

SPORTS EXPERIENCES FROM THE PERSPECTIVES
OF WOMEN BASKETBALL PLAYERS:
INFLUENCES AND GENDER IDEOLOGY

by

RACHEL SHALEA BROWN HOOVER, B.A.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As a young girl growing up in a small Texas town, I realized that stimulating activities were sometimes hard to find. We did not have a movie theatre, shopping mall, or even any shops. I learned that the main avenue for recreation was the gymnasium, which was left open to the public most of the time. I therefore depended on sport for much of my entertainment. We mainly played pick-up basketball games at the gym, but if nobody else was around, I was satisfied with hitting tennis balls off the cinder block walls. Besides basketball and tennis at the gym, I delved into other sports such as tag football, swimming, and baseball, which became my favorite activity of all when I was named the most valuable player of my tee-ball team. Based on my great experiences in tee-ball, I was extremely excited when tryouts for Little League baseball began. I tried out and even had a hit!

My excitement was replaced by dismay the following day when the Little League teams were posted. I realized that my name, along with the name of my friend Missy, was missing from the list. I thought there must have been a mistake until I realized that all the names on the list were those of boys. Even the most inept male players present at the tryouts were on the list; the only players that were not chosen were the two girls that tried out.

My experience as a girl who just wanted to play baseball with the rest of her friends but was denied the opportunity taught me a valuable lesson at a young age; that

life could be limited by prevailing ideals about what boys and girls can and cannot do. I do not remember if I told my parents about the Little League excluding me and my friend. I do know, however, that nothing was ever changed to rectify the situation. I knew that I was good enough to play baseball with the boys; however, my talent was not acknowledged by the male coaches. It is this type of situation that leaves so many girls knowing the truth about their talent, yet doubting their abilities after all. Many girls and women are faced with structural constraints that tell them that they are not good enough, but many women resist these forces, which will be discussed further in Chapter III.

As I grew up, my parents continued to drop me off at “the gym,” and I eventually focused on basketball as my primary activity. My parents saved money to send me to the best basketball camps every year, and they never missed one game of my athletic career. My experiences with sports were resolved by the support I was given, but for many young girls, I believe that early negative experiences can greatly affect their future involvement in sports.

Throughout the past thirty years, female participation in sport has greatly increased; however, one ongoing issue in sport remains. Even though women are becoming more involved in organized sport participation at all levels, gender equity has not been achieved in most sports programs (Coakley 2001). I believe that investigating the early experiences of women in various activities and sport involvement with an emphasis on personal transitions and choices will shed light on later sport involvement and participation patterns.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of women basketball players from their own unique perspectives. Not only are their life histories important, but also influences that aid in their exposure and participation in sports and the gendered experiences that occur throughout their life histories are important considerations. In order to understand women's experiences in sports and more specifically basketball, it is important to take into account the historical and cultural contexts of the sports institution along with the socialization of women into sports. Several theories also provide useful insights into the experiences of women, which are life course, McCall's and Simmons's identity and role support, Lorber's social construction of gender, Gerson's life analysis, and Hill Collins's and Smith's women's resistance. Taken all together, women's experiences are represented by their own voices through interviews that shed light on life histories in organized sports, influences, and the gendered world of sports participation.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to better understand female experiences in sports, I have selected two main themes from the literature for guidance. The first theme, feminism and Title IX, reviews changes over time regarding women's participation in sports. Research on socialization, the second theme, is also important because it outlines the transmission of specific cultural values that work to facilitate or limit the participation of girls and women in the "masculine domain" of sport.

Historical Dimensions of Female Sports Participation

It is important to consider that cultural and historical contexts shape the experiences of females in sports. Throughout most of the history and throughout many cultures, organized sports participation has been a masculine endeavor and women have been largely excluded from participation or have been marginalized in sports organizations. For example, in Ancient Greece, Olympic games and festivals were the main places that organized sports took place. Women were not allowed to participate in or attend these activities; however, women often held their own games (Coakley 2001). The Roman empire also excluded women because most sports participation was held to prepare military men for battle. In Medieval Europe, and throughout the Renaissance period, women were restricted from sports participation because they were viewed as weak and passive.

American history also reflects the marginal status of females in sports. Although women have participated in sports throughout the history of America, for most of this history sports has been defined as “an almost exclusively male activity” (Hoffert 2003: 451). From the 1880s through the 1920s, sports took on an elite competitive form, which was heavily influenced by the upper-class (Coakley 2001). During this time, sports became connected with the economy, and according to Hoffert (2003), the middle-class influence resulted in the ideology that manhood could be earned through sports participation. Although many males have resisted female participation in sports, women began entering the male-dominated sports realm in the late-nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Historical and cultural contexts are therefore important in understanding the experiences women have in sports because opportunities afforded to women shape their participation and experiences.

One classical sociological theorist who examined the plight of women in leisure activities was Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In Gilman’s (2001 (1914)) *The Man-Made World* she recognized that athletics were important for females however she contended that games and sports are “essentially masculine and as such alien to women” (95). Although both boys and girls have the same “play instinct,” girls and boys are socialized into different activities, with girls play activities and toys restricted to the household domain while boys are pushed to play with combat toys and pursue games outdoors (Gilman 2001). Males and females alike enjoy sports, but sports and games have been restricted to the male domain not only in that they are offered almost exclusively to boys, but that they are also created by males and represent the interests of males and not

females (Gilman 2001). Just as the voice of Gilman has been ignored in sociology, so too has the voices of girls and women been ignored in sports and games.

Even though sports has been an essentially masculine domain throughout history, women have overcome many obstacles in order to gain access to more sporting opportunities. As Coakley (2001) contends, several aspects of social life culminated in order to offer more opportunities for young girls to participate in sport.

Until the 1970's, girls' interests in sports were largely ignored in most countries. Girls were relegated to the bleachers during their brother's games and, in the United States, given the hope of becoming high school cheerleaders. Then the women's movement, the fitness movement, and government legislation prohibiting sex discrimination all came together to stimulate the development of new sport programs for girls. (Coakley 2001: 111)

Second wave feminism began in the mid-1960s when women "found their voices" and started speaking out against the inequalities based on traditional gender roles, which hindered their opportunities (Allen 2001). The 1960s and 1970s signified the early efforts of women for equality, but the movement has only gained more power in the past twenty years. As Beeghley (1996) contends, higher rates of premarital sexual intercourse, abortion, divorce, and employment and income signifies more choices for women, which reflects women's greater independence. The percent of women in the work force has increased starting in the 1950s, but the largest increases have occurred since the 1970s (Chasin 1997). Although this increase in employment is an example of the ways in which women's opportunities and choices are expanding, it is important to point out that an increase in opportunities for women to work outside the home did not arise from changes in the ideology that women should be equal participants in the workforce. Since the 1970s, real wages have fallen by 14 percent, so the male-

breadwinner arrangement may not be feasible for many families in present times (Wallace 1998; Edwards 2001). Many women from working- and middle-class families have been forced to pick up the slack and enter the workforce in order to avert downward mobility (Edwards 2001).

Although necessity has given rise to more opportunities for women, second wave feminism has also expanded opportunities for women in many realms, including sports. The women's movement was a catalyst for the enactment of a law, which granted women equal access to a plethora of educational prospects (Chapman 2000). Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act was signed into law by President Richard Nixon in 1972 which stated that

no person in the United States shall on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.
(Banowsky 2003: 2)

Most colleges and universities receive federal aid, so almost all must comply with Title IX (Banowsky 2003). However, as we shall see, compliance does not necessarily ensure equal opportunities or outcomes for women athletes.

This compliance specifies that women must be offered equal chances to participate in sports at the collegiate level. A recent Big 12 Conference Memorandum reports that almost 3,800 women's sports teams have been added to higher learning institutions since the 1970s, and from 1981 to 1999, women's teams increased by 66 percent (Banowsky 2003). As opportunity expands, so does the number of female participants. High school athletic programs have also felt the influence of Title IX. For example, in 1971, about 294,000 girls participated in high school athletics. Now this

number has risen to over 2.7 million girls (Banowsky 2003). This increasing access to sports for females has had an effect on women's participation and socialization, which in turn affects the research findings on this subject.

Along with the positive effects on the participation opportunities afforded to girls, Title IX has also brought about more negative reactions towards the participation of girls and women in sports. Although females are afforded additional albeit limited opportunities due to federal regulations, many critics claim that Title IX has resulted in unfair cuts of men's programs. When money runs low, many schools and universities have decided to cut men's teams that are viewed as "non-revenue producing" because cutting women's teams puts them in violation of Title IX (Messner 2002). Many men have contended that they are now marginalized and are beginning to speak out against Title IX and some men have even filed law suits against various universities (Messner 2002).

Socialization and Sports as a Masculine Domain

As cited above, although opportunities have been expanded for women over the past 30 years, gender equity has not been attained in many sports programs (Coakley 2001). Sport is a social phenomena; therefore, socialization into sport is one important concern. Coakley (1998) argues that socialization, or as he states it "learning the rules by which to behave," is connected with sport participation because playing sports is a social experience as well as a physical one. "People do not play sports in social and cultural vacuums; as they consider alternatives and play sports, they make decisions and form

identities” (Coakley 1998: 113). One factor agreed upon by sociologists is that family is a major agent of socialization for children including socialization into sport (McCandless 1969; Tomeh 1975; Coakley 1998). Leonard (1988) states that “since the socialization process through which the learning of skills, traits, dispositions, values and attitudes for the performance of roles occurs, it is apparent that someone or something must initiate the process” and this process begins at birth (114).

Since family is a major agent of socialization, and socialization provides a prime motivation for participation in sports, it is logical to conclude that sports involvement is influenced by the family (Greendorfer & Lewko 1978). Parents are the first people that a child relates to, and their decisions influence the child’s activities (Pfister 1993). Parents stimulate children’s sports participation by providing room to play, toys and sports apparatuses, contact with sport, and encouragement to participate.

Parents also serve as examples (Pfister 1993). Parents are not only the primary organizers of sporting activities for children, but they also coach teams, attend games, and cart their children to and from athletic events (Coakley 1998). Leonard (1988) suggests that parents also use sport to socialize children about society and social life. He stated:

The family serves as a socializing agent for the learning of sport roles; it provides a structure from which ascribed and achieved attributes impinge on an individual in a sport system, and it uses sport as an expressive microcosm of the larger society in its attempt to socialize children. (Leonard 1988: 115)

Most of the few studies on sport socialization of children by the family were conducted in the late 1970s. Greendorfer (1977) used the social learning paradigm in

order to assess how different socializing agents influenced the participation of children in sport throughout different life stages. After analyzing questionnaires completed by 585 female participants in the Wisconsin Women's Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, she found that the family serves as a strong socializing agent during childhood, has no significant effect during adolescence, and has even less influence during adulthood. She gives two possible explanations for the decrease of family influence during adolescence: (1) sport may be acceptable for younger girls but not for adult women and (2) sport may be viewed as a less serious sphere of social activity that must be abandoned as a girl grows up in order to undertake more serious tasks (Greendorfer 1977).

Greendorfer (1977) found that other sources play a greater role in socialization into sport throughout adolescence and young adulthood. Peers maintained a high level of impact on the participants their entire lives, while coaches and teachers were found to be significant sources of encouragement throughout adolescence (Greendorfer 1977).

Higginson (1985) also researched the impacts of significant others across "life-cycle states" (73). He gathered questionnaire responses from 587 females and grouped them into categories of below thirteen years of age, junior high, and high school. The results indicated that parents constituted the most important socializing agent for the under thirteen group, while coaches and teachers were the most influential during junior high and high school (Higginson 1985).

As cited above, freedom and equality for women has changed since the 1970s, so it is logical that research findings have shifted as well. Giuliano, Popp, and Knight (2000) examined the factors that motivate females to initially participate in and to stay

involved in sports. They found that while childhood play activities did significantly predict future sport participation, parental influence was not the main driving force behind childhood play. Instead, they offer that “the lack of effects for parental influence may reflect a shift in the last decade toward increasing peer influence, relative to parents, over childhood activities” (Giuliano, Popp, & Knight 2000: 176).

Researchers have not only studied the socializing agents that influence sport participation during different life cycles, but they have also sought to understand what particular role each family member plays in this influence. In 1978, Greendorfer and Lewko conducted an exploratory study in order to find out if family members influence male and female children differently. They distributed questionnaires to 95 children, ages 8 to 13, who were enrolled in a summer fitness program at the University of Illinois. They found that parents, rather than siblings, are significant socializing agents for both boys and girls, and fathers are the most significant role models for both sexes (Greendorfer & Lewko 1978). A later study conducted in 1980 also found that while both males and females need encouragement and support from parents in order to become involved in sports, females need more support than males from parents in order to “deviate from current activity patterns of females which are less sport oriented” (Lewko & Ewing 1980: 67).

Although Greendorfer and Lewko (1978) did not find the mother to be a significant socializing force in the amount of sports participation by males or females, more recent research underscores the importance of mothers as athletic role models for their daughters (Miller & Levy 1996; Weiss & Knoppers 1982). Miller and Levy (1996)

report that female athletes are more likely to come from more athletic families than non-athletes, and that mothers particularly serve as athletic role models. By comparing 69 non-athletes with 76 athletes from various intercollegiate sports in a sample of female college students, they found that “significantly more female athletes reported athletic participation by their mothers and fathers than female non-athletes” (Miller & Levy 1996: 119). This finding is contrary to the findings of Greendorfer (1977) who found that parents only influence sport participation during childhood. Miller and Levy (1996) concluded that their findings suggest that it is important for parents to encourage their daughters throughout their lives, so a greater effort should be made on the part of educators and coaches to get parents more involved in the sporting activities of their daughters. Lensyj (1994) also maintains that females who are successful in sport offer positive examples for other females to follow. Also, it is important for girls and women to have role models who are not far removed their own daily experiences because the effects of observing prominent female athletes are likely to be short lived (Lensyj 1994).

Sociological research has aimed to specifically document the shift in female participation over the last thirty years by using longitudinal studies. Weiss and Barber (1995) conducted a study that compared female athletes with female and male non-athletes regarding their perceptions of support and encouragement in athletic participation. They first gathered data through questionnaires in 1979, and then finished their comparison by distributing more questionnaires in 1989. Their findings suggested that the encouragement and support received from significant others, or parents, older siblings and friends, significantly increased through the ten-year period (Weiss and

Barber 1995). Also, importance of different significant others changed through three life stages. First, fathers, mothers, older sisters and brothers, and best male and female friends provided the most support during childhood. At the next life stage, adolescence, mothers were the most important influence on female athletes. Finally, fathers, mothers, and older sisters gave the most encouragement during young adulthood (Weiss and Barber 1995). From these results, Weiss and Barber (1995) concluded that support, encouragement, and interest in young females' athletic participation result in more active and ultimately healthier lifestyles for women.

Although many gains have been made since the passage of Title IX, socialization, especially through the family, still has many implications for female participation. Sport has been dubbed masculine, and the institution of sport has been viewed as one of the most gender-traditional social arrangements in that it not only promotes sexism, but also upholds patriarchy (Harry 1995; Kidd 1990; Messner 1988). In order to test this contention, Harry (1995) researched the association between sport ideology and attitudes toward women. He distributed questionnaires to 304 students of a Midwestern university and found that sport ideology is significantly associated with sexist attitudes among male students but not female students. While men who scored high regarding sport ideology had significantly more sexist attitudes, women who scored high regarding sport ideology did not show more sexist attitudes. Instead, Harry (1995) found that "for women, sports is less expressive of gender differences" (44). He concluded that males are offered sports and its ideologies as a means of validating their manhood. "Sports becomes a largely

symbolic and even ritual activity through which traditional gender roles and gender prejudices are validated for boys” (Harry 1995: 45).

In an attempt to analyze how status and gender roles are emphasized in sport participation by children, Melissa Landers observed two YMCA tee ball teams in the spring of 1993. The team consisted of 24 five- and six-year-olds, 6 females and 18 males. Through observation and interviews with the coaches, one male and one female, she found that parents were reported to be more concerned with the participation of their sons than that of their daughters. Coaches reported that parents were more likely to play catch with their sons than their daughters and most of the girls did not own gloves, while most of the boys did (Landers & Fine 2001). Based on these observations, they found that gender differences manifest in the different ways girls and boys are treated in early sport participation, and these differences are not noticed or challenged by parents (Landers & Fine 2001).

This finding underscores previous research regarding socialization of children into sport. Lever (1976) collected data through observation, interviews, questionnaires, and diary records of 181 fifth grade children from different schools. She found that while males are encouraged to participate in more activities outside the home, females are pushed toward pursuing more sedentary activities within the home. She concluded that the socialization of children into different types of play and games aids in the preservation of traditional sex-role divisions in society by equipping boys with skills that are necessary for careers outside the home and providing girls with skills that will enhance family oriented careers within the home (Lever 1976).

Not only are the early experiences of females different from those of males, but these experiences also take place in many different settings outside of families. Wilson, White, and Fisher (2001) conducted participant observations and interviews in order to examine the female culture in a community center environment. They found that the activities of males were privileged over those of females. Although the female members of the center were afforded time in the gymnasium, the males had more access to social and cultural resources. While males were never forced to be spectators, at some point every female in the center was relegated to a spectator status. Wilson, White, and Fisher (2001) concluded that while more females did have opportunities to participate in sports, their status was still marginal in the sport culture of the center.

Although conditionally empowered within some programs and spaces, the integrated, informal sport culture of the center reinforces and maintains the traditional gendered power relations that these females youth have come to accept and have trouble seeing beyond. (Wilson, White, & Fisher 2001: 319)

Not only does the masculine ideology of sport influence children's behaviors, but it also shapes the options that are available to adult women. Lenskyj (1994) argues that ideological constraints arising from traditional gender roles also inhibit women's sport participation. "The prospect of women engaging in sport and recreation purely for their own enjoyment is at odds with traditional societal expectations that women should put others' needs before their own" (Lenskyj 1994: 9). Many different entities are involved in the socialization process into sport including family members, peers, teachers, coaches, the mass media and the advertising industry, and administration (Lenskyj 1994). One area that has been largely overlooked in present research, however, is the influence of

family on sport involvement of females. Most of the research that deals specifically with this area is outdated. Also, almost all of the studies conducted were quantitative and utilized only one way of collecting data--questionnaires. In order to get a bigger picture of how the family, as well as other factors, influences females to participate in sport, a variety of methodologies are useful, including more qualitative research that can shed new light on the experiences that shape the lives of females.

The face of athletics has changed significantly over the past thirty years. Women are afforded more chances to participate and are capitalizing on these new potentialities. Also, it is reported that young females are receiving more support, encouragement, and interest from more sources as the years progress (Weiss & Barber 1995). The examples of research findings highlighted above, however, underscore the ways in which gender statuses and rankings are reproduced in sport participation. Since gender is constructed and males are the dominant group in society, females are marginalized in many institutional settings, including sports. Sports is an institution that perpetuates the socially constructed differences between males and females because males and females are treated differently in sports participation. Also, males are offered sports as a way of reaffirming their manhood, so masculine ideology is associated with sports participation. Different treatment based on gender and masculine ideology have been prevalent phenomena throughout the history of sports. Although strides are being made, I believe more research that seeks to understand the experiences of women in sports from their perspective can help in the fight to achieve gender equity in sports.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One of the main goals of my research is to find out how women perceive their life experiences and how their experiences have contributed to their participation in sports. In order to frame my thoughts and questions on this subject, I have utilized key assumptions, concepts, and propositions from several different sociological theories. The life course perspective provides a foundation for my research because it shows that life paths are complicated and develop along many lines. In order to form more concrete questions on the topic of female participation in sports, however, theories that provide propositions more specific to the process are also necessary. Socialization is one force that motivates women to participate in athletics, so the concept of role support that was set forth by McCall and Simmons (1978) is useful. Although socialization is an important consideration, the choices of women also affect their participation. One final dimension that cannot be overlooked when researching women in sports is the social construction of gender. Women have unique experiences that differ from their male counterparts because social forces interact in order to treat men and women differently.

Life Course Origins and Applications in the Social Sciences

Throughout the past, many social scientists have had concerns about pivotal events experienced by individuals throughout their lives. Early attempts to understand dimensions of change over an individual's life time were compiled into two main

approaches: life span and life cycle (Settersten 2003). Both theories sought to understand human development by tracking the experiences that shaped individuals' lives at each stage, or age period, in their lives. Most researches found this approach problematic, however, because the implication is that people move through their lives in a "fixed sequence of irreversible stages" (Settersten 2003: 16).

In order to combat this critique, a less rigid view of the stages of life and the experiences that occur within them was necessary. The critiques of life span and life cycle approaches eventually led to the formulation of the life course perspective, which takes into consideration "historical dimensions of change," or period, age, and birth cohort effects on the individual (White & Klein 2002:108). As Giele and Elder (1998) contend, the life course perspective utilizes models that take into consideration many different variables, which allows researchers to take into consideration "many diverse events and roles that do not necessarily proceed in a given sequence but that constitute the sum total of the person's actual experience over time" (Giele & Elder 1998: 22).

The life course perspective is complicated in that it is multidisciplinary, so it has been used by a wide range of disciplines in order to understand a wide range of phenomena. Life-course scholarship has addressed issues regarding biology, economics, history, psychology, and sociology, just to name a few (Settersten 2003). Although this complexity makes life-course a little more difficult to plot out, the interdisciplinary features of life-course are perhaps its greatest strength because it incorporates a high level of plasticity (Giele & Elder 1998). "The superiority of the life course idea is in its flexibility and capacity to encompass many different types of cultural, social, and

individual variation” (Giele & Elder 1998: 22). Although I must limit the realm of my study to mainly the sociological realm, the assumptions that life-course puts forth guide my knowledge in that I can understand that no one aspect of life alone molds an individual’s life path.

Life Course Trajectories: Events, Transitions, and Parameters

In order to better understand the life course perspective and what it offers for researchers, it is important to recognize the key terms that it provides. One major key concept is *trajectory*. Trajectories are defined as long term “pathways” that chronicle “the course of an individual’s experiences in specific life spheres” (Settersten 2003: 24). Trajectories are also likened to careers (Settersten 2003; Elder 1998). Many different trajectories combine to form an individual’s life path, thus the occurrences along one trajectory often influence what happens along other trajectories (Settersten 2003). Also, roles individuals assume along trajectories often correspond with roles assumed along other trajectories.

Other key concepts in life course such as *events* and *transitions* are embedded in the idea of trajectory. Events and transitions denote changes in an individual’s state (Settersten 2003). Events are abrupt changes, while transitions are more gradual. Both concepts are tied to attaining and renouncing roles throughout an individual’s life course, thus transitions at one point in time can have long term consequences (George 1993). Along with transitions and events, turning points also affect individuals’ various

trajectories. Turning points refer to points in which a trajectory appreciably changes directions (Settersten 2003).

Additionally, while life course is defined in terms of central events and transitions, it must also be understood as bounded by time. The parameters of *timing*, *sequencing*, and *duration* are essential in comprehending the experiences of individuals (Settersten 2003). Timing refers to the specific ages events occur, sequencing is the order that events occur in, and duration is how long events or states lasts. These parameters provide useful guidelines in understanding female experiences in sports because they help shape questions regarding transitions, events, and turning points that have affected individuals' participation and experiences in sports.

The life course theory has been utilized by a variety of social and behavioral sciences in order to understand change through life. Gubrium, Holstein, and Buckholdt (1994) summarized different approaches to researching life change employed by psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists. These "conventional approaches" include behavioral, psychoanalytic, cognitive, covert personality, symbolic interactionist, functional, psychocultural, and constructionist (Gubrium, Holstein, & Buckholdt 1994: 8). The symbolic interactionist approach is one that guides my research because it focuses on social locations, micro level interactions, role enactment, and interpretations and responses to social messages (Gubrium, Holstein, & Buckholdt 1994).

Life course on the micro level also highlights personal transitions and choices (George 1993). The concentration on life transitions in the social sciences studies the "normative and non-normative changes that individuals experience over time" (George

1993: 353). Research is conducted by using both macro and micro approaches; however, the micro approach described by George (1993) provides the best framework for the objectives I have set out. The individual based focus on life transitions involves researching conditions under which events or transitions experienced early in life affect subsequent life course patterns (George 1993). Individual focus on life transitions has three main strengths: “explaining how transitions affect outcomes, examining transitions in the contexts of long-term trajectories, and promoting consideration of the joint effects of transitions in multiple domains” (George 1993: 364).

Cultural and Historical Context of the Life Course

One aspect of the life course perspective that occurs on the macro level is the importance of *cultural climate* and *historical context*. According to Settersten (2003), “Human lives are framed by historical time and shaped by the unique social and cultural conditions that exist during those times” (22). Bengtson (1996) also contends that individual lives cannot be fully understood without recognizing the social and historical factors that affect them. One of the ways in which individuals’ life courses are shaped by social forces is through institutions (Settersten 2003). Institutions provide social roles and ties that affect the ways in which individuals behave and live their lives (Settersten 2003). Although individuals do make choices about their life courses, their life courses are not initiated from scratch at birth, rather they are institutionalized within social and cultural contexts. Some of the institutions that researchers have studied that affect life courses are education, work, family, and social policies of the state (Settersten 2003).

Another important macro force that shapes life courses is historical context. History is important for several reasons: (1) present patterns come from the past, (2) historical patterns provide important contrasts to the present, and (3) recent history exists in the memories of individuals who have experienced the past (Settersten 2003). Large scale historical events and social change affect the life courses of individuals by affecting their development. The term cohort refers to individuals who are born at similar points in historical time, and Settersten (2003) contends that both historical and cultural contexts can “leave a unique imprint on members of a cohort” (23).

Development Over the Life Course as Multispherical, Multidimensional, and Lifelong

One life course proposition described by Settersten (2003) that guides my research dealing with the experiences of women in sport is that development is both *multidimensional* and *multispherical* (Settersten 2003). Multidimensional means that individuals develop throughout their life times along many different dimensions: biological, psychological, and social. Not only do different dimensions affect individuals, but also different spheres, or activities, such as family, work, education, and leisure (Settersten 2003).

Another component of the life course perspective that is helpful in understanding the experiences that females have in sports is that development is *lifelong*. Individuals have differing experiences that shape their participation throughout different life periods; however, no “age period” is more significant than another (Settersten 2003:18). As Settersten (2003) contends, “while development during a specific life period may be

unique, it is experienced within the context of the past, present, and future” (18). Also, although earlier experiences often shape later experiences, they do not necessarily provide barriers.

Individual Experiences of Life Course: Roles, Identity, and Gender

The concept of trajectory is important in evaluating the experiences of women and girls who participate in organized athletics. Researchers have compared the moral and cognitive development of athletes and non-athletes, and these studies have examined topics such as grade achievement in education, self esteem, and delinquent behavior, just to name a few; however, no consensus has been achieved on whether or not being an athlete has a significant effect on future life patterns. For example, Mielke and Bahlke (1995) surveyed young people in Germany in order to assess if a difference occurs in fundamental values based on athlete and non-athlete status in German youth. Their findings suggest that athletes and young people who participate in alternative leisure activities do not significantly differ in regards to ethical values, and they concluded that their research counters the belief that sports build character (Mielke & Bahlke 1995).

The point is that although it has not been established if athletes and non-athletes differ significantly in terms of development, I believe that being involved in organized sports results in an athletic trajectory. Playing basketball in high school and college is in a sense a career because athletes have different responsibilities from those who are not involved in organized athletics. I do not contend that being an athlete builds a young person’s character or that because a young person is involved in athletics he/she develops

different morals than a young person who does not participate; however, an athletic trajectory exists based on the varying life experiences and responsibilities that occur when one is involved in organized sports. Furthermore, applying life course transitions to the study of females in sports lends that the rules and norms that girls encounter early in their lives affect but do not necessarily determine their subsequent patterns of participation in sports. If sports participation is taught as a viable role, girls may adopt a long-term athletic trajectory.

Role Support and Identity

The tenets that the life course perspective lend are broad in scope and serve as a macro-level foundation for research examining the experiences of girls and women in sports; however, more focused questions are also necessary in order to guide sports research. McCall and Simmons (1978) proposed an important micro-level theory that can be applied to socialization of females into sports. The purpose of their theory is to systematically map both the intricacies that are known to occur in processes of interaction between human beings and the beliefs about processes that influence interaction. In order to understand the reasons people act as they do, McCall and Simmons seek to understand not only the structural process that act on people, but also those that occur inside the people's own mind.

One central concept of their symbolic interaction perspective is role identities. Role identities are defined as “the character and role that an individual devises for himself [or herself] as an occupant of a particular social position” (McCall & Simmons

1978: 65). The concept of identity can be compared to that of a trajectory because if individuals assume a certain trajectory, they will act out certain roles within that trajectory. Individuals imagine role identities, and they in turn perform in ways that support these idealized images. An important aspect of playing the idealized roles, however, is the reactions of others. In this way, other individuals are “built into the very contents of one’s role identities” (McCall & Simmons 1978: 66). A major goal of individuals is to legitimize their role identities through role performances. Although much of this legitimizing occurs within individuals’ own imaginations, identities are not just for individuals’ own uses. Other people demand that individuals claim an identity; therefore, individuals must legitimize identities for themselves and these identities must be confirmed in the eyes of others (McCall & Simmons 1978).

This quest for confirmation of role identities from others leads to another central concept of the theory: role support. Role support is defined as “the expressed support accorded to an actor by his [or her] audience for his [or her] claims concerning his [or her] role identity” (McCall & Simmons 1978: 70). If a role identity is not confirmed by important audiences, one will most likely suffer. In order to lessen this suffering, the role identity may be pushed further down in the salience hierarchy and replaced by other role identities that have been proven to be confirmed and supported by important audiences. While the reactions of some audiences are important because they are realized to be competent and have many credentials, other audiences are highly regarded on more general grounds.

One of these highly regarded audiences is the family. A major contention of McCall and Simmons (1978) is that identities and interactions cannot be understood without considering the influences of both the past and future expectations of individuals and others in their environment. Role identities originate from two main factors in individuals' early life histories. First, certain social roles are ascribed to the individual from birth, which affect role identities. Second, children's primary socialization lead to role identities. Based on role ascription and primary socialization, "the child learns to act, feel, and perceive the world in the manner expected from someone in his [or her] position" (McCall & Simmons 1978: 208). Also, children and youth engage in playing that is actually a rehearsal for later roles and identities that they will perform.

The Social Construction of Gender: Socialization, Identity, and "Choice"

In order to better understand how the experiences of women shape their life transitions and trajectories, a third component must be taken into consideration. Dennis Wrong (1966) contends that sociological theory often offers a view of people as oversocialized, which means that theory more often contends that people's actions are entirely products of the norms and values that they are taught from birth. Social factors do shape interaction, they cannot be "taken for the whole truth" (Wrong 1966; 118).

Another sociologist, Kathleen Gerson (1985) also takes into consideration human agency. In Gerson's (1985) book *Hard Choices*, she utilizes life analysis in order to understand the choices women make regarding work, careers, and motherhood. She contends that it is important to acknowledge that childhood experiences shape later life

choices and that structural constraints also affect the options women have. According to Gerson (1985), a more complete understanding may be accomplished by also highlighting the role women take in their own destiny because they respond to social conditions that they inherit. Human beings are complex creatures, so although two people may be in comparable social situations, they may react differently.

Another point that Gerson (1985) makes is that neither social expectations nor social constraints are simplistic or clear cut, but rather expectations and social constraints are ambiguous. Based on this assumption, she believes that it is imperative to take into account the varying factors that affect the life paths that women choose. In order to best accomplish this task, she highlights a central assumption of the life course perspective; that female development must be studied through different stages in women's lives, not just childhood. Gerson (1985) argues that life history analysis traces the paths of women as they age, which is a useful theoretical framework because it acknowledges not only socialization and social constraints, but also the ways in which women interpret each point in their lives and choose diverging life paths based on different transitions.

The life course perspective offers the conceptualization that cultural contexts affect the life courses and ultimately the experiences of people. Life course scholars have debated about "the nature of men's versus women's lives" (Settersten 2003: 40). This debate examines whether or not men's and women's lives are "chronologized, institutionalized, and standardized" in different ways. Lorber (1993) is a feminist scholar who addresses the ways in which gender is constructed through social institutions. She contends that gender is not only biological and physiological differences in human males

and females, but rather gender occurs through socially constructed statuses. Gender is “done,” or reproduced, by everyone starting at birth, and in order to understand this phenomena, researchers must not only examine individuals’ experiences with gender but also must delve into the ways in which prevailing gender ideology is perpetuated through social institutions. One central aspect of gender ideology is that gender must be separated and differentiated. Western society separates gender into two categories, man and woman, and goes to great lengths to preserve the categories as separate and different.

It does not matter what men and women actually do; it does matter if they do exactly the same thing. The social institution of gender insists only that what they do is perceived as different. (Lorber 1993: 48)

Another central concept that Lorber (1993) offers is that social statuses are not only constructed as different, but gender ranking also ensues. The social institution of gender creates differing social statuses that assign rights and responsibilities to individuals. In most societies, genders are ranked based on power and prestige. According to this ranking, genders are constructed as unequal, and one gender is usually “the touchstone, the normal, the dominant,” while the other gender is perceived to be “different, deviant, and subordinate” (Lorber 1993: 51). In Western societies, men are seen as the powerful, dominant gender, while women are perceived to be less powerful and subordinate.

This point is highlighted by the testimonial of a transsexual, who changed from a man to a woman half way through life. According to this individual, the way one is treated in society differs substantially based on male and female status. After the change,

the transsexual felt that other females treated her as if she was part of a special group, while men treated her more and more as an inferior (Lorber 1993).

Since Western society is stratified according to gender, even when the activities of men and women are comparable, the actions of men are perceived to be more valuable than those of women (Lorber 1993). Gender is constructed and males are the dominant group in society, so females are marginalized in many institutional settings, including sports. Sports is an institution that perpetuates the socially constructed differences between males and females because social research confirms that males and females are treated differently in sports participation (Wilson, White, & Fisher 2001; Landers & Fine 2001). Also, males are offered sports as a way of reaffirming their manhood, so masculine ideology is associated with sports participation (Harry 2001). Different treatment based on gender and masculine ideology has also been a prevalent phenomenon throughout the history of sports (Coakley 2001; Hoffert 2003).

Beyond the ways in which structure acts upon the opportunities that women are afforded, the separation of men and women based on gender also operates in the lives of women. This can take the form of resistance against societies views of women as different and less than men. Women know what is right, and they also know what actually occurs in their lives based on their marginal status. According to Hill Collins (2000), women can be empowered by realizing that they are marginalized and fighting against prevailing ideals that women are less than men.

The fact that more women than men identify themselves as feminists reflects women's great experience with the negative consequences of gender oppression. Becoming a feminist is routinely described by women

(and men) as a process of transformation of struggling to develop new interpretations of familiar realities. (Hill Collins 2000: 27)

Another standpoint theorist who examines the empowerment that resistance bestows on women is Dorothy Smith. Smith (1987) argued that the voices of women have been largely excluded from the social sciences; however, when women explore their marginal status, they can make better sense of their social worlds and work towards changing it. In order to accomplish this task, Smith proposes an “insider’s sociology” which is “a systematically developed consciousness of society from within” (Smith 1990: 27). By realizing and challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about sociology and the world in which women live, women can become empowered by resisting socially constructed gender relations.

Although many of the perspectives explicated above have not been utilized in regards to sports participation, I have outlined several examples that underscore the important ideas that life course, interaction theory, and feminist theory can offer in sports research. I believe that life course serves as a basic foundation for sports research that is enhanced by the concepts of role support, women’s choices, and the social construction of gender. Taken all together, these theories provide a constructive framework for analyzing the experiences women have in sports and how these experiences affect their sports participation.

CHAPTER IV

METHODS

Research on the experiences of females in sports, is necessary in order to better understand both the barriers and advantages that affect their sports participation. In order to measure and compare the experiences females who have pursued athletics in college and those who have not, data from the population of female college students at Texas Tech University is utilized.

Sample

For my sample, I chose two different groups of women: college basketball players and college students who played basketball in high school but not in college. Even though comparing the factors that lead some women to play college basketball while others do not is an important consideration, the main reason I chose the sample I did was to explore the experiences of women athletes across several levels of participation: early experiences, high school experiences, and college experiences. Although many of the women in the sample participated in multiple types of sports, I limited my sample to those who had played basketball at least at the high school level in order to maintain some common factor in the type of sport I examined.

Two different methods were employed in order to gather participants for the study. Due to limited funds and time constraints, a random sampling procedure is unfeasible; therefore, one non-probability method was employed. Although the

information from the data may not be applicable to the entire population of females who participate in sports, it does provide useful insights that can be expanded upon in subsequent studies. The goal for the sample was to gather data from at least 20 college females between the ages of 18 and 22; however, the sample that was obtained varied slightly from this goal because one of the college females was out of the age range by three years since she was age 25 and only 18 women were interviewed, ten college athletes and eight college students. While age was easier to control for, race/ethnicity posed a challenge. The university women's basketball team from which I derived my sample is proportioned about equal regarding race/ethnicity. It was difficult to match this proportion in the sample of former high school athletes because the proportion of non-athlete African American women is limited at the university that the sample was drawn from, so the former high school basketball player sample only included one African American woman.

One half of my sample, the women who currently play basketball in college, was obtained by contacting athletic administration. An assistant coach of the women's basketball team set up the interviews with women who are returning to play on the basketball team the following season. The other half of my sample, college females who are former high school basketball players, was obtained by canvassing various Sociology classes. I presented a short lecture on the objectives of my research and the importance of it. I placed my name, e-mail address, and phone number on the chalk board and instructed the students that anyone interested in participating in the study should notify me or the instructor. Compensation in terms of extra points in their classes or money was

not offered in most of the classes; however, one professor did give credit to the students who agreed to participate in the study. The majority of the women who played basketball in high school but not in college came from this class.

Once the sample was established, I set up interviews and proceeded with collecting the data. Certain information concerning the study and issues of anonymity was given to each participant. Also, each participant signed a consent form before the interview took place. Anonymity was assured by informing the participants that their true names will not be divulged in the research project. Their rights concerning the interview were also outlined. Each participant was told that they have the right forgo answering any question or end the interview at any time.

Data Collection and Techniques

The method of data collection chosen is the semi-structured interview format. All interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of participants so all information gathered could be transcribed, coded, and evaluated. All participants were asked questions so comparison of their experiences in sports throughout their life times thus far could be made. Also, each participant was asked at the closing of the session if any specific information that they feel is crucial had been left out. They were also given the opportunity to identify any questions they believe need to be addressed in subsequent interviews.

The first part of the interview was composed of demographic information. The topics covered in the interview include their life history in sports, influences on

participation throughout their lives, and the effects of gender on their participation (see Appendix). My goal was to make the questions as open ended as possible in order to reduce interviewer bias and to allow the subjects to shape the interview. The interviews ranged from about fifteen minutes to forty-five minutes each.

This methodology was chosen because of the potential benefits that can occur. The format involves contact between individuals, so the researcher can observe certain behaviors such as extra-linguistic and non-verbal communications. Also, this type of methodology is more conversational and the interviewer not only has the ability to clarify questions, but the interviewer may also probe to extract other valuable information from the participant. These advantages enhance the possibilities of gathering information about experiences of many different types, which can be compared for gender and race. Also, by gathering feedback from participants through both verbal and nonverbal communications, a potential for creating new research questions that better measure both commonalities and differences exists.

Setting

Interviews were held in two different locations. One major goal in location selection is to find an environment in which the participant feels comfortable enough to take their time in answering the questions and never feel rushed and in which they have privacy. All of the interviews with college students who do not currently play basketball were conducted in my office, while the college basketball players took place in their own players' lounge. I perceived no difference in comfort levels based on location.

Analysis Techniques

In order to analyze the data, I utilized two analysis techniques set forth in Strauss's and Corbin's (1998) book called *Basics of Qualitative Research: open and axial coding*. Open coding involves uncovering concepts through breaking the data down by naming and labeling passages of the transcribed interviews. Strauss and Corbin (1998) define open coding as "the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data" (101). In order to utilize open coding techniques, I read through each interview and selected major themes: life history in sports participation, influences, and gender ideology. Next, made three copies of each interview in order to focus on one theme at a time. I used a set of interviews for each theme and took notes on the theme as well as highlighted key passages. I then cut and pasted the key quotations onto note cards and labeled the note cards with concepts that encapsulated the ideas set forth by the respondents. By analyzing each theme separately through the use of three sets of interviews, overlap between themes was allowed for.

The next coding technique I used was axial coding. Strauss and Corbin (1998) define axial coding as "the process of relating categories to their subcategories, termed 'axial' because coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions" (123). I used the method of axial coding by separating my note cards first into three piles; one pile was composed for each theme. Next, I read all of the note cards in one theme and developed categories and subcategories based on the concepts developed through the open coding procedures. The analysis was completed by

writing up the findings in terms of the themes, categories, and subcategories that emerged from the data.

Limitations

Although the research conducted provides useful insights that may serve as a foundation for subsequent studies, some disadvantages and problems exist due to sampling procedures, characteristics of the participants and interviewer, and locations of the interviews. The sampling procedures are non-probability samples, which do not yield statistically measurable results because randomization is not used. Although the participants may have characteristics that are similar to that of the population, the results are not necessarily reliable representations of the population; however, I feel that this research is indicative of the ways in which many females view the world of sports.

Racial/ethnic characteristics of the interviewer may produce limitations. Since the sample was mixed racially, some participants could have been reluctant to divulge information to a white woman. Questions could have offended people, so it was extremely important to make sure the questions were not biased. Familiarity with the literature and the experience of being an athlete in both high school and college seemed to have buffered any potential problems.

Another problem that occurred with the sample was location. Since I could not control for setting in the college basketball player sample, privacy was a limitation. Several of the interviews were interrupted by people entering the players' lounge or working on the computers in the lounge. Also, the college athletes interviewed play for a

prestigious program. Many of the women are trained regarding ways to answer questions. Although I believe that many women told the truth about their experiences in their own words, sometimes it was apparent that the women were trying to be careful not to divulge an excessive amount of information and some women also hesitated to use names of people and places. Some women would catch themselves and put their hands over their mouths, but after reassuring them that the interview was confidential, they usually finished their stories.

Class distribution and racial/ethnic characteristics of the sample were also a limitation. Only one woman in the sample spoke of coming from a lower socioeconomic status background. A majority of women in the sample had at least one parent who graduated from college or held some type of degree. As alluded to earlier, the racial composition of the sample was not equally distributed. One Caucasian and African American women were included in the sample, and even though the college basketball player portion of the sample had the same amount of African American women and Caucasian women, the sample of college students contained only one African American woman.

One final limitation is that the scope of this research is not large enough to include results on more than one cohort. It is important to point out that this research applies to the sample only in only the period of time that it is conducted in.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Women, Basketball, and the Life Course

Life history provides useful insights into female experience into sports because as life course theory sets forth, it summarizes peoples experiences through highlighting important factors in their lives. Some of these factors include transitions, events, and turning points. Other parameters of participation that are important are timing, sequencing, and duration of involvement. The experiences of each woman in my sample are unique, and their life patterns in sports participation can be best understood through their history of participation in sports and the choices they made regarding transitions at different points in their athletic careers.

History of Participation in Sports

As life course sets out, early life patterns do affect subsequent life patterns. Almost all of the women in both samples began participating in some form of sports at a very young age. By elementary school, almost all women reported being involved in some type of organized sports. These organized sports included soccer, tee ball, basketball, cheerleading, ballet, and gymnastics. Many women also reported attending basketball and volleyball camps as children. All of the women in the sample maintained that they were very active at a young age, whether it be playing in their front yard, neighborhood, or community sports leagues. As woman pointed out, she was exposed to

basketball at a very young age, and another woman adds that she was also involved in basketball her entire life time. As one woman stated:

Before I started playing any type of organized, I mean when I was just a toddler there's pictures of me with like the little plastic goal and a basketball.

Another woman said:

I played basketball my whole life, and I just grew up around it. My dad played and so I used to follow him to the gym, and we would always watch games, so dating back to just being able to walk, I got a basketball in my hand.

Not only were the women in my samples involved in sports at early ages, but they also were involved in multiple sports. Many played basketball, volleyball, softball, and ran track throughout junior high and high school. As one woman pointed out, her life path included various sports at different times in her life, and she had to make choices at times regarding which sports she wanted to pursue.

I played, uh, basketball from the time I was in second grade til I graduated from high school. I played AAU basketball, which was year round, starting when I was in six, fifth or sixth grade, I don't remember, and I played through high school. I also played softball year round, um, since I was in the eighth grade. I swam on the swim team also when I was in high school for a year because they needed a butterflyer (laugh). I didn't really want to but the coach kinda talked me into it. And um, I swam in the swim team when I was younger. I started when I was like six, and I stopped doing that when I was ten because I wanted to play basketball instead.

Beyond the scope of what sports the women participated in at which points in their lives, sports provided other meanings to the women. Although many women cited discouraging moments in their sports participation, all of them spoke of athletics as a fun endeavor, even through the hard trials that college basketball puts one through. All

women spoke of enjoying competing and some cited that winning important games were among their happiest moments in sports. As one athlete highlights, enjoying time with teammates and friends met through sports participation was also an important factor described by several women.

I think just traveling. You know regionals was probably, that was one of the most fun times I ever had just cause it was all of us girls just on a trip, you know. And our coach was really cool. You just, the whole traveling and just taking a trip all together.

Transitions

As cited above, women made choices at different points in their lives about which sports to pursue. These women also made choices concerning whether or not to pursue athletics on each new level. A combination of factors helped them make their decisions regarding playing basketball in high school and college. Out of all the women in both of my samples, only two quit playing basketball during high school. One woman played three different sports in high school, and although she wanted to pursue a college basketball scholarship when she was younger, she decided her senior year that she was interested in volleyball and track more than in basketball and did not play basketball her senior year. Another quit playing basketball when she was sixteen because she wanted to work and save money for a car.

It basically came down to, I was sixteen and I wanted a new car. The only way I could get a new car is to pay for the insurance, so with me havin' the work program at school, I took advantage of that so I could get the money to have my car. I though my car was more important at that time, but I mean, after I graduated I went back and of course played with different associations and played other stuff, but that's why I quit durin' high school.

Many women in my sample contended that a point came in their athletic careers that they were forced to make a decision on which sport to play. Sometimes this decision was forced upon them at an early age, while others were not forced to choose until they went to college. One woman said that a coach forced her to choose between soccer and basketball at an early age, which was discouraging.

Whenever I played soccer for so long, once I got into fifth grade or so and I was kinda startin' to play basketball, my soccer coach called my mom and told my mom that "You, you need to tell [her] I'm gonna call her next week and she needs make a decision. She's either gonna start playin' soccer or she's gonna start playin' basketball," 'cause I was good at soccer when I was little. She said, "she needs to pick between those two and let me know because we just really want her to be the forward of our team, make sure we're really good and she's gonna have to decide." And so I called her the next day and I was like, "Yeah, I'm gonna play basketball." And so that kinda discouraged me just because she put, you know she put it on like a fifth grader that they had to decide the rest life whether they were gonna play soccer or play basketball. And you know I was just kinda like, why can't I play both? But she didn't see it that way.

Women's turning points involve a combination of many factors. One woman decided that she wanted to play basketball in college when she was younger and played summer leagues in basketball year round in order to hone her skills. Even though she put a lot of time and energy into her basketball skills, events transpired that changed her future goals. She stated:

It had always been one of my goals to play college basketball, and when I got into high school, my freshman year, I was really focused on that. That's what I wanted to do. And then my sophomore year I was kinda indecisive about it because I wanted to go to a big school and I knew being five two they weren't really gonna, not very many Division One schools were gonna want a five two point guard (laugh) with bad knees, but I didn't know I had bad knees then. And then when I tore my ACL [anterior crutiate ligament in the knee] my junior year, I just kinda decided that, that probably wasn't the best idea, playing college, and I had like a whole year to sit out and really decide on what I wanted to do and I, I'm

very involved in my education, like I want to succeed in that, and I know that the athletes like anywhere you go have to really struggle to balance the school and the sports that they're involved in, and I didn't want to have to focus too much on that because it's, it's my view that like you go to college for an education, and that's really what I wanted to get out of it, and I would have liked to have played basketball

Her story of her decision to not play college basketball covers many factors that other women cite when discussing their decisions to not play in college: wanting to go to a big school, absence of recruitment by prestigious college teams, other goals, and physical deficiencies.

Although all of the women in the sample who do not play organized college basketball faced the decision of transitioning out of organized basketball, almost all contended that it was not a hard choice. Two of the women did contend that they are presently talking to college coaches about being on track teams. It is important to point out that although these women chose not to pursue basketball in college, their lives are not devoid of athletic participation. Sports remain an integral part of many of their lives in the form of watching college basketball, participating in sports classes and intramural leagues in college, and participating in softball and volleyball leagues for adults. One woman is a manager for a college athletic team.

The sample of college basketball players also underscores the importance of transitions and turning points in the athletic trajectory. Similarly to the women who did not pursue college athletics, women basketball players cite many factors that affected their decision to continue organized sports participation in college. Some of these factors include getting school paid for through a scholarship, the love of the game, having talent and superior basketball skills, and being recruited by prestigious college basketball

teams. Many of the women cited that they knew early on, either by junior high or the beginning of their high school careers, that they wanted to continue playing basketball in college. Financial benefits in the form of a scholarship were a major factor for many of the women. For example, one woman discovered at a young age that she had talent in basketball which could help provide her with a college education.

I guess in like seventh and eighth grade you just, I just really, I mean I love to play and it was just so much fun and I was, I was always competitive since I was little but um then is when I started getting serious. Like I can be good at this and I can, I can do somethin' and that's when my dad planted in me you know if you get good you can, you can help us out. You can pay for your college, and um you know if you can play ball in college and uh, that was always a dream for me and of course um it also in gonna help my parents out tremendously, paying for my college, so um that's when I first started.

As one college athlete recounts, a college scholarship meant that she could pursue an education that would have not been an option otherwise because her family did not have any money.

I mean like I said you know we were um pretty low class and you know they wanted me to get out and you know get an education and stuff you know and play basketball for free and stuff so I wouldn't struggle the way we did.

This woman's sister had gotten a college basketball scholarship; however, after her first semester, she returned home pregnant. At one point, the woman considered just staying home and getting a job in order to help her sister financially instead of going to college, but her father persuaded her to follow her athletic trajectory in order to get an education.

Along with the financial support that basketball scholarships could give, another factor that influenced many women to pursue a college athletic career was realizing that

they could actually achieve the goal. As life course theory offers, development is multidimensional, and one of these dimensions is psychological. One major way in which the women realized they had the potential to compete at the college level occurred through recruiting by university basketball scouts. While the women who do not play college basketball cited that they were only recruited by small schools or not recruited at all, the women in the college basketball sample stated that being sought after by prestigious college basketball programs provided an incentive for them to pursue their athletic trajectories.

One main avenue that many of the college basketball players said provided for opportunities to be seen by college scouts was AAU. A difference occurs between the two samples regarding duration of participation in AAU. Even though many of the women who do not play college basketball played AAU at some point in their lives, most of them did not play throughout high school. Almost all of the college basketball sample played AAU throughout high school. One woman contends that AAU was an important event in her athletic trajectory.

Probably like ninth grade, eighth or ninth grade I knew then that I wanted to go to Division One college and play basketball if I could. Like I said, we played AAU a lot and we won national championships and so we had a lot of exposure to college scouts and stuff and I knew that was definitely gonna be a possibility so I just continued to work hard so I could make it become a reality.

Parental acknowledgement of the women's basketball skills also helped the women realize that they could get a scholarship in high school. Parental influence was a major part of woman's college basketball career. She stated:

My parents both said that I had a lot of talent they thought, and they said that if I tried hard and get my grades and stuff then I could go and be in Division One because we sat down and talked about it when I was in high school... They told me that if I didn't want to go and play then I should kind of just stop what I'm doing until I get my grades together, but I told them that I wanted to play and every day my mom and dad were like on me in school working and making me practice everyday so I could get better.

Athletic participation for women involves trajectories and those trajectories involve decisions at different points in the lives of women athletes. The choices that women make in regards to sports participation are influenced by many factors. Two main factors that influenced women to pursue a college scholarship in basketball were financial issues and others believing that the women's basketball skills can take them to the next level. Some women who did not go on to play college basketball were recruited and told by family and friends that they should pursue a college basketball scholarship, but just as a variety of factors influenced the decision of the college athletes to pursue college athletic careers, so too did a combination of factors influence the women to pursue other areas of interest outside of sports.

Influences

A major factor in understanding life paths are life histories in sports; however, it is also important to understand the socializing agents that aided in the women's participation. I chose two main categories in order to summarize the diverse ways that others influenced the women athletes: facilitators and role models. The influences in women's lives reflect the importance of family influence and socialization into sports through the family and others.

Facilitators

The term facilitators was chosen in order to indicate the ways in which different people assisted the women's athletic trajectories. Facilitation is an important concern because it points out the ways in which women are encouraged by their families, peers, coaches, and others. Four different "ideal types" of facilitation occurred. According to Weber (1962), ideal types "show how a given type of human behavior would occur, on a strictly rational basis, unaffected by errors or emotional factor, and if, further, it were directed only to a single goal" (36). The first ideal type is initiator which is defined by instigating participation. Pusher is the next ideal type, which means pressuring to hone skills or continue participation. The third ideal type, technical advisor, is advice on technical skills. A final ideal type is supporter, which means encouragement through helping financially and emotionally.

The use of ideal types provides for overlap between the types of facilitation. It is important to point out that many responses can fit into more than one type of facilitation; however, the definitions provided in the previous paragraph show how each ideal type is different.

Initiators

The first type that emerged from the data is initiator. Initiator means that the person instigated participation. As reported earlier in the life analysis section, all of the women in the sample began sports participation in some form at an early age, so initiators represent early influences in these women's sports participation. There are several ways

that people influenced the women to begin participation: teaching sports, following others around and observing their participation, serving as connections to organized sports teams, and providing equipment in their own homes. Given the different ways that women's participation can be initiated, some women had more than one initiator, and these various initiators could occur at different points in their lives. For example in one interview, a father served as an initiator by putting up a goal in the front yard and playing with the woman when she was a young girl. Later on in her life, though, a volleyball coach served as an initiator into organized basketball because she approached the woman and told her she should try out for the junior high basketball team.

Family members were the prime initiators for the majority of the women in the sample. Within in the family, fathers were cited as teachers and aiding in participation by being involved with the women early on by playing sports with the women. One woman was home schooled and cited her father as an initiator through teaching:

I also home schooled in junior high, and um that was when I really got serious about stuff and sixth, seventh, and eighth grade my P. E. credit was my dad would take me to the gym and shoot and that was after school every day. And that's really when I started lovin' the game, really workin' hard and, and I don't know if, I mean so many people are so different but I just learned to love to practice and stuff and especially with my dad's influence over me and him working with me. I love to spend time with my dad, so that's when I started getting into that (basketball).

The prime ways that mothers initiated the women in the sample to play were through establishing connections through networking. One example of connection is a mother taking the initiative to find out about basketball organizations that the women could get involved with:

Interviewer: Did you get hooked up on those teams (AAU summer leagues) through networking or friends all got together on a team or?

Respondent: Well, I was really the only girl from my school that played year round like that competitively. And uh, it was more or less like a, somebody had seen me play and mentioned something to my mom about maybe getting into that kind of stuff, 'cause in my area like volley ball's really a big deal, and basketball is not really that big of a deal, but, and my mom kinda got some names and numbers and stuff and I went and tried out and got on a team.

In some instances, mothers also initiated sports participation by signing their children up in various organizations. One woman reported that her mother initiated her participation by actually forcing her to play. She stated:

Well my mother made me play sports cause I didn't wanna play and she forced me to play sports so that I could do some extra activities and not you know fall into the bad crowd and what not. And then I think um I just started playin' and then kinda like and every year I kinda cried not to play, didn't want to play and what not, and my mom kept makin' me.....

Interviewer: How did she force you? Did she just take you and?

Respondent: Yeah, pretty much (laugh). She said um I signed you up for this and you're gonna play this, and I was like, I really don't wanna play this, and she, she kinda knew that I didn't like anything until I tried it and she knew that I'd probably start likin' it, but I always complained I was bored so she made me play.

Finally, older siblings, both sisters and brothers also served as important initiators by taking on a more mentoring role with many of the women. Older siblings provided the women in the sample both knowledge and exposure to a variety of sports, including basketball. In asking specifically if one woman's older brothers influenced her she responded:

Well, yeah, they for sure cause they were the ones that got me started. I think if 'cause I've always kinda followed them because, you know, coming from a small town, and you know, just growing up with them, they were like my best friends, so thinking of things that they did as things I wanted to do, so I'm sure if they wouldn't have played basketball, I probably would never have picked one up. You know, it's just, they

started the interest in it and it was just something you did. I think it was kinda learned by the time I got that, you into high school and stuff. It was just something I did when I was little and that, you know, growin' up with three boys, that's what they did, so I did it too.

Pushers

The next type of facilitator is the “pusher.” This term was chosen because some of the women themselves used it. Pushers pressured the women to work harder on their game and in some instances urged the women to stay involved in basketball when they wanted to quit. Family members, including fathers, mothers, siblings and even an aunt in one case were reported to “push” the women in sports participation. Although some women did report resenting the pushing at times, all the women appreciated the effort their family members put forth in the end.

Respondent: I mean my parents pushed me a lot, but they didn't like push me to the point where they said you have to, but they, like there was a time when I wanted to quit right before I blew my knee out, and they wouldn't let me quit.....

Interviewer: Do you have an example of how they pushed you?

Respondent: Like my mom just wouldn't let me quit. Like I really wanted to quit my freshman year right before I blew my knee out 'cause we had to run cross country to play basketball, and I really didn't want to do that (laugh). So, um, she wouldn't let me quit at all, and I'm glad she didn't cause I really enjoyed it.

Interviewer: What did you say? Like mom, I want to quit or?

Respondent: Yeah, we argued about it all the time, and she just wouldn't let me do it. She'd just say NO! yeah, we, we had countless arguments over it (laugh).

Interviewer: Did she ever give you a reason?

Respondent: That I shouldn't start somethin' if I'm not gonna finish it, pretty much.

Another example of a pusher is advising the women to practice more. Some parents told their daughters to work harder on their game, but did not force them to.

Other parents, especially fathers, took the women to a gym or a front yard goal and worked with them on their skills, as was the case with one woman.

My step dad influenced me a lot 'cause he was hard on me but, I mean, I knew why he was being hard on me. He only wanted me to get better, so every time I mess up, he'll, we'll work in the gym for like hours and hours tryin' to make me better.

Technical Advisors

A third way in which women were assisted in their sports participation that was prevalent throughout the interviews was advice on the technical aspects of basketball. Coaching in a technical way is different from the teaching cited above in the initiator section because the instruction does not begin the participation but instead helps hone the skills throughout the women's entire athletic careers. Other factors involved in the technical concept include criticizing the women's play and offering advice in order to correct problem areas in their basketball skills. As with the pushing concept, many times correcting and criticizing were perceived as positive influences. The main correctors and critics referred to by the women were fathers. As one athlete pointed out, although her father could not always attend her games, he did offer advice on how to improve her skills:

He was, he was, I mean he was always there. He was just the one who always like, "well, you did this wrong," you know what I mean? He was the one who'd criticize you and tell you to do this, but he was always a good role model and always was there for me and wanted me to do good and stuff. And I think that's his main goal, is why he criticizes me is cause he wants me to be the best, and he still does it to this day, so.

Another technical influence for many of the women in the sample were high school and junior high coaches. These coaches were not necessarily the women's coaches either, although in many instances they were. Some women contended that the men's basketball coach at their schools took interest in their abilities and taught them skills. For example, one woman stated that her own coach in high school did not take the initiative to teach them the skills that they needed to be good basketball players. The boy's coach, however invited her and a couple of friends to practice with the boy's team and also took time to help them on their individual games.

He'd (the boy's coach) actually put us in some of the plays with the guys, I mean, you know he's like, "Okay, you run point." You know he'd get me out there and say, "this is your man. You better stick to him. If he goes this way, you better be right on him." He was the one who taught us, and me and the two other girls that actually would practice with the guys, we'd try and runt the defenses by ourself. He made me just sit there and shoot threes all day because there's no way I was gonna get underneath the net, so he just, you know, "Go from here and just walk the line." He had little X's around the three point line and I had to go from each position.

While none of the women in the sample were coached by parents on teams organized through schools, many parents of the women in the sample coached teams outside of school, such as tee ball, little dribblers, and summer league teams. Many of the women reported that they enjoyed having their parents coach them, but one woman in particular did not enjoy the experience, so she simply switched teams.

When I was, when I first started when I was younger my mom and my dad coached, and after about two years of that we realized that that wasn't gonna work. You know it's hard to have your parents coach you and we thought it'd be better if I just played for somebody else `cause we got into too many arguments over whose gonna play and this and that you know so we just decided that I'd rather play with a different coach instead of them coaching me.

Overall, most women reported that having their parents coach was a positive experience. While many fathers were viewed as more winning coaches, many women who reported on their experiences with their mothers as coaches emphasized the fun they had. For example, one woman, who went on to play college basketball, painted a picture of her mother as not being as concerned with winning as she was with having a good time.

My mom did (coached) in little dribblers. She was my coach. That was fun playin' with my mom, and I, I love playin' my mom because she didn't go out for the best players, you know whenever you can pick your own team or whatever, she wouldn't pick just the best players, she'd just pick the players and we would always have fun. You know she wasn't too strict, like we gotta win and all that stuff. She was like just go out there and have fun and just play, and so it was fun playin' with my mom.

Supporters

A final type of facilitator was through support. Many women in my sample utilized this term when discussing how people influenced them through encouragement, helping the women both on the basketball court and off, attendance at games, and fronting the money that it costs to participate in sports. Support came from various sources including family members, coaches, and friends. Family members provided each kind of support discussed above for many of the women, with mothers being the most likely to be viewed as a supporter. Although a few mothers did coach and criticize the women's playing, most mothers were described as being encouragers and cheerleaders.

As one woman claims, her mother always helped her emotionally by giving her positive words of encouragement.

A lot actually. She always, she never brought me down ever. Like you know, didn't say that I messed up during this game or whatever. She was more the encourager, and you know the only thing she would ever get mad at was if I had a bad attitude or anything like that. But she was really just there emotionally more so than, than like you know, encourage, I don't know, not to like tell me what I'm doing wrong or correct what I actually do, but to just encourage me.

Another important way in which family members served as a support system was through game attendance. All of the women in the sample whose parents were not divorced reported that both of their parents attended almost all of their games. Mothers were more likely to attend summer leagues year around because some women stated that their fathers had to miss occasional games because of work. Some women also reported that members of their extended family, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins attended their games regularly. Family attendance was viewed as a very positive part of playing sports. For example, when asked about her happiest moments in sports, one woman replied:

Um, just, I don't know, just having you know, we'd have nights where it would be like parents' night, or you know just before a game you'd come out there and just, always having my parents there and stuff like that you know. And they'd always be there watching my games, and I mean, it made me feel really good, you know they care, and they followed up on every game, you know. They were there, so that's always like a memory that's happy.

Besides encouragement and attendance, families were a significant source of financial assistance for the women who played year round basketball in leagues. One woman said that it was important for her to get a basketball scholarship in college

because her mother had “probably paid for college four times over with all the stuff she’s done.” Also, another woman reported that members of her extended family would chip in ten dollars each when she needed money to travel in order to play in summer leagues. Mothers again played an important role as a supporter through driving their children to events and taking care of the minor details that come along with sports participation. Even though many mothers were not viewed as athletic, mothers were a significant source of support and influence as one woman contends:

And of course I mean my mom influenced me too. She wasn’t athletic you know but I mean she was there at all the games. She took me to practices. She did everything in that area.

Coaches also went beyond the technical scope of the game. For example, one coach played a very important role in one woman’s life when her parents were going through a divorce:

Respondent: My coach the last year, my junior and senior coach, he influenced me a lot. He helped me out. That was when my parents were goin’ through a divorce, too, so he was pretty much there as a father figure to me, and I really looked up to him.

Interviewer: What did he do? Could you give me an example of something maybe he did that really helped support you?

Respondent: Well, he was just there, like as a person too instead of a coach. We’d go talk about anything and was able to talk to him off the court, and we were just friends.

Facilitation as a Gendered Process

As alluded to through many of the examples above, facilitation was gendered in many cases. While mothers tended to be perceived as more supportive, encouraging, and less knowledgeable about athletics, fathers were reported to be more technical,

pressuring, correcting, critical, and more knowledgeable about sports. For example, one woman summarizes many of the assertions of many of the women in the sample:

My mom was more of like support system for me, where my dad was more of a, um pusher, like not a pusher but he just wanted, he wanted me to do well and he knew I could do well. But my mom was more of the um, "You did good, honey." You know, all that kind of stuff when maybe I didn't play so good (laugh). But my dad, I mean my dad would tell me if I didn't play well, and you know, he was an athlete so he kinda knew where I was coming from when I'd had bad games and stuff. And where my mom just wanted to kinda cheer me on and stuff so that's where a lot of my mom's athletic stuff came from. She's kinda a cheerleader (laugh).

Overall, many mothers were perceived to be less knowledgeable about sports than fathers and less athletic than fathers. One woman discounted her mother's athleticism even though she played in high school, while she relied on her father who may have not played organized basketball in high school to teach her skills in basketball.

Interviewer: Have either one of your parents been involved in sports in their life times?

Respondent: Yeah, I think, yeah.

Interviewer: Did your dad play.....

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: 'Cause you said he helped you a lot, like with the logistics of the game?

Respondent: I don't know if he played like in high school and stuff, but he's really athletic, so.

Interviewer: And your mom?

Respondent: My mom said she played basketball, but she doesn't look like she could (laugh).

Interviewer: We change a lot as we get older.

Respondent: Evidently (laugh).

Although these gendered influences did occur throughout many of the interviews, it is also important to point out that not all fathers were technical advisors and pushers and not all mothers were encouraging and lacked knowledge. For example, one woman's mother was a high school basketball coach for many years and coached her AAU team.

She also played on an Olympic basketball team. Another woman's mother was a pusher and went to great lengths to help her improve her game.

She wasn't always the mom who was like good job, you know, you played good and all that kind of stuff. She was the one to say, "you really need to hustle a little more and get some rebounds," and that. You know sometimes I was just like leave me alone but at the same time that was, I liked that a lot better than someone saying, "oh, great job," or you know someone who didn't take enough, you know she took enough interest to where she didn't know anything about basketball but she went and learned because it was something I like doing, and so she could help me and she could you know be there for me. She bought, actually went and bought some Tae Kwon Do pads, and so 'cause she's [quite a bit shorter than me] so she couldn't really do anything, like when we were shootin' in the front yard, and she couldn't 'cause she was like okay, you're shootin' over me but she would like push me and stuff and help me on my post moves so I could get better. So she really helped me a lot.

Role Models

A second category that emerged from the data was that of role model. Role models are people that the women looked up to and wanted to emulate in their own lives. Research has found that positive examples in the forms of successful women athletes and women who are not far removed from the experiences of girls are important factors in the participation of women in sports (Lensy 1994). Also, role models can serve as an important component in the formation of role identities because if young girls see other women and girls who successfully achieve an athletic identity, they may imagine themselves as having an athletic identity and strive to have the identity confirmed in the eyes of others through sports participation.

Different kinds of people served as important role models in the lives of the women interviewed. Television was a main conduit for observing role models for several

of the women. One woman contended that both men and women athletes served as important role models for her.

Interviewer: Besides people, was there anything else at all that influenced your sports participation?

Respondent: Um, I think just kinda growin' up and being around sports all the time. Kinda like watchin' the NBA and the boys' college basketball when they didn't have you know the women, and watchin' the women's college basketball, but when they, mostly the men because they were you know promoted more than women. I think that you know I just saw that um, it seemed like really fun to be part of a team and you know to all go for one goal and stuff like that. So, I guess the TV.

Congruent with literature findings, successful women athletes were perceived to be important exemplars for many of the women in the sample. Also, some of the women college basketball players that the women in the sample looked up to were not far removed from their lives because they come from the same area the women grew up in. The region of the county in which the sample was drawn is home to one of the highest ranking women's basketball teams in the country. As one woman described:

I, like my idol was Krista Kirkland from the Lady Raiders, and um Sheryl Swoopes and everything. And my high school coach that lived across the street, I mean when I was young, he got me the, the cards like the, you know like the baseball cards but they're basketball cards of the national championship team and got 'em all autographed for me. And um then later Krista Kirkland was a coach at Lockney, and I went to a cross county meet to watch my sister run, and I saw her there (laugh). And he made me go over and talk to her, and she like signed my shirt and everything. But that's just another influence kinda 'cause I always watched the Lady Raiders on TV.

Not only did successful college and professional athletes serve as role models for the women in the sample, but peers also provided motivation for sports participation. For example, one woman recounts the ways in which a teammate on her summer league team inspired her athletic identity:

Um, my second year playing AAU there was a girl on my team and her dad was the coach at the local Junior College. And I just saw how hard she worked to get where she was. She was really tall, but she was kinda going through a growing spurt at the time and was kinda uncoordinated, and I just saw how she worked really hard to get her coordination down so that she could be successful playing. And um, I'm sure a lot of it came from pressure from her parents, but they were really, um, they were very focused on basketball. I think she also just loved to play and knew she could continue her play like through college and wanted to go that route and get a scholarship and stuff, so I just saw how hard she worked and it made me want to work harder, and I think it motivated me to put effort into my play and practice and stuff like that.

Along with peers, many women idolized older people who participated in high school athletics. One woman pointed out that watching older youth play sports was a motivation to play sports herself.

Interviewer: At what point in your life do you think you became most interested in sports and in basketball?

Respondent: It probably started early, like when we were young cause that's like the big thing to do cause you like, you go to the games and you watch the high school kids and you just idolize 'em and that's what you want to do.

Family was a final place where some women found role models. One woman believed that her father who was a professional athlete for several years was an inspiration to her. He died when she was younger; however as she got older, he became a role model in her life because many people commented that she resembled him. Several women contended that their families were athletic, so playing basketball was a tradition in their families. As a woman described:

My dad played professional football when I was, he was playing when I was born, so he played for eleven years, so pretty much until I was six he played, and so we were a real athletically kinda based family. You know that was just somethin' that, I was kinda built like my dad and did all that so, it's just natural that, that'd be the thing I was drawn to since I watched them do everything.

As with peers, older siblings and cousins were frequently cited as important examples for many of the women in the sample. A few women from the college basketball sample told of how some of their family members had also gone on the play college sports. Many women also grew up watching their older siblings participate in sports, which served as an example of how they should live their lives. One woman remembers the accomplishments of one of her sisters, which was an important motivation in her athletic trajectory:

My oldest sister who was a senior in high school when I was in sixth grade, she, like I loved everything she did because she was a point guard, and I wanted to be a point guard, and she was maybe five foot tall. She was really, really small, didn't even weigh a hundred pounds, and she was really tiny and just so, so fast, and I just like really looked up to her and I saw her go to the regional tournament and all that stuff so that really got me excited about all that.

Women were socialized into sports through the two types of influences discussed above; however it is important to point out that these categories are not exclusive or exhaustive. Just as the categories within the theme facilitator were ideal types, facilitators and role models also serve as ideal types in that not all responses concerning influences fit neatly into either the facilitator or role model categories. Much variation and overlap occurred throughout the main categories and subcategories. The influences that women reported were complex.

The Gendered Experiences of Women Athletes

Sociological theory lends that males and females are separated into two categories, with males perceived as “the touchstone, the normal, the dominant,” and

females being relegated the “different, deviant, and subordinate” category (Lorber 1993: 51). Research in sports complies with the idea that women are viewed as less than men because the participation of women in sports has been marginal to that of men throughout the history of sports. Even though women are gaining more opportunities in sports, it is evident through the data collected that gender still plays a big role in sports participation. Two categories became apparent through the interviews: gender biases and resistance in sports and personal gender perceptions of women in basketball.

Gender Biases and Resistance

Gender biases are ways in which women were held back or treated differently than male athletes. Although not all women initially contended that they were treated differently than that their male counterparts in any way, after probing, several differences did come about in some cases. Women reported being treated differently than males in several ways, which can be summarized in two subcategories. One subcategory includes organizational biases, and the other subcategory covers interaction biases that stem from one-on-one experiences and attitudes that individuals have about women in sports.

Organizational Biases

Many women in both samples reported being treated differently through structural denial of opportunities and material resources. Denial of opportunities was cited in regards to early participation in organized baseball leagues and football leagues by a few

women. For example, one woman's experience in getting on a little league baseball team was similar to my story that was told in the introduction.

Respondent: Well, just probably growing up 'cause you know we wanted to play football and they wouldn't let girls play football. Then like once you get, you play base, tee ball with the boys and they, once you get older, you can't play [Little League] with them. It's only for boys.

Interviewer: Did you try out for Little League or would they let you do that?

Respondent: Well, I tried out and made the team, and I guess the coach had a problem with girls being on the team, so they kind of told me that I was too, they tried to say I was too old to play on there or something like that, or whatever, so I just said forget it and kept playing basketball.

Interviewer: Did you show up for the game and they wouldn't let you play or?

Respondent: Well, I made the team and the coach called and said I made the team and then he called back and told me that. I guess they found out that I was a girl on the team, and they don't want to make the boys look bad or something, so they called me and told me that I was too old to play and they made up some story so I was like okay. So I just went and played basketball.

Interviewer: How do you know that he made it up?

Respondent: It's just because like, I mean my dad went and talked to him and him and my dad are real good friends and he told my dad the real truth that you know the coaches wouldn't think it was right to have a girl playin' in a boy's league.

Another level of sports participation that organizational bias occurs on is the high school level. While some women contended that they got as much funding as the men's teams and even had more access to material resources at some points, the majority of women stated that the boy's team got many more material support than their team got in the form of nicer equipment and transportation, newer uniforms, and access to higher quality food on road trips. One woman sums up the ways in which her high school basketball team was treated differently from the boy's basketball team.

Interviewer: Did you ever feel like in high school that the teams were treated differently like with equipment or court time or anything?

Respondent: Oh yeah! Like in high school, oh yeah. I can't tell you how many times the girls got the back gym and the guys got the main floor, and I mean equally you can say equally, but I mean it wasn't equal. I mean we always got the, the second thing and the guys always went first on the bus and we had to wait for the second bus, and I mean, I mean there was so much. I remember also, I remember the guys got um new uniforms and shoes a lot more than we did the four years I was, I was there and um and then there was also I mean there was a lot of different goofy stuff that always went on.

Interviewer: Like what?

Respondent: Oh just, I mean just different things like eating places or some, I remember the guys would eat at nicer places and I remember we got sent to like Furr's Cafeteria and um and stuff like that, so.

Women from the sample who currently play basketball in college also reported differences in material goods, although not to the extent that unequal access to material goods occurred in many high schools. More than anything, the college basketball players in my sample reported that while they have equal access to financial resources within their program because of their high level achievement, many of their friends that play college basketball in less recognized programs do not have the same treatment materially as their male counterparts.

You know so I mean I think the bigger everything gets and you know the more and more recognition that women's basketball gets, I don't think, I think it really evens things like that up a lot more. Maybe at some places also it's a lot less. Um, I've got friends who play everywhere. You know I have a friend who plays at [a college] in Louisiana and she like, we had a pair of tennis shoes on, and she was like, "Did [your college] give you those?" And she was like we get one pair of basketball shoes and if they wear out then that's it. And she was like, our men's team is horrible and they get runnin' shoes every year and several pairs of basketball shoes and different stuff like that. So you know I think we have it really good because [our college] has such a strong basketball program, but I know a lot of places it's not, it's not that way. You know we have a lot of friends who play in a lot of different places. They're just kinda, they're really second fiddle to the men's team.

Although many programs are required to give women's and men's team equal resources, the stories of many of the women in my samples told that different treatment on all levels of sports participation still exist. These women attended high school thirty years after Title IX was signed into legislation, but they must still combat institutional inequality in sports programs.

Interaction Biases

Interaction bias involves one-on-one discrimination against women in sports. Many women in the sample reported that their experiences with male peers, fans, and the media, just to name a few, highlighted the attitudes of society concerning the participation of women in sports. One way in which women are constantly reminded that they are second class citizens in the world of sports is through the lack of respect and credibility afforded to their sports skills. When asked if being a girl or woman in sports makes sports participation harder or easier in any way, one woman stated that women are treated as less than men in society, which filters into the institution of sports. Although this occurs, she maintains a positive outlook on what women accomplish in the institution of sports.

Well publicly I think it's harder because, I mean, even to quote [a well known men's basketball coach], "Girl's basketball is not a real sport." But yet you know the girl's basketball team is the one that wins. Where are his boys? You know, so I don't think we get enough credibility just because we are female and we're stuck in that old society where we're lesser, you know, we're a lesser value or whatever, but as for it being competitive and actually you know, it's real competitive. It's worth it. I mean even, you know, as a girl getting out there and doin' it, you know now at my age they're aggressive. They're actually serious about sport and that's the, you know, that's all that matters is the dedication, so.

As pointed out in the life analysis section, just because women did not go on to play organized college basketball does not mean that their lives are devoid of sports participation. Women in the sample who do not play organized college basketball recognize the ways in which their skills are disregarded in informal sports at the college level. One woman revealed that she was involved in a basketball class, and the men in the class discounted her ability to play the game.

Respondent: Well, I have this basketball class right now, and there's probably like three guys on my team, and they just don't pass it to ya.

Interviewer: They don't? Do they ever say anything?

Respondent: Even if those other guys like really, really sucks, they'll, they'll pass it to him and I'm just wide open and they won't pass it. I just walk. I don't even do anything 'cause it's useless. They won't, they don't give you a chance.

Interviewer: Does your teacher ever say anything?

Respondent: Um, m. She's a girl. I guess she just expects it too.

Although the sample of women who play basketball have achieved notable success in Division I play and are publicized throughout the area, many of these women report that their informal interactions in the recreation center on campus also highlight the ways in which women are viewed as having less athletic ability than men. These women tell stories of the ways in which they must prove their skills in order to get respect in informal basketball games at the center. As one college athlete states, her ability is "taken for granted" at the recreation center.

Yeah, like the guys at the rec like they, they kinda take us for granted. They kinda take us lightly like we're not good and stuff. I know sometimes I go to the rec by myself and um, they're really hesitant to pick up a female on their team. Sometimes they'll just like overlook you, like I'll pick the short five three guy before I'll pick you (laughing). Or stuff like that, but you just gotta step up and be like hey! I'm goin' you know. That's, they don't expect us to do, they expect to run over us, and we don't

usually let that happen, but usually we go up there in groups, so we all just run 'em off the court.

The need for women to constantly try to prove themselves in order to gain respect and recognition for their sports abilities goes beyond interactions with their male peers. According to many women who do not play basketball in college, they want to support the women's teams by attending their games; however, many of their friends will not go with them to the women's games. A discrepancy in attendance between men and women's sports occurs at both the high school and college levels. Many of the women in the samples contend that they had to prove that they could win in order to boost attendance at their games. Even though the sample of college basketball players are part of a winning program, some of them still contend that they must remain winners in order to boost attendance. One college athlete believes that their team must put forth a winning effort in order to the arena full.

Since he's come [the new men's coach] I think it's been um, I mean it's been different because of course he's a higher coach or whatever and um it's just always hard cause the guys will always have the crowds and the guys have more students and stuff like that, where we're always gonna have to work to get people in the crowd as far as winning and um stuff like that. Just like I mean if they, we play Texas you know a lot of people come anyway to both Texas games, but if we're having a losing season, not as many people will still show up. Stuff like that.

Throughout the interviews, some women did contend that the fans support them as much if not more than they do the men's teams, however, most of the women pointed out that women's sports are still treated and viewed by many people as less competitive and enjoyable to watch. Some of the women cited important examples of how women's sports are not given as much attention as men's sports in the media, through both

advertisements and televised games. Although the majority of women in the sample saw that these differences occurred, they did not let the lack of respect and attention sway their involvement in sports.

Resisting an Inferior Status in Sports

As is evident through the many quotations dealing with the organizational and interactional biases that women face in sports, many women resist the unfavorable conditions and attitudes that people in society put forth regarding women's abilities and skills in sports. Although a very few of the women in my sample overtly called other women to action in the fight against inequality and one woman even stated twice that she was not a feminist, another woman voiced her opinions about women in sports proudly.

I just think we need to um you know all the women's sports, soccer, you know softball, all of them, we just need to go out there and show 'em you know. Let's, we just need to earn their respect. I mean just 'cause we don't have fights here or there, so that doesn't mean they have to put us down because we are women. I mean obviously we're good at somethin'. You know we're out there. We're on scholarships, some of them playin' professional. You know we're just as good as them. You know we're just the opposite sex and I just think we need to get the same amount of respect as the men do in sports.

This is just one of the many quotations that this particular woman offered regarding respect for women athletes. She was very vocal in her support for the equal treatment of women in sports, and when I asked her if there was anything else about the being a woman in sports that she wanted to add, she simply replied, "I just, all the people that hate women's sports, I hate you too (laughing)." Although not many women were as vocal as she was in their appraisal of what it means to be a woman and play sports, many

of the women resisted the idea that men's sports were better than women's. Women also cited that parents became advocates against unfair treatment of their daughters basketball teams. One woman's father even got on the school board and fought for more rights for the women's basketball team.

I don't know. I didn't really think it (treatment) was fair. I always, I think our, to an extent, a lot of our administrators were a little sexist on that, you know issue about guys being better athletes or whatever. You know I don't know what they think but uh, and then my dad got on the school board (laugh), and uh, he really pushed you know encouragement and support and stuff, so for girl's athletics, so I really think that helped a lot too. Just having our administrators behind us finally you know.

The athletic participation stories of the women interviewed depict sport in the United States as an institution that is not only gendered, but also reflects a perception that women are second class citizens in sports. Women are treated differently than men through the material support they are given and the attitudes of others regarding the women's perceived skills.

Personal Perceptions

As described above, the women in the sample point out many ways in which they are marginalized in sports participation. Personal perceptions involves the way they view their position with in the realm of sports. In many cases, the women internalized the very attitudes and beliefs that have served as barriers for women's sports participation throughout history. Another main perception that emerged from the data was that many women believe that opportunities are expanding for women in sports.

Although most women did not internalize the belief that women are less capable of being athletes than men are, some women did contend that men and women were different in terms of athletic ability. One extreme example comes from one woman when asked if being a girl or woman makes sports participation harder or easier in any way.

Um, I mean, I don't, I don't really compare it. Like I don't know if you're talking about compared to, to men in sports, but I don't, I think that's a total different league because I think, honestly I think men have more athletic ability, and I think that's pretty, you know obvious, but uh, I don't really ever compare the two, but being a girl in sports, I mean I think it's great because you always think of guys having the opportunity to play. You know football and baseball and basketball and they're more prominent, you know, even you know when they're older, and, and, whatever, but I don't ever really compare. I just, I don't know, I think being a girl in sports, I'm glad that you have the opportunity, you know to do it, but it's in your own league. I mean with other girls and I mean guys have that opportunity all the time, and I feel pretty privileged because don't know very many of my friends that played sports in high school, you know as a girl. I mean most of my guy friends did, and most of my girl friends didn't.

Other women in the sample also believed that sports is a more "masculine role" and equated men with more aggressive and competitive play. Several women made comments that they enjoyed playing with the boys growing up more than the girls because the boys were more aggressive and competitive. These women internalized the belief that sports is a man's world in several instances. In discussing the different treatment of males and females in sports, one woman commented that playing basketball was a more "masculine role."

I think we also get a lot of respect because it seems like it takes a lot of discipline doing what we do and um and it takes a lot of effort on our part and a lot of our time and not to say anything is not, but it's kind of a, it's a, you're kinda doing a masculine role, too. You're sweating. You're going hard. You're doing physical stuff, physical labor type stuff.

Although women themselves sometimes view sports as a masculine domain, the women also understand that their cohort is afforded many more opportunities to compete and be recognized in athletics than preceding cohorts of women. Many women appreciated these opportunities and made statements that they are also role models for future generations of women in sports. A couple women referred directly to Title IX and how it has given them more opportunities in sports, while others recognized through the older women around them that they are better off than women in the past. When asked about whether or not she was ever held back in sports because of her gender, one woman utilized her mother as an example of the change in attitudes in the last thirty years concerning women.

Not that I particularly was, but the females in general were. Like um, it's just became recently more socially acceptable for women to focus on athletics. Like while I grew up in, it was, you know, I got a lot of praise for that and stuff, but like my mom could've been a successful athlete, you know. Nobody knows, but she just wasn't, that wasn't something that her family wanted her to do because it was different at the time, and just now, with like women's rights and stuff like that, it's just made it more socially acceptable for women to take on that role and a lot more women are working now than they have been in the past because they are getting closer to more like opportunities for women to um, take control of the work force, also and then it's also puttin' a lot of focus on the family and kids growing up without moms being at home all of the time, like that used to be a long time ago, and all that kind of stuff.

The personal perceptions many women in the sample had about women in sports reflect those of society. Many women internalized the belief that men and women are different in terms of athletic ability and the ways in which they compete. Some women, however, have resisted these ideas and speak out firmly against inequality in sports. Although biases exist through organizations and

interactions, many women realize and appreciate that they are afforded more opportunities to participate in sports than the women athletes who came before them.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

My goal for this research on female experiences in sports is to provide a valuable base of knowledge by using a qualitative approach. I am a sociology student who is committed to the assumption that classical theorist Harriet Martineau put forth in all of her work: sociologists have a duty and responsibility to collect knowledge, not just for the sake of knowledge, but with the purpose of transforming the world into a better place to live. According to Martineau (1838), a society can be analyzed by observing the gap between “morals,” or the values of a society, and “manners,” or the behavior of society. The wider the gap between morals and manners is, the less cohesion and progress a society has achieved. Another way to analyze the progress of society is to observe the ways in which women are treated in society. The basic assumptions set forth by Martineau can be utilized in order to analyze society’s progress through the institution of sports. Title IX serves as a “moral” because it sets forth how society should behave. The testimonials of the women basketball players indicate the “manners” of society in that these are the actual observed behaviors of people in society. The data show that a gap between the “morals” and “manners” in regards to sports is prevalent. Although society values equality for men and women in sports participation, equality is not evident through the life stories of women in sports. In order to achieve true equality and freedom, this gap must be extinguished.

Sports participation has had a huge impact on the path my life has taken, as well as the life paths of the women in my sample. I have met so many people through my sports participation and learned many valuable lessons in life. I understand that not all women are interested in sports for various reasons; however, all women should be given the choice to pursue sports participation.

The contention of life course theory that development is multispherical and multidimensional was apparent through the women's life histories in sports. Each transition that affected their athletic development proved to be composed of a combination of many factors that sometimes went beyond the purely sociological realm of inquiry. Although themes emerged, much overlapping occurred through the themes, categories, and subcategories chosen. As life course also purposes, cultural climate and historical contexts also shaped the participation of the women athletes in the sample. Many women realized and appreciated that the women athletes who came before them carved out a road that lead to more opportunities for all girls and women to reach their goals of becoming athletes.

Through their complex life histories, the women also gave credence to Lorber's (1993) contention that gender is socially constructed with men belonging to the normal and dominate group while women are relegated to the abnormal and subordinate group. The women tell tales of having to prove their abilities, and even when they succeed, they are still second behind the male athletes. One woman who was a successful shot puter in high school even said that her junior or senior year in high school a coach abandoned her in practice in order to work with junior high school boys. The inferior status of women

was also apparent when discussing fan support. Even though the women college basketball players had achieved great success, they still had watch as fans filtered down from the upper level of the stadium during their biggest game of the year in order to fill up the empty student section.

Although the women were marginalized in the world of sports, the support of many people was a driving force in their athletic trajectories. Family is an important socializing factor into sports participation, which was a key finding through all of the interviews. Even though influences were gendered, family members and others became facilitators and role models which exposed the women to sports participation, encouragement the women, help the women with their skills, and pressured the women to continue their sports involvement by working to reach their full athletic potential. Also, families and college scouts shaped the dreams and goals of many of the women by planting the ideas in the women that they could be successful athletes.

More girls and women are afforded the opportunity to participate in sports in the United States than ever before, but I do not think that is enough. I will not be satisfied with female sports participation until programs at all levels across the country achieve gender equity. It is apparent through the stories of the women interviewed that this has yet to occur. Many women cited the ways in which they were treated differently from their male counterparts from early childhood participation to college participation in both formally organized sports participation and informally organized sports participation. Through the stories of women five to eight years younger than me, I relived my story as a young girl whose hopes to play little league baseball with her friends were splintered.

Although my research shed light on many factors that influence women's participation in sports, more research is sorely needed. Through my research I found that the stories of lower socioeconomic statuses are an important consideration that needs to be looked at more fully. Also, the impact of race/ethnicity was not main consideration in my research, which needs to be explored. Another important research question arose through analyzing transitions into sports on each level or transitioning out of sports. Many women who did not go on to play basketball cited that the only scholarship offers they received were from small colleges. It is important in the future to analyze this contention more fully by researching the choices women made who did opt to play basketball at Division two and three colleges, junior colleges, or private universities. Also, researching the choices of women to continue on playing without scholarships in college is an important consideration. A final area to research are the life histories of men in sports regarding influences, gender ideology, and history of participation in sports. Men also face many obstacles in their participation, which were not included in this research.

Over the past ten years, I would like to believe that the situation regarding girls playing little league has been changed; however, just last summer while I was at a tee ball I looked to an adjacent field and observed a Little League game. Unfortunately, I did not see any ponytails hanging from the caps of the players. To those who believe that sports programs have succeeded in reaching gender equity, I have one mission to send you on. This summer, go watch kids playing baseball on organized teams. First, watch a tee ball game and count the number of girls on the team. The team will probably be composed of

about equal numbers of boys and girls. Next, and this is the important assignment, go watch a Little League game. Count the numbers of boys and girls on the two teams. Good luck finding an equal number! We must all realize that being excluded from any sports teaches girls at a young age that they are not first class citizens in the world of sports, and we must all work to change this occurrence in order to rear our children in a free and equal world.

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APPENDIX
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic Information:

How old are you?

How do you classify your race/ethnicity?

What is your major in college?

What is your grade level in college?

What is your marital status?

Do you have any children? If so, what are their ages and genders?

Are you attending this university with any kind of scholarship? If so, what is it, how long does it last, and how much financial support does it provide?

Family Demographic Information:

Who did you live with while growing up?

Did you have any siblings? If so, brother? Sisters? Ages?

What do your parents do for a living? What is the highest level of education they both completed?

Did your parents divorce? If so, how old were you and with whom did you live?

Did anyone else live with you besides parents or siblings? If so, who and why?

Where did you live? Did you ever move? If so, when and why?

Life History in Organized Sports:

Can you tell me your life history in sports, starting at the earliest point that you can remember?

How did you become interested in sports?

Who did you play sports with?

Did you play in summer leagues or attend camps?

At what point in your life did you become most interested in competing in sports?

Can you tell me your happiest moments in sports?

Influences:

Who influenced you at the different points in your career?

Specifically, how would you say your mother influenced you? Father?

Have either of your parents been involved in sports in their life times? Are they still active in any type of sports?

Who attended your events?

Did either parent coach any of your teams?

Was there anything or anyone who ever discouraged you? How so?

Besides people, was there anything else in your life that influenced your sports participation?

Transitions:

Can you tell me the story of your decision not to play organized basketball in college (for portion of sample who do not play now)?

Can you tell me the story of your decision to play organized college basketball (for portion of the sample who do play now)?

Who supported your decision? How?

Did anyone discourage your decision? How?

Female perspective:

Can you describe what it is like at each point in your career to be a girl or woman and participate in sports?

Does being a girl or woman ever make sports participation easier or harder in any way?

Did you ever feel like you were held back in sports because you are a woman?

Did you ever feel like you were treated differently than the males?

Do you think being a woman in sports ever helps you in any way?

Conclusion:

Is there anything that I left out about sports participation that you think is important? If so, what is it?

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