted the bodily performances made available to them—femininity, sexualized femininity, and heterosexuality—by a male-dominant culture in order to participate in athletics and/or to survive in the sporting world and general society. Many female athletes do not want to be seen as masculine just because they are athletes and subsequently they choose to use their bodily appearances on and off the field of play to persuade spectators of the legitimacy of their feminine, womanly ethos. For others, they have

used their bodily appearance in similar ways, but instead of rhetorically using their appearance to establish their feminine ethos, they use it to establish a heterosexual ethos. Then there are athletes who have also participated in the same kind of rhetorical activity, but they have done so to pass and survive in the sporting world; in other words, they engage in rhetorical performances of heterosexuality to protect their sexual identity because, historically, non-heterosexual women have been banned from sports or they have been socially ostracized. Finally, there are athletes who similarly engage in this rhetorical activity as a means to bridge the divide between their multiple subjectivities.

The different purposes behind these acts highlights the disproportionate and discordant experiences of female athletes especially when it comes to issues of race, gender, and sexuality.⁶³ What is afforded female athletes within the context of the economy then, are offers to pose, such as in the *ESPN Body Issues*, which both commodifies their bodies and promotes them as athletes and women. Through the venue of the *Body Issues* female athletes can work within and against patriarchic systems of power to illuminate the reflexive, rhetorical ways of performing and presenting their self anew and opening to scrutiny how male-dominated cultural norms, the economy, and even the criticisms issued by feminist sports scholars diminish female athletes and/or divide their multiple subjectivities. As women cultivate effective means of presenting themselves rhetorically through mediums like *ESPN The Magazine*, male-dominated social constructions of athleticism, gender, race, and sexuality show evidence of fracture, and “disruptions in both the expected appearance of the body and the space which that body ha[s] permission to occupy expose[s] the fabricated nature of gender [and sexuality] by a constantly

⁶³ To be sure, this list of motives undergirding these rhetorical acts is not complete nor does it claim to account for all of the experiences of female athletes. A limitation of this project, and a line of research I plan to address in the future, is that it does not include disabled athletes’ experiences.

shifting play with images of a woman's body, its gender, [its sexuality, its race] its place, and its performance" (Mattingly 7).

Conclusion

In the Tucker Center's most recent study on re/presentations of female athletes both on and off the court, they ask college athletes to select images of professional female athletes that reflect how they themselves would like to be portrayed if the economy was not an issue. Not surprisingly, many athletes selected images of athletes in action on the field of play and many chose this image along with a more glamorous image of athletes off the court and dressed up. Of note in this study is that the economy was not a factor in individual athletes' decision process and even without having to consider the economic factors, many athletes still chose images that represent both their athleticism and their womanhood. To be sure, many female athletes desire the acknowledgement of their entire identity—their womanness and their athleticism—regardless of the prevailing economic circumstances of professional sports. Moreover, this study is unrealistic in that it ignores that professional sports cannot be separated from its economy and that professional athletes cannot be separated from the economic parameters of the sporting world. Therefore, even if the athletes in this study had chosen only athletic representations, their choices would be problematic given that the current economy functions in such a way that female athletes are compelled to give prominence to performances other than (and/or in addition to) their athleticism to secure their livelihood as professional athletes. Certainly, late capitalism has influenced the sporting world to such a degree that it imbues athletes' on and off field performances with social currency. As a result, the complexity of female athletes' bodily appearances and performances must be considered in the context of the cultural capital and

account for influences the economy has on their performances. Additionally, discussions of athletes full selfhood cannot be negated or ignored because their on and off field performances coexist in, on, and through the body, and the body is the visual ethos of both their athleticism and womanhood. Thus, we need different definitions, terms, language, etc. to understand these athletes' performances. To be sure, the sporting world is still very much a space of "heteronormative, masculinist white power," but is it also "undergoing immense change, with sex at the center... body commodification through niche targeting has identified men's bodies as objects of desire and gay men and straight women as consumers, while there are signs of targeting lesbian desire" (Miller 11). As Heywood and Dworkin state, "Suddenly the athletic body has become an ideal for both sexes, problematizing traditional gender codes in the popular imagination" (81).

In this chapter I endeavored to contextualize the contemporary landscape of women's sport by addressing the structures of our capitalistic economy as well as posit that female athletes can work within and against these structures to exert rhetorical agency; thus, in the following chapter I will fully elucidate this argument and analyze the challenges and opportunities that arise in venues such as *ESPN The Magazine*. Additionally, I question how female athletes can help surpass the traditional, patriarchal category of woman and embody new identities and arguments about women's potentiality, making visible a wider range of performances of women's selfhood. The following chapter, then, offers a response to the critiques I presented here through an analysis of female athletes' rhetorical activity in the images presented in the *Body Issues*.

Chapter 4

Encountering Female Athletes: A Rhetorical Analysis of *ESPN The Magazine* Body Issues 2009-2015

In the previous chapter I argued that because the body is the visual, material ethos of both sportswomen's athleticism and womanhood, discussions of athletes' full selfhood should not be avoided nor should their multiple subjectivities be divided. Such negation or division would greatly limit any consideration of the rhetorical strategies at play in female athletes' visual representations and performances. Responding to these claims in this chapter, I consider the total selfhood of female athletes as I present my examination of *ESPN The Magazine* Body Issues (2009-2015), which is a case study of the embodied rhetoric produced by professional female athletes. I begin with a discussion of *ESPN The Magazine* and my rationale for selecting the Body Issues as a site of analysis. Next, I discuss my mixed method approach to this study that combines both quantitative and rhetorical analysis as well as the rhetorical framework that informs my analysis. Finally, I analyze how female athletes can work within and against male-dominated structures, as delineated in the previous chapter, to exert rhetorical agency and address the challenges and opportunities that arise in venues such as *ESPN The Magazine*. My main goal in this chapter is to demonstrate how female athletes' bodies are framed and engage in rhetorical acts that are complicated and often contradictory; that is, these athletes assume stances that perpetuate cultural conceptions of female athletes while simultaneously disrupting and/or evolving such conceptions.

The visibility of female athletes is still a major issue and achieving professional visibility is highly fraught for women since it is not achieved solely through athletic play but through financial endorsements. Although male athletes benefit from endorsements, they are not as dependent on them as female athletes because their salaries are so much higher, and the media

coverage, advertising, and audience for men's sports is much more stable and established. Thus, claiming professional agency and securing a livelihood are critical impetuses underpinning women's professional sports. Unfortunately, however, endorsements and the commercialization of athletes are not determined by merit, but rather by market forces that reflect cultural assumptions about race, sexuality, and gender. This means that the path to endorsement deals is uneven, with female athletes of color at a particular disadvantage. Thus, they need public recognition to gain a consistent and stable spectatorship that can financially support their sport, secure their individual, financial solvency, and promote and secure their presence and identity as professional athletes. Posing in magazines such as *ESPN The Magazine*, then, is a step to obtaining this visibility and, ideally, the various levels of security that come with such recognition. Certainly, male athletes also pose in magazines to obtain visibility; yet, there is less of an urgent need for men to pose due to the stable environment of men's sports and the acceptance of the men's athletic identity in American culture—aspects that are tenuous in women's sports.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, professional American sports are fused to and galvanized by the economy. Organizations such as the NFL reign supreme as one of *the* money-makers in American business and consumer capitalism. While these organizations exist to produce sports and win championships, they also exist and endeavor to make a profit. The media plays an important role here because it often does the work of marketing and advertising athletes for these organizations. A sport media franchise like *ESPN* is especially powerful because it solely exists to report and circulate information about athletes and athletic organizations. In many ways, sport organizations and the media have a symbiotic relationship where their individual survival is based on their mutual financial success. *ESPN*, then, as a nationwide,

network station, is the most viewed media outlet for sports, and as such, is highly influential when it comes to the production, circulation, and consumption of discourse on athletes. In the case of the network's magazine, *ESPN The Magazine*, the annual Body Issue was created to increase revenue because of declining print magazine sales. The 2009 Body Issue was "the biggest October issue, in terms of revenue, that ESPN [had] ever had," and the Body Issues continue to be quite successful in terms of increasing ESPN's magazine sales as well as their overall network sales (Clifford).

The athletes' nude poses represent the magazine's interesting, yet vexing efforts to display and valorize the "athletic-ness" of their bodies. As I explain in the first chapter, my choice in selecting the Body Issues for study is three-fold. First, the magazine is a rich site of embodied discourse that can augment the study of the body as inseparable from rhetoric, discourse, and power. In this way, my project connects to and extends rhetorical research that instates the body as an integral part of rhetorical study and rhetorical production. Second, the Body Issues are a corpus of mediated visual and textual representations of athletes that function as a legitimate, representative sample of the wider media coverage of sportswomen; they annually present images and text that highlight the dominant patterns and ways of racializing, gendering, sexualizing, and/or othering women's bodies as well as the complicated ways of valorizing these same bodies; and they showcase how female athletes choose to represent themselves in the sporting world. Thirdly, the Body Issues allow me illustrate how female athletes use the magazine as a vehicle to represent themselves even as they are represented by ESPN in ways that are not entirely within their control and examine how female athletes' self-presentation in the Body Issues can be interpreted as strategic, rhetorical acts. In addition, the magazine's celebration of bodies is structured as epideictic rhetoric, and in framing issues this

way, the magazine uniquely demarcates itself from other media outlets as shaping, reinforcing, and potentially creating new public values. Put simply, it is essential to analyze the Body Issues in order to understand how they epideictically influence audiences and what type of community is called forth by their epideictic function.

To establish the Body Issues as inherently epideictic, *ESPN* introduced the special issue as a celebration of the “Bodies We Want” during the initial launch of the Body Issue in 2009 (50). They present the issue as their “annual celebration of athletes’ amazing bodies, where we stop to admire the vast potential of the human form and unapologetically stand in awe of the athletes who’ve pushed their physiques to profound frontiers” (<http://espn.go.com/espn/bodyissue>). Additionally, the magazine features male and female athletes posing nude, a choice which *ESPN* justifies with a rhetorical question: “How else to fully comprehend the ultimate keys to their success?” (49). Through this question, the magazine asserts that it is by looking at a nude body the audience can fully and truly witness evidence of the sportswomen’s athleticism. This celebration of bodies continually invites the audience to stare and, as they stare, to appreciate and validate the amazingness of the bodies before them. From a rhetorical perspective, the epideictic framing and marketing of the Body Issues spark questions about how these bodies are celebrated; which bodies are celebrated; what type of public is brought into being through the magazine’s “celebration of athletes’ amazing bodies”; how does the magazine’s economic purpose complicate the “We” in “Bodies We Want—and to that end, who constitutes the “we”; how are these values “creatively reinterpreted” and the community transformed (Agnew 153); and how does this type of rhetoric influence discourses about female sporting bodies and female bodies in general.

Additionally, the magazine repeatedly uses textual introductory sections in the Body Issue to continually remind readers and viewers that their purpose is to lionize athletes' bodies as well as control viewers' interpretations of the images through a guiding, epideictic theme. Also accompanying each image is a very brief synopsis of an interview with the athlete or someone who is close to the athlete, which aims to echo the theme of the issue.⁶⁴ In 2010, *ESPN* added a subtheme to the issue which focuses on the capabilities and limits of professional athletes, and, as an extension, of the human body. In this issue *ESPN* claims, "We marvel at the potential of the human body," and "We delight at the possibilities when athletic form meets mechanical function..." (68). Similar to the 2010 issue, the 2011 issue also has a subtheme to the "bodies we want"—the injury and breakdown of the body. Here they write, "The bodies we want eventually, they fail us all. Become less beautiful....It's why athletes' brilliant physical performances amaze us; we stare in wonder at strength and beauty...[and] celebrate those athletes in their purest forms. They [their bodies] are why we watch" (61). After the 2011 issue, *ESPN* drops the introduction and use of subthemes from the Body Issues and instead uses one sentence tag lines that evoke the same message and language of the 2009-2011 issues: "The bodies we want. Admire. Stare. Wonder. Marvel" (2012, 54); "ode to exceptional athletic form" (2013, 52); and "tribute to the extraordinary power of the athletic form" (2014, 38). By repeatedly using terms like delight, stare, and marvel, *ESPN* emphasizes the epideictic rhetoric undergirding the annual Body Issue that constitutes an audience whose job is staring at these bodies. Also bear in mind that while *ESPN* praises and applauds these athletes, the magazine also displays specific athletes

⁶⁴ Occasionally, the full transcript can be found on the *ESPN The Magazine's* website; unfortunately not all of the interviews are put online nor are they archived. Thus, any discussion of text published by the issues will solely refer to the miniature write-ups displayed next to the image of each athlete. Every interview for all of the Body Issues are conducted by *ESPN's* sports writer Morty Ain. Of the full transcripts I could locate, Ain appears to rotate through a long list of questions with the athletes. Athletes may be asked the same or different questions depending on where he is in the list. Also, he poses the same questions to both male and female athletes.

in specific ways to market and make a profit off of their magazine. These issues, thus, serve a dual and, arguably, dueling purpose—to commend athletes so as to reinforce and (re)shape public values of athletics and how we conceive of the human body and to make profit off of them.⁶⁵

ESPN and the Body Issues are not the be-all and end-all in terms of presenting a comprehensive understanding of the contemporary discourse on female athletes nor do they fully capture the total state of women’s athletics. Moreover, the Body Issues are a mediated sample of women’s sports and female professional athletes; it is incredibly difficult to gain unmediated access to these athletes so as to get at a more authentic knowledge of the individual, the individual’s sport, and the entirety of women’s sports. However, as a multi-media conglomerate, and as one of the leading sports reporting outlets, *ESPN* has immense power when it comes to deciding how and what to frame, produce, and sell when it comes to discourse on athletes. Certainly, the American public, myself included, primarily “knows” and encounters professional athletes and professional sports through the media. I argue, therefore, that it is vital to investigate the sports discourse emerging out of the Body Issues because they are a significant site for the production and interpretation of the “great deal of cultural freight” embodied in women’s corporeal forms (Crowley 361).

Rhetorical Framework

To examine the relationship between athletes and rhetoric through an embodied lens, I couch this case study in Jay Dolmage’s two-part redefinition of rhetoric as the “strategic study of

⁶⁵ An interesting point to consider here is the convergence of these two purposes. At the end of the chapter, I discuss this point and the how the magazine’s purpose to make a profit off of athletes can be situated as part of its epideictic message that includes the commodifying and consuming of athletes in the public value of sports.

the circulation of power through communication” (3) and as the “study of the circulation of discourse through the body” (5). In Dolmage’s reconceptualization of rhetoric, the body becomes inseparable from discourse and the production and circulation of discourse becomes inconceivable without the body. Embodied rhetoric then, as Dolmage presents it, positions the body in rhetoric “as the engine for all communication” (3). To this end, communication and cultural scholars Phillip Vannini and Aaron M. McCright elaborate that “through our bodies we perform, express, and (re)present ourselves, and others judge our appearances and performances. The body is both a subject and an object of action, and it is through our self-directed action and reflection that we communicate with others” (231). In my study, I regard the body as a material text that both produces rhetoric and is influenced by rhetoric as it circulates through the body. In this sense, rhetoric impacts the body because it is “‘action on the body, toward the body, or with respect to the body,’ and consequently performances by the body and appearances of the body” influence the rhetoric circulating through it and produced by it (Strauss 120 qtd in Vannini and McCright 231). The athletic body, is deliberately shaped, molded, and stretched to create a figure that performs specific capacities for specific purposes—athletic competition and, in the context of the Body Issues, these bodies serve *ESPN’s* epideictic and economic purposes. When we encounter the posed and performing athletic body, we read and interpret the intersecting discourses contoured into and onto it, moving within it, and created by it.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ In material and embodied rhetoric, scholars disrupt our understanding of what a text is and how it is impacted by its rhetorical situation. Carol Blair aptly addresses this very issue in her article “Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric’s Materiality.” Blair revisions “rhetoric as itself, material, just as substantial and consequential as any element of its setting” (16) and proposes that “we must ask not just what a text means but, more generally, what it does; and we must not understand what it does as adhering strictly to what it was supposed to do” (23). Adjusting our frame of analysis to consider the materiality of a text and investigate what that material text does provides the space to contemplate the body as a rhetorical text.

Furthermore, Dolmage's two-fold understanding of rhetoric engages a dual line of inquiry which seeks to understand oppressive discourses that influence how different bodies exist in our society—in his case disabled bodies—as well as examining how these bodies work within and against oppressive systems and discourses of power. Similarly, I follow a dual line of inquiry, which 1) addresses how the text and images of the female athletes in the Body Issues can be traditionally read according to marginalizing and restrictive sport discourses especially when they are presented via the media, and 2) studies how these images might be divergently interpreted so as to account for the various way athletes use their bodies to exert rhetorical agency and play with and against “oppressive systems and discourses of power” in the sporting world. To that end, I interpret these athletes and the images of their bodies both as acting subjects and static objects which enables me to consider the athletes' rhetorical acts and the audience's receptions of these acts. To ground this part of my analysis I use Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's theory of staring, which presents the relationship between a staree and starrer as a “visual exchange that makes meaning” (9). Garland-Thomson's conceptualization of staring is “distinct from the gaze, which has been extensively defined as an oppressive act of disciplinary looking that subordinates its victim” (9). She further explains that the gaze, unlike the stare, “has been defined by critical theorists as a type of look implicated in gendered objectification and colonizing aspects of sight” (198).⁶⁷ I use her understanding of and terminology about staring, as opposed to the concept and term gaze, to discuss the audience's reception of the images in the

⁶⁷ For example, in her seminal text, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” (1975), analyzes how image “reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images” (6). Mulvey notes that ways of looking and the ways of existing as spectacle have traditionally been determined by the male gaze: “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly” (9). In other words, the male gaze “is a position of privilege in social relations which entitles men to look as women and positions women as objects of that look....[And] regardless of which sex the partners in the exchange identify with, looking masculinizes, then, and being looked at feminizes ” (Garland-Thomas 41).

Body Issues because stares “do not necessarily make one a victim; rather, they can make one a master of social interaction” (84). The stare, in this context, allows me to counter-balance and respond to the critiques raised by sports scholars, which I elucidated in the previous chapter, that the majority of mediated images of female athletes disempower them, especially if the athletes are sexualized in these representations. Ultimately, Garland-Thomson’s theory of staring enables me to consider the multiple, embodied subjectivities of the posed female athletes and creatively consider them as rhetorical agents.

I also include performance theory as a component of my rhetorical analysis because attending to the relationship between the body and performance offers a perspective of the body that provides a lens through which to consider the “materiality of the physical body” as well as the body’s capacity to signify meaning (Shellenberger 12-13). Moreover, a focus on rhetoric and performance enables me to account for female athletes’ complicated and bodily practices as they are represented via the static images in *ESPN’s* Body Issues. At the intersection of rhetoric and performance, then, “power works in part through discourse and it works in part to produce and destabilize subjects” (Butler 202). Here, rhetoric locates how discourses of power circulate through the body (Dolmage) and how these discourses are enacted through and influenced by the posed, performing body. Furthermore, given the complex representations of female athletes, I also draw on Michel Foucault’s reverse discourse theory and Jacqueline Rhodes and Jonathan Alexander’s queer rhetorical analysis of counter-logics as well as Judith Butler’s and José Muñoz conceptualizations of disidentification that they present as rhetorical acts of performance that oppressed groups employ for survival.

With this theoretical backdrop in mind, I submit that embodied rhetoric, as it pertains to the body and discourses of power, names a network of rhetorical practices that are used for

varying purposes for different types of performing bodies. Applied to the Body Issues and images of female athletes, this rhetorical framework offers an alternative perspective on representations of female athletes' bodies. Rhodes and Alexander explain this as “seeing slant” in order to uncover and recover the “disavowed” identifications and narratives at play under the surface. Understanding embodied rhetoric in this way distinctively positions my analysis to consider female athletes' entire selfhood as presented in the Body Issue images and how these athletes employ rhetorical agency.

The Body Issues: Quantitative Analysis and Explanation of the Collected Data

Given the vastness of the sporting world, the diversity of the culture that varies from sport to sport, and the high number of athletes featured in the Body Issues—there are ninety female athletes featured from 2009-2015—it is necessary to select a small number of sports and athletes to analyze in this study. To narrow my focus I collected the Body Issues dating from 2009-2015, seven in total, and catalogued the images of all of the female athletes in these issues according to sport, race, and the type of pose.⁶⁸ I primarily focus on the specific sport, race, and pose type since these aspects are the most common elements to play a role in the discourse surrounding female athletes.⁶⁹ As I will shortly elucidate, I look for patterns and relationships between these three elements in the Body Issues.

To establish the type of pose, I determined whether the athletes are posed as in-action, meaning that the image presents the athlete as physically playing their sport or in athletic motion,

⁶⁸ Also, there were other elements presented across the images such as disability, age, team photos, and athletes who are married to other athletes and posed with their spouses.

⁶⁹ Merlisa Lawrence Corbett, a *Bleacher Report* columnist, published the article “The Problem with the Conversation Surrounding Serena Williams,” which is an excellent example of how race, sports, and sexuality intersect in the sporting world.

or whether the athlete is posed as stationary, meaning they are sitting, standing, or lying down. In terms of race, I recorded the number of White, Black, Asian, Latina, and Mixed-race athletes.⁷⁰ Only one athlete self-identified as mixed-race—she explains that she is half Black and half white—thus when I use that phrase in this study and in the charts presented below, I specifically refer to this one athlete and how she identifies herself. While race can be visible and scanned as one gazes upon a body, often times the race of a body is unclear to the eye; therefore, I want to clarify how I scanned and came to label these bodies. Sometimes the athletes self-identify their race—this specifically occurs in the 2013 issue with soccer player Sydney Leroux who discusses her multiracial heritage. In other instances where athletes do not address their race, which most commonly occurs with white athletes, I identified their race phenotypically.⁷¹ I selected race as a feature to focus on in this study because it is a central component of embodied rhetoric; moreover, in a history of sports—both women’s and men’s—the racial identity of the athlete has played a crucial role in the success of the athlete and the relationship between race, athletics, and racial discrimination in American society.⁷² To make visible any relationships between race, pose type, and sport, I quantitatively analyzed how many athletes from the same sport appeared in all of the issues; this enabled me to focus my study on athletes participating in the three sports most often represented—basketball, tennis, and soccer. Out of the forty women’s sports

⁷⁰ I only discuss these five race demographics because these are the only ones featured in the magazine.

⁷¹ I want to be careful to not categorize athletes’ race according to where they are from, but I use this term to communicate that I determine their race based on skin color. I originally began by trying to research the race of every single athlete, but I quickly found that this information is not consistently available and sometimes it is not available at all, which is why I resorted to determining their race based on skin color. Clearly, this is a very basic interpretation, and risks inaccuracy because while a body might scan as a certain race, the person might be multiracial or not even identify with that race demographic. This is certainly an area of my research to develop and further explore.

⁷² Two of the most well-known examples that highlights the tense relationship between sport and race are 1) when Jackie Robinson, an African American baseball player, became the first black man to play second base for the Brooklyn Dodgers in the all-white men’s professional league in 1947; and 2) when Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised black-gloved fists during the playing of the national anthem for their Olympic medal ceremony in 1968. There is debate about whether the fist raising was a Black Power salute or if it was a human rights salute—Smith, Carlos, and the Australian silver medalist, Peter Norman, all wore human rights buttons on their uniforms.

represented in the Body Issues, women's basketball is featured in every single issue except for 2009, and tennis and soccer are featured in every single issue except for 2010. Across the issues, 6 basketball players, 6 soccer players, and 5 tennis players are displayed.⁷³ After determining the sports most often featured,⁷⁴ I then recorded the race demographics as well as how many of the athletes from each of these three sports were posed as in-action or stationary in the issues. Next, I compared the pose type to the race demographics. I recorded the number of White, Black, Asian, Latina, and Mixed-race athletes who play basketball, soccer, or tennis posed as in-action and compared those numbers to how many athletes in these same race demographics were posed as stationary. Presented below are three data charts that visualize the relationship between race demographics and pose type in basketball, soccer, and tennis. In addition to providing visualizations of this information, I also provide a chart that offers a macro perspective of race and pose type in the entire corpus of the Body Issues.

⁷³ The rest of the sports are only featured once or twice with the exception of mixed-martial arts, surfing, snowboarding, and golf, which were each featured four times. While I do not focus on these sports, I do provide a brief discussion about the implications of their presence in these issues and recommendations for further research in the following chapter. I focus on basketball, soccer, and tennis athletes because they are the most often seen and most consistently represented throughout the issues.

⁷⁴ The hard to determine cause-and-effect relationship between media attention and most featured sport and/or popularity of that sport raises a provocative question: Are these sports covered so much because of public popularity, or are they popular because of media coverage—or something in between?

Women’s Basketball, Tennis, and Soccer: Data Totals of Race Demographics and Pose Types:

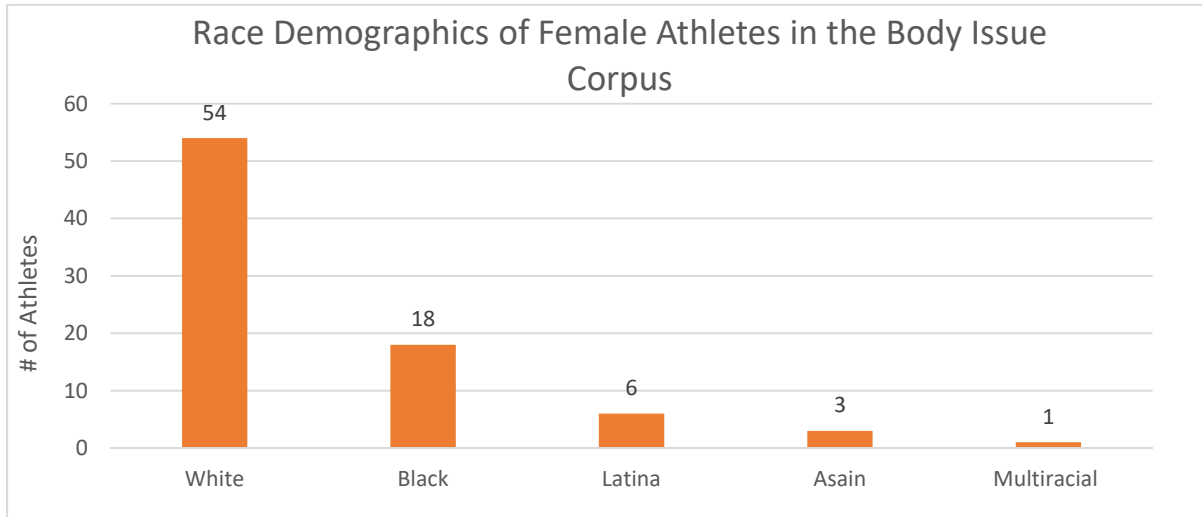


Chart 1

While the majority of the charts presented here focus on athletes who play basketball, soccer, and tennis, Chart 1 provides an overview of the overall race demographics in the seven Body Issues. Accordingly, as I discuss race in the three sports and in the issues in general, I base many of my claims about race on the data presented in Chart 1. In accordance with the socio-political research on race as presented in the previous two chapters, Chart 1 demonstrates that white athletes comprise the majority of images while athletes of color comprise the minority.

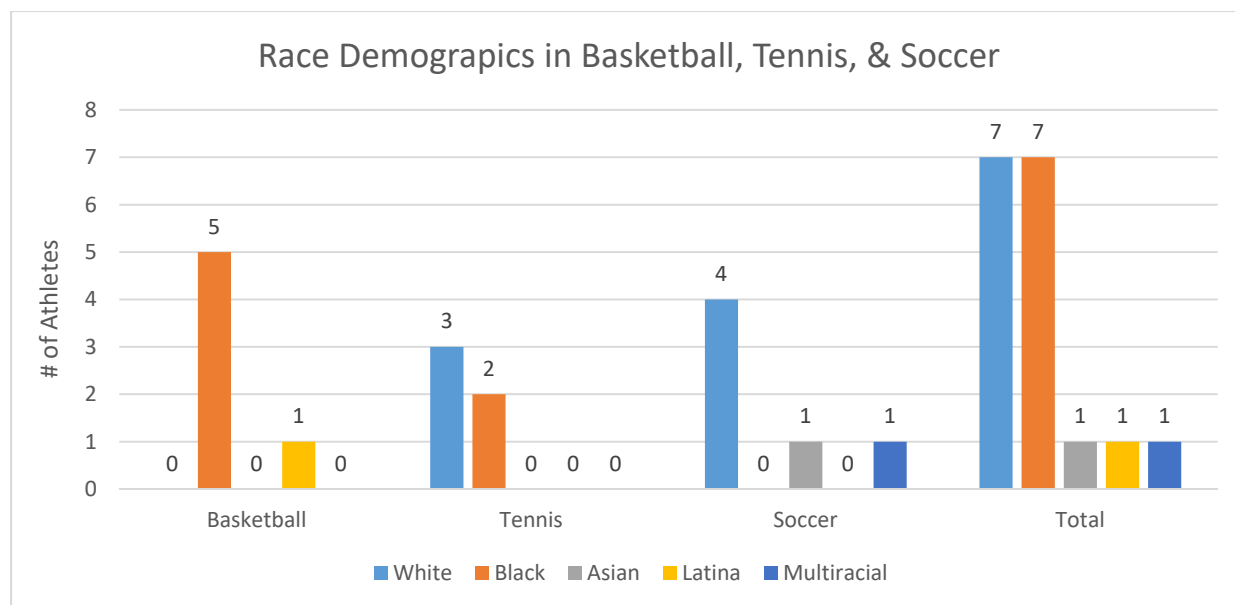


Chart 2

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, Chart 2 demonstrates that basketball hosts the most black players, and soccer hosts the most white players. As mentioned in chapter two, athletes of color have often played basketball because it was a sport that was more accessible in terms of opportunities to play and the relatively affordability of the sport itself. Soccer, on the other hand, has primarily been a sport played by white athletes, specifically in the United States.⁷⁵ The breakdown of race in tennis presents a more complicated picture. In comparison to the other two sports, tennis appears to have a more even split between white and black athletes in the Body Issues; however, this is a rather inaccurate depiction of women’s tennis. There are only two black tennis players featured in these issues, the Williams sisters. These two athletes took the tennis world by storm in the late 90s because they were black women from Compton, California—a historically poor, non-white city on the Southside of Los Angeles—competing in a historically wealthy, upper-class, white-person’s sport where they continually defeated their white competitors. Indeed, to date, Serena Williams is ranked as the best female tennis athlete to

⁷⁵ See Helene A. Shugart (2003) “She Shoots, She Scores: Mediated Constructions of Contemporary Female Athletes in Coverage of the 1999 US Women's Soccer Team” for more on this issue.

ever play the game.⁷⁶ Yet, despite the success of the Williams sisters and the space they have carved for themselves in the tennis world, there are still relatively few women of color who play professional tennis; the American Women’s Tennis Association is dominated by white-American and white-European athletes. The seemingly “even” split between black and white athletes that is presented in Chart 2 does not accurately show the presence of black female athletes in women’s tennis. What this chart, and Chart 1, do accurately display is the lack of presence of athletes of color who are not black. While black athletes are a minority in the sporting world, they have experienced much greater opportunity and access to sports than Asian, Latina, and other athletes of color (Women’s Sports Foundation 136; Suggs 142-147).

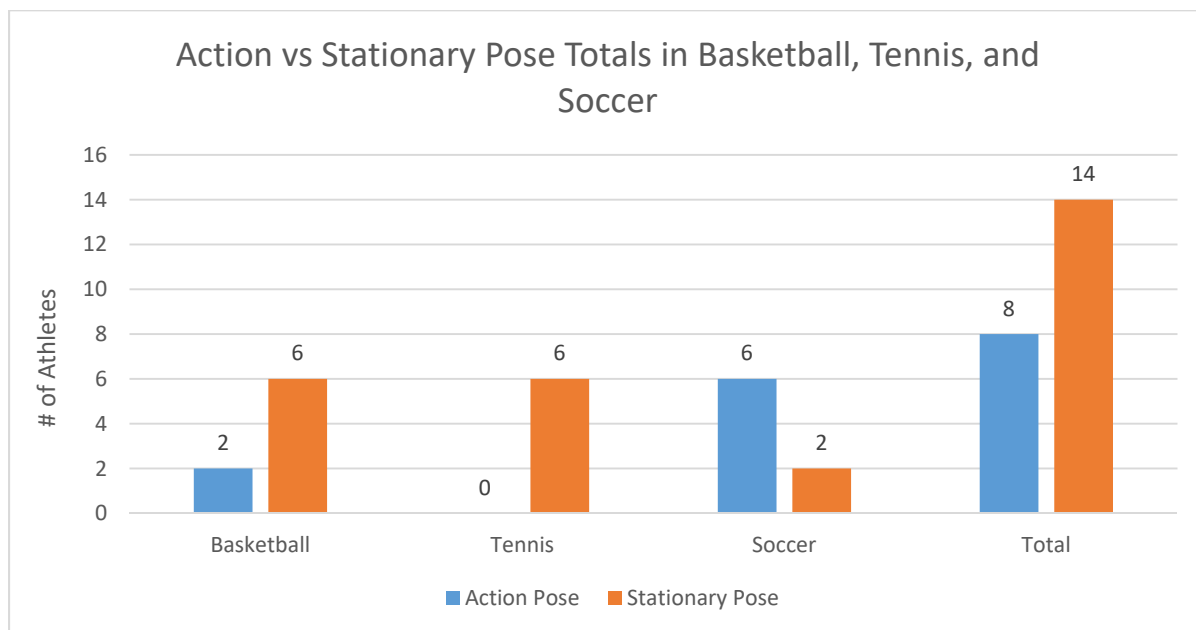


Chart 3

Chart 3, “Action versus Stationary Pose Totals in Basketball, Tennis, and Soccer,” compares the number of athletes posed as in-action to the number of athletes posed as stationary in these three sports. An interesting component of the Body Issues is that many athletes have more than one

⁷⁶ Despite their success, however, the Williams sisters, especially Serena, have faced incredible backlash from the media and fellow competitors. Merlisa Lawrence Corbett, a *Bleacher Report* sport columnist, defines this as “anti-black misogyny” in her article “The Problem with the Conversation Surrounding Serena Williams” (2015).

pose represented in the magazine. For example, in women’s soccer Hope Solo and Abby Wambach have two images of their bodies featured. In the 2015 issue, Brittney Griner, a basketball player for the Phoenix Mercury of the Women’s National Basketball Association, is displayed three times. Thus, the numbers above reflect the total number of poses of the female athletes rather than the total number of athletes who play basketball, tennis, and soccer.

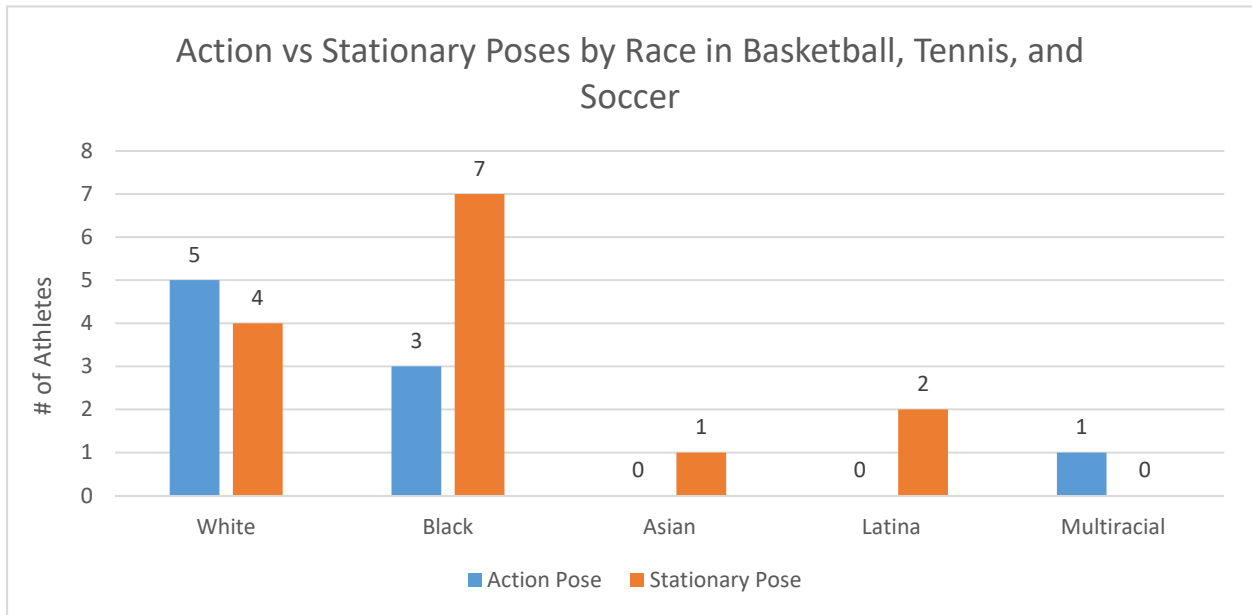


Chart 4

While Chart 3 depicts the number of athletes posed as in-action versus the athletes posed as stationary in basketball, tennis, and soccer, Chart 4 compares the type of poses to the athletes’ race.

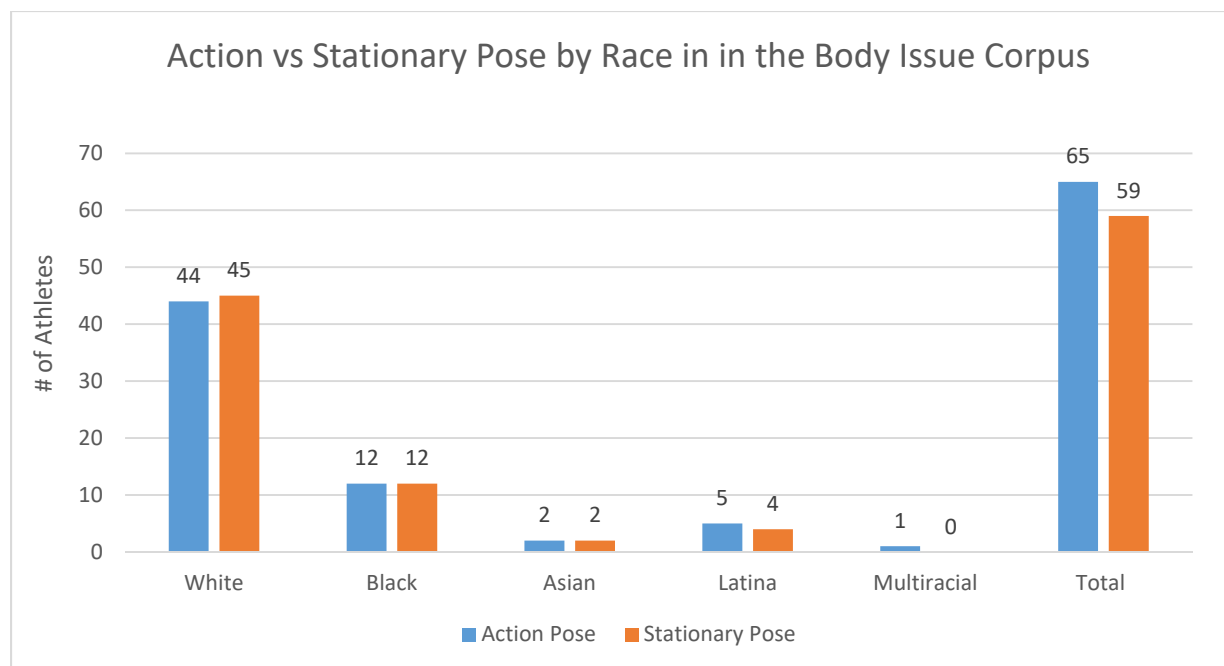


Chart 5

To fully develop my assessment of the data collected from the magazine in regards to race and the type of pose, Chart 5, similar to Chart 4, compares the pose type to the race of all of the athletes featured in the seven Body Issues. Both charts show that white female athletes are more prominently featured than female athletes of color and black female athletes are featured more frequently than other female athletes of color; however, in Chart 5, there is a fairly equal division between the two types of poses within each race demographic across all of the sports while Chart 4 depicts a larger imbalance between pose type and race.

The relationship between in-action and stationary poses is quite complex because of the myriad issues the poses raise. As discussed in the previous chapter, according to feminist sports scholars and some athletes, the posed in-action body serves as visual evidence of athletic ethos whereas the posed stationary body undercuts the bodily evidence of athletic ethos.⁷⁷ This line of argument creates a narrow dichotomy that values in-action poses over stationary poses and

⁷⁷ See chapter 3 for reference.

reinforces a restrictive rhetoric that denies the total selfhood of female athletes. However, feminist sports scholars' preference for and valorization of in-action poses are a reaction to a history of media portrayals of female athletes that often functioned to diminish them as athletes. Elucidating this history, communication scholar Helene A. Shugart argues that the media coverage of female athletes perpetuates traditional (and marginalizing) gender roles via strategies of sexualization. She specifically categorizes images and the visual representations of female athletes as "passive objectification," which she defines as when female athletes are displayed "as objects positioned passively for the male gaze, entirely absent of their athletic context" (7). Positioned between the history of mediated images of female athletes and feminist sport scholars' advocacy for in-actions poses, Chart 3 can be interpreted as communicating that female athletes posed in-action in the Body Issues are more likely to be viewed as athletes which fosters a discourse on female athletes where they are viewed as legitimate sportswomen; however, the athletes posed in stationary stances are more likely to be viewed as sex objects, passive objects, mothers, lesbians, etc. rather than as athletes, which maintains a marginalizing discourse about female athletes. Additionally, Chart 4 can be interpreted as communicating that white female athletes are posed in-action more often than athletes of color because they have a more visible history in the general sporting world, and they have had more opportunities to enhance their social standing and legitimacy as athletes. The data in Chart 4 suggests that the Body Issues maintain a marginalizing discourse about the race of female athletes because athletes of color are posed as stationary, which risks diminishing the focus on their athleticism, more so than white female athletes.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ While I fully theorize the intersectionality between race, gender, and sexuality in my rhetorical analysis of the images later on in this chapter, I want to provide a list of the theorists grounding my current claims. Mainly, there is a historic tendency to connect black womanhood with sexuality as well as to converge muscularity and masculinity that frames black women as possessing animalistic qualities. Patricia Hill Collin's book *Black Sexual Politics*

However, I submit that this interpretation is too narrow and does not account for the complex rhetorical activity within these issues. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, such an interpretation ignores the entire selfhood of female athletes as well as limits any consideration of how female athletes work within and against a male-dominated culture of sports to exert rhetorical agency. Responding to the tension between this restrictive rhetoric and a history of marginalization via media portrayals, athletes like WNBA player Maya Moore champion, “I want to be seen as a beautiful person...and seen as a great basketball player” (41:20). I suggest, therefore, that this data reflects that female athletes use both in-action and stationary poses as rhetorical strategies to communicate with the audience in diverse ways for varied purposes. The different motivations grounding the choice to pose as stationary or in-action, as stated in the previous chapter, highlights the disproportionate and discordant experiences of female athletes especially when it comes to issues of race, gender, and sexuality. As such, in-action poses should not necessarily be valued as more progressive or effective than stationary poses and vice versa. To be sure, the Body Issues and female athletes in these issues are doing much more complicated things than the data in the charts can capture. While the quantitative section of this chapter presents factual information about pose type, sport, and race in the Body Issues, the rhetorical analysis of these images allows me to elucidate the nuances of these carefully constructed images and interpret the discourse communicated through the poses of these bodies in the images. Presented in the next section, then, is my rhetorical framework, the images of the basketball, tennis, and soccer athletes featured in the seven Body Issues and the

(2004), Jamie Schultz’s article “Reading the Catsuit: Serena Williams and the Production of Blackness at the 2002 U.S. Open” (2005), and Patricia Vertinsky and Gwendolyn Captain’s article “More Myth than History: American Culture and Representations of the Black Female’s Athletic Ability” (1998) all address these intersectional issues that female athletes of color negotiate in the sporting world.

text accompanying them. They are organized by sport and within each sport they are organized by the ascending issue year. I also provide a brief describe of each image. After presenting the images, I rhetorical analyze the visual and textual representations of the athletes. Lastly, I rhetorically assess the audience's reception of the representations of the athletes and the magazine's epideictic mission.

Images of Female Basketball, Tennis, and Soccer Athletes in the Body Issues 2009-2015

In order to work within and against a male-dominated society, these athletes have to creatively play with the discourses underpinning the sporting world. Foucault's theory of reverse discourse illuminates one possible way this kind of rhetorical play can occur: "...we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies" (100). According to this concept, female athletes are not constrained to a discourse of the oppressed; rather, they access and engage the discourse used and circulated in the male-dominated sporting world to exert rhetorical agency. To this end, Foucault explains that groups that seem powerless purposely and even effectively use the discourse of the dominant group to respond to oppression: "Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy" (101-02).⁷⁹ From this perspective, discourse is the negotiation of power between groups that uses the same language,

⁷⁹ As an example, Foucault presents the gradual presence homosexuality and the homosexual community has garnered over the past two centuries: "homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" (101).

structures, and systems. Such a conceptualization of discourse enables me to account for the possibility that seemingly marginalizing visual representations of female athletes, when framed as a type of reverse discourse, are strategic, rhetorical acts responding to and circulating within an oppressive system of power. For example, in their highly regarded article “Female Bodies on Display Attitudes Regarding Female Athlete Photos in Sports Illustrated’s Swimsuit Issue and ESPN: The Magazine’s Body Issue” (2014), communication scholars Rachel R. Smallwood, Natalie A. Brown, and Andrew C. Billings position Foucault’s theory of reverse discourse as productively addressing the “athletic- or- attractive binary regarding women in sport” (4). They position his theory as “helping to advance the concept of women specifically regarding perceptions of visual representation in sport” because it “argues that some of the actions of the oppressed group, in this case the female athlete, work to qualify themselves by using the trait which is said to cause the oppression—being feminine—in order to gain power” (4).

Similar to Foucault’s reverse discourse, Jacqueline Rhodes and Jonathan Alexander’s *Enculturation* webtext, “Queer Rhetoric and the Pleasures of the Archive” (2012), theorize that queer rhetoric relies on a revisioning and reworking of identifications and counter-discourse “to disrupt and reroute the flows of power, particularly discursive power”. Rhodes and Alexander highlight and investigate moments where specific communities of people have been diminished and oppressed and emphasize how discourses of power have functioned to cause this oppression: “Queers often find that the logic of the larger culture are aligned to discredit them, to disavow the legitimacy of their interests, and even to discombobulate their attempts to find social justice.” Similarly, female athletes have found that they are discredited by a cultural logic that traditionally positions athletes as male, masculine, white, and heterosexual as well as the cultural logic of womanhood and femininity that excludes women from the male-dominated arena of

athletics. In this sense, female athletes' bodies exist in the void between that which is considered "traditionally" feminine and historically athletic. In response to these types of situations, Rhodes and Alexander examine how queer rhetoric responds to exclusionary cultural discourses: "the queer...questions, particularly at this late stage of corporate capitalism, the extent to which reasoned debate successfully addresses and ameliorates injustices...these cultural logics, or narratives, are very powerful, and it is important to play with those logics and create meaningful and powerful, counter-logics." Their concept of counter-logics and playing with common discursive practices correlates with Foucault's theory of reverse discourse insofar that queer rhetoric "plays" with cultural scripts to respond to marginalizing discourse. For example, Rhodes and Alexander present the LGBTQ community as claiming and using the discursive elements of the "dominant" discourse on heterosexuality to create a meaningful and powerful space for themselves: "If queers are to have agency within the dominant public sphere, they must address how that sphere characterizes itself to itself" so that they can "position themselves rhetorically as both challenging and maintaining the lifeworld structures and narratives of the dominant culture." Rhodes and Alexander also stress that this positionality often emerges out of a need to survive in a culture that suffocates their identity and very being.⁸⁰ Certainly, these scholars do not evoke Foucault in the sense that they label their work as engaging his theory of reverse discourse; however, when considered together, counter-logics and reverse discourse, as rhetorical play, offer a provocative model for strategically operating within and against dominant

⁸⁰ Their discussion of survival stems out of the work of Jose Munoz, who I discuss in the following paragraph. After presenting his concept of disidentification Munoz keenly stresses "Disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship" (4).

systems of power. Situated within this model, the visual representations female athletes' bodies can be reinterpreted as embodying and enacting agency.

To further elucidate the way counter-logics can function, Rhodes and Alexander also ground their work in theory of disidentification as it is conceptualized by José Muñoz, and they present it as an “embedded” rhetorical practice informing their theorization of queer rhetorical play. Quoting Muñoz’s seminal monograph, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999), they write:

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture. (Muñoz 31 qtd in Rhodes and Alexander)

Muñoz delineates disidentification as a “as a hermeneutic, a process of production, and a mode of performance” (25). He also directly calls forth Foucault’s theory of reverse discourse and positions it as “inform[ing] the theory of disidentification being put forth here inasmuch as disidentification is a strategy that resists a conception of power as being a fixed discourse. Disidentification negotiates strategies of resistance within the flux of discourse and power” (19). Disidentification, as a strategic, rhetorical, and performative act, “understands that counter discourses, like discourse, can always fluctuate for different ideological ends and a politicized agent must have the ability to adapt and shift as quickly as power does within discourse” (19). Fundamentally, this coalescing conceptualization of reverse discourse, counter-logics, and disidentification enables me to account for the possibility that seemingly marginalizing visual representations of female athletes, as a type of reverse discourse, counter-logic, and

disidentification, are strategic rhetorical acts working within and against a male-dominated system of power. With this rhetorical framework in mind, I now turn to present the visual and textual representations of the female athletes and my rhetorical analysis.

Basketball

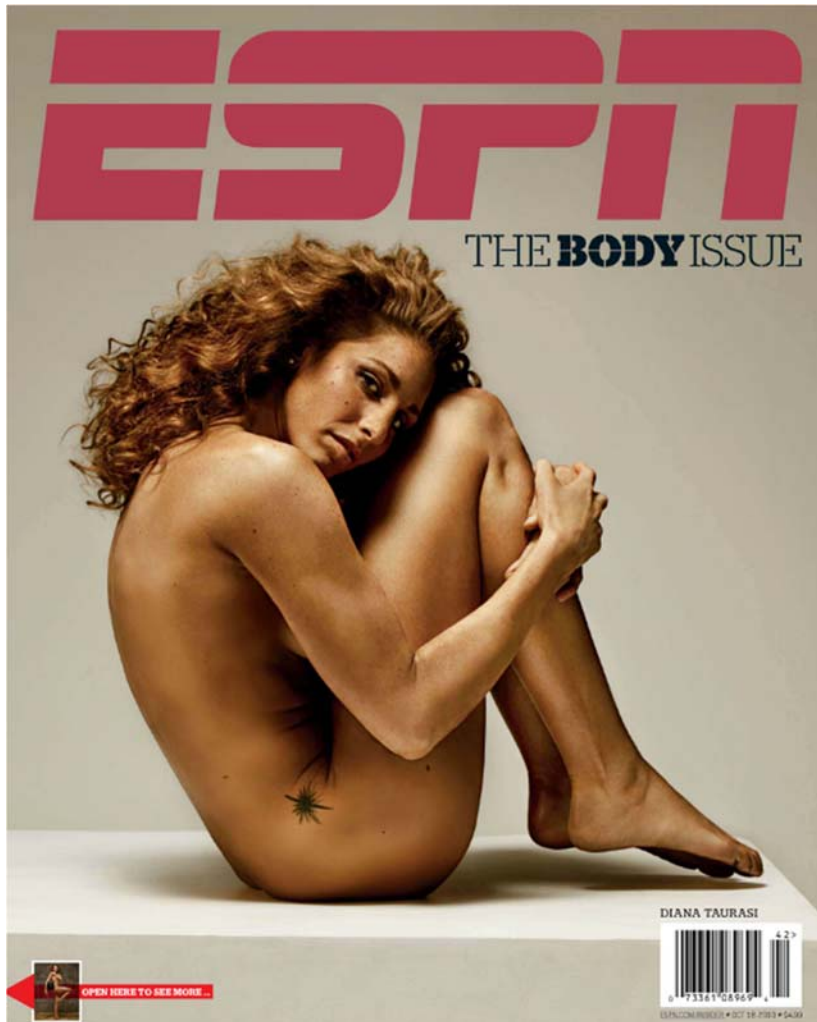


Figure 1 Basketball Player Diana Taurasi, 2010 Issue Cover

Figure 1 depicts Taurasi in a stationary pose that displays her in the fetal position as she stares out at the audience with her hair cascading softly down her back. The top of the image is framed by the title, “ESPN” in block, capitalized red letters. The phrase, “THE **BODY** ISSUE” sits right

under “ESPN” in the far right margin of the image. The angles of her arm and leg, which act as vectors to frame her face, direct the audience to her eyes that stare out at the audience and initiate a staring exchange.



Figure 1 Diana Taurasi, 2010 Body Issue Spread

In Figure 2 Taurasi’s entire body acts as a vector directing the audience to stare along her torso as she lays out, arching over a black basketball until they reach the tiny blurb of text beneath her foot at the bottom, right hand corner of the image. Floating above Taurasi’s face is the title “BODIES WE WANT” with “WANT” appearing on its own line in a much larger, red font. Following this title is a smaller description about the theme of this issue: “admire with us the vast potential of the human form” (69).



Figure 2, Basketball Player Sylvia Fowles, 2011 Body Issue Spread

Sylvia Fowles poses outside in a desert landscape framed by a background of intensely blue sky that dramatically gives way to rugged, rust colored boulders. On a flat part of the rock Fowles rests in plank position—a very traditional position many athletes and yoga enthusiasts assume during exercise⁸¹—and looks left (from the audience’s perspective) out into the distance. The angle of the light functions as a vector directing the audience to look first at her face with her dark hair flying back in the wind, down the sides of her right shoulder and arm, and then along her hip and leg.

⁸¹ This pose is designed to strengthen a person’s arms, shoulders, spine and core.



Figure 4 Basketball Player Candace Parker, 2012 Issue Spread

Figure 4 showcases Candace Parker standing with her back to the audience, feet spread, and she turns her face over her left shoulder to stare and smile at the audience. Using both arms, she holds an orange basketball behind her to cover her buttocks, and superimposed over the basketball are the words “THE END” in tiny white letters. The light shine vertically along the left side of her body so that the audience stares at her face first and then moves their stare down the course of her back, arms, the basketball, and legs.



Figure 5 Basketball Player Swin Cash, 2013 Issue Spread

Figure 5 features Swin Cash sitting down, angled to the left (from the audience's perspective) with her legs folded underneath her and to the side so that her left leg horizontally frames the bottom of the image. As her knees and torso face the left side of the image, Cash's face turns to the front and she stares out at the audience. Her left arm crosses

up and over her chest so as to shield her breasts from view and her right arm braces against the ground to support her upright, sitting position. The light shines from above and angles down on her face, left shoulder, knees, and leg. The vector of light and the vector angles created by Cash's torso and legs direct the audience's stare to her face and then in a zigzag motion down her body.



Figure 6 Basketball Player Angel McCoughtry, 2014 Issue Spread

Angel McCoughtry, featured in Figure 6, poses in-action with a basketball in hand as she jumps to the basketball hoop. The basketball hoop and backboard frame the top border of the image as well as appear to provide the backdrop to McCoughtry's body. While the background is in grey-scale, McCoughtry is featured in color and her entire body is angled to the right (from the audience's perspective). She appears to have just jumped off of her left foot, which is extended longer than her left.



Figure 7 Basketball Player Brittany Griner, 2015 Issue Spread

Figure 7 is the introductory image to the 2015 Body Issue spread and the text framing Griner's body on the left side of the photograph is the introductory text to the entire issue. In this image, Griner is shot close up, standing, and facing left (from the audience's perspective). She stares directly over her shoulder through half-lidded eyes at the audience, and her left arm, decorated with a colorful half-sleeve tattoo, hangs

at her side. Her other hand pulls her hair back from her neck to reveal more tattoos on her left shoulder.



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PHOTOGRAPH BY PAULA KUSACKI
STYLING: JESSICA WILSON
HAIR: JESSICA WILSON
MAKEUP: JESSICA WILSON
DRESS: JESSICA WILSON



BRITTNEY GRINER

GRINER
FIGHTS
FOR
HER
WOMEN

In early April, reporter
Mary Kay Vaughan wrote
Brittney Griner about all
things Griner—from growth-
sprint jumps and her 77 inches
to being drafted and coming
out to her parents. Then,
on April 23, the revelation
arrived: Griner charged.
She and three-finger Clay
Johnson, star of the WNBA,
were arrested at their home
in Arkansas on charges of
sexual and disability
conduct. The police report
described the incident as
“sexual conduct.” On April 29,
Griner pleaded guilty to
disability conduct (the
sexual charge was dropped)
and agreed to undergo 36
weeks of intensive, intensive
counseling, after which the
disability conduct charge
will also be dropped. Johnson
pleaded not guilty to charges
of disability conduct and
sexual, but case was
informally dismissed.
On June 5, less than a month
after the incident, Griner
fled for an assignment.
Following the arrests, the
WNBA suspended both
Griner and Johnson for 6

Figures 8 and 9 Basketball Player Brittney Griner, 2015 Issue Spread

Figure 8 displays Griner in an in-action pose that mimics a basketball player’s long reach as she stretches and extends to push the ball to the top edge of an imaginary basketball hoop. Griner stretches so that both arms and legs fully extend and angle out, and her back faces the audience as she palms a basketball in her right hand. Figure 9 is also a full body shot of Griner standing, facing right, staring directly at the audience, and flipping her hair back so that it forms a halo around her head. Her arms cross over her chest to cover her breasts, and her right leg is bent forward. This longer shot emphasizes the length and height of Griner’s body.

Tennis



Figure 10 Tennis Player Serena Williams, 2009 Issue Cover

Figure 10, the cover of the first Body Issue, features Serena Williams in a stationary pose where she is sitting, facing forward, and staring out at the audience with a smile. Her left leg strategically pulls up to towards her chest to block the audience's view of her torso and her right leg folds in and underneath her. Her right arm crosses in front of her to cover her breasts and her left elbow rests on the top of her left leg as

she moves her hand to tuck her hair behind her ear. Her bent left leg also act as a vertical vector directing the audience's attention up to the bold red title "ESPN" that frames the entire top of the image, acting as a backdrop to Williams's head.



Figure 11 Tennis Player Serena Williams, 2009 Issue Spread

This second image of Serena Williams (Figure 11) shows her in a black bikini.⁸² In this image Williams stands, fully facing forward, with her hands on her hips as she rests her weight on her left leg, pops out her hip, and slightly bends her right leg while pointing her foot. She stares softly out at the audience as the light shines directly on her, forming a vertical vector that directs the audience to her face first then down the length of her entire body.



Figure 12 Tennis Player Vera Zvonareva, 2011 Issue Spread

Figure 12 showcases Vera Zvonareva lying on her side on a bench. A window with open, vertically slatted blinds hangs to her left and the sun shines in on her body. Due to the design of the blinds, light and shadow angle across her body in long, repeating rectangular segments. Although she balances on her side and her body faces left (from the audience's perspective), her face turns unsmiling as she stares intensely out

⁸² The 2009 issue frequently features both male and female athletes in black bathing suits, but this trend was dropped after the 2009 issue was published. The poses in the later issues are much more creative in terms of how they cover parts of the athletes' bodies. I also posit that the black swim suits were used as a strategy to gage the audience's receptions of nearly nude bodies before they published an issue that featured entirely nude bodies.

at the audience with piercingly blue eyes and slicked-back hair. She rests her bent right arm on the bench and her left arm bends up to cover her breasts.



Figure 13 Tennis Player Daniela Hantuchova, 2012 Issue Spread

Similar to Serena Williams's 2009 Body Issue cover (Figure 10), Daniela Hantuchova (Figure 13), sits and smiles invitingly at the audience. Her body faces right (from the audience's perspective) and her arms fold delicately over her breasts. The audience can clearly see the side of her torso and the line of muscle running vertically down the side of her stomach.



Figure 14 Tennis Player Agnieszka Radwanska, 2013 Issue Spread

Agnieszka Radwanska (Figure 14) poses sitting and leaning forward in a reclining-arm chair next to a pool filled with floating tennis balls. Her body faces the pool, and she rests her arms on her left leg as she holds a tennis ball in each hand and dips her toes into the pool. Her face turns out so she can stare and smile at the audience. The light shines down from the right side of the image so that the audience focuses on Radwanska's face then her shoulder and legs.



Figure 15 Tennis Player Venus Williams, 2014 Issue Spread

Venus Williams, whose image initiates the 2014 Body Issue spread (Figure 15), poses standing tall and proud on the slope of a white sand dune. Her body slightly angles to the right (from the audience's perspective) as she balances on her right leg as and her left leg bends forward. Her right arm rests high in her hip, showcasing her muscles, while her left arm covers her breasts. A long, metallic silver cloth drapes over her hips and flows back into the wind, leaving her legs bare as she stares intently to the right. The light shines from the right highlighting her face and the muscles in her shoulders and chest.

Soccer



Figures 16 and 17 Soccer Player Natasha, 2009 Issue Spread.

body. She looks out and down as if staring at something just to the left of the audience. The rest of the image is cut off by the other photograph of her body (Figure 17), which is on the right (from the audience's perspective). Figure 17 features Kai standing and fully facing the audience while wearing a black two-piece swim suit. The light predominately highlights her face as she laughs and smiles directly out at the audience. This effect causes the audience to primarily stare back at her face and then move on to stare at her toned stomach and tattooed arms.

The two images of Natasha Kai (Figures 16 and 17) are individually spliced off and fit together to create a larger image of two different poses. Posed against a white background in Figure 15, Kai stands and angles her body to the right (from the audience's perspective) as her right arm stretches back to display her torso, inner arm, and bent right leg. Her left hand, which lies across her right breast, is all that can be seen of the left side of her



Figure 18 Soccer Player Hope Solo, 2011 Issue Cover

Featured on the cover of the 2011 issue, Hope Solo (Figure 18) faces the audience head-on as she poses in-action, as if kicking a soccer ball; her arms twist across her torso as her left arm covers her breasts and her right arm extends straight behind her for balance while her right leg and knee come up, stopping just below her left elbow to make a ninety degree angle. She balances on the toes of her extended left leg. She stares intensely out at

the audience as she angles her chin down in a look of concentration. Similar to William's 2009 cover photo, *ESPN* is in the background of Solo's upper body. Solo's body forms a vertical line down the center of the image directing the audience's attention to the top of that line, her face, and then down the vectors of her left arm and right leg that point directly at the words "The Body Issue."



Figure 19 Soccer Player Hope Solo, 2011 Issue Spread

Posed to the left of the photo (from the audience's perspective), Solo faces right so that the audience has a profile view of her body. A green garden hose winds around and behind her—the shadow of her body shows her holding the hose in her left hand that is down by her side—as she holds the nozzle in her right hand. Her right arm extends with her upper arm shielding her breasts from view as she waters the grass. A redbrick house, three sets of windows, and a row of hedges lining the front of the house is in the background.⁸³

⁸³ Image 19 stands out in the collection of Body Issue images as an outlier of sorts because it features an athlete watering the lawn. To be sure, this image is rather puzzling when considered along the other photographs in the Body Issues. This image may be read as playful seeing as Solo lives in Seattle and thus would not need to water her lawn given all the rain; the image could be interpreted as having sexual connotations in the sense that it evokes images of women getting wet and washing cars; also, it may be playing with traditional gender roles given that yard work has historically been men's work. All that said, I submit that this image is interesting and playful solely because it is unclear as to its aim—both in terms of Solo's purpose and the magazine's. It raises the question, why she is posed in this manner?



Figures 20 and 21 Soccer Player Abbey Wambach, 2012 Issue Spread.

Figure 20 depicts Wambach from the right side with her right leg in a lunge and a gold soccer ball resting between the top of her knee and the bottom of her outstretched right arm. Her torso is straight and her left shoulder angles back so as to better display her back, right shoulder, and extended right arm. Wambach stares steadily to the right in accordance with the direction of her body. Interestingly, the gold color of the ball emphasizes the golden hue of light that tints the entire image. The light shines from the right directing the audience's stare to Wambach's face, then her impressive muscular shoulder and thigh and down to the soccer ball. Wambach's backside is cast in shadow creating a contrast that further highlights her muscles. Additionally, Figure 21, placed directly alongside Image 20, displays Wambach from the side as she kicks a soccer ball, which is not featured in the image. Here, Wambach's right arm crosses over her breasts and torso while her left arm extends out and back. Her left leg fully extends with her toes

barely on the ground while her right leg also extends out to run parallel to the ground. Wambach is shot from a distance so the audience can view her entire body captured in motion.



Figure 22 Soccer Player Sydney Leroux, 2013 Issue Spread

Sydney Leroux, impressively featured in-action in Figure 21, poses horizontally in the air as her body rotates—her arms twist across the left of her torso covering her breasts—and her right leg bends at a ninety degree angle to her body while her left leg bends at the knee as if she is about to kick it forward. Portrayed against a black background, Leroux is backlit so the white outline of her body stands out against the black. This lighting and color scheme causes the audience to stare primarily at Leroux’s pose and the outline of her body rather than one specific area of her body.



Figure 23 Soccer Play Megan Rapinoe, 2014 Issue Spread

Figure 23 features Megan Rapinoe lying on her back with her legs flexed straight up so they make a ninety degree angle with her torso, and she balances a blue soccer ball on the bottoms of her feet. Her arms also angle up, stopping just below her knees, and the angle allows her to shield her breasts from view. Rapinoe is shot from the side so that the audience views her profile in this pose. Rapinoe is cast against a black background which blurs the line of her back so she almost appears to be floating. This effect and the lighting, which

shines in from the left to emphasize the ball, her legs, and face, direct the audience's stare to her face and the ball.



Figure 24 Soccer Player Ali Krieger, 2015 Issue Spread

Ali Krieger poses standing and leaning over to grip a gold soccer ball against her bent, right knee in Figure 24. She faces right (from the audience's perspective) and stares intently out and to the right of the audience. It appears to be raining and Krieger's hair hangs loose and wet around her face and shoulders. The light shines directly on her profile so that her face and the rigid muscles of her torso are highlighted against the dark background.

Analysis of the Visual and Textual Representations of the Basketball, Tennis, and Soccer Athletes

The nature of the way the Body Issues are put together raise complicated issues about agency because there are multiple photographers, design editors, writers, etc. who influence the creation of issue. To address this issue, I posit: where is agency happening why I you look at these images? Certainly, it takes a whole team of individuals to put the issues together, but viewers' focus goes to the athletes and their interviews. To that end, the interviews have a significant role in the magazine because it is a space where the athletes directly insert themselves and guide the viewer's perception of their body. In addition, many of the images of the female athletes in this study can be interpreted according to the marginalizing discourses of race, gender, and sexuality, feminist sports scholars' arguments that position athletes' sexualized performances as restrictive and/or as resisting these dominant narratives. I've organized and approach this section of my analysis thematically in order to account for the intersecting subject positions richly depicted in these images. From a theoretical perspective of intersectionality, according to Patricia Hill Collins, race, gender, sexuality, ability, age, etc. are intersecting, rather than competing, components that constitute one's identity, and as such, they are aspects of "mutually constructing systems of power" (10-11).⁸⁴ Similar to Collins, I see these multiple identity frameworks converging and informing one another, and therefore I often talk about these elements in tandem even though I've structured my analysis according to separate identity characteristics. Also, while discussing the athletes' subject position in each section, I may focus my analysis on one specific aspect of their identity, but undergirding this focus is the assumption

⁸⁴ While I use Collin's intersectional approach, I want to note that her conceptualization of intersectionality is based on the work of critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw who coined the term intersectionality in order to effectively theorize "problems within the legal system that occurred when individuals faced both racial and gender discrimination" (Shellenberger 88).

that a person's multiple subjectivities operate together. This assumption also serves to forward my efforts to feature athletes' entire selfhoods in the larger project of this dissertation.

Raced and Sexualized Bodies

In her theorization of intersectionality, Collins asserts that race and gender are inseparable and for black women in particular, "the relationship between gender and race is intensified, producing a Black gender ideology that shapes ideas about Black masculinity and Black femininity" (6). Many of the images of female athletes of color in the Body Issues, then, complicatedly feature both race and gender performances. For example, in Figure 10, the combination of Williams's smile, laughing stare, and the way she angles her right shoulder towards the camera beckons to the audience in an almost flirty manner. Then in Figure 11, Williams's pose mimics that of swimsuit models as she stands fully facing the camera, legs spread, breasts pushed up and out, and her thumb hooked in the waistband of her bikini bottoms so that they are slightly pulled down. The visual representations of her body certainly sexualize Williams. According to Schultz, in the context of tennis, "'where traditional femininity is publicly valued above strength in female athletes,' there is little 'natural about female athleticism and muscularity,' and as a result, Williams must negotiate overlapping racialized and gendered stereotypes" (Schultz 348 qtd. in Shellenberger 172). In addition to these two poses, there is an interview with her physiotherapist, Ester Lee. Lee explains that "Serena is blessed with a solid, hourglass athletic build with muscle mass. It suits her game" (55). Lee uses her description of Williams's body as evidence to support her claim that Williams's body type is what makes her playing style successful. Lee's description of Williams, such as her "solid" build and "muscle mass," seem to echo what sport historians Patricia Vertinsky and Gwendolyn Captain explain as the marginalizing discourses about black athletes that associate their muscularity with

masculinity. They trace these associations back to “the linking of African American women’s work history as slaves, their supposedly ‘natural’ brute strength and endurance inherited from their African origins, and the notion that vigorous or competitive sport masculinized women physically and sexually” (541). Possibly, to work within and against the white, male-dominated tennis world, Williams rhetorically use the visual representations of their body in the *Body Issues* to construct bodily appearances that direct the audience’s attention away from her race, and redirect their focus to her feminine, womanly ethos. This maneuvering enables Williams to survive and succeed as a tennis athlete.

Likewise the image of Fowles (Figure 3) is one of the most problematic representations of an athlete in this case study. Unlike the other athletes whose background is an inside setting, Fowles is featured outside in the desert; posed in plank position against this specific background conjures up an animalistic image.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, there is a long history of characterizing black athletes as animal such as track star Wilma Rudolph who was dubbed “the black gazelle” and boxer Joe Lewis who was labeled the “creature from the jungle” (Schultz 354). However, there is an alternative interpretation of this image when analyzed according to the theoretical framework presented earlier in this chapter. Interpreted through the lens of reverse discourse, Fowles rhetorically poses in a way that maintains a marginalizing race discourse *and* gains visibility for herself and her sport. Fowles plays into this discourse to feature her body, and while the visual

⁸⁵ When initially examining this image of Fowles, I thought the layout of her body and the evidence of her strength countered on her body as it was contrasted against the stark background of the desert was impressive. However, something about the image nagged at me and I sensed there was a problematic element about the way this athlete was framed in the photograph. Upon sharing my work with a colleague for revision, it was pointed out to me that Fowles evokes a famous cultural image from the Disney movie, *The Lion King*. At the beginning and end of the film, the king lion walks out onto a rocky ledge, stretches out, and stares over the land; during this scene the audience views his profile against the stark, animated backdrop of the African desert. Viewed side by side the image of the lion king and the image of Fowles are shocking similar. To be sure, there is a horrible, long history of associating black men and women to animals and of especially using animalistic type language to describe black athletes (Vertinsky and Captain 541 qtd in Shultz 347; see also Cahn, 127). Please refer back to chapter two and my discussion of racial discourse in sports for more on this matter.

representation carries racialized undertones, it also presents a woman strategically using this type of representation to gain visibility and demonstrate her pride in her body. For example, Fowles's interview specifically highlights her legs: "You'll think I'm cocky, but I'm totally infatuated with my legs now. They are just big, healthy, and toned" (69). Her comments direct the audience to stare at and even ogle her legs in an appreciative manner. As a rhetorical act, then, her pose embodies "different and even contradictory discourses" (Foucault 100). That is, this image offers both a marginalizing race discourse as well as discourses of subversion and empowerment. Furthermore, Fowles's pose "capitalizes on racialized and gendered expectations about acceptable behavior in order to raise awareness [for the audience] about issues of systematic racism" (Shellenberger 144). Analyzed alongside her interview where she claims that basketball helped her to love her body (69), the visual representation of Fowles rhetorically works, via the process of disidentification, to "scramble and reconstruct" a marginalizing race discourse "...in a fashion that both exposes the [discourse's] universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications" (31). Simultaneously, she "recircuits" this discourse on black womanhood and athleticism to present the black female body as beautiful and athletic.

Like Fowles, Parker's pose (Figure 4) rhetorically functions to work within and against male-dominated systems of power in regards to race and gender and calls attention to the way athletes' evoke their identities as mothers to reinforce their identity as heterosexual, feminine women. Parker's pose can be read as specifically sexualizing her with its gold, stage like background and "The End" written on the basketball covering her buttocks. The background connotes sexualization insofar that it places on a stage as if she is a spectacle; furthermore, the spotlight on her body and gold color of the stage evoke an image of an exotic stage—exotic in

terms of both the erotic and race. The words “The End,” because they draw the audience’s attention to her buttocks, can also be interpreted as reinforcing this sexualization of her and her body.⁸⁶ Additionally, women’s basketball, historically, has been influenced by homophobic and/or masculinizing discourses; thus, Parker’s decision to call forth her role as a mother and highlight her now transformed, postpartum body function as rhetorical acts of disidentification. That is, she performs according to a heteronormative script by emphasizing her motherhood and femininity to disidentify with homophobic and/or masculinizing discourses.⁸⁷ Motherhood and femininity evoke a certain level of heterosexuality because, biologically, women need men in order to produce offspring. Disidentification, in this case, is “descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere” (Muñoz 4). Parker’s pose and her interview certainly seem to maintain a marginalizing script that hetero/sexualizes female athletes, but they are also rhetorical acts employed to survive and negotiate marginalizing cultural scripts of homophobia and/or masculinization that can restrict her success in the sporting world.

Similar to Parker, Swin Cash’s pose (Figure 5) and interview suggest that she wants the audience to see more than her identity as an athlete. For example, her pose, which displays her sitting down on the ground, straightened hair flowing around her while she stares invitingly out at the audience, emphasizes her sexuality and femininity. According to sports sociologists James McKay and Helen Johnson, “African American women struggle to articulate a positive and sustaining discourse of black female beauty that enhances their agency and subjectivity” (493). In this sense, the visual representation of Cash epitomizes the sexualized performances feminist

⁸⁶ However, given Parker’s clearly fit form in Figure 4, it is plausible that “The End” refers to the work she did to get her body back into shape in order to compete professionally. Additionally, since “The End” often comes at the conclusion of a narrative, it can also function as a resounding exclamation point to her work ethic.

⁸⁷ See Hanna Rosin’s “Slam Dunks and Nail Polish” for more on this topic.

sports scholars advocate against. However, I suggest that her pose and interview, as rhetorical acts, qualifies themselves by using sexuality and femininity, forms of marginalizing discourse used by a male-dominated society, in order to exert agency. For example, female athletes' hair, especially athletes of color, often times signal its own meaning. Tracey Owens Patton explains that the way athletes use their hair can be performative and "for African American women in particular, hairstyling becomes part of a performance of hegemonically defined beauty as well as 'a way for the marginalized to attempt to become centered in a world of beauty that tends not to value African American forms of beauty'" (Patton 123 qtd in Shellenberger 149). Cash's long, straight, blown out hair signifies a beauty style often seen in fashion magazines that reinforce traditional norms of white femininity and bodily appeal.⁸⁸ Moreover, Cash stresses in her interview that her body has enabled her to "have a career to provide for [herself] and [her] family and so [she] take[s] care of it as such" (96). While her athletic body enables her to have a professional career, her presentation of her body enables her to subvert marginalizing racial discourses that masculinize black women by playing into discourses of femininity and sexualization. Implicit within her interview then is that her body provides for her livelihood via her athleticism and her feminine, sex appeal; that is, she rhetorically uses her bodily appearance to accommodate cultural expectations about femininity which can ideally enable her to gain more visibility and thereby gain more financial security.

Lastly, Sydney Leroux (Figure 22) and Megan Rapinoe (Figure 23) also address the multiple subjectivities, specifically race and sexuality, of female athletes. Leroux discloses her experience as a racial minority in school: "I think it's a big deal to be an athlete and feel

⁸⁸ Easily, there could be a whole article on the politics of athlete's hair; for more theorization of the politics of hair, see Cheryl Thompson's article "Black Women and Identity: What's Hair Got to Do With It?"

confident in your body and show it off. I wasn't confident in high school. I was at a school where there weren't any people of my ethnicity. Everyone was blond and skinny, and I was different. It made me want to be something I wasn't" (84); Rapinoe reflects on her motivations for coming out to her family, friends, and fans about her sexuality: "It's awkward when everyone knows you're gay but you don't say it. Everyone in my life already knew. If you want to stand up for equal rights but won't even stand up for yourself—it just started to feel weird" (50). Leroux's and Rapinoe's interviews illustrate common experiences many minority female athletes endure. Leroux felt physically out of place as a half-black half-white girl with dark skin, curves, and black hair; and, Rapinoe, most likely, evaded speaking about her sexuality because of how LGBTQ athletes were and are often ostracized. Leroux's desire to "be something [she] wasn't" and Rapinoe's silence about her sexuality are rhetorical acts of disidentification; that is they employed "survival strategies...in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship" (Muñoz 4). Both athletes explicitly discuss their past rhetorical performances to expose the marginalizing rhetorics circulating in women's sports—and the general public. Their narrative reflections and current claims about their comfort with their subject position as minority women demonstrate how female athletes traverse between the polar ends of dis/identification and reverse the discourse of a male-dominated society to account for their multiple subjectivities and exert rhetorical agency. In addition, their poses accentuate their ethos as sportswomen: Leroux is captured in motion as she twists through the air as if to kick a soccer ball, and Rapinoe easily stretches her legs up to balance a soccer ball on her feet. Paired with their interviews, the visual representations of their bodies resist dividing their selfhood and dually presents their athletic, raced, and sexual identities.

“Non-Normative,” Gendered, Sexualized, Feminine Bodies

Brittney Griner three poses and interview uniquely diverge from the visual and textual representations of Fowles, Parker, Cash, and McCoughtry. Figures 7-9, paired with her lengthy interview, they provide a three hundred and sixty degree view of Griner’s entire body and selfhood. In her interview she explains, “I’m comfortable in my body and I don’t mind putting it on display...I like how unique it is...If everybody was the same, it’d be a boring-ass world...I’ve heard, ‘Oh, she’s not a female, she’s a male...she’s tucking stuff...I mean [in the Body Issues] it’s out there...I was told to pick one [gender role] I wanted to be—masculine or feminine. I want to be both because that’s who I am” (110). Griner’s statements and the images of her body work in tandem to highlight her acceptance of and advocacy for her body and gender identity. Griner rhetorically presents the images of her body as evidence of her biological gender identity. She strategically poses so as to conceal her chest from view and in doing so, she signals to the audience that she’s hiding her breasts, the evidence of her womanhood. To undergird this rhetorical act, she uses her interview to strictly frame how she wants the audience to interpret the visual representations of her body.

In addition to claiming her biological identity as a woman, Griner also pushes the boundaries of the visual and cultural landscapes of bodies and gender. Fundamentally, the visual representations of Griner and her statements work together as rhetorical acts of disidentification—where she disidentifies with traditional notions of gender and gendered bodies—that “crack open the code of the majority” and use “this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture” (Muñoz 31). She is six feet and eight inches tall, flat chested, and has a deep speaking voice. Based on these features, her body—as she notes in her interview—has often

been read as male, because men, biologically, are more likely to be (extremely) tall, flat chested, and have deep voices. Therefore her positionality as a black, female, lesbian athlete that is embodied in a masculine corporeal form, “has been rendered unthinkable,” abnormal, and disempowered because it violates our male-dominated society’s social constructions of gender. However, by establishing her female ethos via the visual evidence of her body, Griner deconstructs cultural assumptions about how gendered bodies look and act. To that end, she proclaims, “I like how unique [my body] is...If everybody was the same, it’d be a boring-ass world” (110). Furthermore, her claim that she is both masculine and feminine, bolsters the rhetoric put forth by the visual representations of her body—that gender and sexuality are fluid, multifaceted identities that all bodies can assume. In this way, the images of and text about Griner “expose” and “scramble” the “exclusionary machinations” of the marginalizing discourses in women’s sports and reconstruct “to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications” (Muñoz 31). To be sure, the visual and textual representations of Griner and of the other basketball athletes discussed in this section showcase the rich, multifunctional rhetorical activity sportswomen engage in to exert agency and lay claim to their multiple subjectivities as they work within and against the male-dominated culture of sports.

Similar to Griner, the images Wambach as well as their interviews also rhetorically function to advance a counter-discourse about female athletes’ bodily appearances, womanhood, and athleticism. Wambach’s image specifically validates the variation of women’s body types and sizes. The visual representations of Wambach feature her muscularity (Figure 20) and her athletically performing body (Figure 21). Working in tandem with the images of her body, she asserts, “Female athletes are getting very, very thin, but I’m a bigger woman—I have bigger muscles, and that’s okay. For me, muscles give me more power and speed, and I need that” (93).

Wambach also stresses that the larger size of her frame and muscles enables her to athletically compete at a professional level and imbues her body with power. Additionally, Wambach's words augment the emphasis placed on her body in the images—her shape, size, and impressive muscles. By drawing a comparison between her body and other athletes, Wambach's interview highlights the vast visual landscape of women's bodies and valorizes bigger and/or more muscled female bodies. The images of Wambach and her interview work rhetorically to create a counter-discourse to the marginalizing rhetoric about femininity, which purports that women's bodily appearances are more feminine, appealing, and acceptable if they are physically thin, that influences women and professional athletes alike. Much like the images of Brittney Griner, which pushed the boundaries of the visual and cultural landscapes of bodies, the images of her body and interview work rhetorically to subvert marginalizing discourse in women's sports, and expand the type of female bodies the audience expects to see in the sporting world.

Femininely Sexualized Bodies

Many female athletes enact the bodily performances made available to them—femininity, sexualized femininity, and heterosexuality—by a male-dominant culture in order to participate in athletics and/or to survive in the sporting world and general society. For example, Zvonareva (Image 12), lounges back on a bench in the shade, Hantuchova (Figure 13), passively poses sitting down and smiles invitingly at the audience, and Radwanska's (Figure 14) pose suggests that the camera captured her right as she sat up from lounging topless next to a pool. According to Delia Douglas, “the institutional and cultural practices of tennis have historically promoted images of a racialized femininity constitutive of a middle-class standard of white heterosexual womanhood embodied in the likes of Chris Evert, Anna Kournikova, and most recently, Maria

Sharapova” (275). To that end, the visual representations of Zvonareva, Hantuchova and Radwanska highlight their white femininity via the passivity of their lounging bodies, invitational stares and easy smiles. Moreover, the cool shade in Zvonareva’s image, the crisp white background in Hantuchova’s image, and the pool side patio in Radwanska’s image depict leisure lifestyles that speak to white, middle to upper class status. Interestingly, these athletes’ interviews depart from talking about their subject positions as women and instead focus on the realities of being a professional athlete—such as dealing with injuries, health, an aging body, and knowing how to train their bodies so they can successfully compete—which, I suggest, works to reinforce their agency as athletes; that is, the texts presents to the audience the common issues, as embodied evidence of their athleticism, athletes face during their professional career. For example, Zvonareva stresses how “Injuries are a major challenge....But overcoming is part of the job” (92); Hantuchova describes how she has to train differently as her body ages (76); and Radwanska’s explain how she “places more emphasis on finesse” when she plays because it suits her smaller body frame (86). These statements highlight key issues athletes—both male and female—deal with throughout their careers. Injury, health, age, and training are significant components of professional athletes, and as such, the presence of these elements in these athletes’ interviews emphasize their professional, athletic ethos.

While these images seemingly maintain a marginalizing discourse where mediated visual representations emphasize female athletes’ sexual and/or feminine appeal, these athletes, I submit, strategically and purposely pose—and use their interviews—in this manner and use their sexuality and femininity as sources of rhetorical power. Viewed through the lens of reverse discourse, these poses feature athletes employing their sexual appeal as a rhetorical strategy. In this sense, the sexualization of their bodies, while appearing to diminish the intrinsic value of

these athletes and women's sports, enables them to gain visibility for themselves and their sport. As Foucault argues, contradictory discourses—e.g. sexualization as a form of marginalization versus sexualization as a form of rhetorical agency—function within the same strategy—in this case emphasized sexuality and femininity—and they can “circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy” (101-02). Sexuality and femininity, then, as rhetorical strategies, can create a counter-discourse to the assumption that the sexualization of female athletes minimizes the value of women's sports and their value as sportswomen. Indeed, this counter-discourse posits that female athletes' performances of sexuality and femininity have rhetorical power that cultivates agency. Constructed through their interviews, their professional ethos acts in tandem with the counter-discourse emitted by the visual representations of their bodies to augment their efforts to exert agency in the sporting world.

Furthermore, similar to the images of and interviews presented in this section, the visual and textual representations of Hope Solo and Natasha Kai demonstrate how sportswomen engage in rhetorical activity that showcase their athleticism and femininity and rearticulate the female athletic body as beautiful and appealing. According to Heywood and Dworkin, post-Title IX female athletes—which includes all of the female athletes presented in this study—

have come to redeem the erasure of individual women that the old Playboy model of sexualization performed, rewriting the symbology of the female body from empty signifiers of ready heterosexual access, blank canvases, or holes on which to write one's heteronormative desires, to the active, self-present sexuality of a body that signifies achievement and power and is in that sense “masculinized” or “queered” if you follow the traditional equation of masculinity with power and heteronormativity. (82-83)

Framed against the post Title IX backdrop, the images of Solo and Kai seem to achieve this effect Heywood and Dworkin describe. The first image of Solo (Figure 18), impressively displays her athletic physique while the second image (Figure 19), which features her watering

the lawn, seems out of place given the context of the Body Issues and the magazine's epideictic mission. However, its oddity does move the audience to thoroughly read Solo's interview in the hope of finding some context to explain the image which addresses her tall form, athletic skills, and sex appeal: "I couldn't have been a great goalkeeper without power, agility, and quickness....I still don't buy the idea I'm a sex symbol...my entire purpose is to do my best, and if that exudes beauty too, that's pretty powerful" (67). Solo's comments suggest that her body, including its larger size, enables her to be successful as an athlete and encourages the audience to value her corporeal form as embodying athleticism and beauty. Strategically, her interview calls forth past audiences' identification of her as a sex icon in order to accommodate traditional discourses of femininity, and Solo simultaneously disidentifies with this male-dominated notion of sex appeal to rhetorically maneuver to create a counter-discourse that purports that female athletic ability is what exudes beauty and power and petition the audience to consider that this combination is what makes her bodily appearance visually appealing.

Likewise, in Figures 16 and 17, Natasha Kai poses standing up and stationary and the emphasis of both images seems to be on the extensive tattoos on her body. While the focus on her tattoos also seem odd in the context of the magazine's epideictic mission, her inked body invites the audience to stare at the complexity of her tattoos, and in doing so, they also carefully stare at the athletic contours of her corporeal form. Kai's visually evident muscle tone and carefully sculpted body are the evidence of her athletic ethos while her tattoos highlight her multiple subjectivities that extend beyond her athletic identity; the visual emphasis on her tattoo subtly displays Kai's selfhood—e.g. her tribal tattoos showcase her connection to her ethnic heritage. Additionally, the interview with Kai's tattoo artist, Kat Von D., pinpoints a significant tension between women's bodies, femininity, and athleticism: "I've seen a lot of women

criticized for being this fit, as if that somehow took away from their femininity. But Natasha's body kicks ass because she works incredibly hard at it...she's a work of art...the ultimate expression of the confident woman" (62). Even as Von D. acknowledges this tension, she raises Kai's body up as an ideal woman's body. Her comments and the images of Kai rhetorically work to bridge Kai's multiple subject positions, specifically a cultural sense of her womanhood, ethnicity, and Kai's athleticism. Not only does this combination resist feminist sports scholars' arguments that position athletes' sexualized performances as restrictive, it also combats the marginalizing discourses circulating in women's sports and cultivates a counter-discourse about womanhood and athleticism—and what it looks like for women to embody these identities—for the audience. As Heywood and Dworkin explain, when the body is specifically coded as athletic, it can “redeem female sexuality and make it visible as an assertion of female presence, and make that presence amenable to a range of sexualities” (82-83). In this interpretation, the visual and textual representations of Solo and Kai, while sexualizing and even positioning their bodies as odd, is an ultimate statement of female presence, and certainly represent athletic bodies.

Athletic Bodies

Whereas poses and interview statements like Fowles's, Parker's, and Cash's address their multiple subjectivities and rhetorically play with marginalizing discourses, poses and interview statements such as Angel McCoughtry's work to advance the concept of an athlete as being inclusive of women. Featured in Figure 6, McCoughtry impressively jumps up to the basketball hoop and her text segment quotes her claiming “I can get over 10 feet. The crazy thing is, I know I can get even higher” (64). The pose and text emphasize McCoughtry's athletic ethos through

the evidence of her jumping capacity, enabling her to claim agency as an athlete and evolve the concept of an athlete so that it moves beyond a traditional gender dichotomy. Similarly, Wambach's stationary pose (Figure 20) and the gold tone of the photograph evokes the image of a bronzed statue, not unlike the ancient Greek and Roman athletes who were memorialized via sculptures and paintings. The act of memorializing athletes—which we still do today via hall of fames, museums, and award ceremonies—not only creates a permanent celebration of the athlete but it also cements that person as an athlete in the sporting public's conscious. While Wambach is obviously not a bronze statue, the effect of making her appear like a statue suggests that her body is one worth memorializing in the sporting world. Additionally, Ali Krieger's image (Figure 24) and interview highlight one of these essential elements of any elite athlete—competitiveness: “I have to win, even if I'm just playing ping pong. It's that way with a lot of people at this level; we are all super competitive” (102). Like her interview, Krieger's pose captures her intensity via the force of her concentrated gaze and through the chiseled shape of her muscles. To that end, I submit that all three of these images and interviews specifically emphasize these athletes' muscles and athleticism to demonstrate how sports and training shape and create athletes' physical bodies; in other words, their physical shape rhetorically functions as the visual evidence of their athletic identity, which in turn forwards an ideal of the athlete that encompasses women.⁸⁹

The amalgam of the visual attention paid to their athleticism and their narrative claims about their identity are rhetorical acts that enable them to use the Body Issues to offer an alternative narrative to the audience that values and includes female athletes' varied experiences

⁸⁹ Lorin Shellenberger's dissertation, *Training Bodies: Performances of Ethos in 21st Century Sportswomen*, specifically address how athletic training shapes the body and how it also influences athletes' “ability to shape and invent their ethos” (4).

and multiple subjectivities. Ultimately, the female athletes visually and textually represented in the Body Issues rhetorically use their bodily appearances, pose types, and interviews in order to survive and/or to gain visibility, economic security, public recognition, and the power to speak and circulate in the sporting world and general society. Their collective rhetorical activity demonstrates how athletes use the Body Issues as a vehicle to work within and against the male-dominated sporting world and propel themselves, their sport, and the larger organization of women's sport into positions of power.

The Audience's Staring Encounter and ESPN's Epideictic Mission

The athletes' rhetorical effectiveness in the Body Issue and the success of the magazine's epideictic mission rests in the audience's reception of the athletes' and the magazine's rhetoric. As noted throughout my descriptions of the visual representations, the majority of the athletes in this case study stare out at the audience. According to principles of visual rhetoric, "when represented participants [the athletes] look at the viewer, vectors, formed by participants' eyelines, connect the participants with the viewer" (Kress and van Leeuwen 117). Thus, the audience is directed to enter into a staring exchange with the posed athlete, staring first and foremost at their face, and "this visual configuration...creates a visual form of direct address. It acknowledges the viewer explicitly, addressing them with a visual 'you'" (117). Also, the producer, *ESPN*, and the female athlete "use the image to do something to the viewer...the participant's gaze...demands something from the viewer, demands that the viewer enter into some kind of imaginary relation to him or her." (118). Rosemarie Garland-Thomson defines this imaginary relation as a staring exchange, and "accomplished starees [or female athletes in this case] often develop a repertoire of strategies they use to choreograph staring encounters" (7).

The images in the Body Issues are “static,” “deliberately staged” self-presentations of female athletes (86), and because they are static, they allow the audience to consider how female athletes, the starees, can use comportment, expression, and even costuming to stare back” (86). In other words, these athletes use their facial expression, pose, costuming—nudity in this case—as rhetorical acts to engage in a visual encounter with the audience that creates meaning. For example, the athletes who smile out at the audience, Parker (Image 4), Williams (Image 10), Hantuchova (Figure 13), Radwanska (Figure 14), and Kai (Figure 17), ask the audience “to enter into a relation of social affinity with them” (Kress and van Leeuwen 118). Female athletes, such as Taurasi (Figures 1-2), Cash (Figure 5), and Williams (Figure 11), who stare seductively out at the audience “ask the audience to desire them” or to desire what their bodies represent (Kress and van Leeuwen 118). Similarly, the athletes who do not stare out at the audience, such as McCoughtry and Griner, direct the audience to stare primarily at their bodies in athletic motion. As discussed in the previous section, many athletes use their pose and interviews to guide the audience to stare at and interpret them in ways that subvert the marginalizing discourse circulating in women’s sports. Athletes rhetorically construct these relational effects with the audience, I submit, in order to advance their visibility, secure endorsements, survive oppressive discourses, etc.

Furthermore, at the crux of the ways of staring that Garland-Thomson enumerates, “is the matter of appearance, of the ways we see each other and the ways we are seen. It unsettles common understandings that staring is rudeness, voyeurism, or surveillance or that starers are perpetrators and starees victims. Instead, this vivisection lays bare staring’s generative potential” (9).⁹⁰ To this end she explains, “When people with stareable bodies...enter into the public

⁹⁰ Garland-Thomson explains that there are several different ways stares engage in looking which she terms the blank stare, the “baroque stare, the separated stare, the engaged stare, the stimulus-driven stare, the goal-driven

eye...the visual landscape enlarges. Their public presence can expand the range of the bodies we expect to see and broaden the terrain where we expect to see such bodies” (8). Female athletes such as Brittney Griner, Serena Williams, or Abbey Wambach, therefore, with their considerable height, skill, and muscles have stareable bodies, and by posing in the Body Issues they enter into an encounter with the audience where they encourage them to stare and consider that their bodies—and bodies like theirs—have significant worth and power. These visual representations are strategic staring encounters that “teach [the] audience a new way to look” at the female athletes and their bodies, which enable the audience to “recognize [female athletes’] full humanity, to stare without stigmatizing” (Garland-Thomson 191). A staring exchange thus rhetorically functions to collapse divisions between the athletes’ multiple subjectivities and asks the audience to consider the entire selfhood of these athletes. However, to say that the visual representations of female athletes in the Body Issues and the audience’s reactions to these images do not stigmatize the athletes in marginalizing ways ignores the larger historical, socio-political discourses that influence the sporting world. That said, I suggest that while there may be stigmatizing images and acts of staring, these images and acts can also be productive because looking at “stare-able people challenges our assumptions by interrupting complacent visual business-as-usual. Staring offers an occasion to rethink the status quo” (5). Staring’s generative potential, then, arises out of “these encounters [that] work to broaden collective expectations of who can and should be seen in the public sphere and help create a richer and more diverse human community” (8). Indeed, many of the athletes use their images to persuade the audience to value and socially accept the bodies visually represented in the magazine. The audience’s staring encounter with the visual representations of the athletes suggest that these images, while

stare, and the dominating stare” (9). For more discussion on these variations see her book *Staring, How We Look* (2009).

complicated and certainly vexed at times, have the potential to evolve cultural conceptions about female athletes' bodies and selfhoods.

In addition to the athletes' stares which invite the audience to gaze at and interpret the discourse contoured on and produced by their bodies, the epideictic mission of the magazine also encourages the audience to stare at these athletes as a form of celebration. While there are various interpretations of epideictic's function, contemporary rhetoricians are of the consensus that:

...epideictic possesses social power that can be realized when rhetors and audiences cooperatively create a vision that defines and celebrates the community's values but leaves open the possibility that those values can be creatively reinterpreted in response to new challenges....Epideictic, therefore, potentially works both to reinforce and to transform the community through creating a shared vision, even as it acknowledges the difference that ultimately creates the potential and the need for change. (Agnew 153)

As I noted throughout my analysis of the visual and textual representations of female athletes, there definitely are ways that the images seem to diminish and marginalize many of the athletes and many of the athletes work within these marginalizing discourses created by male-dominated power structures to survive and/or exert rhetorical agency. From the perspective of the epideictic, the rhetoric produced by *ESPN* suggests that the media conglomerate oscillates between reinforcing these discourses of marginalization and cultivating alternative discourse about female athletes and women's sports. On the one hand, the perpetuation of marginalization and the diminishment of female athletes as athletes and as women is highly problematic. As I explained in the previous chapter, the marketing of athletes is determined by the combination of "expertise and trustworthiness" and "similarity, familiarity, and liking" of the athlete (Simmers et. all 53). A female athlete, then, must have an established cultural ethos that appeals to target consumers in order to become a marketable commodity. However, the commercializing of female athletes is

disproportionate and discordant because the market has strong ties to racism and sexism, creating an uneven playing field for sportswomen. Thus, the economic and marketing structures that influence how the Body Issues are put together—and which athletes are selected to be featured in the issues—also have the tendency to marginalize female athletes, especially female athletes of color.⁹¹ Additionally, *ESPN* has a vast, diverse viewership—their circulation is currently fourteen million people—and the magazine would likely assume that maintaining such a readership would best be achieved through not deviating too far from certain cultural norms, which often marginalize female athletes. As a result, the large portion of their audience pays for *ESPN*, thereby supplying the company's, and subsequently the magazine's financial solvency and success. The magazine runs the risk of losing profits if they completely ignore the market and abolish this discourse that attracts their audience. In this way, the Body Issues reinforce a community with traditional, narrow gender roles and disempowered minority subjectivities.

On the other hand, however, I submit that the presence of these discourses has a multifunctional purpose and that the presence of this discourse also enables the magazine to subtly persuade the audience to “creatively reinterpret” these values to transform them into inclusive discourses about bodies and identities. Put simply, reinforcing discourses of marginalization while gradually introducing inclusive, empowering discourses about women's sports and female athletes' bodies enables the magazine to create a substantial space for the audience to rearticulate the values of the sporting world. For example, for the first time in the introduction of the 2015 Body Issue the magazine explains, “There are countless reasons athletes pose for the Body Issue: to display their dedication, to revel in their uniqueness, to exhibit form and function at its furthest limits. But to be in the Body Issue is also to be vulnerable—raw, laid

⁹¹ As I demonstrated in the quantitative section of this chapter, white female athletes are featured much more often than female athletes of color across all of the Body Issues.

bare, inviting us to see the very stuff of which they're made. They reveal as they reveal: Kevin Love opening up about being a pudgy kid, the Colt's O-linemen sharing stories about being so big they can't hide, Brittney Griner not just exposing her form but disclosing something darker, a body uncontrolled. Behold the Body Issue, where the nakedness is more than just skin-deep" (2015 Body Issue, 47). This introductory segment, couched in the magazine's epideictic mission, is a turn to not only call forth a public that admires athletic bodies in a traditional sense of spectatorship, but it is also a call to create a bridge between these common values and the unexpected, even odd qualities of female athletes' bodies and embodied identities. To that end, the magazine primarily features Brittney Griner, a black, lesbian, female athlete who identifies as both masculine and feminine, athlete as the focal point of this issue. The magazine's guiding theme, "The Bodies We Want," solicits the audience to want a raced, gay, fluidly gendered, visually ambiguous female body. In this sense, the magazine's epideictic rhetoric problematizes and ruptures traditional, normative public perceptions about "acceptable" bodies and subjectivities.

It is also important to keep in mind that the "We" in "Bodies We Want" constitutes a commercialized audience, where wanting doesn't only mean desiring or valuing these bodies, it also means spending money to consume—e.g. buying the magazine or a ticket to watch these athletes compete—these bodies and/or to pay to shape our own bodies to look like them. Thus, the magazine's economic and epideictic purposes conjoin as they sell and celebrate these athletes' and their bodies and as they encourage the audience to buy their magazine in order to participate in the celebration of these athletes. Moreover, ESPN's epideictic rhetoric subsumes its economic goal and includes the commodifying and consuming of female athletes in the public values of sports. In this way, the magazine not only commercializes female athletes' multiple

subjectivities and commodifies their bodies, it also commercializes resistance to the exclusion of non-normative female bodies and subject positions. Ultimately, the 2015 issue's textual introduction invites the audience to work with the magazine and the athletes to (re)interpret their values about bodies, athletics, and public identity. This text fundamentally acknowledges that athletes present and address their multiple subjectivities through their poses and their interviews. Language such as "they reveal as they reveal" and "nakedness is more than just skin-deep" emphasize the embodied nature of subjectivities and invites the audience to acknowledge the identities contoured on and within athletes' corporeal forms. Moreover, the invitation to stare asks the audience to see themselves represented in these bodies just as it asks us to consider how they differ so as to reinterpret and create new common values about athletics, female athletes' bodies, and bodies in general. The epideictic rhetoric put forth by the Body Issues, the female athletes' exertion of agency through the visual and textual representations of their bodies, and the rhetorical staring encounter between the athletes and audience foster a relationship where together they (the magazine, the athletes, and the audience) can "transform the community...even as it acknowledges the difference that ultimately creates the potential and the need for change" (Agnew 153).

Chapter 5

ESPN's Commercialized Rhetoric: Reinforcing and Rupturing Oppressive Discourses in Women's Sports

Often, I have watched professional men's championship sports games, such as the Super Bowl, and I have laughed and cheered the male players on as they run into the stands to find their female significant others and kiss and hug them as part of their celebration of their team's victory. I have routinely been able to witness these intimate moments because the media chooses to cover them, and in doing so, the media helps maintain for the public the celebration of love and the heteronormative family in correlation to athletic victories. For example, during the recent 2017 Super Bowl post-game award ceremony, the media focused on quarterback Tom Brady as his mother, wife, and children surrounded him in celebration of his fifth national championship win. Similarly, the media also focuses on these moments that simultaneously feature family values and honor athletes' victories in women's sports. In the 2016 Summer Olympics, for example, the media often cut between U.S. gymnast Aly Raisman and parents during her floor routines, due, in part, to "their extremely nervous reactions during their daughter's gymnastics competitions," which NBC, the media network broadcasting the Olympics, described as "an epic, hilarious and sweet freak out" (nbcolympics.com). While NBC circulated a story about their amusement with Raisman's parents' reactions to her gymnastic competition, this type of coverage also features traditional family structures—e.g. a husband and wife supporting each other as they watch their daughter perform and a father and mother supporting their daughter by watching her perform—and speaks to a larger pattern where the media maintains a celebratory connection between athletic triumphs and family values. Arguably, this larger pattern epideictically functions to uphold traditional American family values for athletes and the public,

and as spectators of these performances, the audience has come to expect these kinds of celebrations from professional athletes.

Additionally, the televised moments like the ones described above showcase heterosexual couples—that is, the athlete’s significant other is a member of the opposite sex and/or their parents are heterosexual—which suggests that heterosexual norms are also reinforced in these publicized, celebratory events. The proliferation of heterosexual values via sports media coverage is unsurprising given the history of homophobia in both women’s and men’s professional sports.⁹² Addressing this issue within the context of women’s professional basketball, Hanna Rosin notes that the WNBA “gets packaged as a wholesome family sport replete with all-American ladies.” Thus, it seems that media coverage predominantly highlights such celebratory moments when they are between heterosexual couples and traditional families.⁹³ However, directly after her team won the 2015 Women’s Soccer World Cup the U.S. team star forward, Abby Wambach, sprinted to the stadium’s edge and jumped into the crowd to kiss her wife, and the media surprisingly zoomed in on this moment instead of quickly panning away. Indeed, the media attended to this moment in the same fashion that it has historically covered heterosexual athletes’ celebrations with their families and loved ones. Situated within this heterosexual framework of “wholesome,” “all-American” values, the positive media coverage of this instance raises the questions, does this televised lesbian kiss commemorating the Women’s

⁹² Similar to women’s athletics, homophobia has a significant strong hold over professional men’s athletics. To date, only one male athlete, former NBA player Jason Collins, who was still professionally playing basketball at the time has publically announced his homosexual identity. For more on this topic and the issue of sexuality in men’s athletics see the Sports Illustrated article “Why Jason Collins is Coming Out Now” (2013) and Michael Messner’s *Power at Play: Sports and the Problem of Masculinity* (1995).

⁹³ To be sure, I cannot and am not arguing that the media only focuses on heterosexual couples, but rather I am suggesting that, based on the celebratory moments of myriad sporting events I have witnessed via the media, it seems that there is a tendency to only showcase heterosexual couples. While this may point to the marginalization or diminishment of non-heterosexual and/or untraditional values, this also may be in part because many professional athletes are not homosexual or they choose to not reveal their sexual identity.

2015 World Cup victory potentially expand these values to include female homosexuality and do moments such as this one offer insight to how women's sports have progressed, in some ways, in terms of the discourses of marginality discussed in this project?

Given that I was in the middle of my research for this project during the airing of the World Cup, I pondered the significance of Wambach's celebratory kiss with her wife. In light of the long, fraught history of women's sports, I found this to be an extraordinary moment that possibly speaks to the promising future of women's athletics in terms of valuing female athletes on and off the field performances of their multiple subjectivities.⁹⁴ I simultaneously kept in mind that this moment was shared between two white women who are married to one another; thus the impact of this kiss and the values it represents are tempered by the concern of whether or not this instance would have been televised if these women were not white and/or not married. Their whiteness as well as their marriage, a union which is historically connoted as heterosexual, are privileged, accepted social norms that lend acceptability to their act and thus extend acceptability to the media's coverage of a homosexual display in women's sport. While this incident possibly captures an impactful moment in women's sports that signifies how far women's athletics has come in the last fifty years, it also gestures to the larger issues that persist in women's sports, such as the oppressions of race, gender, and sexuality, which I've addressed in this project.

In addition to interrogating the raced, gendered, and sexual discourses informing women's sports, this project also points to issues, such as the inclusion of research on other intersectional identity positions, that need to be further developed in subsequent projects.

⁹⁴ I think moments such as these speak to a more inclusive trend in the larger sporting world as well. For example, The Ad Council partnered with the NFL extend their campaign "Love Has No Labels" to the professional sporting world. In January 2017, they filmed live at the NFL Pro Bowl and "put a twist on the traditional kiss cam by replacing it with an unbiased camera that features all forms of love –friendships, families and romantic relationships—across race, religion, gender, sexuality, ability, and age" (adcouncil.org). The role of kiss cams are certainly an interesting feature of American professional men's and women's sports and an intriguing area for future research.

Therefore, I'd like to briefly highlight some of these subject positions so as to look forward to important areas for future research. While researching the history of Title IX I learned that Title IX did much to champion equality for women's sports, but it did little to foster equality for female athletes of color, especially Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian female athletes.⁹⁵ Future research thus needs to examine the ways female athletes of color argued and advocated for inclusion in the sporting world, how these arguments overlap and diverge with white female athletes, and a rhetorical history of women's sports must recover and include these women and their experiences. Additionally, as I collected and quantitatively analyzed the visual representations of female athletes in the issues, it came to my attention that there are only four disabled athletes featured across the seven issues and they are all white females. Embodied and material rhetorics, such as Jay Dolmage's *Disability Rhetoric* and James C. Wilson and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson's edited collection *Embodied Rhetorics: Disability in Language and Culture*, advance the view that feminist rhetoricians should account for marginalized others, in this case, disabled persons and bodies. With the rise of disability studies and recent scholarship about disability in the field of rhetoric, disabilities and disabled, or differently abled, bodies have become significant sites of study in terms of developing both pedagogical practices and rhetorical theory. To that end, the study of disability with respect to female athletes can further develop research on the relationship between rhetoric, disabilities, and bodies as well as expand feminist rhetoricians' efforts to locate marginalized women and construct conceptualizations of rhetoric that are inclusive of minority women's rhetorical practices.

⁹⁵ For more discussion on the issue of race and the shortcomings of Title IX, see Welch Suggs "Title IX has done Little for Minority Female Athletes"; the National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education's "Title IX at 30: Report Card on Gender Equity"; Sarah K. Fields's chapter "Title IX and African American Female Athletes"; Meredith M. Bagley's article "Performing Social Class: The Case of Rutgers Basketball versus Don Imus"; Mary McDonald's chapter "The Whiteness of Sport Media Scholarship"; and Michael Lomax's monograph, *Sport and the Racial Divide: African American and Latino Experiences in an Era of Change*.

Moreover, while Patricia Hill Collins's theoretical development of intersectionality, a concept originally conceived by Kimberle Crenshaw, focuses on the multiple subject positions of race, class, and gender as interlocking frameworks of power, intersectionality can also include disability as a subject position influencing these systems of power. Put simply, disability is another subject position intersecting with race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, nationality, etc. As such, studies of disabled female athletes can not only advance projects like the one presented here, but they can also forward feminist rhetorical studies of embodiment and materiality. Furthermore, as a minority identity, disabled athletes are rarely accounted for in histories of women's sport. Thus, future research needs to locate the experiences of disabled female athletes, their fight and arguments for inclusion and participation in a rhetorical history of women's sports.

Additionally, while this dissertation largely functions to demonstrate the rhetorical power embedded in the visual representation of female athletes' bodies and how they rhetorically use their bodily appearance to negotiate the male-dominated power structures within the sporting world, it also points to the way language and discourses of power significantly influence women's sports and female athletes. For example, a large portion of the examples used to illustrate the tension between female athletes' rhetorical acts and the systematic power structures are textual, grounded in language and discourse. Future research can more fully examine and understand the way the language of sports rhetorically functions as well as interrogating the language specific to women's sports. For example, feminist rhetorical analysis can further illuminate how the language and textual media coverage discussed in this study do much to disseminate a marginalizing rhetoric about female athletes and their gender, race, and sexuality, and such analysis may also locate the kinds of discursive practices female athletes use in order to

rhetorically work with, around, and/or against the language of sports. To that end, sports and linguistic scholars Jeffrey O. Segrave, Katherine L. McDowell, and James G. King III present a brief article calling for the rhetorical study of the language of sports, and they provide a categorization of language as an initial starting point for such research: “the marginalization of women’s sport is accomplished through a variety of discursive tactics” which they classify as “the aesthetics of women’s sport, the adolescent ideal, the male norm, the linguistic framing of difference, and descriptive and narrative ambivalence” (33). An example of these discursive tactics Segrave et al. explain is the “linguistic idealizations of beauty,” such as *Sports Illustrated*’s swimsuit issues, which “erects a monolithic conception of heterosexual femininity” (34). Similarly, linguistic acts of othering, such as the descriptive language used to compare Serena Williams to her white competitors, proliferates the concept of a “marginalized other” to negate female athletes, especially if those athletes embody minority subject position(s).

Additionally, the “metaphorical language of sport”—e.g. *you play ball like a girl*, *locker room talk*, or metaphors of violence, sex, and the machine—also “encourages the subordination and exclusion of women” as well as constructing gender difference as a gender hierarchy (35-36). These scholars call attention to the language of sport because it is representative of how “words...mold our cultural ideas and assumptions and give value and structure to the world in which we live,” and because the discursive tactics within this language maintain a white, heterosexual, male-dominated society (38). While these categorizations offer a launching point for research into the language of sports, they only scratch the surface of the “complex set of formal and informal practices of encoding issues of gender, physicality, power, labor, and ideology” in the sporting world. For example, their article does not address the way the language of sport interacts with issues of race, class, and disability, which are significant subject positions

informing the sports community (38). Thus, it is vital to study and expose the social power embedded in the language of sport, particularly women's sports, because "the social semiotic of the language of sport affirms and perpetuates discriminatory gender relations"—to which I would add race and sexual relations—and is, therefore worthy of our continued critical scrutiny and analysis (38).

In addition to indicating minority female athletes' experiences and the language of sports as important sites for future research projects, I also want to stress the significance and implications of this study. A central claim of this dissertation is that Title IX's clearly defined position against sex discrimination in intercollegiate athletics gave women's sports the language and momentum to advance and circulate a rhetoric of equality in the larger public. Furthermore, as sports sociologist Mary Jo Kane explains, "In two generations we've gone from young girls hoping there is a team to young girls hoping they make the team and that has been the real tipping point in women's sports" (Tipping Point, 1:28:05-14). This fundamental shift in women's and young girls' experiences with sports has greatly impacted interpretations and receptions of visual representations of female athletes on and off the field of play because the post Title IX athletes are no longer fighting for the right to play, but rather fighting for visibility when they play. For example, some female athletes, such as those who pose in the Body Issues, "tend to see physical appearance as a marketing asset that is not necessarily gender-specific, pointing to the ways the male body has itself become sexualized and commodified in recent media culture, and the ways male athletes are increasingly valued for aesthetic reasons as well as for their athletic successes" (Heywood and Dworkin 39). Thus, the female athletes in the Body Issues use their nude bodies' appearances in order to gain visibility and traction with the audience, "reifying gendered [and I'd add raced] stereotypes that associate a woman's public presence with her sex

appeal, [and] in the process they also capitalize on that media attention to emphasize their athletic achievement” (Shellenberger 245). As I argued in chapter three, pre-Title IX athletes and feminist sports scholars who claim that most media coverage of female athletes’ bodies *only* objectifies their bodies disregards the rhetorical power embodied in their physical appearance.

Moreover, critiquing athletes for their individual choices and claiming that such choices fundamentally hurt these athletes and the larger organization of women’s sports restricts them to a divided sense of their identity. These women continually try to claim agency as female athletes, but more importantly, they try to claim agency as both women and athletes, not solely as athletes nor solely as women. Accordingly, Heywood and Dworkin assert, “it is no longer simply the case of naïve women who buy into a false sense of power when they pose for the camera and we need to educate them about their mistake” (85). To that end, they suggest that female athletes *know* what they are doing “both because they do not experience themselves as manipulated and powerless, and because ... they see rightly visibility in the media as the only ‘real’ outlet for the achievement of selfhood this culture offers,” [which enables them to] capitalize on a body commodification culture to advance their careers (Heywood and Dworkin 85 qtd. in Shellenberger 246-47). Of note in this study, then, is the fact that a professional athlete’s subjectivities such as their race, gender, and sexuality—to name a few—are all embodied in the commodification of their being and marketed as cultural capital to the public. Additionally, this capitalization on body commodification culture, as Shellenberger aptly terms it, highlights the importance of acknowledging the immense influence our economy has on women’s sports. Within the sporting world, especially women’s sports, there exists an embodied rhetoric of gendered and sexualized entrepreneurialism that persuades female athletes that their ethos as a professional athlete and woman relies on responsible enterprise and self-investment that align

with the socio-economic norms of a male-dominated society. In this context, then, professional female athletes can enhance their livelihood by engaging in the free market and commodifying their bodies to sell their sport.

Another significant argument of this project, therefore, is that female athletes can acquire a measure of power economically and rhetorically by figuring out how to accommodate social norms in a way that is to their advantage despite the constraints that emerge out of the amalgam of our male-dominated society, our economy, and criticisms from feminist sport activists and scholars. Thus, to read female athletes' on and off the field performances as only a reflection of the values, social hierarchies, and economy in American culture or to read their performances of femininity, sexualized femininity, and hetero/sexuality as only as a means of marginalization would greatly limit any consideration of the rhetorical strategies at play in female athletes' visual representations of their bodily appearances. As Shellenberger explains, these constructions of identity "hold material consequences for certain individuals" (236). For example, cultural discourse of race and gender influence how Serena Williams performs on and off the field of play as well as how her body is read by the public. The relationship between her performed identity and the audience's reception of her embodied identity influence the material conditions such as endorsement deals and media coverage. By extending conceptualizations of rhetorical acts to encapsulate the visual and textual representations of female athletes and situating them alongside the epideictic rhetoric of the magazine, I offer an explanation of how embodied discourses about race, gender, and sexuality are contoured onto the body, thus informing people's subject positions and the audience's reception of a person's identity. Female athletes both accommodate and subvert these norms, through venues such as ESPN where they can rhetorically use the visual and textual representations of their bodies and identities to gain

economic security, public visibility and recognition, and the power to speak and circulate as female athletes and women in the sporting world and general society.

The challenge of explaining the implications of this project, especially in regards to the Body Issues' economic and epideictic purpose, is that rhetoric is both the marketing and celebration of these embodied subjectivities in the magazine. This marketing rhetoric persuades the audience to purchase the Body Issue and engage with the celebratory rhetoric framing the (re)presentations of the athletes. Accordingly, the marketing and celebratory rhetoric of the Body Issues constitutes an audience with commercialized values. For example, from an economic perspective, the magazine sells a rhetoric of desire via the repetitive use of "Bodies We Want" throughout each issue, encouraging the audience to desire these bodies. Moreover, this rhetoric of desire not only persuades audiences to buy the magazine and want these bodies, thereby maintaining the cycle of consumer capitalism, it also commodifies desire, suggesting that these desirable bodies can be bought and that people can pay to shape their own bodies as desirable. Furthermore, the epideictic nature of the magazine includes within public values a capitalistic ethic that distracts us from an absence that isn't there; in other words, the "celebration" of female athletes, their presence in the magazine as they are featured alongside male athletes, distracts us from issues such as how under-watched, under-supported, under-financed, under-paid women's sports still are. For example, on March 30, 2016 five players from the women's national soccer team filed a federal complaint against U.S. Soccer, the federation that pays both the men's and women's national teams when they participate in international competitions. This complaint accuses the U.S. of "wage discrimination because, they said, they earned as little as 40 percent of what players on the United States men's national team earned" (Das) despite the fact that they

won their third World Cup Championship in summer 2015 while the men's team has never won the World Cup.⁹⁶

Despite the problematic implications of the Body Issues' marketing and celebratory rhetoric, the visual variation of female athletes' bodies in the magazine also works in tandem with the magazine's epideictic rhetoric to rupture public values. Essentially, just as the "Bodies We Want" theme solicits the audience to participate in a cycle of desire and capitalistic consumption, it also solicits the audience to desire and consume non-normative bodies and subject positions. The presence of athletes such as Brittney Griner, with her masculine looking body, hybrid construction of gender, and lesbian sexuality—all of which are embodied in a biologically female form—petition the audience to want bodies and identities like hers. Similarly, the presence of these bodies, e.g. "thick" female athletes like Olympic Shot Putter, Michelle Carter (Issue 2009, 64) or disabled athletes such as Paralympic Rower Oksana Masters (Issue 2012, 60), couched within the celebratory narrative of the magazine, also invites the audience to desire bodies historically excluded from acceptable, normative ideals for women. To that end, the 2016 Body Issue features its first Trans athlete—Chris Mosier who is a member of the U.S. men's sprint dualathlon team—which suggests that the magazine continues to maintain and develop its trend of presenting non-normative bodies and identities as desirable to the audience.⁹⁷ In this way then, the visual representation of these athletes and the magazine's rhetoric possibly expand the visual and social landscape to include and value non-normative

⁹⁶ According to Das's article, the federation has very different financial terms with both collective teams. He explains that "A men's player, for example, receives \$5,000 for a loss in a friendly match but as much as \$17,625 for a win against a top opponent. A women's player receives \$1,350 for a similar match, but only if the United States wins; women's players receive no bonuses for losses or ties."

⁹⁷ Interestingly, the 2016 Body Issue highlights a lot of firsts for *ESPN The Magazine*. In addition to featuring a Trans athlete and displaying *each* female athlete in an in-action pose, the magazine also has a woman as its editor and chief. She is not only the first female editor and chief of this magazine, but also the first ever female editor of a major sports media in the United States.

bodies and subjectivities. Indeed, this visual and textual rupture raises the provocative question—what kind of public is called into being via the Body Issues’ commercialized rhetoric? Arguably, this public is a fractured and possibly hybrid community with capitalistic, male-dominated values about gender, sexuality, and race, a community undergoing disruption via the presence and valorization of non-normative bodies and subjectivities, and a community cultivating social norms inclusive of embodied minority gender, race, and sexual subject positions.

This fractured, hybrid community and its potential for transformation speaks to the innovative ways female athletes and advocates of women’s sports have argued for inclusion, equality, and visibility as well as the work that still needs to be done to dispel gender, sexual, and race discrimination in women’s sports and the larger public. This project augments for the field the study of women’s resourceful and provocative rhetorical acts, and in this way it aligns with the works of Carol Mattingly, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Cheryl Glenn, and Sarah Hallenbeck, to name a few, to illustrate the “available means” afforded to women as well as the ways feminist rhetoricians can continue to creatively conceive of women’s rhetorical capacities for exerting agency. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the potential for reimagining women’s rhetorical acts, and such an understanding of these acts as purposeful, resourceful, and powerful is possible through an alternative conceptualization of visual representations of women’s bodies in rhetorical studies. Understanding these images and female athletes’ performances “as embodied and as part of an interlocking system that includes gender, race, class, and the body not only provides rhetoric scholars with a more performative, situationally, and contextually-sensitive understanding” of women’s rhetorical acts, it also presents rhetoric scholars with a way to account for subjectivity that “includes embodiment and that considers the ways in which [visual

representations of the female body] and [women's bodily performances] influence subjectivity and the process of becoming a subject" (Shellenberger 253-54). Most importantly, female athletes' effective means of presenting themselves rhetorically in spaces like *ESPN The Magazine* call attention to the fractures in male-dominated social constructions of athleticism, gender, race, and sexuality, and "disruptions in both the expected appearance of the body and the space which that body ha[s] permission to occupy expose[s] the fabricated nature of gender [race and sexuality] by a constantly shifting play with images of a woman's body, its gender, [its sexuality, its race] its place, and its performance" (Mattingly 7). According to Judith Butler in "Athletic Bodies," female athletes and women's sports have the power "to rearticulate [gender, race, and sexual] ideals such that those very athletic women's bodies that, at one time, are considered outside the norm (too much, too masculine, even monstrous), can come, over time, to constitute a new ideal of accomplishment and grace, a standard for women's achievement. And women's sports offer a site in which this transformation of our ordinary sense of what constitutes a [gendered, raced, sexual] body is itself dramatically contested and transformed" (Butler, "Athletic Bodies"). Ultimately, sportswomen's capacities to rupture oppressive social constructions of women's subjectivities and reshape these subject positions via their bodily appearances and on and off the field performances demonstrate the rhetorical power of the female body and solicit further research on women's embodied rhetorical strategies and ways of cultivating agency.

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EDUCATION

- April 3, 2017 **Ph.D., Composition and Cultural Rhetoric.** Syracuse University
- Dissertation: "Sporting Bodies: The Rhetorics of Professional Female Athletes"
- Core Committee: Lois Agnew (Chair), Eileen Schell, Collin Brooks
- May 2012 **M.A., Rhetoric and Writing Studies.** San Diego State University
Specialization in the Teaching of Writing
- May 2009 **B.A., English Writing and Rhetoric.** Pepperdine University

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Syracuse University

- 2012-present Graduate Teaching Assistant, The Department of Writing Studies, Rhetoric, and Composition
- 2014-present Consultant, Writing Center
- 2016-present Editor, Graduate Editing Center
- 2016-present Graduate Teaching Mentor, Graduate School Teaching Assistant Program

San Diego State University

- 2011-2012 Graduate Teaching Assistant, Rhetoric and Writing Studies Program
- 2010-2012 Writing Tutor, Rhetoric and Writing Studies courses

Fulbright Teaching Fellowship

- 2009-2010 English Teaching Assistant, Saarbruecken, Germany

Pepperdine University

- 2007-2009 Writing Tutor, Writing Center

COURSES TAUGHT

Syracuse University, Graduate Teaching Assistant

WRT 607: Graduate Teaching Assistant Training, Fall & Spring 2013-2014
WRT 307: Professional Writing, Fall & Spring 2014-15
WRT 205: Critical Research and Inquiry, Spring 2013 & 2014
WRT 105: Practices of Academic Writing, Fall 2012 & 2013
WRT 104: Introduction to College Level Writing, Summer 2013 & 2016

San Diego State University, Graduate Teaching Assistant

RWS 100: The Rhetoric of Written Argument, Fall & Spring 2011
RWS 200: The Rhetoric of Written Arguments in Context, Fall & Spring 2012

Saarbruecken Gymnasium, Fulbright Fellowship, English Teaching Assistant

Grades 3-12: Led English lessons, hosted conversations groups, shadowed teachers and administrators, assisted during English exams. Fall 2009 & Spring 2010

PUBLICATIONS

"The Courtesan and the Intellectual: Refiguring Aspasia as an Erotic Pedagogue." *Peitho Journal*. Revise and Resubmit.

Banister, Lindsey. "A Review of *Evolutionary Rhetoric: Sex, Science and Free Love in Nineteenth-Century Feminism*." *Enculturation: A Journal of Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture*. N.p., 28 May 2015. Web. 17 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.enculturation.net/free-love>>.

Banister, Lindsey, Tamara Issak, and Theresa Keicher, eds. *Revolution by Love: Emerging Arab Youth Voices*. New York: New City Community Press. 2012. Print.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

National Conferences:

"The Evolution of the Female Athlete: From Living the Paradox to Redefining Woman as Muscled in *ESPN The Magazine* Body Issues 2009-2015." Rhetoric Society of America. Atlanta, GA. May 2016.

"Unhinged: Performing the Academic Essay in a Multimodal Classroom." Computers and Writing. Washington State U. Pullman, WA. June 2014.

“Embodied Experiences of Segregation: A Call for Self-Directed Placement of ‘Remedial’ Student-Writers.” Conference on College Composition and Communication. Indianapolis, Indiana. March 2014.

“Contradiction as Strategic Choice: Opportunities for Cultivating Agency.” Feminisms and Rhetorics. Stanford U. Palo Alto, California. September 2013.

“Rhetorical Travels: The Public Experience within the Landscape of Abolitionists’ Discourse.” Rhetoric Society for America. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. May 2012.

Local Conferences and Workshops:

“From MA to PHD: Evolving as a Researcher and Teacher.” Invited Presentation. Composition and Cultural Rhetoric Program. Syracuse, NY. March 2016.

“Female Athlete: An Oxymoron?” Articulation: Illumination An Ignite Research Colloquium. SU RSA Student Chapter. Syracuse, NY February 2016.

“When Writing Center Practices Meet Multimodal Assignments.” Professional Workshop Creator and Leader. The Department of Writing Studies, Rhetoric, and Composition at SU and Writing Center. Syracuse, NY. February 2016.

“The In’s and Out’s of Creating a Professional Teaching Portfolio.” Invited Presentation. Future Professional Professoriate Teaching Portfolio Colloquium. SU Composition and Cultural Rhetoric Program. Syracuse, NY. February 2016.

“Multimodality and Multiliterate Expression in the Basic Writing Classroom.” We Make the Road by Walking: Exploring the Theory/History/ Practice Divide. SU Composition and Cultural Rhetoric Program. Syracuse, NY. October 2013.

ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

Intern, Writing Center. Syracuse University. Fall & Spring 2015-16.

Worked with the Administrator of the Writing Center. I trained new incoming consultants and reviewed practices and policies with veteran consultants; organized and developed a professional development workshop for consultants and the general writing department; became highly proficient in the use of WC-online for managing writing centers.

Curriculum Developer, The Department of Writing Studies, Rhetoric, and Composition. Syracuse University. Summer, Fall, & Spring 2013-14.

During the 2014/2015 academic year, the writing program underwent a curricular transformation in the lower division of the program. I aided in the development of new class materials, specifically the syllabus and main course assignments, as well as piloted the new curriculum in my classes.

SERVICE

Syracuse Writing Department and Composition and Cultural Rhetoric Program:

Teaching Consultant, WRT 670 Graduate Teaching Assistant Training. Syracuse University Fall & Spring 2013-14.

Member, Lower Division Writing Committee. Syracuse University. Fall & Spring 2013-14.

Chair, Composition and Cultural Rhetoric Graduate Circle. Syracuse University. 2014-2015.

Co-Chair, Composition and Cultural Rhetoric Graduate Circle. Syracuse University. 2013-2014.

Member, Composition and Cultural Rhetoric Graduate Circle. Syracuse University. 2012-2015.

Event Coordinator, Composition and Cultural Rhetoric Graduate Circle. Syracuse University. 2012-2015:

- Graduate Writing Retreat, "Inquiries & Intersections of Composition & Cultural Rhetoric: Theory, Method/ology, Pedagogy" – Featuring guest speaker, Dr. Laurie Gries. May 2016.
- Graduate Writing Retreat, "Meandering Pathways, Strange Turns: Visualization Method for Heuretical Discipliniography" – Featuring guest speaker, Dr. Derek Mueller. May 2015.
- Graduate and Faculty Research Forum featuring Dr. Lois Agnew, Dr. Brice Nordquist, and Dr. Rebecca Moore Howard. February 2015.
- "Saturday Workshop Series," Spring 2015.
Rocking the Teaching Philosophy
Publishing a Book Review

- Building and Sustaining a Professional Web Presence
- Graduate Writing Retreat, “Literacy, Ethics, & Research: Developing Sustainable Research Projects” – Featuring guest speaker, Dr. Tobi Jacobi. May 2014.
- Recorded Podcast Event, “Feminist Perspectives on Living a Rhetorical Life in a Transnational World” – Featuring guest speaker, Dr. Rebecca Dingo. March 2013.

San Diego State University RWS Department:

Co-Founder & Co-Chair, Rhetoric Society of America Student Chapter. San Diego State University. 2011-2012.

AWARDS

Graduate Student Organization Travel Grant. Syracuse University. 2016.

Weirich Award for Outstanding Scholarship. Composition and Cultural Rhetoric, Syracuse University, June 2015.

Certificate in University Teaching. The Graduate School. Syracuse University, April 2014.

Graduate Student Organization Travel Grant. Syracuse University. 2012-13.

State University Grant. San Diego State University. 2010-12.

Fulbright Fellowship. English Teaching Assistantship. Saarbruecken, Germany. 2009-10.

California Governor’s Scholarship. Pepperdine University 2009

Associated Women for Pepperdine Scholarship. Pepperdine University 2005-09

Thomas and Shelia Bost Scholarship. Pepperdine University 2005-09

University Alumni Scholarship. Pepperdine University 2005-09

MEMBERSHIP in PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Rhetoric Society of America (RSA)

College Composition and Communication (CCCC)

Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition (CWSHRC)

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

REFERNECES

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