

Negotiating Gender in Sports

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Department of Sociology

Colorado College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of Bachelor of the Arts

Alexis Cornachio

March 2024

On my honor, I have neither given nor received
any unauthorized aid on this thesis

Alexis Cornachio

March 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Gail Murphy-Geiss for her mentorship throughout this project. I appreciate the time and thought that went into her honest feedback. I feel so grateful for her constant support and passion throughout this entire process.

Thank you to my participants, all the athletes and coaches who filled this project with life, I appreciate you sharing your spaces with me and for your vulnerability.

I would also like to thank the women on my club soccer team for reigniting my passion for sports, and my friend Evie, for challenging me throughout the development of this project and for always sparking new ideas into my head. Thank you to my friend Leyla for her last-minute editing expertise and to my sociology community at CC, you inspire me.

I have the most gratitude for my family. To my parents, thank you for making this education possible and for your unwavering love and support.

ABSTRACT

In 2024, we celebrate the progress of women's sports which has come as the product of female athletes resisting dominant structures of inequality. Despite progress, female athletes still navigate the complexities of their identity within the sporting world each day, confronting obstacles such as the pressure to conform to existing gender stereotypes. This study focuses specifically on the experiences of gender for Division III female, gender-queer and male athletes. The study centers diverse perspectives of athletes from gender segregated and co-ed teams, focusing on how these athletes negotiate their gender identities with societal expectations within the social culture of these two environments. Female and gender-queer athletes on both team environments displayed negotiating gender through self-talk practices. Female and gender-queer athletes on co-ed team environments reported a heightened level of gender awareness due to direct interactions with the male gender, including sexism, male-centric horseplay, validation processes and competition dynamics.

Every February, on National Girls and Women in Sports Day, we celebrate female athletes and the advancements of gender equality in sports since the enactment of Title IX in 1972 . In March 2024, Iowa women’s college basketball star Caitlin Clark passed former men’s basketball player Pete Maravich for most points scored in Division I’s history, men’s or women’s (Deitsch 2024:1). The historic Iowa-Ohio State game garnered the attention of over 4 million viewers, the most a regular season women’s college basketball game has gained in 25 years since a UConn-Tennessee game in 1999 with 3.88 million viewers. In 2024, we celebrate the progress of women’s sports which has come as the product of female athletes resisting dominant structures of inequality. Despite progress, female athletes still must navigate the complexities of their identity within the sporting world each day, confronting obstacles such as the pressure to conform to existing gender stereotypes. Female athletes entering and being successful within the traditionally male-dominated domain of sports must constantly negotiate their gender presentation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Doing” Gender: Foundational Texts on the Construction of Gender in the US.

“Doing” gender is a concept introduced by sociologists West and Zimmerman in their 1987 article “Doing Gender” which examines gender as a performance and ritualistic behavior that is reproduced in everyday life and social interaction. West and Zimmerman argue that gender is not a fixed characteristic of an individual, despite the widely held belief that gender is an essential aspect of human nature. Rather, the communication of one’s gender is viewed as everyday social achievements of the individual to “do” their gender in the “correct” way according to societal expectations.

The idea of “doing” gender as a social achievement takes a social constructionist approach to masculinity and femininity in society. The social actions, attitudes, and behavior of individuals must align with their biological sex and consequently, their gender role in society. Goffman (1976) would agree that gender presentation is a display. Goffman theorizes that people are actors in the performance of everyday life and uses the metaphors of front stage, backstage, and offstage behavior. Goffman theorizes that an individual’s level of performance is dependent on their positionality, a term used in sociology to reference intersectional identities of race, class, gender, and sexuality, often associated with social inequality and discrimination. The individual’s performance is based on their intersectional identity and all selves are socially constructed. The actor makes decisions— some more conscious than others—to either peel back or add layers of their identity depending on how they fit into certain social settings. Regarding the performance of one’s gender identity, Goffman would argue that depending on circumstantial factors, the individual will either choose to downplay or accentuate their gender identity by communicating cues of masculinity or femininity. Goffman claims that masculinity and femininity are “prototypes of essential expression” and that some actions are conveyed subtly in social interactions, and some are so distinct that they function as essential characterizations of the individual (Goffman 1976:75).

Feminist scholars claim that sports are among the most masculine of social institutions and should not be immune to feminist challenges (Messner and Sabo 1990). Messner and Sabo consider scholars Sandra Harding (1986) and R.W. Connell (1987) in their discourse of developing a new framework for examining the gender order in sports. These scholars’ frameworks address points of shifting inequalities and avoid what Messner and Sabo (1990) call gender reductionism. According to Messner and Sabo, gender reductionism is the product of

various feminist frameworks that tend to conceptualize the gendered power relationship in sport as solely two-pointed, stagnant, and neglectful of intersectional identity. The scholars' central point is to critique traditional feminist theories which privilege one form of social domination over the others – privileging gender over all else – and emphasize a multi-dimensional wheel of inequality with shifting dynamics.

Bandy (2005) claims that a formative moment for research at the intersection of gender and sports studies was the influential work of Michael Foucault (1982) on power, institutions, and the body. Rather than envisioning power as hierarchically ordered and possessed by persons, a Foucauldian notion of power is seen as enmeshed networks variously asserted through modern institutions and manifested most concretely at the level of the body (Foucault 1982). The discourse of the gendered and sexualized feminine body in sports began to develop because of texts such as Foucault's (Bandy 2005). The development of feminist research surrounding sex roles and the social construction of femininity combined with the patriarchal control of modern sports also influenced research in the ideology of male dominance in sports and the view that the culture of modern sports was formed because of the nineteenth century crisis of masculinity (Bandy 2005).

Foucault's theory on power can be used to contextualize the interactions of power between a male-dominated institution and female athletes. Institutions such as the mass media have historically perpetuated the sexualized commodity of the female body created and developed for the consumption of men and the male gaze in society. The contestation of gendered stereotypes by female athletes' works to defy this imagery, however the female athlete's body is not immune to this sort of exploitation. Contemporary scholars argue that despite increases of participation and rising attention of girls and women in sports, female sports

are still defined as a male dominated domain, ignoring gendered differences and experiences of unequal treatment and marginalization from grassroots to elite sports (Fraser 2023).

Reimagining Sport through Various Contemporary Feminist Scholar Lenses

In the pursuit to reimagine women's sports, contemporary scholars have identified resistance strategies at the roots of the foundation of women's sports. Scholars reference two levels of everyday resistance in women's sport: women's sport as everyday resistance and everyday resistance within women's sport (Isard, Melton, and Macaulay 2023). According to Isard, Melton, and Macaulay everyday resistance refers to when members of an oppressed group engage in mundane actions such as participating in sports, to resist dominant power structures and social norms (Isard, Melton, and Macaulay 2023). The first level identified refers to how women in sports challenge societal norms that marginalize them. The latter focuses on intersectional identity of women athletes and how women athletes with intersecting marginalized identities resist norms in women's sport such as those favoring whiteness and higher social classes. The model outlined by the scholars addresses the everyday resistance of women athletes to challenge social norms and be agents for change on a broader level as well as viewing athletes within women's sports as agents for change at the inner level.

An important aspect of women athletes' resistance is their bodies. Scholars focused on the everyday resistance of women in sport examine how women embody everyday resistances through taking pride in large bodies, resisting Westernized beauty standards that emphasize thinness for women, and embracing personal aesthetics such as hairiness, resisting Westernized beauty standards that suggest body hair is unclean and unfeminine (Johansson 2016). In this way, everyday resistance among women is less about outright activism (marches, boycotts, walkouts)

and more about embracing the feminist ethos that “the personal is political” (Johansson 2016). Simply, the way a woman shows up in her everyday life has implications.

Similarly, earlier research such as George’s (2005) study on Division I college athletes, analyzes “intricate and nuanced ways women do gender” through exploring how college women soccer players negotiate their body awareness and physicality in relation to societal ideals of femininity entirely informed by the male gaze (George 2005:341). George highlights Brandi Chastain’s iconic moment in the 1999 Women’s World Cup, where she ripped off her jersey, a gesture traditionally men soccer players do, after scoring the game-winning goal. Chastain’s muscular yet slender physique garnered mass media attention, reflecting a shift in the ideal female body towards one that is “sexy, feminine, and fit” (George 2005:347). Despite progress in gender equality in sports, George argues that societal emphasis on the male gaze, attractiveness and the sexualization of the female body will continue to shape women’s athlete’s experiences.

George’s conceptualization of the male gaze is used to describe how dominant gender prescriptions influence body consciousness, leading to behaviors they observe in female athletes such as scrutinizing their bodies for excessive fat or muscle (George 2005). As observed by George, women soccer players navigate between resistance and compliance with hegemonic definitions of female beauty, reflecting the contested ideological terrain of female athletes. George argues that women athletes who challenge gender norms often face devaluation and stigmatization. However, these athletes also recognize the necessity of size and power to compete effectively, leading to an embrace of attributes typically associated with masculinity, though not aligned with what the male gaze wants to “see”. In contrast, male soccer players can work out without the preoccupations of women soccer players, because the physicality achieved through soccer training will only enhance their masculinity.

George's (2005) study examines the complex interplay between gender, athleticism, and ideals of femininity, with implications that extend beyond the realm of sports. Another study by Chase (2006) examines how women rugby players discipline their bodies according to the physicality demanded in their sport, through Foucauldian notions of disciplinary processes, power, and docile bodies. Chase concludes that the women in the study resisted disciplinary processes of femininity but simultaneously were willing participants in the disciplinary processes of competitive sport. They and their bodies are shaped by competing discourses, ultimately drawn to their sport because of the physical nature of the game, fully invested in the competitive game, and resisting notions of the ideal female body. Framing the female athlete's bodies through Foucauldian theory on disciplinary processes of the docile body and power as well as applying resistance scholarship can produce a broader understanding of the experiences of female athletes.

To rethink the framework surrounding women's sports, contemporary scholars agree that it is important to step outside of traditional models of examining the gender in sports. Women's sports have made significant progress in society, however, women's sports and female athlete's bodies remain located under the male preserve of sport, operating under the male gaze even in all-female team environments.

“Undoing Gender”

Contemporary perspectives on women's sports focus on the broad variety of stakeholders in the ecosystem of women's sports to rethink the way research is conducted in the field. Grant (2021) noted that the art of reimagining women's sports has never been more critical, specifically referencing the time post-pandemic. Grant argues that the pause of the COVID pandemic facilitated a growth in women's sports, marking it a pivotal moment for reimagining research to grow the women's game. Grant posits that the pandemic caused the sports industry to

begin re-evaluating how women's sports are not only produced and distributed but how they are perceived and supported. Lebel (2021) called upon scholars to "look in the mirror" to confront the biases they hold as researchers in the field, who may conform to traditional frameworks. Looking in the mirror means stepping outside of dominant ideologies of the gender binary, facilitating a reimagining of what "doing" gender looks like. Expanding the study of women's sports to include a broader range of stakeholders in the field helps resist a male-dominated system and redirects our attention to perspectives aimed at undoing gender.

Referencing earlier gender theory frameworks which suggest that individuals are actors in the performance of their gender identity, scholar Butler (2004) suggests that if individual actors have the agency to "do" gender through achieving behaviors that communicate the status quo, then actors have the agency to "undo" dominant notions of personhood. In congruence with Butler, Deutsch (2007) claims that despite the revolutionary potential of West and Zimmerman's (1987) article to reframe how we think about gender and question how we interact in gendered ways, doing gender has become a theory of gender persistence and inevitable inequality. Deutsch suggests that a better theory for how to dismantle the gender system highlights interaction as a site for change. To interrupt gender persistency, Deutsch (2007) argues that we should examine when and how social interactions become less gendered and view sites of interaction as sites for change (Deutsch 2007).

Deutsch identifies sports as a male domain that women now enter and must negotiate (Deutsch 2007:111). Referencing George's (2005) study on the behavior of DI women's college soccer players, Deutsch argues that, overwhelmingly, scholars like George, have used West and Zimmerman's social constructionist approach to confirm that to do gender is to act accordingly to gender norms. Deutsch asks scholars to examine how West and Zimmerman's approach to

doing gender can be analyzed for its transformative potential to “undermine the stereotypical perceptions that buoy up an ideology of inequality” (Deutsch 2007:113). Instead of focusing on everyday social interactions where individuals do gender to fulfill gender norms, Deutsch argues that scholars should view sites for interaction as sites for change to undermine the stereotypical perceptions that uphold social inequality (Deutsch 2007:114).

This literature review examines the intricate relations between gender, sports, and societal expectations. Foundational social theories on the construction of gender in US society have produced ideologies on the performance of gender and ways in which individuals perform and negotiate their intersectional identities within societal frameworks.

Through an examination into how sports institutions play a role in perpetuating gender segregation, scholars call for a reevaluation of existing traditional frameworks and a shift towards more inclusive practices in their research. This review is an introduction to a study that centers diverse perspectives of athletes and hopefully provides a more in-depth, broader understanding of their gender experiences in sports.

What the literature neglects is an exploration of the social and cultural team environments of different sports, and how these environments affect athletes’ conceptualizations of gender and their performance of gender. How does the nature of sports help define gender? On the collegiate level, how do gender segregated sports team environments such as basketball affect gender consciousness in athletes? How does this compare to co-ed sport team environments such as track & field and cross country?

METHODS

This project focuses on the experiences of gender for college athletes. Specifically, it explores how college athletes relate to and perform gender. The qualitative data include 20 semi-structured, in-depth, and individual interviews (see Appendix A) with Division III student-athletes and observational field work at multiple sites. Two women's basketball practices, a swim practice session, a track & field and cross-country practice, lift session, and a home track & field and cross-country meet were sites of observation. Using a fly-on-the-wall approach, empirical data was gathered through watching and listening without interference or participation within the environment. To recruit participants for interviews, convenience sampling was employed, later evolving into snowball sampling after the initial participants referred their teammates and friends. During observations at multiple sites, hand-written notes were recorded and digitally logged afterwards. Interviews were recorded using Otter AI and after each session, manually transcribed and cleaned.

The intention was to gather data and recruit athletes from two main categories: gender segregated and co-ed sports teams, identifying women and men's basketball and women's lacrosse as three gender segregated teams, and track & field, cross-country, swim, and tennis as co-ed teams. This study was designed as a comparative between the two categories of team environments to examine how team social and cultural environments affect conceptions of gender within college athletes.

Twelve female identifying athletes, six male-identifying athletes, and two gender-queer identifying athletes were interviewed (see Appendix B). The sample of the female athletes was split evenly with half of the sample interviewed from gender segregated teams and the other six participants from co-ed teams. Five male athletes were from co-ed teams and only one from a

gender segregated team. One gender-queer athlete was on a gender segregated team, and one was on a co-ed team.

My analysis consisted of identifying broad themes after each individual interview and organizing my data into these thematic categories: how the nature of sports help define gender, gendered differences in mindset and self-talk in athletes, and horseplay referring to how male athletes bond and cultivate community. Finally, I present an argument for how the term “healthy competition” is gendered through examining how female and gender-queer athletes compete amongst each other in comparison to male athletes.

FINDINGS

Awareness

Scholars West and Zimmerman’s social constructionist theory on “doing” gender and Goffman’s theory on gender performance are crucial to understanding how sports have worked to perpetuate constructs of gender. Sports have contributed to defining what “masculinity” looks like, and vice versa, what femininity looks like. Sports provide a unique site for organized competition likened to a stage where the athletes are the performers. The dominant depiction of an athlete is male, and they are embraced by society as embodying the ideals of masculinity; they are aggressive, arrogant, and unapologetically competitive. Traditionally, sports are a domain where masculinity thrives and where femininity is not seen as having a place. While female and genderqueer athletes must negotiate their gender in sports, male athletes are encouraged to express their gender because masculinity in sports is most compatible to perceived stereotypes and societal expectations. Female and genderqueer athletes reported compartmentalizing qualities typical in male athletes as an everyday routine in the practice of negotiating their gender

in sports, while male athletes reported on the expectation to remain, “in character” even in environments outside of sports.

Lilly described that when she steps onto the basketball court, it’s like, “pulling the curtain down,” on societal expectations. In sports, it becomes socially acceptable for her to be aggressive, entitled, and arrogant, qualities typically associated with the male gender.

As women, this is our opportunity to be more aggressive and less docile. It's kind of beautiful in that way... You kind of have this innate drive to just like, let loose in this physical way, that I don't think women are given the space to do in a lot of areas, sports at least are one of the few places that celebrates that.

For Lilly, it takes a lot of “hyping herself up” to get to the level she believes is more of a baseline for a lot of male basketball players. Through self-talk, Lilly will say, “alright, I’m gonna *do* this, I’m gonna *get* BIG.” Although she’s perceived many of her teammates as having a more natural tendency to be confident in meeting the level of physicality the sport demands, for her it has never been easy to shift into this mindset. She posited that this may be a symptom of insecurities rooted in her childhood and adolescence, being tall at a young age and put into sports but never necessarily referenced as an athletic person, she felt awkward, gangly, and never like she was “*that* good at sports,” although she played a lot of them.

For her teammate Olivia, her physicality is an ongoing process as well. She attributed her aversion to touching people and being too physical on the court as a product of going to an all-girls Catholic high school, where girls are socialized to be “good,” and behave in a manner that directly opposes the physicality of an aggressive basketball player. Olivia and Lilly both play the same position: they’re post players, “Big’s” as they are commonly referred to. The post players are generally the biggest on the team, they specialize in blocking shots and being the power assets on the team.

Female athletes like Olivia and Lilly practice compartmentalization in their sport through having to negotiate physicality and body awareness in relation to societal ideals of femininity and the level of aggression their sport demands. Their capabilities to be aggressive and physical on the court are hindered by their subconscious, which tells them they do not “fit” into the sport or that their behavior goes against ideals of femininity which have been ingrained within them since childhood. Drawing upon George’s (2005) study of the women’s soccer players, similarly the women basketball players demonstrate body awareness and gender negotiation, influenced by the pervasive male gaze in society. Being socialized as a female and being conditioned as an athlete prove to be incompatible with one another, while being socialized as a male in society and conditioned as a male athlete are much more compatible.

Ryan, a member of the men’s basketball team reflected on the expectations of a male athlete, to always exhibit masculine qualities such as embodying leadership, unrelentless mental and physical toughness, and the gendered and sexuality stereotypes that come along with the inextricability of his basketball identity to every realm of his life. “Being on a stage of athletics and basketball, you have this perception that you’re a leader and supposed to be this big confident guy, who just knows who he is.” For Ryan, it’s expected of him that he matches the behaviors associated with being a basketball player even “off the court,” such as fitting into the stereotypical image of a “player” and the social culture of his team that’s rooted in hyper-masculinity and anti- “soft”-ness culture.

Ryan would walk into the locker room and things would go quiet: people would refrain from using offensive language and slurs such as the f-word and r-word. “I felt like I was the police,” said Ryan. When a teammate came out as a transwoman to the team, Ryan described that although this person on the surface was initially met with love and support from teammates,

following her coming out, there was a beneath the surface culture of joking about her identity. According to Ryan, his old teammate felt unsafe in a locker room that fostered an environment for hateful transphobic speech.

“You’re expected to present as a man and there’s an expectation of straightness as well,” reported Ryan. He pointed to the activity of communal showers after practice as an example of why it’s considered a necessity that all the men are straight. He said that having a transwoman on the team was challenging for many of his teammates because of the assumption that “everybody in the room is a man,” considering the way that heteronormativity is valued within the culture of the team.

Ryan described that there is an expectation of being a “player,” in the sense of being with many girls at one time. Certain cues that communicate you fit this image, such as “wearing the earring” are typically associated with male basketball players . Ryan said he has always felt a sense of belonging in the sport from a visual point of view although, at times, the culture of the team environment conflicted with his personal and moral beliefs as he was pressured to fit into these perceived stereotypes.

Gendered social processes work as the building blocks in producing certain perceptions of self-identity for athletes. My findings suggest that while female and genderqueer athletes must negotiate their gender in sports through compartmentalizing masculinity, male athletes are encouraged to enhance their gender because their masculinity in sports is most compatible to perceived stereotypes and societal expectations.

Although gendered and body awareness is prominent on gender segregated teams as expressed by the basketball players in the above section, the prominence of gendered differences becomes most relevant on co-ed teams such as track & field, through direct interactions of

gender. The findings concluded that gender awareness is elevated on co-ed team environments compared to gender segregated environments because female athletes are made most aware of the fact that they are left out of the forms of play, competition, and the male validation men garner amongst other men.

Mindset and Self-Talk

Prior to examining the gendered forms of play and competition that occur within dynamics of co-ed team environments, an important finding from this data was the gendered differences in mindsets and self-talk of the athletes. It was found that male athletes tended to speak comfortably about having a “best of the best” mindset in their sport and on inter-team competitiveness amongst their male teammates. In contrast, female athletes reported being incentivized by self-improvement and beating oneself instead of their teammates. These findings provide necessary context for examining how gender manifests in performances of play and competition within co-ed team dynamics.

Track & field male athlete Elias described that his mindset needed a shift after pushing his limits and losing to his teammate Oscar last season.

So, Oscar was like, one of the biggest recruits we've ever had. He came in my sophomore year. And like, you know, we had similar times, so I was really excited about that. I was like, oh, he's going to really push me, like, yeah, I want to stay number one. I think that became too ingrained [in me] and I ended up overtraining. I just became too focused on that.

Elias's goal to beat Oscar was ego driven and caused him to overtrain and injure himself. He spoke unabashedly about how he wanted to stay number one, he even made an Instagram post with the caption “only time will tell” where he was looking at the record board and posted it right before he “got smoked” by Oscar. When Elias lost to Oscar, it catalyzed a mentality shift, as Elias resolved to focus more on having realistic goals for himself and having fun.

Male athletes tended to express more of a straightforward response about their individual goals and accomplishments, and about wanting to beat their teammates to remain the highest ranked. Senior Nate, number one ranked on the men's tennis team, has always had the mindset to be the highest ranked on whatever team he is on. However, Nate emphasized that although the individual aspect of his sport is a major part of it, the team should and does always come first in his mind. "You want to prove to yourself that you can play at a high level... but at the end of the day it is a team sport." As someone who has always competed to play at a higher level and to be the highest ranked he could be, Nate has always had this "best of the best" mindset. Nate emphasized that the team's success and his own individual motivations and successes are inextricably linked because of the sport itself. Generally, the male athletes were more inclined to resonate with having a "best of the best" mindset compared with the female athletes, overall, all the athletes did express a care for the team's success as the ultimate goal, regardless of if the sport was more individualistic such as tennis, track, cross country, and swim or team-oriented like basketball and lacrosse.

Female athletes focused more on self-improvement, not necessarily about being the "best of the best." They were more hesitant to talk about their accomplishments and ego-driven goals. Female athletes tended to describe how they would coach themselves through self-talk. Like Willa's self-talk reminding her to "get BIG" and reassuring herself she can *do* this, track & field female athlete Mia described her self-talk as a reassurance of her capabilities. She would talk herself out of self-doubt by reminding herself how she'd performed with the pain before: "you're just going to have to leave your body, you've done it 1000 times before," She reflected on how her mentality and self-talk before track meets has shifted throughout her career. In high school, Mia would have to hype herself up a lot because she was nervous; she described this as "tricking

herself” by “hyping” herself up to an unrealistic level, giving herself the confidence to perform well. Competing at a collegiate level however, she has had less ease believing her mantras she had coached herself into for so long. She’s shifted her mindset, following a more mindfulness approach instead of hyping herself up into thinking she’s, “the best one out there,” and “has worked harder than anyone else to win,” She trusts her training and practices acceptance before especially longer races, acknowledging that they will be painful but she has the capabilities to push through: “this is going to hurt but it’s going to be okay. You’re just going to do your best.”

What pushes cross country female athlete Taylor to keep going is thinking of her family and friends who have supported her; she almost makes it about them over herself.

It’s ridiculous to have the mindset you are going to beat everybody, because you’re not; it’s about self-improvement and beating yourself.

She recognizes the pain and frustration that would come if she had this mindset that she was capable of beating everyone else, because this mindset would produce never-ending disappointment when there is always going to be someone better than you.

The female athletes did not report on a “best of the best” mindset that pushed them, unlike the male athletes. They expressed broader perspectives on what individual success meant, leaving their ego’s behind, they focused their self-talk on reassuring themselves of their physical and mental toughness. They focused on steering away from self-doubt instead of having the mentality they can beat everyone else, which was prevalent amongst the male athlete’s responses.

Horseplay

The rich qualitative data collected in this study provided evidence for how gender pervades co-ed team environments, most specifically relating to the gendered social processes of how community and inter-team competition is cultivated and performed. I use the term horseplay

to describe the forms of gendered interactions and play that occurs on especially co-ed team environments. The male athletes on co-ed team environments were observed participating in horseplay with one another as a form of male bonding, the female teammates were excluded from participating in these activities. The female athletes were excluded not with ill-intent necessarily, but by default, they could not engage in these activities because of their gender presentation. Horseplay was also connected to receiving male validation amongst males, which proved to be challenging amongst female athletes in these environments where they were often met with a range of responses to their gender, from subtle exclusion to blatant sexism. Additionally, there was a culture of inter-team competition that built community on the men's side whereas it was perceived to rupture community on the women's side.

A main example of horseplay was observed in one track team's practice session that took place in a small basketball gym, the men performed horseplay during a pause between the warm-up and the coach giving them instruction. The men one-upped each other by seeing who could jump the highest to reach the basketball net. They created their own game where they played and competed in a physical way that was unrelated to the physicality necessary for their sport, and it was not an organized part of practice. The male captain, Elias continued to jump higher than the other boys in every attempt he made. A freshman male-team member John tried to match his efforts as they were taking turns jumping, but each time Elias jumped higher than John. Elias, as the captain asserts superiority and establishes the reference point for his younger teammates, the sort of horseplay male teammates participate in is used as a way of asserting dominance, socially or physically, as well as a form of bonding that cultivates community amongst the men.

Penelope reflected on the performative nature of male teammates, “The men are constantly shitting on each other” Penelope attributed the atmosphere of toxic masculinity created by the men’s team to “overcompensating for lacking genuine confidence.”

Throughout her track career, Penelope has observed a “top down” leadership style coming from the most dominating male athletes on the team, influencing the rest of the men to behave according to the leader. This sort of environment has influenced male team members to perform their masculinity as a way of gaining male validation amongst males. Penelope mentions a culture of “team-cest,” essentially “hookup” culture, within the co-ed team. By participating in this sort of fraternization, the men garner validation amongst their group.

there's a lot of “team-cest” or fraternization on the team; everyone's participated at some point or another and I think our men, they get so much validation from it. When women participate, they don't really gossip or say anything, you know, they want to be responsible. They want to keep it on the DL (downlow). They want to be respected. And men, they just say shit, they're like, she was over last night, and they love people knowing their business as another form of masculinity.

Whether it’s social situations outside of the track team environment, locker room talk, or in the weight room, male athletes don't have to compartmentalize masculinity, it’s an expectation that they carry their manifestations of masculinity into and outside of the track team environment, in the pursuit of achieving male validation. Another site of interaction for performing gender is the weight room. In the weight room a series of gendered expressions manifest in the men and women, they seem to be “doing” the same activity, except the way these same activities, such as competing for the captain’s spot, warm-up, and lift session, are performed differently based on gender.

Elias reflected that horseplay and competition amongst the guys on his team gets him “fired up”; he loves how they push him to be better at his sport and he feels more competitive with them than his female teammates given their physical capabilities and skill. He does not view

himself in competition with his female teammates; he views himself as establishing a reference for them to work towards.

When I'm competing with my guy teammates I get more fired up and more competitive because they're more similar to my skill level, so they can push me. I can kind of help elevate the other female athletes too and give them more of a reference or something to work towards.

Elias views competition as gender segregated, and it is. His view is facilitated by the institution of sports which coincides with the gender binary, dictating that men and women should compete separately based on gendered physical capabilities. Therefore, inter-team competition, and comradery that comes with that, cannot exist between Elias and his female teammates in the way it exists between Elias and his male teammates. Simultaneously, however, Elias communicates the sentiment that even though competition is gender segregated, the standard of the sport is set by the male athletes. The standard set by male athletes in the sport should be viewed as a reference for female athletes, disregarding that their skill levels are incomparable based on physical capabilities of gender.

Elias confirms the frustrations of his female teammate Mia: "People are so fixated on the standard that men set, which is higher." There is a complicated nature and tension surrounding inter-team competition. Competition amongst male athletes is encouraged because the dominant perception is that they will push one another to be better, additionally it forms bonds between male teammates, cultivating strong community. Amongst men and women, the sentiment is that they cannot compete with one another because they are judged at separate levels, making it complicated to compare skill and performance. If a female athlete does try to compete with male athletes, she's viewed as overestimating her capabilities, but when a male athlete makes the claim that he sets the standard for their female teammates to work towards, it's normal. Being a

male on the team puts you in this elevated position of power which gives you also the power to exclude non-male gendered athletes from participating and gaining validation from your group.

Participation in horseplay and competition is a learned way of gaining validation amongst male teammates. Another way is more obvious: sports performance. Female track & field athlete Penelope expressed how she hated the environment fostered by her male teammates regarding respect for women:

I feel like men on this team are just automatically respected but women are respected after meets start happening, after they are backed by good performances, and I felt it every single year I've been here. I think a lot of the women would agree to that. Because like men start respecting you once you have shit to back yourself up on, but they just respect other men. Other men are just respected as a given.

Male athletes sit complicitly in the dominant culture while female athletes must work harder to receive validation amongst their male teammates. It seems that men are automatically treated with respect upon joining the team based on their gender presentation. Women must work much harder to gain a similar male validation and respect, which usually comes from having successful performances in your sport to “back yourself.” It is a requirement that women prove themselves as impressive enough to garner the validation and respect from their male teammates.

Meanwhile, men who portray masculinity are entitled to respect at a certain extent, regardless of if they have an impressive physical performance or not, even the slowest or smallest male athletes will be a member of that in-group before any female athlete will.

At a lift session, it was recorded that there were three lifting spots. The men took the spot to the left, the women took the one to the right and in the middle spot was Riley, the female shot-putter that lifts heavier than her female teammates but still lighter than most of her male teammates, putting her in this liminal position. Most of the men face the side that looks into the mirror as they lift, most women decide to face the way that is opposite the mirror, facing a blank

wall. The men admire themselves in the mirror as they lift or squat weights, they clap and cheer each other on. The weight room is likened to some of the male athletes' vanity projects. The ways in which they perform lifting weights is hyper-masculine and feeds their egos. For women, it seems like they use their lift sessions as a means-to-an-end: if they workout and lift consistently, they get stronger, leading to better performance. The women tended to keep to themselves, spotting each other from time to time when someone was lifting heavy, and speaking encouraging words to one another, but the sheer noise and sounds coming from the men's bench and the sense of comradery was in stark contrast to the women's side. The weight room is not the same vanity project for women as it is for men because that would resist societal expectations. Penelope reported that the weight room coach pulled the boys aside and told them they had to stop "ego lifting." Afterwards, she stated boldly:

I think the weight room is definitely a place men love taking up space, whether it's like unnecessarily dropping weights or screaming. I get yelling and cheering but there are [some things] I do think are unnecessary and trying to one-up each other. They love jumping up and touching the lights, they love seeing if they could do muscle ups and like, these aren't part of our workout. Usually, the women just follow the workout.

Riley expressed how she views her event in track as one that emphasizes power and strength, traits typically associated with masculinity, and how she perceives herself among the rest of the female athletes competing in this event, tapping into a sense of masculinity when competing. Although in a lot of ways Riley relates to a traditionally masculine way of training and competing, she is not accepted within the social group of her male teammates. Despite existing within this liminal space on the team, Riley is treated differently than her male counterpart John, the male shot-putter on the team, because she cannot participate in social horseplay or garner the sort of male validation John does from his male teammates.

She is aware of the male-dominated environment within the weight room at lift sessions that she cannot participate in as a woman. She described how the men constantly crowd around each other when lifting, clapping, and screaming absurdities. She commented on how the women tend to keep to themselves during the workout, “with the guys, this is a show, they honestly like showing off.”

The weight room is a site of pride for Erin, similarly to how it is for many of her male teammates, however her experience is not received the same by her teammates or society. She is aware that her progress in the gym does not look like her male teammates, nor does it look like some of the female teammates who have more of a lean muscular look to them, commenting that there is, “definitely a sense of, yeah, that’s not what mine look like,” regarding her muscles and larger physical build.

Riley reflected on how strength and presenting in a female body can coexist. She lifts for the purpose of gaining muscle, being stronger and performing better, not for body aesthetics. “There are so many times I wish I weighed less. And at the same time, I’m like, if I did that, I wouldn’t be as good at my sport, and I *really* want to be good at my sport.” Riley is aware of society’s misogynist response to women who train like she does, however she resists the ideal beauty standards in favor of achieving the physicality demanded for shot put.

The weight room is not a site of vanity for women – being buff does not align with the ideal standards of femininity. The unalignment with societal beauty standards and gendered expectations explains why there is not the same sense of comradery amongst women during lift as there is amongst the men. George (2005) would argue that women athletes such as female shot putters, who challenge gender norms often face devaluation and stigmatization from society. However, these athletes also recognize the necessity of size and power to compete effectively,

leading to an embrace of attributes typically associated with masculinity, though not aligned with what the male gaze wants to “see”. The women lift for self-improvement; the men lift for others to see because training for their power events leads to achieving a physicality that will only enhance their masculinity.

John described being motivated by his male teammates in the weight room. John described a “playful competition” amongst his male teammates in the weight room which consists of clapping loudly and cheering each other on as they lift heavier. He’ll say things like, “I just lifted this. Beat it.” As a way of motivating and “hyping up” his teammates, however he says that he would never say the same sort of things to his female teammates.

Especially in a competition: getting pumped up, screaming, throwing as hard as I can celebrating; jumping up and down. It just feels pretty masculine.

John is celebrated for being masculine in his sport; where he believes he fits in, whereas Riley must confront much more isolation and estrangement from her personal femininity in the same sport. Additionally, John described the overall team environment as accepting, and mentioned that he values that everyone is constantly joking around with one another regardless of gender. He described the culture of competing on the men’s team to be motivational and positive. He looks up to the upperclassmen on his team, mentioning multiple male leaders he looks up to on the team, but not any of the women. Compared to the female athlete’s testimonies on the track team, John’s perspective confirms that he exists within the dominant culture of the team and does not have to negotiate his gender expression in a way that represses masculinity, however the expectation remains that he continues to portray himself as masculine.

Female athletes are excluded from the sort of horseplay, vanity and competition that elicits male validation amongst males. Female track athlete Mia describes the team’s environment, reflecting on how the women are left out of the culture and forms of play that is a

major component of team bonding amongst her male teammates. She attributed this gender division to a lack of willingness on the men's side to understand how to make a comfortable co-ed environment for women, or perhaps a lack of experience of training with women.

We will line up for warmups and all the men are on one side and all the women on the other side. It was never supposed to be like that. That happens naturally. I just think a lot of men on that team are not aware of how certain conversations they have, or certain ways they act are kind of like excluding women. It's just these are the type of men that sports attract, like they do tend to be more masculine and a little less sensitive.

When I brought up the element of men's horseplay that occurs on the team environment, Mia responded that, "that's like a big part of their bonding. It's like, right, we can't participate in that." There is this unspoken rule that female athletes on the team cannot participate in the horseplay or bonding that the male athletes can. However, they have their own form of play. During an observation of one of the track team's practices, as the gender segregated warmup lines mentioned above were formed, the female athletes displayed affectionate physical touch as they waited for their turns in line. They hugged and cuddled one another, showing affection and care as manifestations of femininity that the men cannot participate in based on under the surface social rules created by the team. I noticed that these sort of feminine ways of showing affection were not observed during the women's basketball team practices attended, where they unapologetically perform in more typically masculine ways. I theorize that this is due to the co-ed vs. non-co-ed environment. A co-ed environment underlines the gender binary, accentuating the sharp contrasts between male and female and making the performance of masculinity and femininity more prominent. Mia reflected: "I feel like a woman on the track team because I am treated like a woman."

I was so *not* conscious of my gender in sports in high school because I was on the all-women's team and was not interacting with male runners at all. And then, now being on a co-ed team, I feel like I'm more conscious of being a woman because I guess I'm like kind of comparing myself to the men on my team and their behavior. And I would say

like, I always interpreted my behavior as more masculine when I'm doing athletics, but then when you're practicing next to like, some masculine dudes, it really makes you feel more feminine.

Being on a co-ed team has given Mia a reference for how men behave and are treated in sporting environments, providing her with evidence that she, as a woman, is treated differently. She was not as aware of her gender in high school when she competed on an all-female team because these direct interactions of gender were not present.

It's weird because I feel tapped into this masculine energy, but I'm very much being treated like a woman by especially the coaches. I feel like when I would be training with just woman, I was like, not really treated as like a woman, per se.

Navigating gender awareness became prevalent for Mia once she joined her co-ed collegiate track & field team. Women on co-ed teams seem to experience wrestling with gender expression more than women on gender segregated teams. Training amongst male athletes in your same sport serves as a reminder that the male gender embodies ideals of masculinity that are harder to achieve as women. Even female athletes like Mia, who described feeling masculine in their sport, are pressured to adhere to expectations of the female gender within her team's social environment.

Mia described how she's attempted to call out sexism multiple times within the co-ed team environment and she is immediately shut down, "I think there have been times where I've kind of like offhand said that something like, 'this feels sexist and there it's always immediately shut down - that's my main complaint.'" There have been times, according to Mia, where her male teammates will counter her claims and outright say, "it's not sexist" alluding to a joke that's made or someone's behavior. But there are also times where her concerns are received with eye rolls, "okay, anyways," and brushed under the rug by her teammates "it's really not

taken very seriously like, they have no concept and don't have the background to understand why I would even say something.”

In terms of being treated differently by the coaches on her co-ed team, Mia reported some instances that illustrate the gendered relationships between the coaches and athletes. There have been instances where gender consciousness becomes not only relevant, but it also becomes the focal point of an interaction. The social and physical relationship between her male coach and her male teammates is different from the relationships of her coach and herself and female teammates. Mia described how one time the coach mocked her voice:

He used a really high-pitched voice to make fun of something I said. He was like digging at me for something, and then I said, ‘what did you say?’ and then he goes, ‘what did you just say’ mockingly, in a really high-pitched voice. I told him he was sexist, and then he told me I think you're sexist for calling me sexist.

Mia also described this, “weird sort of tiptoeing” that happens when, the coach is “touching them in a certain way,” to coach them into a movement or technique, making gender and body consciousness the focal point of the interaction.

In a different instance, when he was coaching some of the female athletes into the Javelin event the coach commented, “I don’t want you guys to throw like girls; you’re throwing like girls,” making a reference to how the female athletes were throwing weak. Mia went on to describe how her coach had this idea that if someone did not grow up playing baseball, a male-only sport, then they would not have the “correct” background to throw Javelin. Mia attempted to explain that most women don’t grow up throwing the baseball, considering it’s a male-only sport; she was trying to make him aware of gender differences, and instead of acknowledging this and making accommodations for inexperienced throwers, his response was that in the future, he would not allow anyone who had not grown up throwing a ball participate in Javelin “I wanted him to be aware that like some people needed more help. But then it felt like instead of

taking it as an opportunity to teach us better, he took it as, okay, well you are not going to be good at this; you might not have potential.” The requirement for having potential in this event was being male.

Besides these instances reflecting blatant sexism, these interactions contribute to a culture where women are consistently made to feel unbelonging and on the outs. The way this male coach interacts on a social and physical level with the men, is different from the ways he interacts with the women athletes. Mia attributed this to just something that happens naturally with male comraderies and comfortability. This bond developed among male coaches and teammates is irreplicable to something a male coach and female athlete would develop together, confirming how the culture around horseplay and male validation works to exclude female athletes once again.

The women on the track team must negotiate gender in their sport in nuanced and complex ways. Gender is the primary reason why female athletes cannot participate in the culture among males. But could there be a co-ed team environment where female athletes are included in this culture?

Can female athletes participate in horseplay if they want to?

Charlotte is a female and gender-queer identifying tennis player (using both she/they pronouns). She shared her experiences of pushing the gender boundaries in sports and elsewhere since childhood. She grew up playing tennis with her dad and brother and was drawn to sports because of the masculine environment, she always wanted to play with the boys. Although sports were a space that gendered her into a category she did not resonate with, she always found ways to break through that.

I definitely have never been the most female presenting and I think part of that ties into like the way I performed in sports. I always wanted to be as good as the boys, you know,

because there's like, a different level of play there. But when I play sports... I don't really feel like a girl.

Charlotte's performance of gender in sports has never aligned with femininity. Every coach has remarked on how she "plays like a boy," which she's attributed to the fact that she grew up learning to play in male environments. Charlotte is an example of a female athlete who has always wanted to participate in horseplay since childhood.

Charlotte discussed the meaning behind wearing the tennis skirt for her: the skirt was a point of contention because of how it related to her navigating gender throughout her career. She played like a boy, and she wanted to wear shorts like them as well.

I become so hyper aware of the fact that I'm wearing a dress and [that I'm] a girl playing sports. I've always had a feminine body, and that's something I don't want to have to think about when I play. I just want to be able to put everything out there. I think the hyper awareness of wearing a skirt or a dress, for me, it's something I've always been conscious of.

Sports always been a space for Charlotte to practice gender nonconformity, and this feeling of being free from the constraints of gender was complicated by being forced to compete in matches wearing a skirt or dress. Some of her teammates described how they felt more confident in the uniform because of the feminized look it gave them, but for Charlotte it has always been a reminder of femininity that she does not relate to. The skirt compromised Charlotte's gender expression in sports, proving to be another example of how women can play under the male reserve of sport, according to the male gaze and upholding societal gender norms and expectations, which will never allow them to *actually* play with the male athletes.

If female athletes have infiltrated the sports domain, a traditionally male dominated realm, and have been successful within it, then how can they infiltrate horseplay and these specific forms of male bonding and validation that manifest on team environments? Drawing upon Deutsch's (2007) "undoing gender," if women can do gender through performing

stereotypically feminine, then they can “undo gender” through performing stereotypically masculine activities such as participating in horseplay within co-ed team environments. Sites of interaction that are less gendered, such as the sports environments, should be viewed as sites for potential change. Yet, the gender binary remains pervasive in sports, where a rulebook establishes that competition and teams be segregated based on gender, and intangible social rules set stubborn barriers for female and gender-queer athletes. Society has determined that women can participate in sports and be quite successful, but they can never compete with the men.

Mia expresses a similar sentiment to Charlotte. Mia shared, “I feel better about being a woman because I am an athlete.” When I asked Mia how she identifies with being a female athlete, her response was that this part of her identity is not something that she bases herself around:

Being an athlete makes me feel better about being a woman because I feel like I'm often made to feel weak as a woman and incapable, and being able to perform physically difficult things has made me feel on par with men in society which is a little fucked because I'm drawing on like, I don't know, things that are often associated with masculinity, to make myself feel better about being a woman.

As these female athletes navigate the significance of their identity, they wrestle with the idea of feeling empowered because of their identity as a female. Being a female in society is disempowering, but being an athlete is a signal of strength because it is closely attached to ideals of masculinity and the male gender. Mia feeling “better” about being a woman because of her identity as an athlete reflects how the athlete identity garners power and validation from being male dominated. Some female athletes like Jane who runs cross-country team, feel empowered by fitting into this category “female.” Jane is often misgendered as a man, but when she lines up at the start line before the women’s race, she’s categorized as the gender that is most authentic to

her without question. Meanwhile, Charlotte and Mia expressed mixed feelings about this topic of feeling empowered through gendered categorization in sports.

Healthy Competition

Focusing on inter-team competition amongst female teammates, the analyses of these findings address how gender affects the way aggression and competitiveness are perceived. Even though these are essential components of many sports, they are viewed differently based on gender presentation. Here, I argue that healthy competition is gendered through comparing how competition is conceptualized and portrayed by male and female athletes.

In many sports, there is a double standard that exists in how male and female athletes are viewed as engaging with aggression and competition. Women's cross-country runner Jane reflected on this binary of healthy competition that exists on co-ed teams specifically, from her experience.

there's kind of a double standard in terms of competing against each other, like when men are very competitive in sport, they are seen as very valiant, and that's what makes them very good at the sport. Versus women, if they're competitive in the same way, it's categorized differently. The same goes for competing, like if you have two guys on our team – there are two freshmen, they really want to beat each other -- they are seen as great competitors, but on the women's team, it might be viewed differently.

When men are competitive with their teammates it's encouraged, even celebrated. However, when women in the same sport make their competitiveness known it's viewed as aggressive with negative connotations, it's seen as "petty" or "bitchy" the dominant culture establishes that making public your competitive edge towards a female teammate is something to avoid, and results in feelings of guilt or shame in female athletes.

Jane described how as a leader on the women's team, she's helped to create this culture that destigmatizes the idea for female athletes that they shouldn't want to beat their teammates. She described that inter-team competitiveness on the women's side feels like this "unspoken

thing,” and the women are encouraged to only want to compete against themselves instead of their teammates.

It's okay to want to beat your teammate. My roommate, Evelyn. We practice together every day; we run together every day; we want to beat each other *really* badly.

Jane was the only female athlete who reflected on how she enjoyed this element of competition that is embedded within her relationship with Evelyn, a roommate, teammate, and friend. Jane is a rarity among female athletes in this study because of her comfortableness discussing competition with her female teammates, unlike male athletes however, she verbalizes her awareness in how her unabashed competitiveness is looked down upon. In this instance competitiveness must be negotiated because of Jane's gender. She's made aware of these gendered differences in how competitiveness is viewed because of her perceptions of inter-team competition amongst her male teammates.

Penelope examines the gendered cultures of the men and women's team, making the differentiation between a hyper-competitive men's team and a “more supportive” women's team environment. Penelope gave the example of how the men and women had approached the captain's election very differently. The way she perceived the race for captain was that all the male athletes were competing aggressively, while barely anyone even had a desire to enter the competition for the female spot.

On the men's team, there were like a handful of them that were constantly one-upping each other like fighting to lead the warmup, which is so stupid. And the way that they would fight to lead the warming warm up is who can do it physically the fastest.

Here, she noted that one of the ways the men competed to prove their dominance over one another to “win” the captain spot was by competing for who could do the warm-up fastest. This competition of physical capabilities gives an example of how men in this environment are constantly one-upping each other in ways to prove their physical dominance in the pursuit of

gaining a socially dominant leadership role on the team. The women did not participate in competing physically during warmup, however competition amongst one another may have occurred in more subtle ways in which they would avoid making their competitiveness publicly known, or the captain's role would have gone to the female with the best times and performance in the sport itself.

The female athletes have this expectation to approach competition in "healthy ways" that prioritizes supporting their female teammates. Penelope discusses gendered differences in the ways that the male and female athletes will receive and give feedback. "I think me and the other female high jumpers, we are constantly critiquing each other in a healthy way, because we ask for it." She reflected on how she's developed these close relationships with her female teammates through being honest and thoughtful in giving and receiving critical feedback. In contrast, she says that her male teammates will taunt her, saying how they can jump higher than her, rhetorically asking her vertical, ("What's your vert?"). This form of play is not received by Penelope in the same way it is received by male teammates. Penelope is made frustrated by this "weird energy that the men bring," as she described it. This interaction represents the dichotomy of horseplay and healthy competition, demonstrating the contrast in gendered approaches to inter-team competition within this co-ed environment. Female teammates will develop bonds through critiquing one another with honesty and thoughtfulness, while male teammates will approach feedback through horseplay in the form of taunting.

During a track "friendly" meet, where the team was competing against one another. Mia won her race, the women's 300m up against some of the fastest women on the team. Once across the finish line, Mia squatted down the furthest from the finish line and caught her breath as did the other competitors. Mia was angled away from her teammates and did not make eye contact or

acknowledge them. I waited to see who would approach who first and what the reactions would be from the competitors, would there be any gloating? Eventually, after a few minutes, her teammates who closely trailed behind Mia at the end of the race came up to her individually and they exchanged high-fives, some nice words and they were all smiling.

I think people view competitiveness in women differently. I think it would be seen as like bitchy or like, rude, gloating, like aggressive. Aggression is a big factor of it, because it is an aggressive way to engage with people and that's seen as more natural for men. For the women like, you will never hear us be like, 'I'm going to beat your ass in this race,' or any conversation along those lines.

In contrast, after the men's 300m race, the winner immediately ripped his shirt off and walked off from the track on his own. The men took a much shorter recovery time than the women did and most of them stayed standing up after the race in contrast to the women who either squatted, sat down, or bent over after their race. The men left the site of the finish line at the same time walking off in a pack, in contrast to how the women each left at significantly different times, going in the order of third, second and first place with Mia leaving the latest.

The first place of the men's team takes his shirt off at the end in a form of celebrating his dominating performance, he's less sensitive to how his competitors may perceive him compared to how Mia behaves towards her teammates after winning her race. There is an element of men wanting to show that they leave with the pack, instead of being the single man out, to make sure that oneself is not perceived as weak compared to the others who beat him. The winner is perfectly fine walking off individually and making it clear he came before the rest, but the men that finished very close to each other want to make sure they are not viewed as finishing after one or a few of their teammates, they want to indicate their evenness.

Female athletes are taught that they should be the utmost supportive and sensitive to the peace of the team before themselves sometimes and that their motivations should be self-

improvement and competing against themselves instead of wanting to beat their female teammates. Men are much quicker to admit that they are competing with their teammates, such as the example with Elias and Oscar. Female athletes tended to worry more about being *too* confrontational, aggressive, and competitive with one another even though these are essential components to many sports. This sort of conditioned mindset forces female athletes to negotiate their gender as they enter competition, while men are encouraged to embody their gender that is expected to be egotistical, aggressive, and unapologetically competitive in sports.

CONCLUSION

Perceived gender stereotypes permeate the sports domain, affecting the experiences of female, male, and gender-queer athletes. Through direct interactions of male-centric horseplay, validation processes and competition dynamics, female, and gender-queer athletes were made to feel most aware of their gender on co-ed team environments. Female and gender-queer athletes on both team environments reported negotiating their gender presentations in the forms of self-talk, however, those on gender segregated team environments faced fewer challenges in having to interact with gender conformity.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research may include interrogating which environments female and gender-queer athletes are “allowed” to participate in the cultures established by male athletes in sports team environments, such as male bonding. What about horseplay and other forms of male bonding is made inaccessible to female and gender-queer athletes? Women have infiltrated sports and been a dominant force in sports culture, how can they infiltrate activities of male bonding? Investigating the ways in which female athletes cultivate community within gender segregated and co-ed team environments will push women’s sports studies forward. What happens in the

weight room when it's just female athletes? It would have been interesting to observe a women's basketball team lift session, and observed if they participated in a form of horseplay themselves. Female and gender-queer athletes have continued to push the boundaries of the gender binary within the sports domain and outside of this realm in society, resisting perceived impenetrable barriers that go back to the constructions of gender in society. What the future holds for female, gender-queer athletes, and sports research is uncontested terrain. Hopefully, future research in the field will contribute to promoting more inclusive policy and practices, fostering environments for all athletes to compete equally.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bandy, Susan J. 2005. "From Women in Sport to Cultural Critique: A Review of Books about Women in Sport and Physical Culture." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 33(1):246-261.
- Butler, Judith. 2005. *Undoing Gender*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Connell, R.W. 1987. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual politics*. Cambridge, MA: Polity.
- Chase, L.F. 2006. "(Un)Disciplined Bodies: A Foucauldian Analysis of Women's Rugby." *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 23 (3), 229-247.
- Deutsch, Francine M. 2007. "Undoing Gender." *Gender and Society* 21(1):106-127.
- Deitsch, Richard. 2024. "Iowa-Ohio State sets a new WBB regular-season viewership record in 25 years as Caitlin Clark passes Peter Maravich." *The Athletic*, March 2024, 1.
- Foucault, Michel. 1982. "The Subject and Power." *Critical Inquiry* 8(4):777-795.
- Fraser, K. K., & Kochanek, J. 2023. "What place does elite sport have for women? A scoping review of constraints." *Frontiers in sports and active living*, 5, 1121676.
- Johansson A, Vinthagen S. 2016. "Dimensions of everyday resistance: an analytical framework." *Critic Sociology*. 42(3):417-35.
- George, Molly. 2005. "Making Sense of Muscle: The Body Experiences of Collegiate Women Athletes." *Sociological Inquiry* 75(3):317-345.
- Goffman, Erving. 1976. "Gender Display." *Gender Advertisements Communications and Culture*. Palgrave, London. 1-9.

- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Grant, A. 2021. *Think Again*. New York, NY: Viking.
- Harding, Sandra G. 1986. *The Science Question in Feminism: Sandra Harding*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Isard, Risa & Melton, Nicole & Macaulay, Charles. 2023. "Women's sport and everyday resistance." *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*. 5.
- Lebel, K., Mumcu, C., Pegoraro, A., LaVoi, N. M., Lough, N., & Antunovic, D. 2021. "Rethinking Women's Sport Research: Looking in the Mirror and Reflecting Forward." *Frontiers in sports and active living*, 3, 746441.
- Messner, Michael A., and Donald F. Sabo. 1990. *Sport, Men, and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*. Champaign, Ill: Human Kinetics Books.
- Washington, Robert E., and David Karen. 2010. *Sport Power and Society*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- West, Candance, and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. "Doing Gender." *Gender and Society* 125–51.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Schedule

I. Background

1. What is your name and your pronouns?
2. Can you tell me about how you started your sport career?
3. When did you decide you wanted to play this sport in college?
4. How you identify with being an athlete?
 - a. What is the relationship between your identity and your sport?
 - b. Do you friends attach your personal identity to your sport?
 - c. Does your family attach your personal identity closely with your sport?
 - d. Is being an athlete something you don't attach too closely to your personal identity?

II. Perceptions and experiences of gender in sports

1. Would you say your sport is traditionally more masculine or feminine or both?
2. Do you feel masculine or feminine when you are playing your sport?
 - a. How do you feel when you are training for your sport?
 - b. How do you feel competing?
3. Are there any mantras you say to yourself before competing in your sport?
4. Do you feel that you "fit in" and belong in your sport?
 - a. Have you always felt this way? Can you describe any times you felt like you belonged or didn't belong in your sport?
5. Given the "typical" athlete image of your sport, how closely to you feel you are to this image? Do you fit into the typical representation for your sport?
6. Do you think there is a difference in how males participate in your sport, individually, and on a team, compared to females?
7. Do you think there are specific expectations for how male athletes and female athletes are supposed to behave in their sport?
 - a. Are there different expectations for how genders are supposed to behave in a team dynamic?
 - b. What are these expectations? When did you become aware of them?
8. How do women interact in a team environment?
 - a. Ask how the participant would describe their team environment in a couple words.
 - b. Can you think back to a specific memory or time when you became aware of the team atmosphere or dynamics?

III. Gender inclusivity

1. Do you feel there is a space for gender non-conforming people in your sport?
2. Do you think your sport gender inclusive?

- c. Is your team gender inclusive?
- 3. Do you think there is space for trans-athletes in sports?
 - a. Do you think there is a space for trans-athletes in your sport?

APPENDIX B

NAME	GENDER	SPORT	TYPE OF TEAM
Lilly	Female	Women's Basketball	Gender Segregated
Olivia	Female	Women's Basketball	Gender Segregated
Ryan	Male	Men's Basketball	Gender Segregated
Elias	Male	Track & Field	Co-ed
Oscar	Male	Track & Field	Co-ed
Nate	Male	Tennis	Co-ed
Mia	Female	Track & Field	Co-ed
Penelope	Female	Track & Field	Co-ed
John	Male	Track & Field	Co-ed
Riley	Female	Track & Field	Co-ed
Charlotte	Female/gender-queer	Tennis	Co-ed
Jane	Female	Cross-Country	Co-ed
Evelyn	Female	Cross-Country	Co-ed
Taylor	Female	Cross-Country	Co-ed