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Leveling the Playing Field: Curriculum Studies and Fast Pitch Softball

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LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD:
CURRICULUM STUDIES AND FAST PITCH SOFTBALL

by

MELINDA M. ROBERTS

(Under the Direction of Marla Morris)

ABSTRACT

Women in sport challenge our cultural assumptions about gender and sexuality. Athletics has been viewed as a male domain, with its emphasis on strength, agility, competition, intellect, and aggression. To play sports, women are pressured to maintain and emphasize their femininity without appearing overly aggressive or possessing masculine traits associated with sport, particularly in the team sport of softball. This research examines the expectations a patriarchal society places on young women who play sports competitively and how such expectations with regards to femininity in both behavior and appearance influence a young female athlete's identity formation. Through the lenses of gender studies and cultural studies, the lived experiences of a female high school athlete are described. This study traces the challenges and successes women have experienced trying to gain entry into the institutionalized world of sport since the Industrial Revolution. It also explores acts of both resistance and conformity with regards to social constructions of gender on a high school softball team.

INDEX WORDS: Gender, Masculinity, Femininity, Athletics, Patriarchy, Education, Curriculum

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by

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Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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2012

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DEDICATION

My daughter Hillary is an amazing young woman, and I could not have undertaken this journey without her. We spent hundreds of hours together at practices, games, tournaments, and on the road throughout the years, and she was understanding of the commitment of time and effort it was going to take accomplish this goal of mine. She let me glimpse into her world, the world of being a female teenager, in ways I may not have otherwise been able to witness. I hope I have showed her that she, too, can accomplish whatever goals she sets for herself with determination and hard work.

As well, I dedicate this work to my husband Don. His support and encouragement of my graduate work extends back many years, back to the first courses I took to earn my teaching certificate. He has continued to help me reach professional and personal goals I wanted through graduate work. It took a lot of weekends, holidays, and late nights to accomplish, but he would never let me give up when I grew tired and frustrated. He knew I had it in me to forge ahead when on occasion the road seemed to be too long or full of obstacles.

My love, respect, and admiration for you both is immeasurable. Thank you for everything.

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Several friends served as support systems to me during this journey. My friend and colleague Dr. Jane Lynes, was a steadfast mentor on whom I could always count. She encouraged me to pursue my doctorate and was always willing to read drafts, brainstorm ideas, and push me along when I seemed to get bogged down. She understood completely what this journey involved because she, too, went through it herself just a few years before I entered the program.

Diane Croy and Germaine Nail, two dear friends, deserve acknowledgement as well. Germaine always sent names of articles or documentaries she thought might be of use to me. Diane was always there when I needed her. Both were willing to listen to my ideas and offer insight, and, most importantly, provide much-needed encouragement to carry on when the journey seemed too long. Many times over the last four and a half years, I had to decline various outings and activities with them, but they helped keep me focused on the finish line.

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So many friends and colleagues checked in on my progress and offered words of support to me over the course of this research. The positive thoughts and well wishes you offered will always be remembered.

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INTRODUCTION

At a time when many teenage girls may be pulling away from familial influences as they establish their own identities, cement their social circles, and carve their own paths in this world, I have been provided a unique opportunity to spend time with and observe my daughter and her friends in ways and situations that many other parents have not. What makes me so different from other parents raising a teenage daughter these days? My daughter was a teenage athlete, a fast pitch softball player who devoted years to the sport at the most competitive levels of high school play and on the fast pitch softball circuit in this area of Georgia. Her athletic pursuits required my involvement and participation, driving her to lessons and practices and to tournaments near and far that lasted several days each weekend for several months out of the year. The hours and hours we spent together over the years have given me a special opportunity to watch my daughter grow not only as an athlete but as an independent young woman.

My husband and I thought it important to give our daughter the opportunity to participate in sport for many of the same reasons other parents do: to help her develop a sense of teamwork and fair play, to value the importance of exercise, to keep her out of trouble and away from video games, to add an additional component to our family in terms of spending time together, and so on. Neither my husband nor I played softball at the recreation department level or in high school when we were growing up. In fact, while my husband and I maintain active lifestyles these days--we both run and work out regularly--neither one of us played a team sport in junior high or high school, although I did participate on swim teams for a few years when I was very young, outgrowing it by the end of my elementary school years. It wasn't until much later, during our only

daughter's growing up years, that I became involved in team sports through supporting her in recreational level and higher level play by attending games, practices, and lessons, coaching recreational level teams (my husband and I both coached), and establishing a high school softball team booster club and serving on its board for two years.

My daughter has had experiences I never had with sport. While I grew up in a military family and traveled the United States and Southeast Asia with my parents, changing friends as many times as we changed duty stations, my own daughter has lived in the same small city since she was three and has maintained friendships with many of the same girls with whom she has grown up. My husband and I wanted our daughter Hillary to have something we felt was missing from our own childhood, which is, growing up with roots. That feeling of being grounded somewhere and having connections to family and friends and place was something we wanted her to have. My daughter Hillary played tee ball which turned into softball in the recreation department leagues and then excelled at that same sport through her middle school and high school years while also playing competitively on area travel teams up through her senior year in high school.

Softball became one of those things in her life, in our family's life that grounded us. Softball, for us, was a time to be together, and I valued the additional time, what I felt was quality time, to be with my daughter during her teenage years. Hours and hours every week we spent together at the fields, at lessons, at ball parks, on the road to small towns across the area provided us with opportunities to watch our daughter Hillary and her friends and teammates grow from young girls into young women.

As the years unfolded, I began to note some interesting observations and interactions between Hillary and the players we have come to know during all the time I spent with them at tryouts, practices, lessons, games, countless miles on the interstates, highways, and back roads of southeast Georgia, so many nights in inexpensive motels and restaurants and fast food joints, and lots of hours in small town Wal-Marts over the years. With the endless hours and months spent with my daughter and dozens and dozens of girls, I watched them grow from elementary school kids to young adolescents swimming through their middle school years to finally reaching the high school years and becoming teenagers. And so it only made sense to me to turn to this experience that has shaped our family's life, and especially my daughter's life, when I thought about beginning the doctoral program at Georgia Southern University.

And the Journey Begins

My research interests have centered on my daughter Hillary's participation in this sport and how such participation has influenced her development in myriad ways—physically, mentally, socially, and intellectually. Women in sport challenge our cultural assumptions about gender and sexuality, what it means to be male or female. Athletics has been viewed as a male domain, with its emphasis on strength, agility, competition, intellect, and aggression. Over the years, I have observed my daughter and her teammates experiment with the reality that tells them in order to play sports they must maintain and emphasize their femininity without appearing overly aggressive or possessing masculine traits associated with sport, particularly with the sport of softball. I have watched her celebrate successes and face challenges as she mentally jockeyed to power positions on the teams on which she played. I have observed her transformation into a thinking,

calculating pitcher when she took the pitcher's mound. I have seen her battle back from painful injuries that might have caused other players to quit the game altogether. And I have made note as she questioned and balanced the messages society sent about female sexuality and gender and sport. As she grew into a young adult, I observed her and her teammates experiment with changing roles, roles influenced by societal messages regarding how young women should look and behave both on and off the softball field. I am particularly interested in the messages about appearance and behavior that bombard young female athletes and what happens when some of that behavior, the kind of behavior, such as aggressiveness, playing with pain, and locker room talk, traditionally reserved for and expected from male athletes, is at odds with expected social norms.

As I began the journey on which this project would lead me, I have embraced a new educational consciousness, one that has enabled me, through reflective and reflexive thinking, that neither my daughter nor I have to accept without question the expectations society thrusts upon us. But in order to be able to think reflexively and reflectively about the issues that affect us, we have to have knowledge about it. For Hillary and young women like her who are the ones who try to strike a balance between wanting to be athletes and balancing the message that says they must look and behave in feminine ways if they do play sports, it is important to know why and from where these messages come. Because it is from there, that starting point, I believe, they can take steps to question and challenge and change their own experiences with sport. When they are aware of the legacy of women in sport, the challenges, and the sacrifices many of those women made so they can play, they can continue to make meaning from the experiences of those who have wanted to play before them. We can and should build new visions of ourselves,

collecting experiences along the journey that make us stronger and more authentic individuals. Janet Miller (1980) wished:

to emphasize the extent to which the unexamined consciousness may conform to forms and modes of action that are shaped by external factors and the extent to which unthinking compliance with prescribed images may lead to a dissonance that promises only further fragmentation and distance from oneself. (p. 35)

Janet Miller (1980) journeyed to become aware of new realities regarding her professional self and her personal self. I can certainly relate to the feelings Miller (1980) experienced. And so, too, do I hope to accomplish the building of a new vision for myself through this doctoral process. By reading the works of scholars in various fields broadly and deeply, I continue to question what I think, who I am, and why I accept or reject particular viewpoints on a given topic, particularly as it relates to education, gender expectations, and sport. As well, through my work I hope my daughter and the other young women she played with or against and those who will follow her onto the softball fields are able to define, develop, and put into place realities they construct for themselves and by themselves. I aim to show that young women like my daughter Hillary can and do resist and challenge the patriarchal ideologies about gender when it comes to the playing fields.

What Should Count in Curriculum Studies?

What kind of curriculum is important for students of today and the future? Livingston (2004) suggests it should address the moral concerns of today and tomorrow. Included in this then would be the moral concerns and struggles females face today as they continue to push the boundaries and limitations of access to the world of sport, a

world that more often than not maintains and perpetuates gender differences, power differences, racial differences, socioeconomic differences, and sexual differences.

Livingston (2004) writes:

The reconceptualization of the field of curriculum over the last 2 decades has changed the way we have come to understand the purposes of curriculum theory. The primary function of the curriculum, from the reconceptualization position, is to create new realities. Creating new realities is not a subtle idea for future generations—it will be their primary function. (p. 44)

While Livingston's (2004) interests in this particular essay focus on the role of technology and its unknown future possibilities and influences on the body and its role in power relations and regulations, he urges us to continue to ask questions, for the questions are more important than any answers we may be able to find. If we stop asking questions about the way things are, then the realities we experience will not change.

Curriculum scholars should indeed constantly ask questions about what is unknown and why things are when others do not think to do so, for it is within the asking of questions that we are able to uncover multiple perspectives of knowing about life. The field of curriculum studies allows us to work our self-formation, reconstructing ourselves based on the insights and the knowledges we gain from studying lived experiences, and we are provided opportunities to fine tune our awareness of the complexities regarding societal expectations for women. Roy (2003) writes about Deleuze and cartography, nomadic spaces and boundaries and *in-betweenness*:

The sense one has at the school is that of being in between things. Students are often in between the field and the classroom; the teachers are in between

observing the placements and teaching in-house classes. In-betweeness here is everywhere. It is also a state of emergent things; it can be viewed as a relationality that is always beyond determinate boundaries. (p. 76)

I believe that it is this place of in-betweeness that curriculum studies should indeed have as part of its focus, to hear what these teenage girls who play sports make of themselves, present to others, and have to say about their own lived experiences helps us demystify the curious nature and world of female high school athletes. We as educators need to be more understanding about the importance of sports in the lives of young female athletes. For those girls who dedicate their after school hours to the playing fields, learning about these spaces and places that are so important to them allows us to tap into and sharpen our own perspectives as we learn about them and what is meaningful in their lives. If we choose only to see rather than observe and learn from them, then we are destined to remain unchanged and miss a valuable opportunity to become more in touch and in tune with the young women with whom we work in our schools.

Questions of Interest

The questions I would like to consider through my research are: How does a girl in a small southern community balance the cultural expectations of being an athlete and feminine at the same time? What happens when she is faced with situations surrounding athletics in which females, both teammates and opponents, act in ways traditionally at odds with accepted societal gender expectations (i.e., aggression, competition, sexuality)? How do gender roles influence her performances on and off the softball field? Is Hillary even aware of these? And what life lessons might she and others hope to learn, discard, and keep regarding gender roles and sport when the game is over? In order to accomplish

this and to get to the point of reflection through the telling of Hillary's story, I think it is important to trace the origins of organized sport in this country and the struggles women have faced trying to break into this male-centered domain. As well, it is important to understand the expectations for femininity in both appearance and behavior that women face if they do play sports, especially certain sports. For without examining the boundaries and obstacles women have faced, it is hard to see how far young women like Hillary have come and, as well, it will be difficult to see where her path leads if attention is not given to the past.

The organizational foundation around which education in this country has been built upon is based on gender. Yet, it is precisely through such a structure that we are allowed to see how such foundations force us adapt or accept (or both, for that matter) what is presented to us. Nowhere is this more painfully clear than when we turn our attention to extracurricular activities, specifically school athletics. It is here that we see women left on the sidelines. Indeed women have made gains in equal access to opportunities to play sports over the decades, and it is abundantly clear to me that the milieu that is high school sports is where I think young female athletes have received a most valuable education about life. Roseboro (2008) discusses dominant discourses and how "alternative narratives can impede the dominant way of thinking and speaking and, in this impediment, change the meaning of the discourse (if only slightly)" (p. 43). It is with this in mind, the interrupting of dominant discourses of high school sports, one should consider how and where and if girls are able to disrupt the discourses found all around them. I'm speaking of the places beyond the reach of the classroom walls of high schools; I'm concerned with the in-between and unsupervised places of the softball field,

the locker room, the school bus, places where and how teenage *girls*, specifically girls who play sports, work out what it means to be themselves, to be both an individual and yet find their place in a group, to figure who they are and how they negotiate the issues of power and marginalization they face as female athletes.

The Focus and Theoretical Frameworks

Angela McRobbie (1977) said:

Very little seems to have been written about the role of girls in youth cultural groupings. They are absent from the classical subculture ethnographic studies, the pop histories, the personal accounts, and the journalistic surveys of the field.

When girls do appear, it is either in ways which uncritically reinforce the stereotypical image of women with which we are now so familiar...or else they are fleetingly and marginally presented. (p. 1)

McRobbie tells us girls themselves reproduce societal expectations and the status quo. Since McRobbie (1977) wrote about the lack of research looking at girls in their cultural groupings in the seventies, much more has been written about those girls and young women who choose to participate in cultural groupings. However, I believe a hole exists in the field when it comes to involving athletics as a growing number of young women have gained more access to both recreational and competitive sports. We understand our world through narratives, the stories we tell about ourselves. I hope to engage and entice readers to understand and explore our experiences and our lives as they are tied into sport during the years Hillary played both recreational and competitive softball. As well, I hope to unravel the threads that hold together or weaken the relationships and experiences among the girls who play fast pitch softball. Blending the research found in both gender

studies and cultural studies bodies of literature will help me unpack and draw out the nuances of social constructions of gender as related to females and the importance role sports plays in this country and many of our daily lives both as participants and spectators.

Needless to say, a wealth of literature exists on both gender and on sport. An abundance of research exists concerning aggression among males athletes. And there is a body of literature that exists regarding aggression among females, most of it in the form of relational bullying. However, the field of curriculum studies lacks such research on female athletes in a number of areas. Such holes include literature on subcultures related to power and hierarchies on female athletic teams. Are the rules and norms different for boys and girls as they regulate the actions and reactions of their own team members? Are softball teams who play at the high school and higher levels of competition (travel teams) immune from bullying and aggressive behaviors and power plays to exert dominance over others? Is what the literature shows us about males and aggression in sport similar to females, if it exists? And more than just aggressive behaviors, how do girls who play fast pitch softball manage competing femininities and masculinities and those performances in a sport that is considered a masculine one and one that opens up the girls who play it to stereotyping about their sexuality (whether they are lesbian or heterosexual) more so than if they were figure skaters or gymnasts? In addition to the gender studies literature and the cultural studies literature, queer theory literature will be of value as it will add insight into the nature of sexuality and sport, an issue that still causes concern among some segments of society.

As curriculum scholars we seek ways to question the power that such categories and compartmentalizations create, and writing narratives such as this one help us construct and identify and consider and resist those compartmentalizations at the site of individual struggle for change. I believe there is a lack of research and theory and narratives by curriculum scholars devoted to the individual stories of girls who wrangle with societal messages about performing gender and sport. Specifically my work, an in-depth look at the culture of girls playing fast pitch softball in southeast Georgia, the balancing and interpreting of societal messages regarding gender and identity and sport, the negotiating of power and performance of playing sport, will hopefully add to the field of curriculum studies, by peeling back and observing the layers surrounding gender and identity and power issues amongst these girls, specifically my own daughter, who play this sport of fast pitch softball competitively on high school and travel teams. But more than that, more than sharing Hillary's story, this narrative is a way for me to question my own beliefs and values, not just as an educator because educator is not my only identity. Mother, wife, and athlete are also identities that belong to me, and they are identities that through this process of reading and research and writing will surface time and again as I reflect on decisions I have made in those capacities in trying to raise a strong, independent young woman who has the confidence in herself to make decisions that are best for her and will give her life meaning and value.

I have chosen to divide my research into five chapters and will use a blending of both a gender studies and cultural studies framework as I share this narrative with the reader. The work of scholars in gender studies will help me uncover the meanings we find in both the masculine and feminine performances Hillary contends with as she works

to balance her athletic self or find that self competing with other parts of herself. The body of work in the cultural studies literature will aid in my research regarding sport as an institution and its power to subordinate women (and others), the elements of the media and sport, and the technology of sport, as I look at the various influences these have had on my daughter's development and growth as a young athlete. Further, the cultural studies literature concerned with popular culture, that is fashion and beauty and its influences on my daughter, will help me unpack the layers of that part of her that actively chooses to participate in particular notions about female beauty, femininity, and sexuality. As well, I will turn to scholars in queer theory. Valocchi (2005) writes:

categories of sex, sexuality, and gender exert power over individuals, especially for those who do not fit neatly within their normative alignments. Queer theory turns this emphasis on its head by deconstructing these binaries. Queer theory focuses on the "deviant" cases, or the anatomies, genders, sexual practices, and identities that do not neatly fit into either category of the binaries or that violate the normative alignment of sex, gender, and sexuality. (p. 753)

If we accept social constructions of gender as they are presented to us, we are not able to question disparities that are created when we accept such constructions as the norm.

Queer theory is an important body of research to my work because females who participate in sport have been considered at various points in our history as contesting the gender order, coming under scrutiny for their athleticism which is simultaneously at odds with what society expects of women. Queer theory allows us to see how these views are manifested through the institution of sport and how women cope with the expectations found there.

Chapter One, Curriculum Studies and the Marginalization of Women in Sport, provides a brief historical perspective of women in sport in this country beginning with the Industrial Age and details some of the struggles women have faced to break into the world of athletics. I believe it is important to discuss this as I will try to show how athletes like my daughter have benefitted from the actions and persistence of female athletes who have come before her. Chapter Two, Curriculum Studies and Femininity in Sport: What Price to Play? considers the challenges and pressures women athletes face to not only play sports but to be accepted by society if they do play. The focus of Chapter Three, Pitching Curriculum Studies—Masculinities/Femininities On and Off the Field, looks at the ways in which my daughter Hillary negotiated both masculine and feminine gender performances and struggled with identity in distinct ways as an athlete and a young woman faced with a culturally significant rite of passage, the high school prom. In Chapter Four, Curriculum Studies, Power, the Hierarchy of a High School Softball Team, I examine the unique ways in which power and hierarchy and gender are negotiated with this particular group of girls both on the field and off. In Chapter Five, Lessons Learned: Curriculum and Identities in Between, I discuss the reality/realities I believe my daughter Hillary has made for herself as well as the new realities I have made of my own through this experience which has been a major part of our lives in so many ways for the last 13 years. This experience of living together, working together, practicing together, traveling together, and playing together has certainly influenced and affected my relationship with my daughter and hers with me. And I believe it is important to acknowledge what we both have learned along this journey. The work has been meaningful for both of us, adding layers of richness and depth to our interactions and communications and our being

together that simply put is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to come to know one another in ways that would not have been available to us had we not undertaken this journey so many years ago.

CHAPTER 1

CURRICULUM STUDIES AND THE MARGINALIZATION OF WOMEN IN SPORT

In this chapter, I will explore the challenges women have had gaining entry into the world of athletics in this country beginning with the Industrial Age using both a cultural studies and gender studies theoretical throughline. I begin with this timeframe as it is a period in our country's history when we see, due to the shift from an agricultural nation to an industrial one, when more time and resources become available for the pursuit of leisure activities such as sport, and the boundaries begin to be nudged by some women for the right and the opportunity to become physically fit and athletically involved in the male domain of sport. It will be important to look at the challenges and roadblocks women have experienced as they tried to gain entry into sports, challenges and roadblocks put into place by the medical profession, industry, education, and even women splintered by differences about what the suffrage movement should include as I will describe in later chapters truly how far athletes like my daughter Hillary have come, what they have been willing to sacrifice for it, and the ways in which they continue to challenge and surprise us by what they bring to the game regarding conventional notions and expectations revolving around female athletes, their behavior, and their appearance as they pave the way for young girls who will follow them in years to come.

What Should Curriculum Look Like?

In reflecting upon what curriculum might look like if it had as its starting point “the problem of living a life”, Whitlock (2007) responds:

It might begin to resemble more life itself: it would be curriculum that takes into account the bodies, voices, interactions, spirits, and desires of people. It would be

a curriculum in which those people—their behaviors and feelings—are contextualized by time and place. (p. 43)

Whitlock's (2007) description of what curriculum should look like, what it should take into account is important for us to consider when we speak about the voices and stories we do not hear as curriculum researchers. I hope to build on those contextualizations and add to the field of curriculum studies by capturing snapshots of time, contextualizations of time and of place and of tremendous growth and involvement of women in sports in this country. Paulo Freire (2004) urges us to remain cognizant of the fact that no culture or its history is immobile. Sometimes the changes that occur within a culture happen slowly; at other times, change happens at a lightning-speed pace (think about the technology revolution, for example). But neither culture nor history would exist without risk. According to Freire (2004):

there could not be culture or history without innovation, without creativity, without curiosity, without freedom being exercised, or without freedom, which when denied, one must fight for. There could not be culture or history without risk, taken or untaken—that is, risk of which the subject is more or less conscious.... The fact is that risk is a necessary ingredient in mobility, without which there is no culture or history. (p. 5)

As educators and scholars, we need to encourage risk-taking in thinking about the world in which we live, where we've come from, and where we are going with our students. We come to know about ourselves through our relationships with others and through our interactions with the institutions and objects of our world. Thinking hopefully leads to action by some. The stages of change to our culture about which you will in this chapter

are a direct result of risk taking and pushing institutional boundaries women have taken to gain the same rights as men in the world of sport. Some decades will show slow growth as women stepped lightly into a world in which they weren't welcomed; other decades will show women breaking into athletic arenas backed by the power of federal legislation. But underlying every stage is the element of risk, a risk women who loved sport were willing to take.

Paul Willis's (1977) ethnographic work in the mid-1970s with working-class English boys gives us direction and provides insight into my work with my daughter and her softball pursuits through her middle school and high school years, but more specifically for this first chapter on the exclusion of and battle by women to gain entry into the world of athletics and a healthy, sporting life. Willis (1977) found that the youth he studied were indeed aware that the schooling they received was meant to prepare them to remain in their positions in the class system of Britain; yet, because they resisted education through various means, they remained pigeon-holed in the very situations the ruling classes meant for them to maintain. And while Willis's (1977) work was concerned with the segregation among the classes, I want to make a connection to his work concerning gender. For like the working class boys of Willis's (1977) study, women and girls of all classes, too, have been pigeon-holed into positions of subordination by a society that expects them to remain there through a variety of institutions meant to exclude. Education certainly has been one of those institutions in which women have been historically subordinated in this country. Sports are another one. I will show in Chapter One some of the exclusions women faced in the athletic arena and how they continued to push against the boundaries that held them in places of

subordination. Even when they did break through some of those boundaries that anchored them, their athletic pursuits were both highly regulated and limited.

I fully believe my own daughter would be a different person than the person she is today had it not been for the opportunity to participate in sports. Her life, her experiences, her relationships are worthy of being told and listened to and they are indeed wrapped up in the webbing provided to her through her sporting life, which crosses over into other areas of her being. But she would not be the person she is becoming if it not for those women who came before her who wanted more than to be relegated to a life defined merely as subordinate, as passive, as dominated simply because they were women. Those women are the ones who paved the way so girls like my daughter Hillary could play, get dirty, and be assertive and strong women without having to apologize for it. Women who wanted to play sports didn't have an easy time of it, but they persevered and continued despite the obstacles they faced along the way.

Organized Sports in the United States

Sports give us a wealth of narratives by which to learn about the world. Sports rally us together from the very local levels to national and international competitions as both spectators and players alike. Cavicchi (1998) asserts "it is generally accepted that ordinary people should learn about the world from the intellectual theories of academics, but I believe that academics, in turn, can learn much about the world from the folk explanations of ordinary people" (p. 10). We can and should and do learn much from what sport has to teach us about our culture and what values we place on it and what values we take from it. Sports are where we turn to learn lessons about profiles in both courage and graceful defeat, about American values of strength and power and

competition, and about overcoming adversity. But sports teach us as well lessons about power, privilege, and exclusion. Bakhtin (1968/1984) raises an important question for us. He speaks of official culture of a particular time and place. Who is it that determines official culture? Today, diversity exists in what is popular and accessible to the masses, appealing to most anyone's tastes and interests. The masses are attracted to all things popular culture for entertainment, for social cues, for rebellion against the dominant powers in the many forms it takes in our society. And as long as those choices can be supported by a capitalistic society, it seems that most anything goes these days in this country. But this was not always the case, particularly for minorities and women, as we moved into an age of mechanization and urbanization of the Industrial Revolution. What little access the working classes and women and minorities had to sports was determined by those in power, strictly managed, and used as a means to control and maintain class and gender distinctions.

Organized sports in America came about as a result of changes in society during a time when women and blacks and immigrants began entering the workforce as our nation began expanding industry and urbanization. Sports, once reserved for the privileged classes of society, eventually were extended to the working classes and others in an effort "by the upper classes as a means of integrating immigrants and the growing industrial working class into an expanding capitalist order" (Messner, 1992, p. 11). The shift from an agricultural society to an industrial society was a cause of concern for those who perpetuated the control and power that a patriarchal society exerts. Sports restored and preserved for white men of power something they felt they were losing to the Industrialized Revolution--power and privilege over women and other males who were

moving beyond the limits of what was traditionally expected of them. Pappano (2008) writes that organized sports in America came to fill a need in a new industrialized society:

The key to the birth of structured, organized athletics was the change in attitude of religious leaders in the mid to late 1800s. In early America, sport-like activities, including boxing and cockfighting, were popular, but the betting, drinking, and brawling that accompanied contests, couple with the Puritan suspicion of play, made sports unpopular with religious leaders and pious governors. However, it was the nineteenth century and America's transformation from an agrarian nation to an industrial society rife with new immigrants and a new ethos of capitalism that saw the massive organization and acceptance of sports. (p. 158)

Sports reclaimed an order of patriarchy for society, making and keeping men strong and virile and placing boundaries and limitations on women by excluding them and maintaining societal gender expectations and hierarchies. But as the feminist movement grew and this country embraced a new industrialized and urbanized society, women began to challenge the roles outlined for them in Victorian domesticated lives. Organized sports served as a mean to preserve white male power and privilege and reinforced the status quo in regards to class, race, and gender segregation.

Industrial Jobs Create Leisure Time

Leisure time and resources improved for a large segment of society, the middle and working classes, during the period from 1880-1920. Sports became seen by those in power in this country, the business leaders and the clergy, as a way to build character and increase the population's work ethic as well as improve health and fitness levels for those

who labored for a living. But this change in leisure time activities was restricted to certain groups of men and boys—the middle and upper middle classes. Because men were taken away from the farms and moved into industrial jobs, the raising and teaching of boys was left to women. Couple this with a lack of physical labor that was required by new industrial jobs, and new concern arose about the possibility that society was becoming feminized. It was at this time that organized sport and the creation of organizations like the Boys Scouts came into being to countermand the perceived influences that boys being raised by women would have. Further, the women's movement of the time challenged current gender relations. For the working class young males, Coakley (1994) writes:

The intent was to create orderly citizens and cooperative workers. Sports programs for young males from middle class backgrounds, on the other hand, were used to counteract the influence of female-dominated home lives.

Participation was intended to turn what many feared to be “overfeminized males” into assertive, competitive, achievement-oriented young men who would make good leaders. (p. 70)

Sports were meant to keep working class youth in shape, preserve masculinity, and maintain the good of the order. Kampf (1977) echoes the same reasoning behind bringing sports into the leisure time of the laboring class. He writes that sport helped keep the working class citizens out of trouble:

Loyalty to the team or the individual performer, rather than one's social class helped mass sports become subjectively the most important life activity for millions in the working class as the elements of autonomy, creativity, and play

became increasingly separated from work—as work became tedious labor.

(Kampf, 1977, p. 836)

Sports were seen as a way to curb deviant behavior and to instill what those men seeking to hold onto their power thought “lesser” men needed—self discipline and a strong work ethic and a sense of national pride. As well, sport was intended to bring men together to celebrate and maintain the differences between men and women and ensure the moving forward of an industrial economy.

Sport was a means to control oppressed and marginalized groups, and it was surely a lesson taken from the British and their use of sport through education to bring young men into the fold of the British Empire. Messner (1992) writes the British used sport in school in the late 19th century as a way to “socialize boys to a certain kind of manliness whose *raison d’être* was the administration of domination over (mostly nonwhite) colonized peoples” (p. 10). Sport, while it had existed in many forms prior to the late 19th century was manipulated by the ruling classes of Britain to further their interests, which eventually came to include sports as a feature of the school curriculum for the middle classes in colonized places as way to continue to exert control and hopefully induce some sense of loyalty from the colonized peoples for the British Empire. What we see in America is the same use of sports to control.

Lesko (2001) makes a connection between adolescence representing at the turn of the 19th century the “worries about unknown futures, about ability to succeed and dominate in changing circumstances, about maintenance of gender and class hierarchy in changing social and cultural landscapes” (p. 50). Lesko (2001) writes G. Stanley Hall promoted separate education for boys and girls, for girls that education meant preparing

for marriage and raising children. Boys had to become men—strong, virile, disciplined—and the only way this would happen was to get them away from the influences of women, teachers and mothers, who Hall felt were feminizing males and threatening the creation and maintenance of healthy, disciplined, properly religious young men who would assume their rightful places in society.

Hall and other reformers of the day, like the Boy Scouts and the Playground Association of America, wanted to redirect efforts to provide better education, democracy, and more supervision of youth. Lesko (2001) asserts organized play:

came to be revered for making children and adolescents moral and strong via direct and efficient processes, unlike the passive, unfocused, and feminized school curriculum. Cognitive approaches to civilized behavior were associated with schooling and were deemed unsatisfactory. Play invoked muscles directly, and muscles were believed to be the location of automatic, instinctual morality. Courage in war, it was reasoned, must be an instantaneous response. Muscles, if properly prepared, carried civilized morality, ever at the ready. Expertly organized play would promote discipline and control, qualities sorely lacking in largely immigrant children who were the reformers' targets. (p. 75)

One way to accomplish this was to provide for boys activities that would harness and harvest both emotion and intellect. But only certain emotions were to have focus, those like loyalty, competition, patriotism, and the hope was to achieve these were through sports, specifically team sports. For these reformers and others like them, organized team sports would see players coming together as one and creating group loyalty which would supersede any one person's identity. Additionally, reformers hoped team play would put

into place peer supervision as a way to self-regulate behavior since adults could not be everywhere at all times. Preservation of male privilege, superiority, and the promotion of a sense of nationalism and patriotism was reserved for boys only. And sports were an ideal institution in which performances of men would be practiced and preserved.

Women—Limited Mobility and Restricted Activity

And just as the laboring and middle class males were to be kept on track by the upper class white patriarchy, so too were women by excluding most of them from any type of athletic activity. Butler (2004) asks us to consider what kind of life is unlivable? Institutionalized and differential treatment makes us oppressed and “to be oppressed means that you already exist as a subject of some kind, you are there as the visible and oppressed other for the master subject” (p. 30). She further argues that women have not been included into human life at the fullest and highest levels because of such differential treatment. Certainly this is true of anyone who walks outside the traditional cultural norms of sexuality and gender and those belonging to other races and classes. But it is particularly true for those women who tried to participate in organized athletics from the onset. Women of the middle and upper classes’ entrance into the world of sport was helped by the additional resources and leisure time afforded to them by the country’s move into the Industrial Age; however, it was indeed through small, incremental steps through the back door, testing the waters, so to speak, as women pushed a little at a time to have at least some opportunity to experience just a little piece of what men and boys were enjoying and had enjoyed for years. Messner (1992) argues dominated groups began to use sports as a way to attain both status and mobility in a society that held them back from doing so:

Sports are a social institution in which social meanings are contested. Power is not simply a top-down, one-way process in which dominant groups assert and enforce their rules, values, and beliefs over dominated groups. Rather, power is a process in which dominated groups may partially accept, but also attempt to redefine, negotiate, or even reject, the ruling groups' rules, values, and meanings. (p. 12)

Women of the middle- and upper-classes who pushed to insert themselves into the male-dominated world of sport, which aimed to reinforce the gender stratifications of society, used that institution as a means to challenge the positions to which they had been relegated. Three distinct periods of women's involvement in sport—the Victorian Age, the Suffrage Movement/the 1920s, and the Title IX era—are important because it is during these times when we see an increasing level of activity, regarding women's foray into the male-dominated world of athletics.

In the 19th century, women were generally considered too weak to participate in many sports competitively, but Pappano (2008) writes the medical community agreed that some form of exercise was necessary for women to be prepared for childbirth. It was more important to society to preserve a woman's physical health and reproductive capacities. Dworkin and Wachs (2000) write that "Given that sports is one of the most powerful socializing institutions for masculinity that privileges male heterosexual bodies, it provides an interesting forum for exploring norms of sexual behavior" (p. 50). As women broke into the limited spheres of sport, their participation was strictly managed. By that I mean modes of fashion and appearance and behavior were strictly monitored as was the level of exertion to preclude any notion of other than femininity and heterosexuality in women. Griffin (2002) writes as late as the 1800s influential medical

experts warned Western women about the physical changes being athletic could have on their bodies, such as “deeper voices, facial hair, and overdeveloped arms and legs” (p. 193). Griffin (2002) asserts that these claims were to keep women in check and focused on their dutiful places as wives and mothers. Part of this restriction may have been based on lack of knowledge about women’s bodies and female physiology at the time, but certainly it fed right in to protecting society’s notion of femininity and left women and girls out of the athletic loop. Their dutiful place was in the home and to be raising children.

Opportunities for girls and women were limited to sitting around and protecting their complexions once they reached puberty. What was offered was based around poise and beauty, activities like figure skating and gymnastics. Some women who belonged to the upper class did get some form of exercise through sport, but most of these opportunities were restricted to very private environments like those found at country clubs and governed by strict rules of dress and behavior. Croquet, golf, and tennis were the sports of the day for women. Cycling was seen as a sure path to prostitution and barrenness. Swimming was typically handled carefully with separate entrances to pools for men and women. Those who attended college had a few more opportunities to participate in sports but not many and practically none on a competitive level.

During the Victorian Era the man was the head of any household because he provided financial support and as well as served as the moral authority figure within the family. The Victorian mindset relegated women to being wives and mothers not meant for much of anything else, let alone sports and physical activity; the prevailing thought was that women just weren’t physically or emotionally capable of much else. The middle

class woman's role was to have children, take care of the house, and ensure the cycle of patriarchy was passed down to obedient children who learned lessons of strict moral codes.

But as middle class families moved to new detached or terraced homes, and as families grew more prosperous thanks to the Industrial Revolution, servants took over many of the household chores that had been reserved for dutiful wives. This made more time available for women to spend their husband's money. Hargreaves (2002) suggests this was evidenced by the lavish clothes and accessories these middle class women displayed (p. 55). As well, because middle class women were freed of the confines of their previous roles and responsibilities, they now had time to participate in leisure activities, another sign of the family's prosperity. Still, the lavishness of the attire, which included corsets, long petticoats and skirts, and fancy gloves and shoes and hats, prevented women from demonstrating any kind of skill or reasonable movement to be expected from playing sport. Early sports for middle class women were more opportunities to socialize and remain ladylike not to demonstrate strength or aggressiveness.

A Foot on the Lawn

Still, some women found opportunity in the limitations placed upon them by a society not willing to see them exert themselves physically through sport. Croquet was very popular during the late 1860s and though not an athletic game, it was played by both men and women because it afforded an opportunity for courtship, and because it brought men and women together, it raised eyebrows and created controversy in various parts of the country. Sterngrass (1998) tells us of the croquet craze:

It was the infatuation of women with croquet, however, that caused the most cultural dissonance in a nation only a generation removed from Lydia Child's caution that activities such as skating and sliding should not take place in mixed company. Although croquet seemed to be a simple and innocent family game—Mark Twain called it “ineffably insipid”—the novel idea that men and women could play together, whether at archery, roller skating, mixed bathing, or croquet, raised the specter of extreme sexual danger for women unregulated by “traditional” social norms. (p. 401)

The controversy seemed to have to do with the lengths some women would take to win at croquet. In one version of the game that was most popular for 40 years from 1860-1900, called tight croquet, a player could place their ball against an opponent's, place her foot upon her ball, and whack the opponent's ball with her mallet, sending the opposing player's ball spinning off into the distance. Sterngrass (1998) writes in his review of illustrations and descriptions of the time which showed women playing men, athletic women wholly reversed:

the doctrine of separate spheres that assigned noncompetitive roles to women [and] when performed by female players, the tight croquet stroke could be interpreted as an act of symbolic castration. Men were “forced” to look on helplessly as their female opponent lined up the two balls, lifted her skirt, placed her dainty foot on her own ball, and with a resounding thwack, hammered the other ball to parts unknown. (p. 403)

Because men, as an act of courtesy, had to place the balls together and women had to lift their skirts in order to put their foot on the ball and strike, this was seen clearly as sexual

suggestiveness and violation of strict moral codes of the time. Croquet required more skill and ingenuity and finesse over physical strength, and therefore challenged male superiority through the wickets.

With men and women playing the game together, it certainly brought in an element of competition and winning, traits reserved for the masculine. And women wanted to win. They were attributed with cheating during the game, dragging the croquet ball under the hems of their heavy skirts to reposition it and double stroking the ball with the mallet. The incidences of cheating among women were so widespread, Sterngrass (1998) reports that the several playing manuals, newspapers, and magazines of the day referred to it and admonished “ladies” against it. Whether they cheated or beguiled their male opponents to distraction, it could be argued that women of the day who played croquet did so thoughtfully about the sport and considered it more than just a delicate pastime during which courtship would take place.

Other Opportunities for Girls

Lesko (2001) provides an interesting example of what happened to girls and their education during this time. In Los Angeles schools, the high enrollment rate of girls and increased chances for boys to drop out of high school in order to go to work caused Los Angeles high school administrators to place an increased emphasis on masculinizing the curriculum, which included a “well organized, competitive sports program run by rugged men, and channeled girls into cheerleading” (Lesko, 2001, p. 79). Young girls’ schooling at that time included physical education that focused on social dances but done so in full dress of the time, reinforcing the importance of being feminine. During this time, exercise was sometimes medically prescribed for women of a fragile and delicate nature in the

form of gentle workouts, some massage therapy, and the very basics of gymnastics to assist women returning to their roles of wives and mothers. Girls were relegated to the sidelines both on and off the field through a greater emphasis on courses with a domestic focus and despite a winning basketball team for several years in the early 1900s. To keep boys in school and to maintain the image of a virile, masculine curriculum, intramural sports were the only ones allowed for girls by 1910 at Los Angeles High School.

Things began to change albeit slowly. Women began to take exception to the rules society put into place for them regarding their subordinate status and exclusion from athletics. The National Association of Girls' Clubs was founded in the 1880s and women then had opportunities to participate in sports such as swimming, hockey, and gymnastics. Wimbledon saw women take the courts in 1884 but with opposition and declarations that tournament play was too tiring for women and "unsuited for women's physiques that would produce an unnatural race of Amazons, thus destroying the prospect of motherhood and hence affecting the deterioration of the human race" (Hargreaves, 2002, p. 62). Hargreaves (2002) says about women and athletics and exercise in general that it was considered indecent and likely to be a "corrupting influence for a properly brought up girl" (p. 62). What was good for the boys was not necessarily good for the girls—strong, healthy bodies, a sense of competitiveness and teamwork, assertiveness and aggressiveness—qualities reserved and valued solely for the male gender. Women continued to struggle and push against the boundaries set for them by a patriarchal society.

Sports and Women in the 20th Century

As the 20th century approached, undoubtedly due in part to the influence of the women's rights movement, women participated in more sports. Golf, tennis, gymnastics and cricket were among them, but still always outside and beyond the world of men's sports so as not to threaten the socially accepted role of men as superior beings who through sport demonstrated the American values of competition, courage, strength, and manliness. Women of the Victorian Era made some strides into the world of sport, but these strides were limited and confining so as not to upset the patriarchal ideology of the time.

To achieve approval and acceptance to play sports, it was necessary for women to maintain femininity and not to appear as challenging conservative thought and patriarchal expectations. Hargreaves (2002) found:

if the activity could be shown to have a utilitarian function, if there was no associated immodesty or impropriety, and if women remained cautious regarding other levels of exertion, then they could extend their physical horizons without threatening their existing social relationships with men—in fact, they could actually show that they positively supported their men in their ventures of sport.

In all the different forms of sport, this process of accommodation can be seen and those from the most wealthy sections of society were no exception. (p. 59)

As long as women were contained and stayed within the strict parameters society set up for them, playing sports was at least tolerated if not accepted by the remainder of white, male upper class society. While a change in thinking about women's involvement in sport began to gain ground because of the potential health benefits it might bring, the underlying motivation of society at the time was to preserve the procreative capabilities

of women, and so any type of exercise was strictly supervised and especially limited. Women's colleges, girls' clubs began to see an increase in competitive team games at this time, but these were sanctioned with very strict rules and procedures in order not to offend the public and the very idea that women who played sports violated the moral and sexual codes of the Victorian Era.

Suffrage-More Than the Vote

In the early 1900s, physical educators and those who had an interest in promoting women's sports continued to square off on the need to protect women's reputations, modesty, and sexual morality in sport. We continue to see women who desire to be athletes stereotyped as overly masculine and a threat to the gender order. This argument cut across racial, gender, and class lines, but in all situations, it was projected that female athletes were heterosexually inclined, according to Cahn's (1993) research. "Efforts to present the female athlete as sexually attractive and available mirrored the playful, erotic sensibility present in the broader commercial leisure culture of the early twentieth century" (Cahn, 1993, p. 346). This preservation of heterosexuality at all costs was all important if women were not only to participate in playing sports but if sports were to be socially acceptable and marketed for any kind of profit. In the end, sports promoters won out and the heterosexuality and sexual desire approach to marketing women in sports shielded viewers against an underlying yet growing current of thought that women who participated in sports were "mannish lesbians" or women of loose morality, perceived as a clear threat to white male power and domination.

The women's suffrage movement of the 1920s showed some gains in sports participation in high schools and intercollegiate athletic competitions around the country.

But those women who were able to rise to athletic prominence were certainly aware of being shut out of the world of sport and the ability to break into it seemed just as important to some of them as was the right to enter into the world of politics by gaining the right to vote. Ethelda Bleibtrey, three-time Olympic gold medal winner in swimming, acknowledged that now that women had obtained the right to vote, they would be after “bigger game”—crashing through the male hegemonic world of athletics. And in an interview in *Women’s Home Companion* in the 1920s, golfer Glenna Collett was quoted as saying: “American women, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, have won two rights: the right of exercising the suffrage and the right of participation in sport.” Collett went on to say she thought the right to participate in sport may have been just as important as the suffrage movement. Dyreson (2003) writes that these sentiments were not rare ones expounded by women with newly acquired fame but continued to be presented in the press in the decade following the ratification of the amendment that gave women the right to vote. And, he concludes that because of the slow movement of women into politics and the splintering off of women’s interests and issues, women, and men, too, turned to the sports world as evidence that women’s lives were indeed being transformed. Women, it seemed, were helping to build America’s national identity through sport. It was during the Olympics of the 1920s that women began to shine in competition and solidify America’s identity as a powerhouse. Yet, they were still expected to be the most attractive competitors and were promoted in newspapers and magazines as objects of heterosexual desire.

Shortly after the 19th Amendment was ratified a group of North Carolina high school girls approached their principal with their desires to form a women’s basketball

team. “The spread of basketball to high schools brought the sport to many new arenas—rural areas, textile mill towns, African American communities—in which women were thoroughly acquainted with the physical and emotional demands of heavy labor and marketplace competition” (Grundy, 2000, p. 125). Grundy (2000) recounts in her history of North Carolina women’s basketball that the sport thrived among African American colleges and industrial plants like textile mills during the 1930s in North Carolina, but many of these competitive leagues adhered to the new rules for girls as well. At the same time, popular culture helped refocus society’s conception of femininity from female deportment to physical health as envisioned by the Gibson Girl. But this is not to say that society as a whole let go of Victorian ideals easily. Cahn (1993) writes that in the early 20th century, sport continued to be relegated to males only, continuing the reinforcement of Victorian ideals regarding the gender order. Women began to work their ways into male arenas of the workforce, nightlife, and politics, and so, too, did they push the envelope for entry into the world of athletics, creating a new vision for themselves in a modern era. Yet, women of the early 20th century who were interested in pursuing this new vision for themselves were subject to intense scrutiny by female educators and male sports promoters. Not only was there concern by men and women alike that reproductive organs may be damaged by physical exertion, it was also seen as an affront to female heterosexuality when women participated in sports because they would adopt manly characteristics, thereby threatening the stability of society. Competition was viewed with caution as it was thought to unleash powerful sexual desire in women. In any case, the arguments of concern for moral control centered on an unleashing of heterosexual desire not sexual preference. Dyreson (2003) tells us that physical educators of the day and their

supporters did not support women participating in international, elite competitions such as diving, swimming, or even playing tennis because they believed this sexualization of women to be a product of sports competition. And while these few events were accepted as events open for women in which to participate, by the time track and field was added to the 1928 Olympics, opinion in much of the American press was negative regarding participating in these events. Dyreson (2003) tells us:

When women conquered new challenges, broke old gender lines and won Olympic glory for the USA, they were hailed as the paragons of the “new woman” of the 1920s. They won more acclaim than women voters and office-holders. In winning victories, however, they had to maintain their sexual attractiveness in order to reassure the nation that while they might well be “new women” they were not unappealing women. Paul Gallico, remembering the 1928 Olympic 800-metre race, dismissed sports that in his view diminished the sexual appeal of women. “If there is anything more dreadful aesthetically or more depressing than the fatigue-distorted face of a girl runner at the finish line, I have never seen it.” (p. 457)

We continue to see the emphasis on feminine beauty even in the international competition of the Olympics during the 1920s. At the time, female athletes were just as popular as movie stars. Dyreson (2003) argues that political and social reform was slow, didn't live up to expectations as promised, and that even the women voters became indifferent to such reforms after the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified. Women didn't take over political offices, nor did they come to command the workplace in a tidal wave of reform. A natural place for women to turn, then, was the world of sports. The point

Dyreson (2003) makes is that whether it was the female athletes, their promoters, the press, or women's activists, the focus was on beauty. They could pursue the right to vote and the right to play sports, but there was always the undercurrent present that the most valuable asset a woman, and a woman athlete at that, had to offer was her attractiveness to men.

Cahn (1993) writes:

Victorian sexual codes crumbled under pressure from an assertive, boldly sexual working-class youth culture, a women's movement which defied prohibitions against public female activism, and the growth of a new pleasure-oriented consumer economy. In the wake of these changes, modern ideals of womanhood embraced an overtly erotic heterosexual sensibility. At the same time, medical fascination with sexual "deviance" created a growing awareness of lesbianism, now understood as a form of congenital or psychological pathology. The medicalization of homosexuality in combination with an antifeminist backlash in the 1920s against female autonomy and power contributed to a more fully articulated taboo against lesbianism. The modern heterosexual woman stood in stark opposition to her threatening sexual counterpart, the "mannish" lesbian. (p. 348)

Given the medical community's interest in deviance by the late 1920s and 1930s, the emphasis shifted from public hypersensitivity toward heterosexual desire to a focus on same sex love if the topic was an assertive, muscular female athlete. And it is about this time we see a shift in promoting a heterosexual, feminine image of female athletes and female physical educators. As a result, women's participation in athletics was much

tamer and less vigorous with basically no challenge to the “hegemonic masculinity of men’s sports for 40 years” (Dworkin & Messner, 2002, p. 25).

Higher Education and Physical Education

As more women entered colleges and universities, despite opposition that challenged higher education for females during this time period, physical activity was introduced to help students prepare for better lives mostly and as expected as wives and mothers, or in the few occupational options of the era, that of teacher or social worker or the occasional doctor or lawyer. But always the physical activity conformed to the strict standards of the day regarding gender roles and was under heavy scrutiny. It was then that we see the first women’s colleges and institutions hiring female physicians and female physical educators whose jobs it were to closely monitor and adapt games to make them more suitable to women playing them. While other team sports like field hockey and lacrosse were considered suitable for women, perhaps because men didn’t play them, it was the invention of basketball, a man’s team sport, which caused great concern. The National Amateur Athletic Association and physical educators of the time wanted a return to the Progressive Era ideals of developing order and harmony, which was in direct contrast to the ideals of competition that was beginning to surge in women’s basketball. Different rules came into effect for girls’ games, physical contact among players was curbed, and recognition rather than reward was favored. The rules of the game included limiting the amount of movement and energy women would expend. The court was divided into three sections, and a female player had to stay in her section. What we see here is obvious attempts to make a masculine sport like basketball more acceptable for women to play by accommodating their supposed weaker physicality and at the same

time maintaining control over them. Basketball may have been the first sport with modified rules and physical space for women, but it would not be the last. Ice hockey, golf, weightlifting are all sports that have come under scrutiny and modification as women pushed to participate in them in an effort to make them more acceptable and, one might argue, more subordinating sports for women.

However, physical educators also shaped their programs according to a developing critique of twentieth-century American culture. As athletics gained an increasingly public role in American life, physical educators cautioned against its dangers, linking the excitement of public competitive strife to an expanding national culture that focused on monetary gain and that all too frequently encouraged excesses in behavior and emotion, overemphasizing the twin goals of triumphing over others and gaining the approval of a crowd. (Grundy, 2000, p. 126)

Educators of the time were fully aware and concerned about what they considered the perceived ills popular culture was having on society and its young people.

The 1930s

The Great Depression of the 1930s left Americans out of work and women out of opportunities to participate in sport for decades (Bell, 2007). Women were once again relegated to their dutiful place in the home despite the benefits sport could provide to keep women physically fit. Dworkin and Messner (2002) note:

In the 1920s and 1930s, in the wake of two decades of burgeoning athleticism by girls and women, medical leaders and physical educators responded with what

now appear to by hysterical fears that vigorous physical activity for girls and women carried enormous physical and psychological dangers. (p. 25)

Perhaps it was the increasing popularity of sports among women and girls that caused a segment of society to rein in the athletic pursuits of women. Women who became independent and self-assured and physically fit were not considered part of the natural order of things and as such became targets for negative attention.

Babe Didrikson was one of the few holdouts toward this push on maintaining femininity and propriety, although she was certainly not immune to the criticisms of the press and society for it. She was a consummate athlete of the first half of the 20th century, winning Olympic gold in 1932 and accomplished in multiple sports—basketball, golf, track, baseball, and several others—yet, she was the focus of intense scrutiny because of her athletic prowess and apparent lack of interest in men until she married wrestler George Zaharias in the late 1930s. Her goal as a young girl was to be a supreme athlete, and she acknowledged in an interview that the only game she didn't play was dolls. Her drive to excel in competition and to earn money for it, she founded the Ladies' Professional Golf Association (LPGA), helped pave the way for other women to see that being strong and athletic and assertive could all be had by women although she was definitely a woman who lived ahead of her time in that she was the exception to the mainstream view of what was appropriate and acceptable of a female athlete of that era-- and she may be considered an exception today as well. But she didn't receive much positive press or social acceptance until she altered her hairstyle and clothes and embraced her affection for all things domestic.

I think it is important to spend time here discussing the lesbian subcultures of the first part of the 20th century because such subcultures came to include sport during this timeframe. Lillian Faderman (1991) presents a sweeping account of lesbian life in the 20th century and discusses in depth the subcultures that lesbians formed in the communities in which they lived and loved mostly secretly. She traces the important places young lesbians would gather as an escape from the oppression they endured and the secrecy these women had to maintain out of necessity in their everyday lives from the “romantic friendships” upper-class and middle-class women enjoyed with other women in the colleges and universities to, later, bars and other clandestine night spots for working-class women leaving their homes to find employment in the 1920s. During the depression years and the 1930s, Faderman (1991) details, middle-class women who once enjoyed their lesbian lifestyle, which may have included living independently (or with a female companion) and working, were less able to be self-sufficient through work, causing many of them to resort to a heterosexual marriage for economic stability. Women who loved women had to move safely and did so through private clubs, camps, colleges, universities, prisons, and sports. Such places were important for lesbians to make connections with others who shared their desires when circumstances in society prevented them being together openly; social networking through the internet, for instance, and activist groups just weren’t in existence yet. And while those who lived in and near big cities like Boston, Chicago, and New York had more opportunities to explore lesbian subcultures than those who lived in smaller communities, lesbians simply did not enjoy access to the same types of subcultures as male homosexuals did...that is, until perhaps World War II.

World War II Era

It wasn't until the 1940s and World War II that women jumped more fully into the workforce, into positions vacated by men called to war, and perhaps with the increased empowerment that working brought, women again participated in sport. It was during this time that semiprofessional softball leagues cropped up around the country and the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League was formed to shore up the possible collapse of baseball franchises that might be created as men headed off to war. Philip Wrigley, owner of the Chicago Cubs, came up with the idea in the early 1940s. During this time, organized, semiprofessional softball leagues did exist around the country, particularly in Chicago, and this new league featured characteristics of both softball and baseball. It gave a handful of the hundreds of women who tried out the opportunity to earn a significant wage for the time. Interestingly, the initial four teams included on their staffs a female chaperone for the players. And while the league's own website states that players were evaluated on their ball playing skills, the maintenance of heterosexual femininity was highly sought after. Female players were expected to attend classes, given explicit instruction in etiquette and makeup application, and expected to use it. They played ball in skirts, with their hair and makeup done, reinforcing the image of a wholesome, heterosexual, girl-next-door image.

But what we see here are institutional histories, those we know about only because they were indeed recorded through league records and narrative reflections or interviews with the participants. What are unknown are the stories of those who didn't participate in these highly visible leagues or those who didn't record their stories because they were poor and/or illiterate.

As well, by the 1940s, more than 30,000 high schools and colleges had cheerleaders, many of whom were girls who gained entrance into the sport once meant only for men as they headed off to war. Grindstaff and West (2006) write that cheerleading became associated with physical beauty and sexuality as it became feminized, where it had once been viewed as a character building and leadership sport due to its origins of being a man's activity. But as the war ended and men returned to reclaim their jobs and other positions they vacated during that time, women were again denied participation in the sport as high schools and colleges began to ban girls from cheerleading (Adams & Bettis, 2003). This may have been viewed, according to Griffin (1998), as a backlash against the increasing freedoms women experienced during wartime and reflected restoring order to male and female roles with renewed and heightened attention to traditional female roles and to lessen the negative associations of lesbians and sports.

With World War II, women entered the workforce to keep America functioning while the men were sent off to war. Women who were tied to heterosexual marriages in previous decades now found themselves surrounded by other women in factories, in the military and other places where lesbian subcultures flourished. This was not due solely to the war effort, as Faderman (1991) explains, but more likely due to the increased "consciousness of lesbianism" after the 1920s and later.

Ironically, war permitted some of them to know for the first time the joy of being paid for their efforts. World War II in particular brought great numbers of females of all classes into a society of women where they were not only able to expand their friendships but to learn to appreciate other females as serious, self-sufficient human beings.

Faderman (1991) concludes it took them away from restrictive family relations and cast them into new environments where they might redefine a narrow morality they may have accepted unquestioningly and for themselves a more personalized set of values.

Working in large numbers together in these environments gave women, lesbian or heterosexual, the opportunity to experience what it was like to be autonomous beings without the sanctioning pressure of male supervision and domination and because the military seemed to be more tolerant of lesbianism during the war than in the years after it. A number of bars that catered to gays and lesbians cropped up around bases and further established a sense of community among working-class young lesbians.

After the war, a return to conservatism and “normalcy” (heterosexuality) was urged by psychoanalysts and the age of McCarthyism included not only the search for Communists but eventually came to include the search for and persecution of gays and lesbians—both in and out of the military. Anyone considered living outside the mainstream was subject to suspicion. As well during this time, Alfred Kinsey’s research in the late 1940s and early 1950s on human sexual behavior brought to light same-sex behavior among men and women, perhaps fueling concerns about the sexual activities of homosexuals and lesbians. Faderman (1991) mentions that military softball teams would disseminate information to other lesbians in the military as those teams traveled around in an effort to give a head’s-up about upcoming “witch hunts” and suggests that after World War II, lesbians in America had to basically begin from scratch to develop, nurture, and sustain a lifestyle that seemed to have a very short history in a country that did not welcome them—and sports provided this haven. It was a conservative time in this country, and public awareness and suspicion of homosexuals was high. Griffin (1998)

writes that in a country that previously emphasized feminine attractiveness of its athletes in earlier decades now became concerned with the sexuality of female athletes.

I wrote earlier about the lesbian subcultures of the first part of the 20th century, the colleges, universities, private clubs, and bars frequented by lesbians in various social classes. But it is after World War II, during the 1950s and 1960s, we see young, working-class lesbians forging into new places other than gay bars to establish a sense of community and opportunity to meet other lesbians in a time when a safe haven was so desperately needed. It was during these decades that we see women's softball teams cropping up around the country. Faderman (1991) writes:

Women's softball usually had at least one or two teams that were all lesbian, and most of the other predominantly heterosexual teams had a fair sprinkling of lesbians. The games did succeed in providing legends and heroes for the lesbian subculture, as well as offering both participants and viewers some possibility for making lesbian contacts outside of bars. (p. 162)

What these teams did was offer women the chance to make contact with other lesbians. It gave them the opportunity for mobility beyond the restrictions of home and church and gave them the freedom to find and create lesbian communities in a world that clearly valued the epitome of the feminine ideal and all the while under the watchful eye of the male-dominated institution of sport.

In the 1950s America's showing in international competition dwindled when the Soviets came upon the scene during the 1952 Olympics. Soviet women soundly trounced American women and it was then that American girls were encouraged to take up sports in an effort to restore national pride during this time period. The Soviet female athletic

body became nationalized; in other words, the Soviet female athletes' bodies were put forth as undemocratic, their unnatural looking bodies affronting the American view that female athletes should be free of any hint that might suggest a masculine side to their appearance and actions. Efforts to regulate gender spurred on a sense of national pride.

Pappano (2008) notes:

Instead of emphasizing how sport would improve character or build muscles, messages sought to persuade girls that athletics would make them more appealing to boys...As long as women worked to display their femininity...and played by girls' rules...they would be exempt from unflattering stereotypes of female athletes. They must, in other words, be females first and athletes second. (p. 205)

And while women did participate in international sporting competitions, they were not bestowed the same qualities of protectors of national pride as a nation's male athletes were. The attention women received was in a sexualized way; for decades the message replayed over and over again was that women must remain heterosexual in appearance and behavior if they participated in sports, still tethered to those puritanical roots about which Pappano (2008) writes. Even Babe Didrikson, Griffin (1998) writes, strategized ways to improve her popularity with the mainstream of American society during the 1950s. No longer did she wear pants; she wore skirts. She began to wear makeup, took up and excelled in golf, and got married.

Kimmel (1995) describes a national masculinity crisis in this country, suggesting that white men in power less and less sustained their roles as breadwinners for the family during this time and that women were increasingly influential in their raising of boys, contributing to a feminized culture which needed to be combated at the ball fields or in

the gymnasium (p. 120). As well, Pinar (2004) adds that the gains made by and for African Americans that evolved through civil rights movement was partly to blame for this crisis of masculinity. Pinar (2004) notes the worries and anxieties over the Cold War, coupled with the crisis of masculinity as it related to gender and race issues, spurred initiatives by the Kennedy Administration to improve the physical and intellectual strengths of young Americans (specifically young white male Americans, according to Pinar) in public schools. And while girls were included in the physical fitness push in American schools, the focus physical education was to make men out of boys. Female high school students around the country were limited in their sports and competition opportunities during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

In the years following World War II, schools also took on the task of lessening concerns about juvenile delinquency and homosexuality. Just as adult homosexuals and lesbians became targets during the Cold War years, soon, too, did schools become involved in the watch for the sexual activities of both teachers and students. Blount and Anahita (2004) write:

Schools employed a number of tactics to accomplish these ends. First high school curricula during these years included gender-segregated tracks, with girls taking such female-associated courses as clerical skills and domestic arts, and boys taking male-associated coursework such as industrial training or advanced math and science courses....Through curricula such as these, students prepared for careers deemed gender-appropriate....Even highly competitive women's sports such as basketball changed rules so that athletes appeared less aggressive and more gender compliant. Fourth, school staff were advised to monitor female

students' hairstyles and the way they walked for possible evidence of homosexuality. (p. 74)

The pattern we continue to see surface here is 40 or 50 years later, females were compelled to conform to heterosexual norms and ideals. Naturally, those girls who desired to play sports would do so in still highly regulated activities, particularly when it came to their appearance. Any hint of masculinity among female athletes was deemed beyond the realm of conventional social standards.

The 1960s

By the time the late 1960s rolled around, female athletes were making limited headway into participating in high school sports. But Pinar (2004) tells us the fitness push was certainly different for girls and boys. Boys were taught to focus on competition and winning; girls were steered toward developing friendships and making themselves attractive to boys. And it was during this time that we see the importance of football and sport to the success of the country. Football equated to nationalism and war and the hard, physically fit, white male bodies that played football would serve to protect the nation. True, girls were left to the sidelines, but they continued to push and push and, eventually, on the heels of the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, and the Vietnam War, one huge piece of historical legislation would soon force the doors open to allow women to step onto the fields once preserved for men.

The 1970s and the Impact of Title IX

The 1970s opened the doors to allow women more access to the workforce, higher education, and athletics, due in part to the second wave of feminism that continued to crest from the 1960s. Women experienced more control over their bodies through sexual

liberation and the legalization of abortion. As well, the passage of Title IX legislation in 1972 helped push reluctant schools into compliance by opening them up to a loss of federal funding as well as lawsuits for discrimination against or exclusion from participating in educational programs and/or activities. Interestingly, Title IX doesn't mention sports at all. But it is often sports and Title IX that go hand in hand. Acosta and Carpenter (2004) write:

A year or two before Title IX's passage 16,000 college female athletes participated on varsity teams. They did so without scholarship assistance, with very little institutional financial backing for coaches, uniforms, travel, locker rooms, medical assistance, or athletic training. They either drove themselves or rode in drafty school buses to away games. During competitions, they wore generic pinies (cloth vestlike creations) over white shirts and shorts to denote to which team they belonged. Their seasons were short; women were not expected to have the stamina needed for full length seasons. On the other hand, the short seasons made it possible for many of the athletes of the day to play on more than one varsity team each year. They played hard, competed with heart, practiced in ill maintained "women's gymnasias", and were generally unrecognized for their efforts and accomplishments. (p. 4)

In 1971, the AIAW (Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women) was founded, just a few short months before Congress passed Title IX legislation in June 1972; its purpose was to advocate for competitive opportunities for female college athletes. While many of us recognize the role or at least the name of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), it was not always the organization responsible

for governing women's college athletics. It was formed in 1906 to reform college football, and it remained interested in only men's athletics for almost 50 years. This tradition began to change in the 1960s with increased exposure and influence of women's athletics (Wushanley, 2000). By the early 1960s, women had become more visible in U.S. amateur sports. Up to that time NCAA institutions provided most of the male medal winners in the Olympics, and the NCAA began to look at women's college sports as an avenue to produce Olympic medal winners. In so doing, they became involved in an intense political battle to take control over women's college athletics from the AIAW. In the 1980s and 1990s numerous lawsuits were filed over both the jurisdiction of Title IX into the world of college athletics and the enforcement of the provisions of Title IX (Acosta & Carpenter, 2004). Eder and Parker (1987) wrote over 23 years ago about the cultural reproduction of gender in schools. They reported that male athletics were given more attention and support; they were more highly valued by the institution. Female athletics did not have as much cultural importance to the school; the only exception to that was the cheerleading squad, which was present at football and basketball games.

The 1980s and 1990s

With the decades of the 80s and 90s and beyond, women have continued to push and organize themselves into traditionally masculine team sports, sports like ice hockey, rugby, and even football. More women participated in the 1996 Olympics, with gold medals brought home by the U.S. women's basketball, softball, and soccer teams.

Theberge (1997) suggests that women who move into sports like ice hockey are challenging hegemonic masculinity, but they are still limited by the rules and regulations of the games that prohibit body checking, that is, the intentional taking out of an

opponent. The argument can be made that there is still body contact and a removal of body checking forces the game to focus on speed, agility, and skill, but without the same rules as the men's version of the game, separateness and inequality still exists. The message for some is body checking is reserved for men only. Theberge's (1997) work on the sport of ice hockey for women in the late nineties is not so very far removed from the change in the rules for the women who played basketball in the early 1900s. Both groups of women are playing sports originally reserved for men, yet, they are allowed to play only if they abide by modified rules that keep in check their physicality.

And while women have gained tremendous strides in sport since enactment of that pivotal piece of legislation, inequalities still exist on the playing fields regarding compliance with Title IX and scholarships, access to and scheduling of facilities and equipment, and leadership positions for females as coaches and sports administrators in schools and, outside the school arena, media coverage, cultural expectations of gender, and remuneration. Lynes (2007) writes "the athletic patriarchy is one of power. Through long-established practices which marginalize women and minorities, this group of men create, recreate, and bequeath these unwritten, unspoken policies of power, authority, and privilege to the succeeding generations of males" (p. 52). Patriarchy continues to retain a strong foothold on sport as women athletes and coaches do not have the same opportunities as men do. Sports are indeed a socializing institution. It is here where we clearly see in looking over the last several decades that women, despite making some strides into the world of athletics, are still relegated to appear as heterosexual females who must follow a certain code of behavior and appearance if they wish to pursue athletics recreationally or professionally.

Female participation in sports is admittedly much higher today than in 1972 and 1987, and females are provided more access to athletics and facilities, thanks in some measure to the 1972 Title IX legislation. A report by Advancing Equity for Women and Girls Through Advocacy, Education, Philanthropy, and Research (2010) confirmed a 940% increase in sports participation levels in American female high school athletics from 1971 to 2008, and a 456% increase in corresponding NCAA athletes from 1971-2005. But Dworkin and Messner (2002) write:

Title IX has not yielded anything close to equity for girls and women – more boys and men still play sports; they still have far more opportunities, from the peewee level through professional sports; and girls and women often have to struggle for access to uniforms, travel money, practice facilities, and scholarships that boys and men routinely take for granted. (p. 20)

And for minorities and the poor, lack of opportunity to play sports may be also due to additional boundaries like a lack of transportation to and from practices and games, a lack of funds to pay for equipment and registration fees, and a lack of space. Take a look again at the year Dworkin and Messner (2002) wrote that. It's been over a hundred years, probably longer, that women and minorities and the poor are still struggling for equal opportunities in athletics. It should give one pause to consider the strength and power and control the athletic patriarchy Lynes (2007) writes about truly has.

One final thought on the additional impact of Title IX. Gavora (2002) writes about the additional impact Title IX is having on schools and physical education. She tells us that sports instruction, with its traditional and patriarchal emphasis on competition, winning and losing, and building physical strength, has been replaced by an

emphasis on cooperation and nonthreatening games where everyone is a winner. Perhaps the shift here, Gavora (2002) suggests, is due to the elimination of separate classes for boys and girls and the need to accommodate differing ability levels and the increased influence of gender theorists who have pushed for softening the physical education approach in schools so that more students can be include. She cites the change in the President's Physical Fitness Test as an example of such inclusion. When I was growing up this was something you had to participate in and only the top performers in each category won a certificate, but apparently that is not the case today with the President's Challenge. Everybody's a winner. I wanted to bring this point Gavora (2002) makes up because I think it is important to consider when we talk about the socialization of girls into sport. This is yet another example of removing an emphasis on winning and competition and building physically fit bodies and being assertive or aggressive in competitive situations I think that girls especially need if they are to continue to challenge societal expectations set for them.

Division of Labor

Sports remain a bastion of male domination and privilege, and opportunities to keep women in a position of subordination do exist—even when girls are “allowed” to play with boys. Wenner (1998) writes about equity for girls and boys in sports:

Much of the efforts for “equity” have aimed at developing comparable programs for girls and women. This maintains a division of labor that, much like that in the neighborhood tavern, might be better seen as a division of geographical space. Integrated boy-girl sport, when and where it exists at all, tends to stop in anticipation of puberty. At this juncture, continued sport participation develops

the “man,” and raises questions for the girl. When girls have “special” (i.e., male level) talents, they are “allowed” on the boys’ team. The sexual geography of sport is largely maintained. (p. 313)

And with this sexual geography and division of labor comes the perpetuation of patriarchy, the maintenance of an institution that insists girls are separate, different from boys, and so should be their activities. Take the example of Melissa Raglin back in the late 1990s. She was a catcher for a Boca Raton, FL, baseball team. When it was revealed that she was a girl, the umpire insisted that she, too, wear a protective cup as the league rules outlined. Although she had played in the league for two years, she was not allowed to continue in the playoffs until she wore a specially designed female protective cup even though there was no medical reason proving that wearing one is beneficial to females. League officials insisted she wear it, despite the negative press that they encountered (Griffin, 1998). And she did--on her right ankle--until she was told she would not be allowed to play without wearing the cup properly (Schoster, 1997). Melissa Raglin was 12 at the time, and although she initially refused to wear the cup--playing the game was more important to her, and she gave in to the male-dominated league but not without a fight. Her parents contacted the National Organization for Women, an attorney took the case for free, and the rule was changed for the national Babe Ruth little league, making it optional for girls to wear cups. Impressive indeed. This 12-year-old girl at the time snubbed the little league’s rules by wearing the cup on her ankle and ended up not only with national press attention (Rush Limbaugh included) but changing the rule for the league. She empowered herself and stood up for something she believed in and, with the support of parents and other adults and the media, Melissa Raglin was a change agent for

girls who are “allowed” to play baseball in a league with over 1 million baseball and softball players in all 50 states.

Like the change in the rules for those women and girls who wanted to play basketball in the 1920s, golf, too, might be considered to fall under the division of labor when it comes to sports. The message: you can play with the men, but when you do, you’ll have shorter distances to the greens with separate ladies’ tee boxes and defer to men who may want to play through. The focus on golf seems to be the power and distance with which men drive the ball rather than the finesse required to get it to the cup. And when the LPGA was formed, it, too, like so many other sports women play, was and still is a place for critics of women in sport to focus their attention. Haig-Muir (1998) writes that the LPGA was once referred to as the Lesbian Professional Golf Association and that attention was given to feminizing the sport to improve its image. It’s yet another example of turning to questioning a female athletes’ sexuality or remarking about it if she is an exceptional athlete.

Another example of this division of labor which clearly sends mixed messages to audiences and participants and even critics alike is female boxing. Women have taken on a more of a presence in the sport of pugilistics over the years both as noncompetitors—judges, doctors, and referees, for example—and boxers alike. They have been most highly visible at boxing matches as ring girls who circulate between rounds dressed in sexy swimsuits and high heels, mixing sexuality and sport but along clearly divided lines for men and women. Just as with those women who endeavor to play ice hockey or basketball, we don’t know what to think about women who box. Clearly, they have stepped into male terrain. In writing on women who box, Carlo Rotella (1999) relayed

observations from of a Pennsylvania women's boxing match that took place right before the evening's intermission, which demonstrates perfectly the irony of women participating in traditionally male sports. On this night, Rotella (1999) wrote that the ring girls, whose presence during the male boxing matches was a clear indication of the division of labor—the women were there for sexual labor—was something different during the female boxing matches. Compared to the highly fit, athletic bodies of the women boxers, the ring girls' public body work looked more closely related to sex work contrasted with the manual, physical labor of the evening's female boxers:

The ring girls at the Golden Gloves in Bethlehem had the long legs, big breasts, and glossy hair expected of them, they had obviously spent plenty of time working out in the gym to tone their bodies, and they had more flesh on display than did the female fighters (since the fighters wore shorts and sleeveless tee shirts), but compared with the fighters they looked unsavory, even sick.... The fighters made the ring girls' shapely calves and buttocks, tensed by high heels, seem like side effects of some unhealthy hobbling practice akin to footbinding. (Rotella, 1999, p. 569)

The female bout was fit in right before intermission that night. It wasn't the opener or the headliner in this Pennsylvania town, but it should definitely be remembered for something. For what better example than this could there be for us to demonstrate to young women the paradox of women in sport as empowered, competitive, physically strong athletes alongside the traditional role of women in sports on the sidelines and available to men for sexual pleasure through their appearance and behavior?

When I think back on my own daughter's access to facilities, equipment, and other opportunities available through sport, it was painfully obvious early on that girls who played softball, in my small town at least, had to "make do" with what our local recreation department and high school had to offer, particularly when Hillary played rec ball. Girls played on fields fewer in number than those provided for boys' baseball, there were no lights on the girls' field, no fencing around the outfield, no access to use the concession stand that was in place for the high school baseball team. I distinctly remember a conversation I had with another parent about the lack of lights on the girls' softball field at our local high school. While parents had voiced concerns over the years to the principal about this obvious inequity, lights were not erected until Title IX infraction was being brought into the conversation by this particular parent with a couple of board of education members. It was not long after that when lights were erected on the softball fields allowing for play at night. Coincidence? Perhaps. She would say not. She would say she had to drop Title IX lawsuit words to get the girls what was fair. But no one can argue with the results. What we see here, in this case, is a clear reflection of what the authors tell us is happening in the arena of equal access in sports: girls continue to have fewer opportunities than boys do. And not just in the case of facilities and equipment. It's about socialization as well. Kidd (1987) explains:

The effect of sports is also to perpetuate patriarchy by reinforcing the sexual division of labor. By giving males exciting opportunities, preaching that the qualities they learn from them are "masculine", and preventing girls and women from learning in the same situations, sports confirm the prejudice that males are a breed apart. By encouraging us to spend our most creative and engrossing

moments as children and our favorite forms of recreation as adults in the company of other males, they condition us to trust each other much more than women. By publicly celebrating the dramatic achievements of the best males, while marginalizing females as cheerleaders and spectators, they validate the male claim to the most important position in society. (p. 255)

It's the stuff of nostalgia in this country—father and son going to that first professional sporting event together, sharing a male rite of passage and reinforcing the important role of sports in the lives of males. But it is just as important to encourage our daughters to celebrate the achievements of female athletes and to discover and celebrate and share their own individual accomplishments and partake in rites of passages that will be remembered. If we don't, then I'm afraid we've done our daughters a great disservice. We've reinforced the message that it's important for boys to have that experience but not girls. Griffin (1998) tells us:

what women can learn in athletics contradicts societal messages that encourage girls and women to see themselves as powerless and subordinate. Meeting the physical, mental, and emotional challenges in sport is exhilarating. In athletics women develop a sense of physical competence. Training hard and pushing to the edge of physical limits engender an appreciation and pride in one's accomplishments. Women learn to know what their bodies can do and trust this knowledge in many different situations beyond the athletic context. Women in athletics learn to perform under pressure. They learn the joy of competitive accomplishment and the discipline of training and practice. Being part of an athletic team teaches women how to work together toward a common goal.

Women in athletics develop strong relationships with other women as teammates, friends, and lovers. They challenge, comfort, and support each other. (p. 27)

Sports help women become empowered individuals. By celebrating the achievements of those women, by encouraging our daughters, by challenging the limits of what is set before us in the world of sport, and by hearing their stories, we will validate their claims to life pursuits that are important to them and those experiences that make them who they are.

Boundaries and Being With the World

For women who have wanted to participate in sport for the love of the game or because someone told them they couldn't, boundaries and obstacles and roadblocks seemed to have been erected at every turn:

Boundaries are not places that dissolve difference but are seams of conflict and struggle. If boundaries are recognized as uncertain sites that shift and change, forming new lines of demarcation, then boundary becomes not something that is definitive and declarative, but rather an undefined space that is constantly in the process of becoming. (Springgay, 2004, p. 65)

This quote captures perfectly how boundaries should be viewed--not as something to keep us from moving forward but rather as something from which we can learn and grow. How do we know who we are or who we will be if we let the boundaries in our lives keep us stationary and stagnant and within patriarchal institutions that maintain gender expectations? Boundaries keep us from saying what we really want to say, keep us from doing what we want to do. The women involved in athletics have nudged and pushed to cross those boundaries. "Boundaries need to be recognized as shifting; we cannot and

should not remove the seam, but observe and honour the sewn, sutured space of existence” (Springgay, 2004, p. 68). When we look back over the struggle women (and minorities and the poor) have faced to gain equal opportunities within the world of sports, we can see the boundaries shifting, albeit slowly. While female athletes are gaining some ground in athletics, pushing the boundary, it has been in incremental steps considering the struggle to play organized sports has existed for so long. Freire (2004) writes about *being with the world*:

Our being is a being with. So, to be in the world without making history, without being made by it, without creating culture, without a sensibility towards one’s own presence in the world, without a dream, without song, music, or painting, without caring for the earth or the water, without using one’s hands, without sculpting or philosophizing, without any opinion about the world, without science or theology, without awe in the face of mystery, without learning, instruction, teaching, without ideas on education, without being political, is a total impossibility. (p. 22)

The female athletes who have played before my daughter, those who paved the way so she could play, worked individually and collectively to challenge and shift the boundaries set up by institutional structures of government and education to gain access and support to the world of sports. They indeed worked on *being with the world*. They created their own culture, their own history through pushing boundaries and testing limits. They faced struggles, to be sure, in a world of sport that did not welcome them unless they conformed to the strictest standards of feminine beauty. And those women of history who did not conform endured stereotyping and isolation all for the love of participating in

athletics. Using the label of lesbian been used as a way to control women who play sports. It is a way to deflect female performance in athletics and serves to keep the emphasis on gender role expectations of a patriarchal society. But more than that, the stigmatizing label of lesbian affects all women who play sport because of its limiting effect on the empowerment of women. Petra Munro (1998) writes about history as memory work:

History has always provided me a way to reshape the future through reimagining the past. As a young girl it was history, rather than literature or science, or art, that provided me a way to understand who I was and more importantly who I was not. History held extraordinary power. As a young girl this was a profound insight....Having learned my history lessons well, I knew I was to be seen and not heard....Astonishingly enough, I had already learned to silence myself—bite my tongue, hold my peace....This repression is the history that has no voice. My knowledge that women's experiencing of the world is invisible is a painful reminder that history, and in this case specifically curriculum history, is predicated on subjugation and erasure. (p. 264)

It was not an enforced silence that Munro (1998) endured. It was not as easy as that. It was and still is a silence reproduced and accepted as the status quo, the way it is for women--except for those who steadfastly refuse to accept it through various forms and fashions of resistance. Like the North Carolina high school girls who approached their high school principal shortly after women gained the right to vote because they wanted to form a basketball team. Like Babe Didrikson who bested men at their own games. Like 12-year-old Melissa Raglin who refused to submit to the humiliation of wearing an

athletic cup. Like Hillary Roberts. Like so many hundreds of women athletes who have a story to tell. And, yes, like me. My hope is that my daughter is able to continue the legacy of questioning cultural reproductions of gender and working to change it if it doesn't suit her or her ambitions long after she hangs up her cleats and softball and glove for the last time. I hope she finds through the years of my work individually and my work with her some value in the struggles of those women who played before her, who tried to crash through that glass ceiling of sport. I want Hillary to know she does indeed possess the kind of critical intelligence and individual agency which will enable her to challenge social constructions and patterns that affect her and other young women like her. But she has to know where she has come from in order to know where she is going. And more than that, I hope that others who may eventually read this narrative, those young women and young men who love the game also--whatever that game is--are able to do the same.

CHAPTER 2

CURRICULUM STUDIES AND FEMININITY ON SPORT: WHAT PRICE TO
PLAY?*Curriculum and the Need for Sense-Making*

Apple and Buras (2006) ask us to consider what determines whose knowledge is of the most value, of the most worth in American schools. As educators and curriculum scholars we are presented with those stories and perspectives and histories that are told in schools, but more importantly, we concern ourselves with those stories, perspectives, and histories that are *not* told in our schools because these are the voices missing from the curriculum and the ones students need to hear. To get to those voices and narratives missing from the curriculum, we need to look beyond the official curriculum of American schools, for when we choose to look beyond what we are presented we can stimulate additional discussion and provide opportunities for insight into the types of resistances in which our students participate actively and regularly. It is beyond the traditional curriculum where our students' interests lie. Apple and Buras (2006) continue:

The official curriculum is always reconstructed at the level of reception as teachers and students engage in the unending process of sense-making, resistance, and day-to-day teaching and learning. Of course, none of the conflict associated with the politics of curricular production, distribution, and reception occurs on even ground. Not all parties have access to equivalent resources, channels of communication, or power. (p. 25)

Girls involved in sports are but one party lacking the access Apple and Buras (2006) point out. They participate in sense-making and resistance every day in our schools.

Every day they are teaching and learning with other girls and boys and adults—parents, educators, coaches—with whom they interact. And they, as females and as athletes, do not have the same access to power or resources as white males do or minorities do or other groups for that matter. In fact, female athletes may face a double bind simply because they are both females and athletes. As educators and curriculum scholars, we need to encourage this sense-making and questioning regarding how and why the world in which these young women live and work and play functions the way it does and how it affects them on an individual and collective level. Doing so, supporting an environment in which young female athletes become cognizant of the expectations placed upon them by others and even themselves, allows us to nurture young minds capable of thinking critically and intelligently about their world. Young girls encounter expectations for how they are to behave and look every day. They are bombarded by media messages and other influences (parents, family, and friends) daily, many times accepting those messages without giving a second thought to what they mean or where those messages may have come from. And for girls who play sports, those messages, which tend to overwhelmingly reinforce traditional views of femininity and sexuality, may leave them feeling confused about their ability and right to pursue an athletic identity. Roman and Christian-Smith (1988) suggest regarding the politics of popular culture:

the struggle for girls and women, then (whether they are feminist or not), over the gendered meanings, representations, and ideologies in popular cultural forms is nothing less than a struggle to understand and hopefully transform the historical contradictions of becoming feminine within the contexts of conflicting sets of power relations. The process of becoming feminine involves not only the unequal

gendered power relations between men and women, but also those of class, race, age, and sexual orientation. (p. 5)

The key words from that quote in my mind are *understand* and *transform*. That is, after all, what we should aim toward if we want our young girls who play sports to be critical thinkers. In order for us to get them there, to that point of thinking critically, we need to give them the tools--the history and the contemporary--by which they can make their own determinations about how and why and if they need to challenge those roles and expectations set forth for them by those artifacts from popular culture they wish to consume.

In this chapter I will describe the ways in which female athletes of previous generations--and those who play today--have been pressured to conform to particular ideals of femininity in order for them to participate and be accepted in sport. The descriptions will focus first on clothing and subordination as related to preserving notions of heterosexuality in sport among women. From there, I will turn attention to the ways in which female athletes manage the sometimes negative stigma of carrying the labels of female/athlete because of their connections to various sports through the apologetic approach. Participating in bodybuilding or ice hockey or softball--considered masculine sports--carries much more of a stigma for the female athlete than does participating in cheerleading, gymnastics, and figure skating, for example, and female athletes manage those stigmas and labels in differing ways. My daughter Hillary had to juggle the messages she received from the media, her coaches, and friends regarding her physical appearance on the pitcher's mound. As well, I will explore some of the ways in which the media portrays females and specifically female athletes, an area important to address

because of the important role technology and the media play in the lives of young girls. We now live in a world bombarded by technology and girls of a younger and younger age are accessing media and its messages that overwhelmingly reinforce heterosexual ideals of femininity.

Our culture wants our women to be feminine, to continue to represent that feminine ideal, which continues to reinforce the dominant discourses of power and patriarchy in this country. Because this is so, women's foray into the world of athletics has been a long, slow process. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, sports help maintain control of our cultural expectations for what is deemed appropriate masculine and feminine behavior. Wachs (2003) asserts sports maintain the status quo with regard to gender structures in our society in a number of ways. First, women's opportunities to participate in sports continue to be fewer despite the progress made with the enactment of Title IX. Second, girls are encouraged to participate in activities that value cooperation and gracefulness and not the type of athletic skill required of male athletes. Third, our society wants women to participate in sports that are appropriate for females, that is, individually oriented and scored by a judging panel (think figure skating and gymnastics). Fourth, when girls do participate in sports with boys, they often lack encouragement and similar skills instruction from coaches and many times are placed in playing positions viewed as less crucial to the winning of the game. And finally, girls who participate in sports, unfortunately, may be labeled with "mannishness...which is often equated with lesbianism, a stigmatized social identity" (Wachs, 2003, p. 180). So for women who want to be athletes, the key—if they want to play—is not to upset the established gender order but to comply with the known and reinforced rules and

expectations regarding masculinity and femininity. Exploring the ways in which women are bound to the rules and expectations of the gender order—through their clothing and their appearance—is a first step toward continuing to push the boundaries for change and more equal, more stable footing on the playing fields and athletic arenas of which girls want to be a part.

Clothing, Subordination, and Heterosexuality

For those women who want to participate and succeed in the world of athletics, it is necessary to walk a fine line between being an accomplished athlete and maintaining an emphasis on femininity. It has always been so. One of the ways in which women were controlled was by their attire. Clothing is a way we learn sex roles. And for women who wanted to get into the game—whether it was bicycling or lawn tennis or croquet of the Victorian era or baseball/softball during World War II or figure skating and gymnastics of later years—athletic attire was at once both problematic for them and a way to keep the focus on the maintenance of the feminine ideal.

Women of the Victorian Era wore confined by the clothing they wore—long, tight sleeves and heavy skirts that tired them out and inhibited their movement. While crinoline replaced layers upon layers of petticoats, Roberts (1977) suggests women became submissive, “caged birds” in these contraptions that with their up to five yards of fabric subjected women to the very real danger of combustibility, injury, and even death (p. 557). We know, too, that corsets laced tightly were meant to enhance a woman’s shape to meet a feminine ideal, but it left women weak and with underdeveloped muscles and, in some cases, curvature of the spine. But with a dress reform movement, increased

opportunities socially and economically, and extended opportunities to pursue education, modes of dress began to change.

Women's increased participation in athletic activity also contributed to this move toward less submissive control through confining dress. Looser-fitting garments, shorter skirts, and knickerbockers came into fashion but not without criticism. Roberts (1977) suggests bicycling offered women of the time the greatest freedom, but the garments to wear caused some controversy. Hugh Nesbit argued in an *Englishwoman* magazine article from the turn of the century that women had considerably less sexual attraction, power, and without their skirts and only time would answer the questions of why these women will "grow dissatisfied with their sex emancipation and man-like costume, with their robust health, open-air exercises and equality of struggle. They require consideration, devotion, support, and home, and these they cannot have, sad as it is to relate, without their skirts" (as cited in Roberts, 1977). What we see here is a clear tie to women and dress and submissiveness and subordination; no doubt this quote reflected the feeling of men and perhaps some women of the time period. And around the same time, Clara Gregory Baer, a physical education instructor at New Orleans' Sophie Newcomb College, introduced bloomers to her students. Less fabric increased safety and mobility and confidence, and changing view was not lost on women who wanted to play or those who wanted to coach. Elizabeth Newitt, an early 1920s-era North Carolina high school basketball coach, remembers that changes to the constricting and heavy clothing women in sports of just a few years earlier to short sleeves and shortened bloomers built a sense of confidence and independence in the girls who played basketball for her. In what must have been a shocking matter for the time of 1923, Newitt "stressed that her team's players

had the assurance to roll their stockings down below their knees. “We rolled out,” she explained, pointing to a team photograph. “We wore hose, and if you see this picture, we've got our hose rolled down. You see how we did it.” (as cited in Grundy, 2000). It surely must have been quite a sight to see just the hint of bare leg between the hem of a knee length bloomer and a slightly rolled sock to just under the knee! But women’s push for entry into the world of sports necessitated the change in attire. Not only was limitation of movement a concern but so, too, was safety. The popularity of basketball, and the increased athletic ability of its players during the 1930s and 1940s due to the removal of restrictions heavy clothing presented, could not entirely erase the message of maintaining and promoting the femininity of female athletes. It remained a top priority to those who still exerted control over the activities of women athletes as evidenced by pictures of the time in which uniforms reveal satin-like fabrics and shorter shorts. If women were going to play sport, to enter the male haven of sport, then by all means and efforts necessary, they would be made to look unquestionably feminine.

The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League of the early 1940s is a prime example of a necessary compromise between women being allowed to demonstrate their athletic ability yet still having to conform to the feminine ideal. As men who played minor league baseball headed off to support the war effort, women filled the ranks of the baseball lineups in order to keep the franchises going until war’s end. Scouts traveled the country looking for the best ball players. So, in order for the media, marketing, and financial ploy to work during this temporary change in the line-ups (the league would be dissolved at war’s end), the women were sent to etiquette classes and given strict instructions on grooming and behavior via a charm school guide, which included beauty

routines and instructions on etiquette. Players were given short skirts to wear and provided specific instructions about hair and makeup. The bob hairstyle of the time was not permissible with longer hair preferred in an effort to preserve the women's femininity in a show for a country that may not have been ready to see women without makeup and in men's uniforms on the baseball diamond. I imagine the women took all this type of reinforcing behavioral training with a grain of salt in order to do what in their minds they were really there for—to play baseball and escape their predetermined lives of being white, heterosexual wives and mothers, even if only for a little while. Playing baseball allowed these women to flirt with masculinity in a sanctioned, socially acceptable way. Further attesting to this pressure on appearance, Scraton and Flintoff (2002) write:

Femininity should be viewed as a code name for heterosexuality. Through sport, females are encouraged to develop an acceptable “femininity” central of which is heterosexual attractiveness and availability. Women's involvement in sport is controlled and restricted through their clothing and their need to present a “heterosexy” image. For example, the clothing for international women's beach volleyball competitions states that the bikini bottoms must not have a side seam deeper than 6 cm. This is less to do with appropriateness of dress for the sport and more about the objectification of women's bodies. (p. 35)

Sisters Serena and Venus Williams make worldwide sporting headlines, sparking controversy for their tennis outfits as much as their games. Their attire has included everything from lace and lingerie to bold and vibrant colors to a denim skirt/knee high boots/miniskirt/crop top combination and is usually accompanied by a lot of expensive-looking jewelry. Certainly, the sisters have capitalized on marketing themselves to add to

their financial empires, but just as importantly, they are not afraid to push boundaries of the very traditional and cultured sport of tennis by showing off their well-muscled and toned bodies with what some would consider racy outfits that challenge the propriety of the traditionally conservative and cultured world of tennis.

Importance of Appearing Heterosexual

Because there were relatively fewer women athletes during the earlier part of the 1900s, they were naturally highly visible to a curious public and, therefore, easily scrutinized for their nontraditional roles and appearance. Cahn (1993) gathered oral histories of female athletes from the 1930s to the 1970s to determine whether true lesbian subculture in athletics actually existed at the time. Of the women she interviewed, particularly those who played softball, some acknowledged that sport was a way to work out and validate their sexual identities, network, and move through the lesbian subculture. In the previous chapter, I discussed Faderman's (1991) research on lesbians who played softball. Despite the underground nature of this subculture, females in sport remained a target of homophobic reactions, particularly after World War II when political and social conservatism regained a foothold on American society.

The image of the mannish lesbian had a direct effect on women competitors, on strategies of athletic organizations, and on the overall popularity of women's sport. The lesbian stereotype exerted pressure on athletes to demonstrate their femininity and heterosexuality, viewed as one and the same. (Cahn, 1993, p. 354)

Even as they competed to win, women athletes made sure to display outward signs of femininity in dress and demeanor; they took special care in contact with the media to reveal "feminine" hobbies, like cooking and sewing, to mention current boyfriends, and

to discuss future marriage plans. Those who managed sports teams that appeared more traditionally male in nature, like basketball and softball, and which would draw an audience, worked strategically to prove the femininity of the athletes, publishing the number of players who were married or staging beauty pageants or enforcing strict dress codes, for example. This strategy spilled beyond the lines of the courts and fields and was meant to make it ever so clear to the public that competitive, strong, assertive women and physical intimacy among them was not happening, not a threat to the gender order and the sensibilities of the American public.

Despite the advances made by women in the world of athletics due in part to Title IX and the women's liberation movement, many women still felt influences to maintain or enhance their femininity as they participated in sport. The 1970s Canadian tennis star Jane O'Hara said her mother told her if she was going to play sports then "she should walk softly and carry a big lipstick" (Washington & Karen, 2001, p. 198). In reviewing studies on social constructions of gender, Washington and Karen (2001) report from an analysis of the social construction of gender as recently as the late 1980s found females were still pressured to maintain their femininity by wearing long hair and "frilly" dresses. Doll (2000) tells us, "Good girls accept unthinkingly, not only the necessity to maintain their youth and beauty, but also to subscribe to an underlying aesthetic that seduces girls to desire the domesticated life" (p. 88). Girls become women according to standards set for them by those in power and Doll (2004) argues that in Western culture, particularly for girls of her generation, girls had no choice but to choose to be either a good girl or a bad girl, roles set up for them by a patriarchal society. This can certainly be applied to the mixed messages young women receive regarding their desire to be athletes and the

pressures placed on them from society to be, look, and act a certain way lest their femininity be questioned. To be a good girl means to follow the rules and avoid rocking the boat. The 1989 yearbook cover of Northwestern Louisiana State University features the women's basketball team outfitted in their basketball uniforms. But in addition to that they sported rabbit ears and bunny tails. Women who want to play masculine sports may feel pressure to take extra steps to reassure society that they truly are feminine even though they play masculine sports. They are still good girls who have no desire to rock the boat.

Other more recent instances of homophobia continue to add to the double bind female athletes find themselves facing. The LPGA is another example from the 1970s. There was concern that the female golfers were just “too butch”, that there was “rampant lesbianism” on the tour, and sponsorship was suffering because of it (Haig-Muir, 1998). Haig-Muir (1998) writes that an image consultant was hired and traveled with the LPGA tour as a response to the perceived image problem.

Further, Theberge (2005) agrees “in women’s sport, this was manifest in the paradoxical conditions of both denying the lesbian presence in sport and placing pressure on women in sport to counteract lesbian stereotypes of women athletes through overt displays of femininity” (p. 94). Feder (1994) found the same and asserts women will resort to “hyperfemininity” efforts to keep from being labeled as overly masculine or lesbian because the competitiveness of sport requires qualities and characteristics that our patriarchal society deems masculine (p. 63). Anderson (2003) noted in his research on openly gay athletes that the culture of silence and an accepted, even promoted, heterosexual discourse make it difficult to establish a positive gay identity, one that

combines an athletic and homosexual self. Both Anderson (2003) and Theberge (2005) found an athlete's homosexual orientation was not really welcomed or accepted-- just tolerated as long as the athlete remained a top performer on the team.

Responding to the Stigma of Being Female and an Athlete

We see despite the decades that have passed since women broke into the sporting world, pressure continues to be levied by society on female athletes to conform to particular demands for feminine appearance and behavior. The literature generally divides how women approach this cultural dilemma regarding balancing athletics and cultural expectations about gender into three areas. Female athletes respond to stigmas about their sexuality either through reinforcing it through silence or apology, confronting it head on, or embracing it knowingly and willingly.

The Apologetic Stance

Many women in sport may knowingly or not adopt an apologetic stance for their athletic skill. Individual performance athletes, women who are figure skaters, gymnasts, or tennis players, for example, are dressed in feminine outfits and made up, no threat to our cultural ideals of beauty and femininity. Feder (1994) suggests "the more successful a female athlete, the more she tries to embody the culturally appropriate gender role... a role essentially at odds with her athleticism" (p. 63). Women athletes in these sports are equally physically able to execute demanding skills but must keep from being labeled as overly masculine; the result is that they overdetermine their femininity through sequins, glitter, and heavy makeup (Feder, 1994). Feder (1994) writes that the costumes, makeup, gestures women display in figure skating competition is actually a way to apologize for

their physical prowess. Such displays are meant to reassure society that the women are still feminine at the core.

And cheerleading, while it has made tremendous gains in being recognized as a sport due to the strength, skill, and athletic demands it requires as well as perhaps now including males on the cheerleading squads, still places pressure on its participants to perform in traditionally feminine ways. Cheerleaders must be, according to Grindstaff and West (2006):

enthusiastic, energetic, and entertaining. This is accomplished not just through dancing, tumbling, or eye-catching stunts, but also through the bubbly, peppy, performance of “spirit” in cheerleading—what we call “informal cheerleading.” Informal cheerleading is what participants do to express enthusiasm and “rally the crowd,” whether on the sidelines or competition mat. It includes smiling, “facials” (exaggerated facial expressions), being in constant motion, jumping, and executing dynamic arm, hand, and head motions—all considered feminine terrain. Performativity is also defined in terms of appearance: how female cheerleaders should look when in front of crowds. In the words of a Stanton cheerleader, “we’re told to be in full makeup, to do our hair. Because we’re performing. If you’re not wearing lipstick, that’s the first thing [the coach] will say to you, ‘why isn’t your lipstick on?’” Being petite is part of the “appearance aspect” for women on coed teams, as is wearing the conventional cheerleader uniform, whose short skirt, tight-fitting shell top (often cropped, exposing the midriff), and hair ribbons suggest a combination of youthfulness and sexual availability. (p. 509)

Additionally, the male cheerleaders on all the squads Grindstaff and West (2006) interviewed felt reluctance to yell and cheer as much or as loudly for other men who were participating in athletic competitions as they were relegated to a supportive role on the sidelines. Many of these men also felt the pressure of being watched and corrected for their appearances (smiling bigger, combing their hair, shaving, etc.). While the pressures were felt to tap into some level of femininity, male cheerleaders needing to walk a fine line so as not to blur the gender performances, maintaining their masculinity, and avoiding being labeled as gay.

And there are some sports women want to participate in that push the boundary of being considered acceptable pursuits for women, simply because of the traditionally masculine characterization associated with a particular sport. Adams and Bettis (2003) tell us:

despite the gains women have made in many areas once relegated solely for men, in the twenty-first century, we still do not exactly know what to do with women who box, women bodybuilders, and women who want to play professional football and ice hockey. (p. 90)

This quote by Adams and Bettis (2003) leads us to a second body of literature questions whether an apologetic stance by female athletes even exists. Messner (2007) suggests based on his review of the literature that there is disagreement as to whether an apologetic actually exists. And is there an apologetic for black women athletes? Do cultural differences in the construction of femininities separate them from white women? Black female athletes more closely aligned with what sport was meant to preserve in men—heterosexuality--so they did not receive similar scrutiny as white female athletes

did. Cahn (1993) writes that female black athletes were stereotyped “as highly sexual, promiscuous, and unrestrained in their heterosexual passions discouraged the link between mannishness and lesbianism” (p. 352). Because these descriptors leaned toward a heterosexual orientation, African American female athletes initially did not endure the same type of scrutiny when it came to lesbian stereotypes; what existed was an expectation for heterosexuality among black female athletes, many of them were married, according to one black female athlete who played semipro softball in the 1950s and 1960s. Coakley (1994) suggests “black women’s bodies are feared, not sexualized, like black male bodies. They are not a valuable commercial commodity like black male athletes. They do not have the “cool pose”” (Coakley, 1994, p. 249), very obvious ways of demonstrating manliness, toughness, coolness as a way to react against the disadvantages they experience in the workplace, in schools, etc. But soon, they, too, could not escape the equating of lesbian stereotypes and athletics; their sexual preference came under scrutiny as well, and they, too, were included in the questioning of their sexuality as were white athletes--simply because they played sports. Coakley (1994) wrote that black female athletes’ bodies were not sexualized like men’s, but that does indeed *not* appear to be the case with the Williams sisters. African-American tennis stars Serena and Venus Williams are examples of women pushing boundaries. Take a look at photos of them or watch them play and you will see young, strong women unafraid of embracing their sexuality or their physically fit, athletically strong bodies.

Confronting the Stigma

Yet, some women choose to not just blur but disrupt gender boundaries in sport. Bodybuilding for women shakes our sensibilities because it pushes the masculine side of

femininity too far. Interestingly, women were allowed to box in the 1860s but by the end of the 1800s, notions of femininity and masculinity caused women's participation in the sport to fade. Women's competitive bodybuilding, which began in the late 1970s, incorporate different rules and poses to ensure that women could display their femininity along with their muscularity, a concession to the public's taste and acceptance of masculine appearing women. In writing on female boxers and feminine masculinity, Halberstam (1998) suggests that men can work on their feminine sides and society seems to have adjusted to that. But when women work on their masculine sides, through boxing or bodybuilding, for example, the talk remains focused on women losing their femininity. And this talk comes from the boxers themselves as well. The assumption is that masculinity and strong, active females must be lesbians. The issue at hand within the sport, according to Bolin (2003), is how much muscularity is too much for the female contestant? Further, Dworkin (2003) adds:

women's bodybuilding both challenges and reproduces ideals of emphasized femininity because the increasing size of the female bodybuilder is only acceptable once "tamed" by beauty. It is for this reason that judges of bodybuilding contests have been found to institutionally reward women for various "feminine" physical markers (e.g., breast implants, painted nails, dyed hair) even when the goal of the sport is to display muscle mass, size, symmetry, and density. And, of course, commercialization is integrally linked to the kinds of femininity that are displayed and rewarded by and in the media. Research on media, women, and sport and fitness has shown that women are not presented

solely as resistant and powerful athletes but rather are framed ambivalently through sexualizing and trivializing their athletic performances. (p. 335)

It seems we are not so far removed from the Victorian ideals of the maintenance of heterosexuality for female athletes, particularly those who participate in traditionally male-dominated sports. Forget the athletic ability, the dedication to the sport, the drive and determination to excel. Women who choose to pursue such sports remain under a cloud of suspicion regarding their sexuality that can only be lessened, not totally eradicated, through a trip to the nail salon and the makeup counter. Obel (2002), though, views the threat to femininity that women bodybuilders supposedly project differently. She argues that the conclusions made about gender and femininity culture are drawn by authors of such research who don't take into consideration the female bodybuilders' experiences; if they did, then, she argues, women bodybuilders would be seen as actually resisting the label of threatening femininity (Obel, 2002, p. 244). Obel (2002) is suggesting here is that by their very participation in the sport of bodybuilding, women are consciously choosing to flex their muscles at a society that has trouble accepting them as not women bodybuilders but just as bodybuilders. Whatever view to which one subscribes matters not; the fact remains that female athletes who bodybuild are rewarded more when they demonstrate their femininity.

Like bodybuilding, rugby is a traditionally masculine sport. Howe (2003) writes women who play the contact sport of rugby are choosing to play the most masculinizing sport there is and are therefore subject to homophobic stereotypes. While bodybuilding attempts to feminize the sport by including makeup and bikinis, many of the rugby players Howe (2003) interviewed felt they were stigmatized and marginalized because of

the very uniforms they wear are exactly like the ones the men wear. That is, they believe the uniforms “lead to the public perceptions that rugby was a game for lesbians”, although the women he studied took no apologetic stance for their interest in the sport (Howe, 2003, p. 235). Rugby is the only sport Ezzel (2009) found in which women typically challenged the sport as a male domain and offered an unapologetic resistance to normative femininity. Theberge (2005) found the same reaction from some of the female hockey players she studied. For those players, playing hockey should be only about the ice, only about the sport itself. But it is not, as ice hockey rules differ for women in that body checking is not allowed as it is considered too violent for the women’s version and perhaps the violence and aggressive nature of such strategies and tactics are simply more than we want to admit women are capable of in the rink.

Embracing the Stigma

A third body of research suggests that female athletes have openly embraced the feminine expectations of society and combined it with sport. Some young women strive to balance their desire to be feminine and athletic simultaneously. On the fields, courts, and tracks, these female athletes are not meek, mild, nor passive; they are strong, assertive, thinking about the game. Ezzel’s (2009) research reveals resistance and apologetics do occur within most female sports, but his study of a women’s college rugby team participated in something he calls “defensive othering” and is in contrast with what other studies say about the resistive nature of female rugby players:

The female rugby players at Comp U were successful athletes in high school, but found themselves unable to compete in their chosen sports at the varsity level at Comp U. So they turned to rugby, an intensely physical yet nonvarsity sport, as an

alternative. They stepped onto the pitch and met with success, only to find themselves stigmatized by outsiders as “butch lesbians.” Instead of resisting and rejecting the power of such stigma, as others have found female rugby players to do, the Comp U players turned to defensive othering, casting themselves as the exception to the stereotype, and thereby unintentionally reinforcing the dominant heterosexist ideology. In doing so, they created a unique identity as heterosexy-fit-simultaneously tough, heterosexual, and conventionally attractive. (p. 123)

Adopting this defensive othering strategy allowed these women to play a physically challenging sport and perhaps avoid or minimize the stereotyping and backlash against female athletes, specifically those who played rugby. Ezzel (2009) calls this identity work “heterosexy-fit--tough, fit, feminine, and heterosexual” (p. 112), an expanded version of Connell’s 1987 work on “emphasized femininity”. Individual players in Ezzel’s (2009) ethnographic study talked about weeding the team out over the years to include more feminine looking, physically smaller, heterosexual athletes because they feared not being attractive to men if they didn’t. Most of the players wore makeup even during games and “were invested in the same conventionally feminine appearance that sorority women projected” (Ezzel, 2009, p. 117). By balancing their athleticism with normative femininity, these women wanted to be viewed as tough athletes who were serious about the game yet still sexually attractive to men.

Does this same apologetic apply to younger female athletes like those of my daughter’s high school age? Kindlon (2006), on writing about alpha girls, girls who seem to be more able to be successful than male peers, says:

beginning in adolescence, many females compromise their authenticity. Their postpubertal role called for them to be good women and put others' needs ahead of their own. As a result, many girls sacrificed their "true selves" to preserve connectedness to others. Speaking their minds might lead to alienation and hurt feelings, end a relationship, and sever an important connection. Thus...adolescent girls choose to minimize the risk of rejection by masking their true selves, a solution for many that is accompanied by conflict and distress. (p. 77)

Our ideas of what it means to be male or female are generated from images in various cultural contexts, and females all too often fall into the trap of conforming to socially constructed ideals of what it means to be female, which further entrenches the all-knowing, all-powerful white male view and positions of domination over women. The challenge then for young women athletes is to manage their true, competing selves, selves who are physically assertive and sexually assertive and intellectually assertive.

In the study of identity development, the concept of a mask means we make efforts to conceal our true selves in various situations. We may wear one type of mask at work, another at home, one different ones for the different roles that we play, often hiding aspects of our true, competing selves in order to conform to what we are told is acceptable, normal, and appropriate behavior. What we know about female adolescent development has been well documented in the literature since the 1980s. It is during these teenage years that many girls begin to experience with something called "beauty work" to move toward the accepted norm of beauty, experimenting with clothing, cosmetics, and diets—all in an effort to achieve an ideal, an identity that has been determined for them (Andolsen, 2000, p. 450). It's an interesting paradox. On the one hand you have girls

who demonstrate their athletic prowess and strength on the athletic field; on the other hand, once the red clay and sweat and grit has been washed away, the mask that contains the mascara and lip gloss and perfume returns to turn the lock on the door that houses the athlete within them. They cannot escape the societal expectations and media images that bombard them daily.

But then again maybe they don't want to. My own daughter consistently asked about her body appearance and how she looked when she was not in her softball uniform. This confusion, this needing to feel like one has two walk in two different worlds is not helped by the fact that some of these young women's idols can be seen reinforcing messages about female athletes and appearance by sporting glitter and bows in their hair, foundation on their faces, and mascara on their eyelashes when they play. Certainly, I think there is a logical connection to be made here between balancing true and competing selves in order to gain and maintain the approval of peers, family, and others perhaps as well as fitting into a notion of what society says a female should be like for some young female athletes.

Foucault (1979) asserts modern societies have need for docile bodies to perform in subordination to the dominant will of a particular discipline--be it the military soldier, the factory worker, the student, the prisoner. The body becomes a site of struggle for power, one to controlled and monitored and subjected to the will of others. We see the push and pull of power relations and struggles in the world of sport as well. Women have challenged and resisted the limits of play by pushing boundaries, by pushing for more opportunities, yet decorum and appearance had to be maintained over the years if they were to play and be accepted. Women have been trained and ingrained with the mindset

that the need to emphasize heterosexuality and femininity from the start. Hillary and her teammates willingly and perhaps unknowingly regulate their own behaviors, which have been internalized since they were young girls in school, at home, and on the ball fields, reinforcing hierarchies and power relations that are deeply entrenched in the world of athletics. Yet, they seem to do so without heavy hearts or the weight of the world on their shoulders. It's a tough call to say whether this is so because those behaviors and expectations are ingrained or whether they choose to do so because they want to embrace and express their feminine sides.

Another Look at Cheerleading and "Feminine" Sports

Let's take a look at cheerleading again, for example, to see how Adams and Bettis (2003) relate this power struggle of domination and subordination, of masculinity and femininity. Adams and Bettis (2003) conclude "Cheerleading represents a liberating shift in normative femininity while simultaneously perpetuating a norm that does not threaten dominant social values and expectations about the role of girls and women" (p. 74). In their study of middle school cheerleaders, Adams and Bettis (2003) found that the girls, many of whom were athletes in other sports, viewed cheerleading as an opportunity:

to revel in what they called being a girlie girl. Unlike other athletes, these girls are participating in an activity that remains firmly entrenched within a feminine discourse; thus, they do not have to veil their masculinity nor worry, like other athletes, about being stigmatized as too masculine or as lesbians. These girls embrace cheerleading as a way to have it all to flirt with the masculine without ever questioning or having someone else question their femininity or their sexual identity. (p. 84)

Cheerleaders accentuate their femininity through their uniforms; while their uniforms do show toned muscles, it is through their athletic skill that cheerleaders tap into the masculine. Other female athletes, like those who play softball and basketball and soccer may play up their femininity off court and the fields, in regular clothes and outside the athletic milieu to avoid being labeled as lesbians. Perhaps they have accepted the heterosexuality look and attitude about which Ezzel (2009) writes.

The media bombards young women with messages regarding femininity and the female athlete. Duncan and Hasbrook (2002) write about televised women's sports and the marginalization of women as it relates to participation in individual sports versus team sports. They review:

Boutillier and SanGiovani[']s hypothesis that women's participation in certain individual sports is more socially acceptable than their participation in team sports because the former (golf, gymnastics, swimming) allow women to remain true to the female stereotype: glamorous, graceful, nonsweaty, and definitely *not* roughed up by contact with other women. (Duncan & Hasbrook, 2002, p. 84)

And organizations do pay attention to the masculinization of women athletes, particularly in professional sports. The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League of the early 1940s is a prime example of a necessary compromise between women being allowed to demonstrate their athletic ability yet having to conform to the feminine ideal. If they wanted to play ball, these women were required to preserve their femininity in a show for a country that may not have been ready to see women on the baseball diamond. I imagine the women took all this type of reinforcing behavioral training with a grain of salt in order to do what in their minds they were really there for—to play baseball and escape

their predetermined lives of being white, heterosexual wives and mothers even if only for a little while. Yet, certain sports are linked with lesbianism, particularly those not connected to society's idea of what is feminine—like cheerleading, gymnastics, and figure skating, for example. And while Duncan and Hasbrook (2002) note in the previous paragraph, that golf is considered a socially acceptable sport for women, it, too, has not been without controversy and suspicion that it is.

Sport and the L Word

Cahn (1993) gathered oral histories of female athletes from the 1930s to the 1970s to determine whether there was a true lesbian subculture in athletics at the time. The women she interviewed, particularly those who played softball, acknowledged that sport was a way to work out and validate their sexual identities, network, and move through the lesbian subculture. Sport is a reflection of society and a place, an institution, where dominant ideologies of our society are accepted and perpetuated. And as such, sports were a target of homophobic reactions, particularly after World War II when political and social conservatism regain a foothold on American society. Women athletes were highly visible and so easily scrutinized for their nontraditional roles and appearance. He submits:

The image of the mannish lesbian had a direct effect on women competitors, on strategies of athletic organizations, and on the overall popularity of women's sport. The lesbian stereotype exerted pressure on athletes to demonstrate their femininity and heterosexuality, viewed as one and the same. Many women adopted an apologetic stance toward their athletic skill. Even as they competed to win, they made sure to display outward signs of femininity in dress and

demeanor. They took special care in contact with the media to reveal “feminine” hobbies, like cooking and sewing, to mention current boyfriends, and to discuss future marriage plans (Cahn, 1993, p. 354).

Those sports that appeared more like traditionally male sports, like basketball and softball, and which would draw an audience, worked strategically to prove the femininity of the athletes, like publishing the number of players who were married or staging beauty pageants or enforcing strict dress codes. This spilled over beyond the lines of the courts and fields and announced that competitive, strong, assertive women and physical intimacy among them was not acceptable.

Halberstam (1998) in *Female masculinity* indicates female gender deviance is more socially acceptable than male gender deviance and refers to “tomboyism” as an example of this acceptance. Being a tomboy is perfectly acceptable for some girls who yearn to hold on to independence and enjoy some of the freedoms reserved for males. However, tomboys become threatening or seen as pushing the boundaries of gender identity once adolescence hits. Adolescence for females is a time of repression and conformity to the ideal of what it means to be women in this society; it is not supposed to be a time for them to continue to maintain their interests in those pastimes considered for the boys. Halberstam (1998) writes:

because modern femininity has depended on all kinds of unnatural measures and unhealthy practices, many women over time must have rejected conventional femininity in favor of healthy bodies. For this reason, the female athlete almost inevitably becomes the object of intense gender scrutiny and surveillance. An obviously athletic female body, because it makes visible a rejection of feminine

activity, seems immediately to be associated with lesbianism. Although it is true that unathletic men also fall victim to homophobic suspicion, notice that the demands of proper heterosexual femininity coincide with the renouncing of a healthy body...the masculine heterosexual woman need not be viewed as a lesbian in denial; she may merely be a woman who rejects the strictures of femininity. (p. 58)

What Halberstam (1998) refers to here regarding unnatural measures and practices must surely be the pursuit of an unnatural ideal of heterosexual femininity that strains and stresses and pressures women in Western society to achieve—plastic surgery, overly thin bodies that result from starvation diets, and the like. But it seems to me that many of the younger players I have had the opportunity to observe over the last several years while working on this narrative indeed give in to the pressure or expectation to apply makeup and appear feminine before games and practices during which they will inevitably sweat, get dirty, get scraped up and banged up, and act in traditionally unfeminine ways—grunting, sometimes cursing, spitting, and playing aggressively--by sheer nature of the game they are playing that requires physical skill and a competitive drive to win.

Cahn (1994) asserts the athletic freedom of women requires certain characteristics associated with traditional masculinity—strength, skill, dominance, etc. But Halberstam (1998) insists such characteristics need to be thought of more in terms of giving women the ability to say these qualities are masculine and they can be embraced and possessed by women as well as men. Both of these authors are arguing for the ability of female athletes to take a nonapologetic stance toward their athletic pursuits, the ability to say yes to being strong, to say yes to being assertive, to say yes to being intellectual about the

game, and, in effect, to say yes to resisting and rejecting notions of traditional expectations of women in general and those women specifically whose identity is tied to a sporting life.

Of course while sports separate the spheres of men and women playing together and serve to silence women who are lesbians, sports do as well establish boundaries among the men who play them. Because we say that sports are a masculine institution does not mean that all men who play sports are equally treated. Anderson (2003) found in his research on openly gay athletes that the culture of silence and an accepted, even promoted, heterosexual discourse make it difficult to establish a positive gay identity, one that combines an athletic and homosexual self. An athlete's homosexual orientation was not really welcomed or accepted--just tolerated--as long as the athlete remained a top performer on the team. And in the more violent or powerful team sports, like football or rugby, for example, one might guess that gay athletes are marginalized as much or more so as all of the lesbian athletes reported to Fusco (1998) in her research. Homosexuality and sport remains an issue that continues to be taboo and continues to reinforce cultural expectations of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity. To be openly gay, openly bisexual, or openly lesbian offers one up for discrimination in our society, a society that values only heterosexuality as legitimate. Many times lesbian and gay athletes may find themselves having to assimilate into the heterosexual world of sport simply to play although the pressures they faced may have been different. Sexuality of the athlete is assumed for both, but for males it is assumed that they are heterosexual; for females, the assumption is that because they play sports, they are lesbians. Fusco (1998) writes:

Although lesbians have not been overtly denied access to participation in sports or active living, the heterosexual image of women in sports persists and is encouraged. The lesbian label is still used to intimidate lesbians and undermine attempts by all women to challenge constructed gender relations in sport. (p. 88)

Lesbians and gay men in sport may feel pressure to pass as heterosexual and remain silent, thereby perpetuating the pressure to be heterosexual, reinforcing the dominant culture of our society, and lessening the chances they will be rejected as deviant and outside the cultural norm. But Fusco (1998) argues sport can and should be a place for lesbians to celebrate their identity rather than to suppress them. In her study of seven lesbian athletes, she found several themes emerged in their stories. Each of them acknowledged a risk in being out, namely in the area of losing respect. Playing a sport opens women up to being labeled as nontraditional, and the added label of lesbian would increase the negative attention they might receive and confirm the stereotype surrounding women who play sports.

In our male-dominated society, girls become women according to standards set for them by those in power. Feder (1994) asserts that women will resort to “hyperfemininity” efforts to keep from being labeled as overly masculine or lesbian because the competitiveness of sport requires qualities and characteristics that our patriarchal society deems masculine (p. 63). But if you think that these messages, these signals, are outdated and a thing of the past, I would suggest you reconsider. It’s the year 2011, and while the institutional prerequisites for femininity and emphasis on heterosexuality and the stigmas that may be found in women’s sports may have lessened

with our increased social consciousness, it is still present and something with which female athletes must still contend.

Softball, Beauty Work, and the Discourse of Femininity

The message regarding what is considered appropriate, normal, and acceptable for female athletes is alive and well today. When my daughter was an upcoming freshman, she attended an advanced skills softball camp run by visiting coaches from NCAA Division colleges and universities. One of the clinics offered after field time was on the topic of developing confidence. Before the girls even walked into the meeting room where this clinic was to be held, my daughter tells me a sign was posted on the door: “Go put on your makeup.” Hillary didn’t put on her makeup nor did any of the other girls who she was with—they were already running late from practice.

Once they sat down, the instructor asked if the girls had put on their makeup. They answered “no” and were sent up to their rooms to put the makeup on and “do something with their hair.” When that was accomplished, they returned and were told that they looked better because they had taken the time to care about how they presented themselves. The instructor used Hillary as an example to the group, pointing to her hair, which was just put up in a bun at the top of her head and held there with a ponytail holder. The instructor told her this just had to stop; it looked like she had just rolled out of bed.

While the instructor’s point was about confidence and not looking thrown together, vulnerable, on the field, it was reinforced to the girls that they had to look good with makeup on and hair done in order to appear confident and in control on the field. And they had to be “presentable” for the photographers roaming the session who were

taking pictures for the website and camp brochures. Clearly, the coach running this clinic fell right in line with what the management of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League of the early 1940s wanted for its players and franchises. Nearly 70 years later we see that, in this instance at least, little has changed with regard to how society wants its female athletes to appear to the public and the ability of young athletes like my daughter to have a voice to challenge it when the pressure to conform is highly institutionalized.

Homophobia and High School Sports

It was not just this one encounter with this one instructor at one camp that influenced my daughter's thinking on how she should look on the field—attractive, put together, made up. Years and years of socialization by the media, her peers, and undoubtedly watching me prepare for work or going out over the years all contributed to her being unable or unwilling to drop her makeup bag at the softball field gates during her time on the field once she entered high school. While not one to go slather on a fully made up face, she rarely would appear on game days without at least some makeup—eye shadow and mascara minimally. Other girls on her team would show up in full glamour makeup—foundation, lip gloss, body glitter—only to sweat it off in the hot, humid springs, summers, and falls of ball season in the Southeast. Years later, Hillary told me wearing at least a bow in her hair or a little makeup on her face had as much to do with the influence of watching her favorite players during the Women's College World Series as well as to make sure she indicated to others that she was not interested in the sexual attentions of other softball players. The irony of this, though, is that she would go days before a tournament or game without shaving her underarms or her legs. Her reasoning

was fourfold. First, her legs would be covered up by softball pants. Second, no one was going to get close to her on the pitcher's mound and so they wouldn't see her armpits. Third, boyfriends usually didn't come to tournaments. And fourth, shaving takes a lot more time than swiping on some mascara and eyeliner and would require getting up even earlier than required to be at the fields by 6:00 or 6:30 in the morning for bracket games after late games at the fields the night before.

This coach's comments fell in line with Dellinger and Williams' (1997) research which showed that most of the women--white women as well as African-American, Hispanics, and other minorities, and both lesbians and straight women--felt more confident and more powerful when they wore makeup at work. Many of the women in the study revealed concerns that they would not be viewed as credible or heterosexual if they did not wear makeup. Wearing makeup is a marker of heterosexual femininity. And those women who were interviewed who were lesbians, whether their sexuality was known or not, felt some pressure to conform to gender expectations regarding appearance. Interestingly, one of the women who participated in the study, who happened to be a lesbian and who chose to dress unconventionally, felt she was accepted more easily because of her contributions to the company. Her mode of dress, appearance, and sexuality seemed to be overlooked, she thought, because of those contributions. At least here we see one instance in the research that supports a piece of research cited earlier regarding gay male athletes and their performance on the field. Dellinger and Williams (1997) argue that wearing makeup at work does reproduce inequalities with regards to power and offer limited opportunities to demonstrate resistance to imbalances and struggles for power, but those who choose to wear it are seeking to empower themselves.

Wearing makeup helped the women in this study assert some level of autonomy found in certain institutions, in this case the world of work.

Weitz (2001) conducted research on the ways in which women use their hair to accommodate or resist societal expectations for femininity and ideologies of subordination in their efforts to gain power. In her study, several of the women interviewed said that how their hair looks gives them a sense of power in their personal relationships and professional careers. According to Weitz (2001), in the world of work, women who appear less feminine and less attractive than others may not achieve their career goals so easily. Job offers and salaries and promotions are less frequent as are the inclinations by others to stereotype and discriminate based on appearance. And in intimate relationships, attractive women are more popular, more likely to marry and marry men who earn higher wages, and more experienced sexually.

But the effects are magnified in the world of sport because of it remains a gendered institution with very strong roots regarding appearance as they are on display in a ritual that embodies social values. A lot of the girls on Hillary's teams have long hair and blonde highlights. Do these girls recognize the value American society places on long straight blonde hair as being sexy and feminine (Weitz, 2001)? Are they aware of stereotyping men may place on blondes? Do they recognize any of this? Or have they been ingrained and exposed to acceptable forms of femininity and beauty for girls who play sport for so long that it just is what it is?

Weitz (2001) suggests that those women who adopt hairstyles that are considered "rebellious", using her term, are challenging others to reconsider their values and beliefs and letting women distance themselves from the very society that subordinates them. She

asks us to consider resistance and accommodation as two variables that exist simultaneously as it gives us a richer description of one's lived experiences. In thinking back over the years and the hundreds of girls Hillary has played softball with, I am hard pressed to think of more than one who sported shorter than shoulder length hair and very few of them could be said to not wear any makeup at all. The girls here seem to be making choices, seeking to accommodate and adjust in some way, shape, or form, perhaps reaching for something--the feminine apologetic, perhaps--that will help them avoid the stigmatism of being overly masculine or lesbian and being accepted in the world of sport. Hillary admitted to such when she revealed that there was indeed a purpose in her choosing to wear some makeup and bows in her hair most of the times that she played softball. Dorothy Smith (1988) argues women are active participants in the creation of femininity and that we are swept up in a "discursive phenomenon" called femininity (p. 41). It's everywhere: magazines, television, cosmetic displays, store window displays. It's on the advertising panes of social networking sites. It's the talking we do, the way we learn about what men want, and what we do to get those things for ourselves. And that's where Smith (1988) takes a turn away from others who would suggest that women and girls are subordinated beings, held in place by patriarchal oppression. She argues to the contrary:

A woman active in the discourse works within its interpretive circles, attempting to create in her own body the displays which appeal to the public textual images as their authority and depend upon the doctrines of femininity for their interpretation. She may have to struggle with a body which won't conform to a textual model, but her identity for herself and others is vested in the effects she's

successful in creating....The discourse of femininity indexes a work process performed by women. Its character as work is not highly visible because it is not accomplished as such by being paid or being recognizably a hobby. Nonetheless, it is consciously planned, takes time, involves the use of tools and materials and the acquired skills of its practitioners. (Smith, 1998, p. 235)

We know young, impressionable girls and adult women, too, are bombarded with messages about how females are supposed to look in order to be accepted. Many of us do very well and willingly succumb to those messages and become active participants in the femininity discourse Smith (1988) describes. Whether it's buying the latest cosmetics or going to extremes to achieve an ideal body type—one that is lean with a low body weight and minimal body fat—women, regardless of whether they are athletes or not—face pressures to become practitioners of femininity. And for young women who participate in sports, that pressure is doubled if they choose to abide by the rules of the female apologetic.

Our ideas of what it means to be male or female are generated from images in various cultural contexts, and females all too often fall into the trap of conforming to socially constructed ideals of what it means to be female, either further entrenching white male view of domination over women or the active participation in femininity as Smith (1988) and others would argue. Still today, women athletes who cross the generally accepted gender line that society has drawn for them are stereotyped with descriptions about their femininity. As long as women participated in traditionally individual and feminine sports like figure skating and gymnastics, there seemed to be no threat to ideals of masculinity; women were accepted here because they are viewed as smaller, weaker,

graceful, flexible, alluring heterosexual beings who are in no way, shape, or form a threat to the gender order and masculinity. In this society, it still seems a nonnegotiable that if you play a traditionally masculine sport, you are still urged to conform to traditionally feminine ideals of beauty and appearance.

Osbourne and Wagner (2007) conducted a study that revealed there is still a great deal of homophobia in the high school setting. While they suggest much research focuses on the benefits of participating in sport, they write few studies have focused on how extracurricular activities promote homophobia in high school. What Osbourne and Wagner (2007) attempted to accomplish was to look at those sports, they call them “core” sports, which affect the high school culture, namely, basketball, baseball, soccer, and football. “The combination of hegemonic masculinity and visibility within the school community, the institution of core sports, creates a highly structured and visible norm of masculinity for its participants” (Osbourne & Wagner, 2007, p. 602). This should not come as a surprise to anyone as the research suggests that participating in sports give boys a chance to experiment with develop masculine identities and athleticism. Females have been found to be more tolerant and less physically aggressive toward gay and lesbian students than males are. Further, sports control female athletes by attacking their sexuality or denigrating it. So there is still an element of homophobia to be addressed on teams described as core sports as Osbourne and Wagner (2007) suggest. Softball, while not listed as a core sport, should probably be included as it is the girls’ partner sport, if you will, to boys’ baseball. Shakib (2003) and Shakib and Dunbar (2002) report that the threat of being labeled with that name of lesbian in sport may be a reason a lot of girls drop out of sporting experiences during the high school years. Girls are having to

sacrifice playing and perhaps excelling in athletics in an effort to keep peers from questioning or teasing them about their sexual identities. Those who do continue to play, like Hillary, for example, seem all too aware that this is part of what she must manage.

The challenge then for young women athletes is to manage their true, competing selves, selves that are physically assertive, intellectually assertive. But this is indeed difficult to do. Girls who play sports many times are sports fans. And sport is used in a market driven economy to generate revenue for those who own the media, the products, the teams, and the players themselves. The end result is that the media through all kinds of outlets bombards young women with messages regarding femininity and femininity in sport, reinforcing the dominant ideologies of society in regards to female athletes and their role or proper place in sports.

Sporting Women and the Media

Males are socialized at a very young age into the world of sport. Further, the media—newspapers, magazines, television, and the internet--sends very clear and distinct messages regarding should be valued in the world of sport. Power, strength, aggression, playing with pain, violence, and viewing women as sexual objects are all messages found to be embedded within the media's presentation of sporting events (Children Now, 1999; Cohen, 2001; Shakib & Dunbar, 2002). And the presentation of the event, how the media shapes and portrays the event, is what influences our perceptions of reality. It's so important for us and the young people with whom we work to understand the ways in which the media exerts its influence on our daily lives. Young female athletes who can develop the ability to consume media with a critical eye can begin to question the messages bombarding them about femininity, gender roles, and the value society and the

media places on their sporting lives in terms of programming and coverage. Boyle and Haynes (2002) tell us:

anybody wishing to understand sport... needs to understand the economic and political forces which are shaping and reshaping the contemporary sporting experience....At a cultural and textual level the images that a community project onto the sporting field, and the manner in which that image gets refracted through various media, tell us much about our individual and collective identities...our values, priorities, hopes, dreams and aspirations like few other cultural forms. (p. 22)

For any sport to be successful, it must attract fans and produce revenue, and one way the media does this is by portraying women as sexy and feminine both in programming and advertising to attract viewers. "Women's sports, however, to be successful, have to be attractive to men as well as women viewers. As a result, notions of conventional masculinity and femininity persist...besides making money, making gender may be sport's chief function" (Dworkin & Messner, 2002, p. 17). The expected gender roles of being feminine and graceful and submissive are at complete odds with the goal of winning athletic competitions. Therefore, we see the focus not so much on the athletic prowess and achievements of female athletes but more so on traditional ideals of beauty and femininity in an effort to downplay any attention that might be drawn to the female athlete's sexuality.

Curry, Arriagada, and Cornwell's research (2002) on television commentators and their remarks about male and female athletes suggest male athletes are held in higher regard than female athletes by male sport broadcasters and that they minimize the female

athletes' accomplishments. Resistance to seeing female athletes in traditionally male sporting events continues as it:

threatens the current gender order, at least symbolically, because it would undercut the prevailing stereotypic ideas of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity the increasing tendency of women to participate in sport and the increased popularity of some women's sport programs, such as professional tennis, on television. (Curry, Arriagada, & Cornwell, 2002, p. 397)

Further, Curry, Arriagada, and Cornwell (2002) tell us even in magazines apparently devoted to acknowledging the strength and skill of female athletes, feminine beauty outweighs athleticism. They ask us to consider, for example, the sport of boxing as presented in both male and female magazines in the year 2000. Boxing is presented using images of war, aggression, and violence in the men's magazine. Yet, in the women's magazine, themes of aggression and violence do not exist; rather, the emphasis in the pictures is on beauty and glamour over fitness and strength (Curry, Arriagada, & Cornwell, 2002, p. 408). And it is again those sports in which women compete individually against a standard—sports like diving and gymnastics—rather than a team competition which receive more media coverage. Howe (2003) reports Welsh women who play contact sports like rugby professionally struggle for monetary rewards and recognition due to a lack of media coverage:

Talented men are able to make a good living from it. None of my female informants, some of whom were international players, was able to do so....Attracting the attention of sponsors to a sport that is often marginalized

among women's sport, because of its confrontational nature that traditionally means that it is associated with masculinity, is tremendously difficult. (p. 239)

Buysse and Embser-Herbert (2004) report on the portrayal of women athletes in the college media guides:

The issue of difference is highlighted by the fact that in media coverage, girls and women may be athletes, but they are female first. The physical attractiveness of these athletes is often emphasized over their athletic abilities. While the media have increased their coverage of women's sports events, the coverage continues to promote women athletes as different or other than men. (p. 68)

Further attesting to this pressure on appearance, Scraton and Flintoff (2002) write:

Femininity should be viewed as a code name for heterosexuality. Through sport, females are encouraged to develop an acceptable "femininity" central of which is heterosexual attractiveness and availability. Women's involvement in sport is controlled and restricted through their clothing and their need to present a "heterosexy" image. For example, the clothing for international women's beach volleyball competitions states that the bikini bottoms must not have a side seam deeper than 6 cm. This is less to do with appropriateness of dress for the sport and more about the objectification of women's bodies. (p. 35)

In our socially constructed, patriarchal world, what it means to be feminine and soft and ladylike may sometimes be at odds with the strength and skill and assertiveness required to participate in sports and be successful. This can certainly be applied to the mixed messages young women receive regarding their desire to be athletes and the pressures placed on them from society to be, look, and act a certain way lest their femininity be

questioned. The pressure is there, for some not all, to conform to long established gender roles that are reinforced through the world of sport. Some young women struggle to balance this desire or need to be feminine and athletic at the same time. On the ball fields, they are not meek, mild, passive people; they are strong, assertive, thinking about the game. They know they will become covered with the red clay dirt of the softball and the sweat and bruises and raspberries that naturally come with such physical play. Yet, there are elements of the good girl that peek through. One can see them fussing over their hair, checking their makeup (if they choose to wear it), etc., mindful on some level of the messages with which they've been socialized in order for them to participate in sports and be accepted in that world without the stigma of labels being attached to them because they are female and choose to be athletes.

Ninety percent of United States boys watch some sort of sports programming, according to a study conducted by Children Now (1999). And because so many advertising dollars are funneled into sports broadcasts, it's important to take a look at how both the media and advertising influences young women, how they see themselves fitting into the world of sports, and what effect those programming choices and media messages might have on men and boys as well, be it through time devoted to coverage of women's sports or the advertising efforts targeted to them or even to men about women during what one would consider male audience sporting events. And because the media is largely run by men, it is a powerhouse of patriarchy; it shapes and controls what both men and women see and experience regarding gender roles and the marginalization of women athletes. What the Children Now (1999) researchers found after reviewing hours and hours of sports programming was that: 1) aggression and violence is valued by

television viewers; 2) male athletes are praised for playing while they are injured; they are criticized if they do not play injured (manhood); 3) war references are used frequently, an average of five times an hour during this study; 4) female athletes receive little coverage on ESPN's *SportsCenter*, as little as three percent of the time. Further, "For the most part, women appear in sports programs as sex objects, supportive spouses, or spectators on the sidelines, cheering the men on" (Children Now, 1999). The study also looked at the incidences women appeared in advertising programming; the results are about the same. Women appear as sex objects or rewards to be won if when a man purchases a particular product. Women were also portrayed as overcontrolling and overemotional. The Children Now (1999) study concluded:

According to the sports programming that boys consume most, a real man is strong, tough, aggressive, and above all, a winner in what is still a man's world. To be a winner, he must be willing to compromise his own long-term health by showing guts in the face of danger, by fighting other men when necessary, and by "playing hurt" when he's injured. He must avoid being soft; he must be the aggressor, both on the "battlefields" of sports and in his consumption choices. Whether he is playing sports or making choices about which products to purchase, his aggressiveness will win him the ultimate prize: the adoring attention of beautiful women and the admiration of other men. (n.p.)

Messner, Duncan, and Jensen (1993) found that while coverage of women in sports in the media had increased, *how* women were portrayed and spoken about by the commentators had not. In other words, the commentators influenced the viewing experience of the audience by using "gender-biased language. In so doing they reinforced the biased

meanings built into language and, thus, contribute to the re-construction of social inequities” (Messner, Duncan, & Jenson, 1993, p. 133). Strategies and references that demean the accomplishments of female athletes and call into question their sexuality only serve to continue the cycle of keeping sport a male-dominated bastion that downplays and denigrates the accomplishments of female athletes. In *Queering whiteness*, McDonald (2002) writes of the deliberate efforts of the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) to market its female basketball players as nurturing, caring women and mothers who also happen to like to play basketball. Doing so calms any worry that might exist in “patriarchal fantasies that posit athleticism as inherently masculine and lesbian and “real” women as inherently feminine and heterosexual” (McDonald, 2002, p. 381). She further asserts black and lesbian athletes are viewed as fatal to the WNBA marketing machine, whose goal is above all else to generate revenue, revenue that ideally would come from mainstream audiences. And Whitson (1998) tells us women’s sports programming is still highly subject to patriarchal institutions. With the Olympic gold won by USA softball we have seen an increase in coverage of softball with the NCAA Division I Women’s College World Series on cable channels like *ESPN* or *ESPN U*, but other than that what kind of coverage do we see of that sport? And where is the coverage of other sports women play that are considered traditionally masculine ones—those like rugby or ice hockey? My guess would be one would be hard pressed to find any if much coverage of it.

More women and girls participate in athletics since Title IX was enacted in 1972, and media coverage of those athletics has increased. But the media still portrays female athletes as traditionally feminine, physically attractive, deferring to men, and

heterosexual (Harrison & Secarea, 2010; Milkie, 2002; Cohen, 2001). Milkie (2002) found a great deal of research related to how we define femininity and the messages mass media sends to young women about patriarchal expectations of femininity and beauty. She cited several studies which demonstrated “opposition to stereotypical media messages is relatively common among girls and women, with a significant portion of women criticizing dominant definitions of femininity as artificially created, unrealistic, narrow, or racist” (Milkie, 2002, p. 842). The opposition to the messages may be common; however, resistance to the messages still has a foothold on young women who succumb to the desire to be like the women in magazines and television ads when female representations in the media—both in and out of athletic events—focus on femininity, thereby supporting the gender order. When the messages are controlled and presented by a media machine bent on generating profit to sustain itself, our perceptions of reality are carefully crafted for us.

Even less media programming is devoted to African American and other minority female athletes, and when there is coverage, it leans more toward the stereotyping that characterizes them as relying more on natural athletic ability than intelligence and strategic awareness of the game. Eastman and Billings (2001), in their study of racial and gender stereotyping in college basketball announcing, found that when race and gender were analyzed in combination, “White women basketball players generated more commentary by announcers than Black women players, revealing a kind of favoritism not exhibited nowadays in men’s basketball announcing” (p. 187). The dominant view of beauty in this culture seems to include only the adjectives thin, tall, and white. And because this is so, it serves to keep much media attention away from women of color (and

those white women who do not meet the ideal), helping them to remain invisible as role models to all women.

In her study of how girls negotiate what it means to be women through the analysis of fashion magazine advertisements, Currie (1997) found that most girls compared themselves with the images in teen magazines, but they often criticized the use of unrealistic portrayals of girls and women. However, she argued that only a very few girls challenged the focus on beauty that these teen magazines held. The opposition to the messages may be common; however, resistance to the messages still has a foothold on young women who succumb to the desire to be like the women in magazines and television ads.

Nike hoped to tap into the women's athletic market in the 1990s by using an advertising campaign that showcased individual empowerment and health benefits through being athletically active. But their marketing approach was less than successful as it targeted women's feelings of guilt about their bodies. Women can have fit, athletic, and slightly muscular bodies, but Nike's approach wasn't working for women who were used to photographs of beautiful, sexy women in ads not the sweaty, hard bodies that without question embodied power and strength. It took a couple of feminist ad agency consultants to help make Nike's marketing campaign a success with the coveted female consumer. They revamped the campaign to help Nike appear interested in women's empowerment and liberation combined with the valued traits femininity, and Nike cornered the market on women's athletic gear (Lafrance, 1998). Brandi Chastain, member of the 1999 World Cup Soccer Championship team, tore off her shirt to reveal her Nike sports bra in a show of exuberance after winning the title. She also appeared

nude in two men's magazines, posed with soccer balls, suggesting that sexuality and an athletically fit body fit perfectly well together. The team became somewhat of an overnight success after that championship game with a variety of media markets clamoring to cover the story of these young women. In an interesting irony though, advertising campaigns by Nike and companies like it who market fitness to females seem to ignore the fact that many women who produce their products in Third World countries don't have access or the means to participate in this empowering wave of fitness.

But above all else, the media wants to make money and garner ratings. Cohen (2001) discusses the selling of women's sports in the media and refers to the use of violence and controversy by the media in reporting the spectacle that unfolded during the 1994 Olympics when figure skater Nancy Kerrigan was attacked by her rival Tonya Harding and her accomplices. She suggests the media framed Kerrigan as "Snow White, an ice princess, graceful, artistic, and eloquent" while Harding "was scripted into the role of white trash, slut, wicked, and athletic" (Cohen, 2001, p. 241). Here we had a beautiful, refined Nancy Kerrigan contrasted with the rough and tumble, working class Tonya Harding. The world of women's ice skating is usually presented in the literature as the sport demonstrating femininity at its highest levels with heavily made up skaters dressed in scanty, sexy costumes. But when Harding behaved badly, the viewers rushed to a defenseless Kerrigan's side. Grace and beauty under duress won the world over and Kerrigan ended up taking a silver medal home while Harding finished eighth and was eventually banned for life from the sport. And indeed the world was swept up in the drama, making the competition between the two women the one of the highest television

program rating of all time. Only two other sporting competitions, both Super Bowls, rated higher.

The emphasis and focus on femininity extends to the college level as well.

Harrison and Secarea (2010) cited previous research on the content analysis of the 2000 Final Four men's and women's basketball tournaments commentary, which found:

although male athletes were primarily discussed in terms of their physical athleticism, women athletes were not. During broadcasts of the women's tournament games the women athletes were primarily discussed in terms of their looks and appearance, personality characteristics, personal background, and whether they were having a good game. Likewise, a similar content analysis of the newspaper coverage of the 1996 Olympic Games found women athletes were likely to be portrayed in terms of their marital status, attractiveness, and emotionality. (p. 406)

This focus on feminine beauty extends all from televised sports programming to college publications highlighting sports and the players. Buysse and Embser-Herbert (2004) report about the portrayal of women athletes in the college media guides that “the issue of difference is highlighted by the fact that in media coverage, girls and women may be athletes, but they are female first. The physical attractiveness of these athletes is often emphasized over their athletic abilities” (p. 68). While coverage of women's sports continues to increase, such coverage still portrays women athletes as different than men, that is, female.

The media reinforces the ideal of emphasized femininity with regards to female athletes and lays open to scrutiny those women who walk the line or cross over it when

their femininity is called into question based on their sports participation. Messner (2007) argues media strategies of gendered language and disparate treatment/coverage of women in sports are no longer acceptable if the media is to still be considered a legitimate entity. The coverage needs to become more objective rather than relying on references that demean female athletes' accomplishments and call into question their sexuality.

Considering the amount of time spent viewing sports, the amount of money devoted to media advertising during sporting events and nonsporting events, the amount of time our daughters and sisters spend using and accessing information through the media, and the value they place on that information, we would do well to continue to look at ways in which societal/media messages influence both men and women on a number of levels regarding the expectations of both male and female roles in and out of sport.

The Phenomenon of Wondering

Huebner (1999) writes in his collection of essays about the phenomenon of wondering. He says we have conditioned ourselves to behave and react in a particular way to our environment, neglecting the thoughts that might arise in us which cause us to question what we should or would do differently if we attuned ourselves to the cues around us:

We learn more or less stable patterns of behavior which guarantee reasonable adjustment to the world, reasonable satisfaction from the world, and reasonable security for the future. We tie ourselves to the environment with our learning, through our habit patterns, our knowledge, our functional behaviors and attitude; and in so doing we lock ourselves in a prison made up of that which we have abstracted from the past. We have turned in upon ourselves. We are self

enclosed. We are blinded by our knowledge and by our own being, which instead of liberating us confines us to our past or to our needs, abstractions, and concepts. In essence, we have given away our freedom by tying ourselves to our environment via our needs and abstractions. (p. 6)

We have become so comfortable with our lives, not in a comforting, at ease sort of way, but by adjusting to and accepting the daily messages delivered to us, that we take in stride even that which perhaps we should not. By that I mean we have become locked into accepting patterns of relationships and behaviors that may not be good or healthy for us. Being locked into such patterns certainly limits what we can do to negotiate change or help our teenage daughters who are female athletes negotiate change. Carlson (2002) writes “only when people become more conscious of themselves, when they recognize themselves in more complex and empowering ways, do they ever advance toward their freedom” (p. 71). As girls and young women continue to become more cognizant of the limits placed on them by society and the media regarding the requirement to appear feminine if they want to play sports and the lack of coverage of women in sports based on power, privilege, and economics, they can at least begin their own conversations about how the very powerful institution of sport and media work together to reinforce and maintain the status quo of the dominant culture. But it is only through recognizing that they are indeed influenced in so many ways, from so many angles, from so many positions that they can take those first steps. Young women and those young women who choose to be athletes) need to be given the tools and the time to question and wonder why things are the way they are. Because knowing what to expect and perhaps wondering how to move forward may help them to make the most of their own experiences.

CHAPTER 3

PITCHING CURRICULUM STUDIES—MASCULINITIES/FEMININITIES ON AND
OFF THE FIELD*The Need for Authentic Education*

William F. Pinar (1994) writes that individual lives are the site where political struggles are being waged:

I regard as the most intense that struggle not to succumb to the routinization of life, and to the attendant freezing over of the fluidity of individual life, the struggle not to succumb to role, to the robotic, to witness and by so witnessing to amplify our withering capacities to live outside the bureaucratic mainstream of “thought” and “action.” Only authentic thought and action can occur—at the present time—outside the congealed, frozen, patterned thought-becomes-procedure that is bureaucratic regulation and the bureaucratic form of life But we can, and must, blow on the flame of human life, trying to keep some light shining in the present darkness. (p. 197)

Pinar (1994) wrote this at a time when he felt the field of curriculum theory was focusing more on efficiency and financial reports and the status of college professors than the true spirit of the Reconceptualization of the field, with attention being given to individual life stories and histories. While he expressed his concerns more than 15 years ago, his words still have meaning for those of us working in the field today. It is vitally important to look beyond the emphasis schools place on standardization, routinization, and regulation to get true meaning about life. To borrow Pinar’s (1994) words, we need to work from within in order to make connections to and meaning from others as well as ourselves.

Blumenfeld-Jones (2004) studied dance as a way to move away from conventional thoughts of what education should be, chronological lists objectives and skills and activities to be mastered, toward a more theoretical approach:

When we imagine curricula in this less conventional fashion (not seeing them as practical policy directives), they become historical documents that speak of their times, their makers, and the conditions of their production. They become personal documents as well, speaking of individual responses to those situations.

Additionally, for those of us who read these texts, we need no longer treat them as authoritative directions for action but instead as documents that we may interpret in order, perhaps, to better understand ourselves and our own place in the field of endeavor that has a history and a context to which we, too, are responding. (p.

126)

Blumenfeld-Jones (2004) urges us to focus on nontraditional forms of curriculum, working from within like Pinar hopes. For that is not where education about life occurs. Education occurs via our own experiences, framed by context, framed by our relationships with others with whom we interact and connect.

In this chapter I will explore the various ways Hillary's education has been created not by those checklists, objectives, and skills to be mastered during her public schooling but by her own hand, her own experiences as she worked from within to become the athlete on the field and young woman off the field she wants to be. She is a multifaceted being, complex, and crossing back and forth over boundaries she has discovered through various places and people that have intersected her life for brief periods of time on her journey to become a young adult. First, I will consider the ways in

which Hillary and her teammates played with femininities and masculinities in the ritualized field of athletics on the softball field; second, I will address the ways in which she negotiated one of the most ritualized aspects of traditional American high schools: the prom.

The Changing Nature of Gender

Butler (2004) in *Undoing gender* tells us about the meaning of gender designations:

The very attribution of femininity to female bodies as if it were a natural or necessary property takes place within a normative framework in which the assignment of femininity to femaleness is one mechanism for the production of gender itself. Terms such as “masculine” and “feminine” are notoriously changeable; there are social histories for each term; their meanings change radically depending upon their geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints on who is imagining whom, and for what purpose....Terms of gender designation are thus never settled once and for all but are constantly in the process of being remade. (p. 10)

Gender is fluid, is changing, and is contextual. Gender is a performance, is performative, and over time we construct our identities through various performances and contexts. On vacation recently in Las Vegas, I had the opportunity to see *Divas*, a professional drag queen show. Indeed, Butler (2004) cites the example of “drag” to illustrate her point about the fluidity and performativity of gender. At the end of the performance, one of the divas came out in full drag and sang a song about what makes a man, during which time he disrobed and cleansed himself of the heavy makeup, literally changing himself back

into a man before our eyes (private parts appropriately hidden behind a dressing table on the stage). Another example from Eastern countries is the actors from kabuki theatre; women traditionally were not allowed to participate in this dramatic venue, and so male actors took on both roles. But where drag in the West may be considered as pushing the boundaries of masculine and feminine performativity for shock value, kabuki actors were highly respected in Japanese society. And while drag and Japanese kabuki are extreme and illustrative examples, the point to be made here is that gender is merely a performance that denaturalizes what we think gender is or is supposed to be. But Butler's (2004) words and the example of drag should not be left to nor limited to the extreme. We can and should consider performativity when we begin to look at female athletes who push masculinity to the forefront by the very fact they are participating in the male domain of sport, especially those that do not rely on overdetermined femininity as part of the costume (read ice skating and gymnastics, for example), challenging and disrupting the power differential between men and women. Bird (1996) tells us that gender identity is a:

continual process whereby meanings are attributed by and to individuals through social interaction. Information received through interactions may be used either to reinforce existing self-notions of gender meanings or to weaken them. That is, mere socialization does not sufficiently explain how individuals conceptualize identity. Socialization provides the terms of social interaction but does not determine how individuals incorporate interactional meanings into their own conceptualizations of gender. (p. 122)

Gender, I agree, is not a fixed thing that one has. It changes in response to social interactions and our own motivations, fears, perceptions, and the like. In Chapter Three I explore how my daughter Hillary negotiated her gender performances and constructed differing identities both on the athletic field and off during an important time in her life and that of many high school girls as she readied herself for the highly institutionalized ritual of the high school prom.

In the area of Georgia where we live, softball is a way of life for many girls. It is not just something they do during the school year. Many of the girls who play fast pitch softball on these travel teams play it with gusto, with passion, with zest. They have to-- it's quite a few steps of from the recreation department leagues with their emphasis on equal playing time for all. Here, it's the best players playing, and a spot on the team or a specific position in the infield or outfield is no guarantee if you are not performing. Picking up competent and skilled players from other teams who may not be participating in a particular tournament is common when a coach needs a player to fill a hole vacated by a player unable to make it that weekend or to fill a weak spot, no matter how long other girls may have been with the team officially. The point is that these girls who play at this level are committed; they have an appetite for the sport.

And curriculum and education should concern appetite, according to Blumenfeld-Jones (2004). He writes that some of us possess a powerful urge that must be satisfied, our appetite for whatever it is in life that drives us at a particular place in time. For Blumenfeld-Jones (2004) it was dance. But this appetite for motion had nothing to do with performance; it was more of a private urge that was difficult to describe. He further argues that this appetite was not described nor discussed in the three educational texts he

analyzed for the article included in Reynolds' (2004) lines of flight scholarship that focuses on finding new multiplicities and approaches to looking at various issues of interest to us. The authors of those texts Blumenfeld-Jones (2004) analyzed wrote about dance as a vocational or rational endeavor, forgoing any discussion of the personal and perhaps irrational pleasures that thinking dancers may enjoy from their pursuits. Those texts did not explain, for Blumenfeld-Jones (2004), why people dance.

While the appropriate place of the fine arts has come under fire when budgetary belts begin to tighten, athletics in public schools seem to be preserved and maintained as long as possible. In the news over the last few years there have been reports of school districts charging fees for players to play, as an example, but for the most part, school sports continue to be tied to middle and high schools. Basic skills for various sports are still taught in physical education classes and schools at both the middle and high school feature athletic teams.

Yet, I agree with Blumenfeld-Jones' (2004) point that why students play, those who stay with it and devote many outside hours to it, specifically these girls like my own daughter, is neglected in our public school education, for they are indeed learning about themselves and learning beyond the rational when they play and perform. And when these girls, these athletes perform, they send a message to the dominant culture and power brokers who dictate women athletes should be like. Fast pitch softball athletes are doing more than developing their physical fitness and skill; they are trying to fit in a world that still tells them they must behave and look a certain way to be considered a "normal" female teenager. The girls who play this sport change, constructing new but

resistant identities while on the field in order to help shift the balance of power in a world that still has clearly set markers for female appearance and behavior.

A Fast Pitch Primer

Fast pitch softball, particularly for those girls and their families who dedicate themselves to a life on the regional travel circuit, is full of rituals. It's like a trip to Mecca, southern style. Hordes of families load up their family cars, coolers, tents, chairs, blankets, umbrellas, pull carts and travel three, four, more hours to some town hosting a fast pitch softball tournament. So many hundreds of miles and thousands of dollars are spent traveling to cities and towns near and far, searching on maps and global positioning systems for the large complexes and small recreational ball fields on which to play. Does the fear of high gas prices keep these families from traveling sometimes hundreds of miles to spend 10 to 14 hours in the blazing heat and humidity, fighting off gnats and mosquitoes with endless bottles of bug spray and sticks of incense, trying to find places most wouldn't care to travel to as part of a spur of the moment weekend road trip or planned vacation? No way. Those of us who are part of the travel ball circuit, those who can afford it, wouldn't trade it for the world. For it is in these places far and wide the stuff of lived experiences is created. And these are the places which students and scholars of curriculum studies should focus. Whitlock (2007) states:

Curriculum and schooling—like living a life—do not take place in isolation, but in the every day. Students and teachers are who we are in large part because of where we are; we are shaped by place; we believe, behave, speak and desire in place; we interact with each other in place....Our lived experiences take place

somewhere. And this somewhere is significant to interpreting lived experiences.

(p. 44)

In addition to the gas and food, there is the added cost of hotel rooms, equipment, and tournament fees. And, depending on whom you ask, you may get different answers as to why girls and their families would commit to the time and expense involved in this kind of sport because it does cost money to play. It could be that some play to snag offers of college scholarship opportunities as scouts sometimes attend these tournaments. It could be for some to keep their skills sharp until school ball starts in the fall. Or it could just be to have something to do during the spring and summer to keep girls physically fit and out of trouble.

But no matter what the reason or the cost of tournament ball, participating in fast pitch softball serves as a launching point for girls to play with gender identities and roles by exercising not only their bodies but their confidence, strength, and ability in playing a demanding sport as well. Greendorfer (2001) and others (Dworkin & Wachs, 2000; Whitson, 2002) write about socialization into sport as it relates to girls and concluded that males and females know that sports holds value with the power and prestige it rewards to its participants; further, girls learn that femininity and the idea of being powerful send contradictory messages. Girls play indoors more often than boys and have fewer rules, less challenges, and interactions in the games they play. And whether it's due to parental or other adult or peer influence or even economic influences, Greendorfer (2001) cites the effects such socialization differences have:

Boys are provided with game experiences that can be applied to a variety of adult role requirements. In contrast, female game experiences do not provide them with

skills for achieving goals or learning to develop strategies. Nor do they expose girls to the value of cooperation or negotiation in competing or achieving an objective. Consequently, girls are limited in the nature and type of social outcomes they can derive from their game playing, and they are not adequately prepared for a variety of adult social, political, or economic roles. (p. 10)

If girls are not provided similar types of socialization experiences through sport, how then do females behave as they sort through such issues found on the playing fields, especially in team sports such as softball? Clearly, if we believe what Greendorfer (2001) suggests, then girls who play sports such as softball are merely accepting such without challenge and reinforcing hegemonic masculinity. But there is more to it than what Greendorfer (2001) suggests. Girls today are indeed challenging dominant messages of ideal masculinity by playing competitively earlier and longer and in tournaments that hold some weight with regard to their potential for college scouting opportunities and exposure.

Performing Femininity and Masculinity on the Field

Teenage girls in uniformed garb and colors mill into the park in the early morning hours, not yet awake, not yet ready to get their game faces on. The humidity will rise with the sun and the girls will soon start to percolate. Bat bags unzip, equipment is sorted, sunscreen is applied, and batting orders are posted. The girls get ready for the game.

I wrote in the previous chapter about overdetermining femininity and Hillary's experience at an elite softball camp. At one of the clinics offered Hillary and other players were running late from a practice and were sent up to their hotel rooms to put on makeup and make themselves "presentable". The clinic session had to do with looking

your best. I think it's important to note some observations here regarding the ways in which most of the girls with whom Hillary played ball conformed to societal expectations regarding the appearance of being feminine and reactions to those girls who may not have been so much.

With these travel teams, it is not just the obvious uniforms that match. Everything matches for the girls, especially on those teams that have the money to spend on such. There are folding chairs in team colors, often with player's name and number stitched on the back. In addition to the actual softball uniforms, the girls many times haul matching bat/equipment bags, athletic shower shoes, ear muffs and head bands for colder weather play, etc. This attempt at building a collective identity is true with boys' teams as well, but many girls take the extra time and effort to groom themselves in alignment with appearing feminine and girls on the field and in the dugout. I can remember my own daughter and her friends tying matching ribbons in their hair, applying makeup and glitter as they readied for a game. Likewise, girls on these teams support each other relationally, chanting, clapping, cheering, consoling in unison, a much different approach to the game than baseball players take. But the girls' world was not insulated and their attitudes about conforming to femininity in sports were a far cry from what they experienced at one particular tournament a few summers ago.

I recall Hillary's amazement (and that of some of her teammates) when they traveled to a particular tournament one summer. They were slated to play a team from rural southwest Georgia and went to size them up as that team awaiting a bracket game. This is something the more experienced girls on the team and the leaders will do—scout the other team, if you will, when they are unloading in the parking lots, readying to play

or when they actually are playing. One of the girls from the rural team sported a tattoo and two others of them were smoking cigarettes. And the most feminine-looking girl on the team had a girlfriend with her. They were openly affectionate in the bleachers between games at that tournament despite the 100 degree weather. The girls, including Hillary herself, bought into the stereotype of some of the more masculine-looking players, believing those girls were stronger, better athletes than they were because of the way they looked and they were about to get crushed on the field. And of course, some of Hillary's teammates were shocked at the open sexuality of the third player on that team. But for some reason, perhaps because Hillary has an aunt who happens to be a lesbian, Hillary says she pulled the team aside and had a talk with them, telling them to quit focusing on the sexuality of the player and instead concentrate on the matter at hand. They were here to play softball, after all, and she encouraged them to look at those girls as such—softball players—not lesbian or straight softball players—just softball players. That's a pretty mature way of looking at those who are different from you, especially during the teenage years filled with pressure to conform.

Hillary herself played with gender and masculinity in a couple of different ways; she played with and through pain, pain that could be described as debilitating enough to perhaps cause others to give up the game. As well, she struggled with controlling the emotional side of her game, something male athletes have been ingrained and socialized to control since they were young, and then grew into a mature, thinking player about the game.

Playing with Pain

Feder (1994) tells us that in a patriarchal society women aren't supposed to have the kind of nerves and intestinal fortitude it takes to compete. Playing with pain is viewed as part of the sport ethic, one's sporting identity, and improving one's skill comes with learning to live with and welcome pain, according to Malcolm (2006). But I agree more with the view that enduring of pain and injuries while playing sports is seen as courageous and a marker of masculinity (Anderson, 2008; Fine, 1987; Lesko, 2001; Malcolm, 2006; Messner, 1992; Swain, 2003). "Bodies may become merely tools or a machine to be utilized. Physical and emotional pain are nuisances to be ignored or minimized" Lesko (2001, p. 160) writes. Injuries that are suspected by teammates as minimal cause players to be blackballed or reduce playing time, thus there is a push to play through even the most serious of injuries some times.

In *Discipline & Punish* Foucault (1977) writes when certain things are put into place, bodies can be transformed into docile ones that give themselves up to whatever system is exerting control over them. He gives the military as an example of an institution breaking down bodies and retraining them, making them into soldiers through deliberate construction that removes their agency and power to fight against it. Anderson (2008) maintains:

team sports approximate a "near-total" institution. This is because, much like the military, sport uses myths of glory, patriotism, and masculine idolatry, along with corporeal discipline and structures of rank, division, uniform, rules, and punishment, to subordinate individual agency and construct a fortified ethos of orthodox masculinity. (p. 266)

Anderson's point here is that athletes who conform to the expectations of the team, sacrificing themselves for the benefit of it, will succeed, gaining prestige and benefits while continually reinforcing sport as a masculine pursuit that allows for no digression regarding challenges to the gender order. It is all about the team. Failure to conform to the highly institutionalized world of athletics and the particulars of a sport's culture make cause those who are viewed as less committed to be shunned and labeled in a variety of ways either to force them out or to get them to conform.

The pain principle is easily at work seen in male-dominated sports like American football, ice hockey, and rugby. Schacht (1996) found in his study of rugby players and the gendered nature of that sport that those players who endured pain, concealed it, went back to play with it were held in the highest regard. And it was for the injured player to comment on his own injury or pain; that was left to the other players. In that study it was more important for the players to be able to withstand pain rather than inflict it upon others intentionally.

Injuries are, in a sense, medals that attest to one's masculinity to be proudly discussed and embellished on in the future (over time, injuries often become more severe than they initially were). Even the blood from minor cuts and abrasions often were proudly smeared across the front of one's jersey for all to see.

(Schacht, 1996, p. 557)

To be injured is to set oneself apart from other players, from those who don't play, and just as importantly, from women. For setting oneself apart reinforces male superiority and dominance over women and other subordinated males.

In his study of young British schoolboys and the role of the body in constructing identities and establishing power and domination through sport, Swain (2003) tells us:

Schools provide a key site where different masculinities are produced through performances that draw on the different cultural resources that are available in each setting. Masculinity does not exist as an ontological given, but comes into existence as people act; that is, the social and material practices through which, and by which, the boys' masculine identities are defined are generally described in terms of what they do with/to their bodies. (p. 300)

Swain (2003) says boys bodies are developed through active participation in practices that form the structures that define what their bodies are and that the boys are indeed aware of these practices as the practices themselves “communicate signs/messages about their self-identity. The body is thus an integral part of identity and of our biographies, for the process of making and becoming a body also involves the project of making the self.”

Swain (2003) writes:

It was important for a boy to refrain from showing weakness by admitting the feeling of pain and, particularly, by crying. In any game of physical contact, ability to withstand bodily pain is frequently going to be put to the test, but for most boys crying is equated with being a “wimp” or a “sissy”. Having said this, although the sports field was accepted as a place for aggressive forms of physical domination, many of the boys were wary of assaulting and inflicting their bodies with too much pain. (p. 305)

Lesko (2001) suggests schools continue to endorse those activities and attitudes that masculinize it. This is what competitive athletics in high schools are all about. Lesko

(2001) makes the connection between high school football and war, noting parallels between the language of football and nationalism. Further, those star athletes are part of the few, the privileged who gain access to a high school hierarchal system of domination over others and who enjoy entitlements those others do not. The pain principle, playing through pain, is another characteristic that reinforces the specialness of male athletes who sacrifice their bodies for the team and who display levels of courage not demonstrated by others. This idea of playing with the pain reinforces a masculine ideal. The body becomes a tool with which to wage war against an opponent, a male opponent, and it is used by some athletes to dominate others, male and female.

But if boys are seen being concerned about the maintenance and appearance of their bodies, willing their bodies to assist in their self-formations, then what about girls? If we buy in to what Swain (2003) and Lesko (2001) and others say about schools being a site where masculinities are contested and endorsed, then shouldn't it be agreed that schools are a site where girls, too, challenge those masculine performances as they experiment with their own masculinities? I argue the hierarchies found in high school football and perhaps some other high school sports, the privileges afforded to some males, and the pain principle are not reserved solely for males who play sports like football. I suggest that these some of these characteristics may also be found in high school sports like softball, which some would argue is a masculinized sport, giving female athletes like my daughter opportunities to play and experiment with masculine traits and characteristics that may not be afforded to her off the field because it is not socially acceptable for a woman to demonstrate competitiveness, aggression, strategizing, intimidation, and strength.

Malcolm (2006) found in her study of socializing pain and playing softball that girls do adapt to the sport ethic and learned to deal with pain and minor injuries by minimizing the pain and working through it. Malcolm (2006) suggests when it comes to playing through the pain one's gender is not a deciding factor. Female athletes not only play with pain, they compete while injured "to maintain their athletic identities, to avoid negative sanctions, and to win the respect of their teammates, coaches, and fans" just as male athletes do (Malcolm, 2006, p. 499). Sabo (2004) found some differences though in how female athletes dealt with their pain or injuries. Female athletes discussed their injuries with teammates and also were aware of a connection between expectations for masculinity and playing with pain while the male athletes Sabo interviewed did not discuss their injuries with teammates nor did they express an awareness that a badge of masculinity is bestowed upon athletes who compete while injured. Malcolm's (2006) research is interesting in that she attempts to fill a hole in the literature by looking at how girls are socialized regarding pain and sport whereas other studies to date have focused on athletes both male and female (although there is much less research devoted to female athletes) who have already incorporated cultural messages about that accepts playing with pain as part of the one's sporting identity. Her work focuses on injuries sustained by preadolescent and adolescent girls that would not be considered severe; in fact, it was the girls' reactions to minor bumps and bruises and scratches with which Malcolm (2006), as an assistant coach, became irritated with her female ballplayers and began to look at how girls are socialized to playing with pain. Coaches would downplay complaints and attention-seeking behavior by the girls, make jokes, and otherwise tell the girls to shake it off. Eventually, over the course of the season, most of the girls with higher skill abilities

adopted this masculine trait of playing with pain. And interestingly, Malcolm (2006) notes those girls who were not white but African American adopted this playing with pain attitude toward sport more frequently, explaining it this way:

This difference is most likely attributable to the recognized racial variations in socialization practices and cultural expectations related to gender identities. In part due to the historical legacy of slavery and oppression, African American women have traditionally been excluded from the dominant cultural images of ideal womanhood. As a result, black female athletes are less likely to be seen as violating norms of proper femininity, and their athleticism is more widely accepted, both within and outside the African American community. (p. 519)

While the purpose of Malcolm's (2006) research was not focused solely on class and race, she did note that adopting the sporting ethic seemed something girls from families with resources were more inclined to do, which makes sense if those families have access to training, supplies, and support both on and off the field. And her preliminary conclusions with regards to race and African-American ballplayers being more committed to the sport ethic and playing with pain falls in line with the research cited in the previous chapters concerning stereotyping of minority female athletes versus white athletes.

Theberge (1997) noted female ice hockey players managed all sorts of pains and injuries in their sport from broken bones to groin pulls to bruises and sprains. She too found that as with male athletes injury and pain were accepted as part of the game and players were no reason to give less than one's best effort.

It used to be that catchers would be the only ones to don the special gear of knee and chest protectors as well as the mask to protect the face. That is no longer the case today. In addition to catchers, many other players on the infield and the outfield have taken to wearing masks. In the most obvious sense, the mask provides the player and additional layer of protection; much like sliding shorts protect the thighs from some awful-looking raspberries. But for the pitcher, wearing a protective mask gives her an added layer of protection because she is so close to the batter and has much less reaction time to protect her face and head against a ball that comes back at an equally fast if not faster rate of speed, sometimes 50 to 60 miles an hour, putting the pitcher in harm's way, just 40 feet from the batter. Compare this to baseball, in which the pitcher is a bit over 60 feet from the plate. Twenty feet might not seem like much difference, but it may give the baseball pitcher a fraction of a second longer to react to a line drive straight back to him. Concussions, broken bones are part of the risk for any player but more so for the pitcher. So it is very common to see female pitchers, especially the younger ones, wearing masks to protect their faces.

But the face is not the only part of the body vulnerable to the stinging and potentially deadly softballs being driven back to the pitcher by the batter by a perfect line drive. Hillary endured playing with debilitating pain in her feet and surgery to correct it, injured shoulders, fingers worn raw by pitch after pitch, line drives to the chest that knocked her flat on her back, shots to the calves and knees and thighs, bouts of dizziness brought on by learning to pitch with her eyes closed.

Many times did she cry; many times did she not want to get back out there and face batters. And there were times her father and I told her to hang up her cleats if that

was what she wanted. We didn't pin all our hopes of Hillary going to college on a softball scholarship, for that matter. We knew she would have access to an education through her academic achievements. We also told her if she didn't stay active in sports, she was going to be working a part-time job. So what was it that kept her coming back when so many others would have quit? Certainly, I believe Hillary was flirting with the masculine side of her identity. She was always welcomed back after returning from injury and held in high regard by the coaches and players and parents when she did so. But I think she may have been engaging also in what Thomas Moore (1992) calls "working the stuff of the soul" (p. 184). The job, the work of softball, was still so central to Hillary's identity, that it "wakened and satisfie[d] the very root of being" (p. 185). Having that recognition, that power, that privilege, that status was still so very important to her. It wasn't until much later that she struggled with the soul work and the role her softball had in it. Swain (2003) writes:

Sporting success was a key signifier of successful masculinity, and high performance in sport and games (both on the field and in the playground) was generally the single most effective way of gaining popularity and status in the male peer group. Sport not only provided a way of measuring a boy's masculine accomplishment against each other, but also against the wider world of men. In all three schools the best athletes were generally the most popular in their class and school year. (p. 302)

Clearly, Hillary enjoyed the status of being a pitcher on her high school and competitive travel ball teams and was for the time being willing to play in order to reap the rewards she may have felt she had earned by sacrificing her body to the sport, rewards typically

related to male athletes who play with pain. The respect she earned came through her success as a pitcher. She received a lot of attention for it. But was all the attention due to her athletic performance, or did some of it have to do with her appearance on the field? She is, after all, tall, thin, blonde, and tan—is she not considered the heterosexual, Westernized ideal of the feminine?

And why should students of curriculum studies care about sports and athletes? What do they have to do with us? On the use of drugs and the natural athlete, Derrida (1992/1995) writes about the use of steroids to improve athletic effort and ability:

One still supposes that the athletic hero should treat his body naturally. As such he works out, he makes his body work in a production that is not simply individual. Through the socialization of sports, whether it be professional or not, this so-called disinterested work brings into play everything that relates to education: and first and foremost to the education of the will as the overcoming of self in the self....Sports can become literally intoxicating and depoliticizing....When one seeks to extend these “natural powers”, it is altogether natural, I mean inevitable, that one should think of using such artificially natural methods to go beyond man, toward the hero, the superman, and other figures of a man who would be more man, more than man.... The use of drugs in sports is condemned because it cheats nature, but also because it cheats a certain idea of justice (the equality of all participants in the contest). One wants to uphold the integrity not only of the natural body but also of good will, of athletic effort, of consciousness, and of the spirit which maneuvers the body in the athletic effort, in

this free work or in this politically healthy game which is, and from Plato on, has been athletic competition. (p. 249)

Derrida's (1992/1995) point is clear here; he objects to the alteration of the human body in the quest to win the sports contest, conceding that the human desire to reach a state of supreme athletic ability is inherently inevitable, and the temptation (financial, egotistical, or otherwise) may be too great for some. For athletes, particularly men, this temptation to live with pain or take measures to play longer with pain adds an interesting spin to what we consider an acceptable expectation for today's athlete—male or female. Lesko (2001) discusses the pain principle among male athletes in her work on youth culture and sports. Men, more specifically, football players, are conditioned mentally to forge ahead when their physical conditions might signal stop. To the male athlete, pain is a phenomenon to be mastered, dealt with, and channeled elsewhere:

High status athletes must embrace pain; facing pain with courage distinguishes strong men from weak others. Football, of course, is especially brutal. In a recent survey of retired football players, 78 percent reported that they suffer physical disabilities related directly to football, and 66 percent believed that having played football will negatively affect their life spans. Boys are taught that to endure pain is courageous, to survive pain is a manly... Male athletes learn to view their bodies as instruments and thus, while dependent upon their bodies, athletes may be also alienated from them. Bodies may become merely tools or a machine to be utilized. Physical and emotional pain are nuisances to be ignored or minimized, often through the use of... drugs. (Lesko, 2001, p.161)

Lesko (2001) refers to the body as an instrument, a tool, a machine—clearly the same lexicon of some other writers on the posthuman. Notice also that she refers to athletes of high status. By ability or salary, high status athletes may feel the need to maintain their positions by suffering with the pain and maintaining their toehold in American sports culture. I remember a movie that was released back in the late 1970 which starred Nick Nolte and Mac Davis. Nolte and Davis were the two main characters in *North Dallas Forty*, the story of two football players battling injury, trying to hang on to their sports careers. Throughout the movie, the two actors could be seen popping pills, receiving injections of various types of painkillers, and participating in various physical therapy regimens to ease the aches and pains of their aging, battered, and abused bodies. Clearly, the characters in this movie (based on a real football team at the time) adhered to the pain principle about which Lesko (2001) writes nearly 30 years later. The plot line of this movie is closer to reality than we might like to admit. Take a look at any newspaper or internet headline or cable news network and it is not hard to find scandals and cover-ups related to the advantages athletes will seek to prolong or improve their playing and earning potential. No question that some male athletes may and have succumbed to the pressure to preserve or enhance their athletic prowess, by diving into posthuman pool; and no doubt we probably know about far fewer than those who actually resort to altering their bodies this way.

But do we see the same in young female athletes who are serious about the game of fast pitch softball? In many places where the weather permits, female athletes work year round in an effort to make themselves stand out against their competition, to possibly secure an athletic scholarship to play softball at the collegiate level. And the

weather afforded to us here in the South makes almost year round fast pitch softball the norm for those who find softball leagues sponsored by the local recreation department not competitive enough. What fills the hole before and after the regular school ball season is the travel ball circuit.

Travel teams can afford to be more selective in who gets to play. It's almost completely opposite of how recreation department leagues operate where a parent pays a registration fee and the child gets to play a portion of every game. Potential team members must try out, and if the skills or ability aren't there, then it is highly unlikely a girl will be chosen. Some of the more elite teams in the area require parents of players who are selected to join to pay as much as \$1,000 each season to help defray the costs of practice equipment and tournament fees.

When the team is not playing, it is in training. At empty school fields, at summer camps and minicamps held throughout the year, at facilities where virtual training of the athlete is the newest cutting edge technology (think swing or pitch analyzer), the products and services are available to those who can afford it. Of course, what is required to attend such camps and clinics as well as to participate in tournaments is money. And parents who can afford it seem willing to pay it. Each week we received email updates at our house from an exclusive softball camp held at the Columbus, GA, softball complex. We received mailings and emails weekly advertising clinics at college campuses and catalogs touting the latest tool to extend the performance of the athletic body. And despite these rough economic times, it seems that there is no shortage in these types of camps and training aids and equipment. The subculture of fastpitch softball continues seemingly unaffected by our current national economic standing. We as parents have been caught up

in valuing our daughter's bodies as athletic ones; some of us, too, have been consumed by the perception that the body as a piece of information, a sporting machine, is of value and one we want to possess. Our daughters, too, feel the pressures to have the latest, greatest gadgets to make them better players amongst the teams that exist on the travel ball circuit as they compare who has what bat, who has signed to which college, and which camps and clinics the girls have attended.

Apple and Buras (2006), tell us opportunity structures are created by conservative movements. They indicate that the middle classes are “anxiously engaged in a variety of class strategies aimed at securing both present and future educational benefits for their children” (p. 15). The authors talk of middle class parents negotiating their way through the educational system, searching for advice and seeking resources to give their children a leg up regarding educational decisions. The authors suggest that the middle class seeks to make the most of advantages that may be available to it by making decisions that may not always be the most rational. In other words, applying this to the realm of fast pitch softball and the middle class families that embrace that way of life, I can tell you of many a parent who thinks their child is the one who will be the one to obtain the full ride scholarship to play ball at a Division I school. As the skill level and competition increase, those parents are the ones getting private lessons, sending their girls to camps, and taking advantage of any other opportunity that might give their daughters a leg up on the competition to secure proportionately fewer scholarships compared to those that sons might receive. I would not be honest if I didn't think my own daughter may have had a chance to play ball at a smaller college or university somewhere. But despite the lessons and the camps, the desire to excel at the next level was lost as she grew older for a

number of reasons. She was a very good technical pitcher; not a lot of speed, but Hillary had a lot of junk pitches to throw--drop, curve, off speed, change ups. But she somewhere along the line lost (or maybe never had) the drive and desire and passion it required to pursue such a goal. By the end of her senior year, she was burned out physically and emotionally.

The fast pitch softball season picks up in February usually and continues through July, right before school ball takes over. What I'm leading to here is that with the increased competition for comparatively fewer athletic scholarships than are offered to males, more girls are starting to play competitive softball earlier—after all, the scouts and recruits don't typically come to the average high school softball game. They can be found at travel team tournaments and showcases. And with this increase competition, naturally we see more injuries to younger female athletes, injuries that often require weeks of physical therapy, drug therapy (like anti-inflammatory and pain management medicines), and just as often surgery to mend or replace body parts worn out too soon. The pressure, or desire for that matter, to begin to play at such an early age when young bones and muscles are not fully or completely developed, obviously increases the risk of injury. And when girls are encouraged to play before they are physically ready or fully healed from injuries, what surprise is it that the injury can and does worsen. Coupled with this are the normal growth changes found in adolescence, which include vision changes, growing feet and growth plates, hormonal changes, the onset of menstruation, all of which affect the female athlete's body as she races toward the posthuman finish line just as fast as her male counterpart might. Wenner (1998) writes:

A central lesson of sports is about male physicality (that is, one's strength and muscles) and how this relates to one's moral stock. Sport helps link the notion that through physicality the male is naturally dominant, with the notion that courage in the face of pain is archetypal of the male. The promise is that physicality and pain will bring gain. This may be the central promise of male sports. It fuels the naturalization and terms of both competition and aggression. Playing through pain means that "real men" naturally use physicality in combination with working through pain to compete, and one bothers with this because one competes only in order to win. Playing aggressively, and even employing one's body (or a sports tool) as a violent weapon, are natural aids that help one be competitive. By learning to play through pain and adversity, one can aggress or take advantage of others who cannot. And in the spectre of sports, those who "cannot" are tainted as "weak" males. (p. 311)

I would suggest that the young women and girls who choose to pursue softball full-time, that is, beyond the recreational department and/or school season, do indeed feel the pressure to play with pain just as their male counterparts who play baseball do. I see more and more young women continuing to play a sport they love while possible getting the chance to go to college and possibly play there. Or through wanting to present opportunities like scholarships in athletics to their children, parents continue to insist girls play until inevitable health issues arise and medical or therapeutic interventions are required. When children play sports, there no doubt will be injuries. Parents sign off on insurance paperwork and offer up copies of their insurance cards at the beginning of each ball season in order for their children to play ball. And with year-round sports like fast

pitch softball, the time devoted to rest and healing is many times put on the back burner to simmer.

Broken hands. Broken ankles. Strained backs and shoulders and ankles. All of these are common injuries and ailments of a typical softball team. My own daughter was knocked flat on her back one weekend when she took a line drive to the middle of the chest after she released a pitch from 35 feet away. This is in addition to a previous pitching injury to her shoulder which required three months of physical therapy and surgery on her foot which required months and months to heal. Countless blisters, bruises, sore and pulled muscles, and shots to the arm during batting practice or games are not at all unusual for the girl who plays this demanding sport. According to Christensen (2001) female athletes have higher rates of injury than men to the shoulder, knee, and foot. So what we see here are girls who are injured in such ways that require physical therapy, drug therapy, surgery, and myriad other medical interventions, including visits to the emergency room or urgent care clinics to repair their bodies to a state that allows them to return sooner to the game and play longer. Injuries from improper form or timing are routine, especially in young athletes who may not have the benefit of coaches who know proper technique and mechanics themselves. The types of injuries I mentioned are happening on teams with girls as young as eight years old. It seems in our desire to have our girls active and pursuing possible athletic careers we have succumbed to Heidegger's concept of enframing (Thomson, 2005, p. 145). Through enframing everything about us becomes information; indeed, we are surrounded by it and pushed toward becoming digitized humans so as to get the maximum punch for our dollars and time. It's about reducing ourselves as humans and, here, athletes to objects

whose sole purpose is to win games and tournaments. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the world of professional sports, and as I argue, more increasingly so at the lower, entry levels into sport. Thacker (2003) as well supports this view when he tells us that the body is essentially information, one that can be altered, reprogrammed, and manipulated to serve purposes on which we place particular value (p. 86). This is what we have become, or rather we have made our children become, in this era of fix it now, fix it quick, so I don't lose my edge over the competition while I heal.

Further, female athletes carry an additional burden that male athletes do not. While the doors to the locker room have opened up to them through Title IX and increased media exposure and popularity, many female athletes seem still to be sensitive to how they look. I see it very obviously at the high school level and even at the middle school level. That is, you can still be an athlete, but you should look and act in such a way that that society deems feminine (Ivkovic, Franic, Bojanic, and Pecina, 2007). You better have ribbons in your hair and a little make up on. It's just an expected part of the game.

As a pitcher, my own daughter, who has played softball since she was very young, put a lot of wear and tear on her athlete's body under normal circumstances. But when she developed physical issues began to impede her performance, three choices became clear—live with the pain, pursue medical alternatives, or give up the sport altogether. She faced the same dilemmas male athletes faced.

Has the constant dragging of her right foot as part of the windmill pitch over the myriad years she has been pitching aggravated what was probably a genetic predisposition to this bone and joint malformation? It's possible. But throwing hundreds

or perhaps even thousands of pitches hasn't helped matters either. She has suffered with chronic foot pain for years, all while continuing to pitch.

When one lives with chronic pain, I suppose in a way one gets used to coping with it. She complained most every day about the pain in her feet. Nonprescription and prescription medications, countless types of cleats, and custom made orthotic inserts for her shoes failed to relieve what was becoming excruciating pain. If she didn't have surgery to correct the misalignment of joints, that misalignment would likely worsen and she'd continue to live with unbearable pain that would follow her off the field as well. To her, living with the foot pain was becoming debilitating; it was affecting her ability to be competitive with other pitchers and players. It had gotten to the point where she couldn't physically keep up during team workouts. She lagged behind but continued to work as best she could, hoping her coaches and teammates wouldn't think she was slacking off by using the excuse that her feet hurt her way too much. So the decision to become pain-free finally came after years of coping.

Clark (2008), in discussing autopoiesis, suggests that we have desire to remain an autopoietic system, to live, to keep oneself alert and to avoid equilibrium. If we believe that we as systems are inextricably linked to our environments and that we adapt to our environments, then it is easy to consider that if Hillary didn't adapt to her environment through medical intervention then the autopoietic state of her athletic identity/system would disintegrate. This sport has been part of her identity for many, many years. Yet, playing with the pain has caused her to lose her edge, what it takes to remain an active, autopoietic system. She has the intellectual part of the game down, knowing what pitches the batters facing her can't hit, knowing the strategy of the game, but knowing this and

being able to transform it into winning on the field has been affected by her physical limitations.

During the surgery in December a few years ago, sections of bone were cut from both sides of her right foot, the one she drags during the pitching sequence. Additionally, the tendon was cut and a two-inch pin inserted into the side of her foot and into the big toe to help with positioning and realignment. Recovering from the surgery itself was lengthy and painful as well. Her foot looked like it had been through a meat grinder, a brutal reminder of what she was willing to endure to continue playing ball and relieving the excruciating pain.

Now, a couple of years later, Hillary has only the thin, fading scars from the surgeon's precise scalpel to remind her of the pain she endured. She is completely pain free in that one foot and has resumed normal activities, even jogging without pain. For us, her parents, the issue is not so much extending or improving her chances to play ball at the collegiate level. That is certainly not the primary value we have placed on the technology available to heal her foot, for we know the chances are slim indeed that she'll secure an athletic ride to college. We also recognize that she has talents and interests other than softball. Rather, it is more about improving her quality of life.

My daughter should consider herself very fortunate. I know her father and I do. We were able to access the medicines and technological advances she needed to become more productive and to live pain-free. She was able to continue to be able to hear the noise from the crowd, the noise that rejuvenates her autopoietic system, challenging both her physical and intellectual capabilities on the field as long as she wanted to play. We

have been able to take advantage of the medical technology out there to help our daughter.

Weaver (2009) points out that we are embracing our new monsters in regards to our teenagers, giving them whatever is necessary to make our teenage children happy, especially in the area of cosmetic surgery, spurred on by all sorts of television shows that transform normal girls into ravishing beauties. Taken further, I wonder, did my husband and I do the same thing for our daughter who is happy when she is able to play ball? I hope not. Playing softball was extremely important to her, but it's more important to us to give opportunities to develop her leadership and self-discipline skills, figure out what kind of person she wants to be on and off the field, keep out of trouble and off the couch, and engage in a healthy, active lifestyle.

Derrida (1981/1972) cautions:

There is always a surprise in store for the anatomy or physiology of any criticism that might think it had mastered the game, surveyed all the threads at once, deluding itself, too, in wanting to look at the text without touching it, without laying a hand on the "object," without risking—which is the only chance of entering into the game, by getting a few fingers caught—the addition of some new thread. (p. 63)

This quote holds important implications, especially for those of us students in the field of curriculum studies. We can and should unravel the threads that contribute to who and what we are as individuals, families, communities, and societies. Because it is through unraveling we can see that nothing exists in isolation anymore; everything is connected,

and those connections make for stories to be shared and understood as part of one's education about the world in we live.

Playing With Emotions, Playing With Intellect

A second way in which Hillary played with masculinity concerned the level of emotion and intellect she displayed during games. I have been privy to observe what I consider the interesting phenomenon regarding the wearing of masks during fast pitch softball games over the last several years since my daughter began playing through our local recreation department, middle school, and high school teams as well as her participation on travel softball teams around the region. Hillary, my then 16-year-old daughter, wore a mask, but this was a mask of a different sort. This was the kind of mask that allowed one to embrace a situation or a role without regard to what others thought or even perhaps what Hillary thought she ought to be like on versus off the field. Hillary donned at the prelude of each game a mask, but it was at once one you both could and could not see. She was performing gender here, and that mask helped her negotiate what Schippers (2002) calls the pushing, pulling, and transforming of gender rules and meanings with which she has grown up.

Once a wearer of the protective mask of which I spoke earlier, my daughter eventually chose *not* to wear the physical piece of safety equipment to protect herself; nonetheless, she wore an invisible mask all the same on the ball field. Given the very real possibility of injury, why did she choose not to wear one? The answer is quite revealing: wearing a mask prevented the opponent from seeing her "stare down" and erased the level of intensity and intimidation she could present to the opposing team. So this invisible mask, one that she chose to wear, was necessary, according to Carlson (2002),

“in order to grow and develop, to become what they are not yet, to adapt to a rapidly-changing world, and to realize their fuller possibilities...people need to be prepared to leave safe harbors and venture out” (p. 2). This invisible mask helped Hillary to venture out, to become a person she is not off the field. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that the invisible mask helped Hillary unleash the assertive, aggressive, masculine side of herself so that she could be successful in this sport.

I started to notice this mask my empowered daughter Hillary exhibited when she began pitching in the lower age groups, perhaps sixth grade. In reflecting further, I can recall how some of the other parents and coaches would comment on Hillary’s persona when she took to the pitching rubber. She became a different person on the mound. She took control, became a leader to her catcher and the other players on her team. She had a job to do, and she knew that. But the invisible mask she wore was vital in allowing her to do this. It allowed her to become someone else for a while, someone who took on a power position, someone who was a leader in the pack, someone who displayed masculine attributes of leadership, competitiveness, and assertiveness versus submissiveness and subordination. Bird (1996) focused specifically on the connection between individual masculinity and gender norms in small groups and found “when personal conflicts with ideal masculinity are suppressed both in the homosocial group and by individual men, the cultural imposition of hegemonic masculinity goes uncontested. Being masculine, in other words, means being not-female” (p. 122). The masculinity ideal involves, among other things, a detachment and independence from emotions.

Clearly, this is what Hillary appeared to be doing, detaching herself from her emotions in order to maintain control and assertiveness on the mound. To show her

emotions, which she struggled with on occasion, was to allow herself to be seen as female, something not so valued in the world of competitive sport. Much like Jim Carrey's character in *The Mask*, for Hillary, the mask gave her the self-confidence to "perform" in front of dozens of people. In Carrey's film, the main character is a pushover, a mild-mannered bank teller until he stumbles upon an ancient mask that releases his inner self. When he wears the mask, he is transformed with a superego and super powers, powers like strength, mental acuity, aggressiveness, assertiveness, and so on. Initially wearing that mask allowed another side of Hillary to emerge out on the mound and became a way for her to release her aggression and competitiveness that may not be acceptable in our socially constructed world of what it means to be feminine and soft and ladylike. Pinar (2006) tells us "because daily life generates frustrations...each individual must turn aggression inward or release it, possibly at some future time, directing it at some acceptable target" (p. 96). The catcher's mitt is certainly an acceptable target, and Hillary has on occasion been able to tap into that aggression when she is mad at her father or at me, for example. But demonstrating those types of masculine behaviors on the field can sometimes cause female athletes like Hillary to be stereotyped as described in Chapters One and Two.

Whether she threw strikes or balls, the facial countenance remained the same—expressionless. But I'm sure that belied what was going on in her head, methodically remembering where the batter likes the ball in the zone, picturing good technique, giving herself mental pep talks, taking advantage of the 20 seconds she's allowed from the time she receives the ball until she begins the pitching motion by stepping up to the plate. And while many softball pitchers at all levels don't reveal their emotions while in the pitcher's

circle, compare that to some other female sports. Ice skating and gymnastics come to mind. These sports are clearly grueling physically intense ones, yet wearing the mask of the forced smile, is part of the requirement. These sports where women do not face a competitor directly across a net or across a field are held to a normed standard which perpetuates patriarchal ideals of how women in sports should appear. I think one would be hard pressed to find anyone that would argue that the masks the female athletes in these sports are forced, part of the job. Feder (1994) suggests “the more successful a female athlete, the more she tries to embody the culturally appropriate gender role...a role essentially at odds with her athleticism” (p. 63). Women in these sports wear these masks, as I call them, because they are equally physically able to execute demanding and must, therefore, keep from being labeled overly masculine and so must overdetermine their femininity.

Deleuze and Guattari (2006) writes in *Triple Takes on Curricular Worlds* that in medicine the white coat that doctors wear sometimes finds doctors becoming the coat. They do this with awareness, both conscious and unconscious, of their power, their status, and the respect and status they receive from patients. The coat signifies prestige and power and boundaries. I would suggest that the same could be said of Hillary who wears a mask of a different sort. Hillary chose to wear an invisible mask to demonstrate her power, domination, and ownership of game time situations. In her work on homosociality and the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity, Bird (1996) writes “the repercussion for violating the hegemonic meaning of emotional detachment, in other words, is to be "put on the outs," that is, to be ostracized from one's male homosocial group” (p. 126). To show one's emotions on the softball field is taboo as well. Even

though these girls are teenagers now, emotions get the best of them at times. They know overemotional players will be shunned in the dugout and between tournaments and games. So, perhaps Hillary donned the mask to preclude her from that potential blacklisting. To show emotions is to give up a bit of her aggressiveness and sense of being in control.

Interesting, too, is Messner's (1992) discussion of the types of masculinity valued in sport. Boys from lower class neighborhoods clearly relied on the physicality of sport. But boys from middle and upper class environments valued the intellectual competition of sport over the physicality. Such a difference reinforced class separation. Middle and upper class athletes used sports as a way to enhance their identity not create it. Sport was used in some instances as a way to get to a better school, for example. Even the talk among them focused on the intellectual aspects of the game and the history or statistics. And Messner (1992) suggests as well that this type of competition was used to cover the average ability levels of these men who had other opportunities and resources to achieve mobility and status. Further, Messner (1992) says that these boys realized this difference while the athletes from the lower classes did not. As Hillary grew into a competent pitcher with several pitches under her command, it was interesting to watch the evolution of her maturity in knowing the game on an intellectual level. She remembered batters and what pitches they couldn't hit from game to game; she was allowed to call her own pitches with the catcher many times, rather than the coach calling all the pitches. She knew what she needed to do with the ball on certain plays and became a pitcher who was able to strategize about the game at hand. She was demonstrating a level of intellectualism attributed to male athletes. Yet, Blumenfeld-Jones (2004) cautions the

intellectual nature of the pursuit must not overtake the emotion or the ability to let go and be consumed by the performance. Regarding his experiences in the discovery of the field of dance and its influence on his own life, Blumenfeld-Jones (2004) relates:

Performing is a very different experience from dancing for oneself. The whole purpose of dancing had to change. No longer was it a personal experience of joy and pleasure but now a measured experience of what the audience might see or not see, how to communicate to the audience whatever it was that I wished to communicate. No longer was dancing just for me. (p. 133)

Like Blumenfeld-Jones (2004), Hillary had to learn how to recognize and use her intellect while simultaneously learning how to let go, to not force the pitch, to let her body take over and naturally perform what it had been trained to do. She had to learn how “unthink” form and function.

Once the games concluded, it was back to another identity, another set of rules, another performance. The softball mask was tucked away, revealing the unsure teenager trying to shift back into her previous self. She questioned me about her performance out there. But not every question was about her technical delivery of the ball. Nor was every comment her take on how she got “ripped off” by “Blue”, the umpire behind the plate, when he wouldn’t call strikes for what she thought were surely perfect pitches in the strike zone. Rather, many of her questions have to do with how she looked when her mask was on. How did she look out there? Did she look mean? Did she look powerful? Did she look in control? Did you see me stare down that runner on third? are questions I could expect to hear from her after each game, questions that for Hillary sought affirmation of this identity’s existence. Hillary’s sense of self is comprised from what she

imagines about herself as much as what she or others think to be real or reality about her persona, identity, and performance on the mound. Clearly, she was seeking feedback on how she performed in this role. She wanted to know how this identity, this performance appeared to others. Was she believable in performing this role? Synnott (1990) writes:

The social face is the public face, and requires the rapid changing of masks or expressions. Only under conditions of extreme emotion or alone or among friends does the mask “slip”, and the private face, the real person appear. Thus the face will often be shielded....Privacy, the private face is preserved. Facial expressions therefore are generally carefully monitored to preserve the desired mask. (p. 61)

This mask Hillary wore afforded her the wherewithal to venture out of safe harbors, borrowing Carlson’s (2002) metaphor, to become someone else on the pitcher’s mound for an hour and a half, someone who didn’t have to worry about the pressures to look or act a certain way in order to be considered feminine.

Interestingly, just as Hillary plays with masculinities on the pitcher’s mound, the sport of cheerleading would beg us to take another look as it requires performativity of its athletes, and the male athletes in the sport must delve into a realm of performance traditionally associated with females and feminine behavior. Grindstaff and West (2006) assert:

Male cheerleaders recognize the tension between conventional notions of performativity, coded as feminine, and conventional notions of heterosexual masculinity (also noted by Davis 1990). This tension makes straight men, as well as gay men invested in maintaining a straight image, initially resistant to the more feminized elements of cheerleading, including dancing and jumping, certain cheer

motions, and the repertoire of gestures and facial expressions in the informal performance of spirit. Men on coed teams facilitate the visual spectacle of cheerleading, particularly through stunting, tumbling, and pyramid building, but they generally are not asked to smile constantly, bounce up and down, shake pom-poms, or wiggle their fingers in the air (a gesture known as “spirit fingers”). To do so would risk being labeled gay, a scenario described by one male cheerleader as “the gay cheerleader syndrome”. (p. 510)

The authors of the study stress that it is not sexual orientation that is at the heart of the issue but the performance of gender. Gender performance is monitored by college administrators, coaches, alumni, and fellow squad members. For those involved in this study, the image of the school should outweigh anyone’s personal sexual orientation, which sets the stage for the masculinization of cheerleading for men and the feminization of it for women (Grindstaff & West, 2006).

Cheerleading has definite boundaries when it comes to performance. Eric Anderson (2008) writes:

Gendered institutions are always dynamic arenas of tension and struggle, but perhaps there is no other institution in which gender is more naturalized than sport. As a highly segregated, homophobic, sexist, and misogynistic gender regime, sport not only contributes to the gender order, but it also reproduces a conservative and stabilizing form of masculinity that renders considerable costs for both sexes. (p. 263)

And just as cheerleading has its own boundaries which encircle it, so too does Hillary’s performance on the field. While softball Hillary performs gender and identity through a

sporting self on the softball field, she has been caught up in a role requiring another performance, another identity, one that seems to be just as powerful, maybe more so than the one demanded by the athletic world. Carlson and Dimitriadis (2003) share about education and the role the formation of identity should have in it:

Education is not, from a progressive standpoint, about the transmission of knowledge so much as the formation of identity. This is because most struggles over social justice are about the domination, silencing, oppression, and marginalization of specific identity groups. Identity thus has much to do with power (either empowerment or disempowerment) and with learning to position oneself within historic struggles over power. For those groups that have been historically marginalized, education must be a process of learning to both affirm identity (through solidarity with others similarly disempowered and/or oppressed), and to reconstruct and represent identity in ways that challenge dominant negative representations and stereotypes. Consequently, shifts occurring in the ways identity is theorized, in the ways identity is represented in popular culture, and in how identity is actually lived and experienced have profound implications for the reconstruction of democratic education. (p. 18)

Women have always been a marginalized group, and women and girls who play sports are then doubly marginalized because of their gender and their desire to enter in a male-dominated arena. Yet, more and more girls continue to push for acceptance into this world by playing earlier, longer, more competitively through travel leagues of all sorts, and by demanding equal access to facilities and equipment and coaches and scholarships. They continue, as do those men and women who support them, to push the envelope in

order to get into the game, whatever game it is that is of interest to them. And so they are pushing that envelope of access to gain a voice, to gain respect, and to gain entrance into a world that once shut them out. This is not to say that all is equal not, that negative representations and stereotypes have been canceled out; to the contrary, such stigmas and short-changing still exists and is slow moving to change. But progress is being made. They are being empowered through education and other ways of knowing.

The time on a softball field seems to be a sacred one. For most, it can be a time when girls don't have to worry about their clothes, their hair, what their bodies look like, and what they think they need to be like in order to be accepted and viewed as normal, female, or feminine. But the equipment bags are stowed all too soon, the uniforms get thrown into the washer, and it's time for a different mask to be worn, the mask that is approved by society, the one Hillary, too, will enjoy wearing for the time being as the culturally sanctioned event of prom rolled around and required the negotiating of a different type of another performance. She wants to have options; it's important for her to walk in the athletic world, yet it is just as important for her to be able to flirt with the feminine side of herself. She is constructing another identity in relation to others as she did on the softball field. She and her friends are unable to resist such a highly sanctioned cultural event, and I am afraid that I, too, was unable to resist 100 percent of the time. She wants to belong to what Carlson and Dimitriadis (2003) refer to as a normalized community, where the normal is separated from the abnormal. Prom is certainly what I would consider part of the normalized community in our small city, an event where most young people want to try to belong, and a time when many of the young women who live

in this town are willing to conform, to overdetermine their femininity and reinforce societal notions about gender.

Performing Off the Field

Springtime arrived. And with it signaled the rites of passage many American teens anticipate since entering high school. What is it about the high school prom experience that causes some teenage girls to begin planning for it months in advance? Why should those of us interested in curriculum studies care about it? Roseboro (2008) suggests that every day we:

operate with similar ways of positioning subjects. We seek advice from others who are “supposed to know” just as we simultaneously remain skeptical about the ability of some to understand our specific predicament. Our being is contextualized and dependent on the interpretation of others. (p. 27).

As students of curriculum studies, we often are called upon to peel back the layers of what it is we are interested in. If we don't do this, if we don't delve into the heads of our kids and pay attention to what's important to them, we certainly haven't studied them. And, as Roseboro puts it, "How can we educate without studying children?" (2008, p. 16). How can I educate Hillary or give her the tools with which to educate herself to recognize that push, that pull of boundaries about which Schippers (2002) wrote with regard to maneuvering masculinities and femininities within one's own gender?

Pinar (2006) writes that “studying academic knowledge and popular culture and their relationships to each other and to subjectivity and society, we curriculum scholars can devise synoptic texts that complicate the conversation surrounding our field's central question” (p. 56). Young people attach themselves to what matters most to them at that

moment. And for my daughter Hillary and her friends who play softball prom is a chance to negotiate the relationship between their masculine selves on the softball fields and the feminine selves demanded through the rite of passage known as prom. Rites of passage and tradition “transmit cultural expectations and behavioral norms, reveal sociocultural conditions and beliefs, and illuminate aspects of culture and worldview that might otherwise not come under analytic scrutiny” (Howard, 2008, p. 130). The fact that prom and the travel softball season coincide is an interesting intersection of both the masculinity and femininity at play here for my daughter. How will she balance the competing performances required by both of these events?

Amy Best (2004) writes that proms were much like debutante balls but for the working and middle classes during the first part of the twentieth century. During the 1940s high school girls became a prime consumer group to companies that supplied what was needed for the American high school prom. Teen magazines of the time editorialized that the prom was a place and time for girls to practice being women. During the 1950s and the Cold War, Best (2004) writes that attending proms and practicing traditional gender roles served to instill a sense of patriotism and pride in country. But prom’s once popular effect diminished with the coming decades, particularly with the advent of anti-establishment thinking and feminism during the 1960s and 1970s. The return of conservative family values and politics of the 1980s saw the reemergence of proms. To this annual event were added dinners out on the town and limousine rides. Further, proms soon became an event that gay and lesbian students wanted to attend. By the 1990s proms were no longer held in high school gyms; hotels now served as the sites, large enough to

hold bands, deejays, light shows, and professional photographers. Today Best (2004) estimates that the rite of passage known as prom is a 2.5 billion dollar industry.

In her article on high school proms, Best (2004) also researched the public spaces girls occupy as it relates to transforming their identities as they prepare for and attend high school proms. This work suggests that girls, no matter what their economic status, participate in work in which girls participate to experiment and play with different identities, typically the expected femininity that society suggests is the most acceptable. Girls may plan months for this one big evening of the year. The high school prom is a place where girls “negotiate the sexual terrain of school” (Best, 2004, p. 200); it is a sanctioned event in time completely at odds with what schools typically allow regarding the regulation of females dress in schools.

Prom Dress Identity

The prom issues of teen magazines began showing up at our house around December. The pages were dog-eared from use, probably traded between the girls for several days before they arrived on our kitchen table. They were slick, high-end presentations that covered everything from dresses to shoes to hair to accessories to what one’s date should wear; the best of them can rival the wedding magazines that line bookstore shelves. What I was looking at was the essence of institutionalized femininity. On the computer at our house websites were bookmarked months before the actual prom. My own daughter, I was soon to discover, had become caught up in the consumer machine and societal message that would occupy much of her waking hours for the next several months. She was hooked on the feminine ideal and so were her friends. And I was along for the ride looking for the safest place to get off, keeping both my sanity and

wallet intact while making sure her excitement and obsession didn't drown everyone around us.

Once these magazines began to arrive at the house, it soon became clear that not just any dress from an area department store would do. Too many girls from her school would be shopping there, mom. We just had to travel an hour away to a pageant/formal boutique to experience something akin to Filene's famous wedding gown basement sale. My daughter promised it would be a good time for us to bond. After all, didn't I want to share this experience with her?

So we went. I thought it might be a great opportunity for her to get some driving experience on the interstate. She had another idea, however. Her head remained buried in her prom magazines while she texted her friends the whole way. Finally, we arrived and queued into the line which was roped off to prevent line jumping. Once we reached the front, we were assigned a personal shopper, a Southern-drawled coed from the local university who would pull the dresses from the racks, get them out of their wrappings, fasten my daughter into it and out of each one, and return them to their rightful position back on the rack if they didn't make the cut. I have never experienced anything like walking into this store. It was overwhelming and exhausting.

My daughter couldn't seem to shake the image of the perfect dress for her in her head, and each dress she pulled off the rack left her frustrated and disappointed with her own body: her breasts were too small and her legs too big and her butt was impossibly enormous, according to her. We experienced the same disappointments Derry (2004) writes about regarding her prom experience--trying on dress after dress, feeling fat, not thin enough, not secure enough that her body was fine the way it was. No encouragement

or reassurance from me about finding the right style and cut for her body would help her get over what she perceived to be her less than perfect figure compared to the ones in the prom magazines. Hillary's body is a strong one, an athletic one of which she should be proud. But that meant nothing to her in the dressing room, flanked by the pageant contestants and college coeds who swarmed in and out of the Statesboro boutique.

Three long hours and 38 dresses later, she finally let me pick one off the rack. If there is such a thing, it was the perfect dress for her body. Of course, it was more than I had intended to pay, but I paid nonetheless. Perhaps it was fatigue that finally made me give in. And the icing on the cake for my daughter was that this shop would register her dress so that the same one would not be sold by them to the same event. This seemed to be extremely important to her, that no one else would be wearing the same dress as she. One of the reasons that I find this obsession with a dress so intriguing is Hillary did not have a date for the prom at this point. On this day, it was all about her and her dress, the object of her desire to become someone else, a young girl who would be completely transformed into the feminine ideal, not the date. She'd think about securing a date to the prom later. She would not be deterred from such a minor issue. She searched online and in magazines for months for the perfect dress and was not about to let the lack of a date or group with whom to attend get in her way. Don't get me wrong, I had no problem with her going with her girlfriends, in fact, her father and I encouraged it, but most of her friends are following the heterosexual date route. She said she didn't mind going by herself or tagging along on a date, and to me this was a sure sign of confidence, but I'm sure now that was merely bravado on her part. Snippets of conversations overheard or notes passed in class that spilled onto the dining room table in the evening revealed the

hunt for a date by her and her girlfriends. To go alone or with girlfriends was not an option. To be dressed up as the ultimate of youth and feminine beauty on prom night necessitated sending the message that heterosexuality dating would remain the status quo. Britzman (2006) writes that “Aesthetic conflicts are preoccupations with what cannot be seen but are nonetheless felt through their absence. They also invoke occasions for ethical considerations with others” (p. 22). Further:

inner objects want to know their own beauty. It is not a logic for a consumer society; indeed consumer society may deaden these doubts [to know the meaning of the Other's love] and the search for beauty that follows. The aesthetic conflict is personal and archaic when one wonders if internal and external beauty correspond....But this means there will be alienation and fascination, an alienation from what cannot be seen and a fascination for what one cannot stop looking for. (Britzman, 2006, p. 23)

Britzman (2006) says we have this innate desire to know goodness and beauty within ourselves, but it is something for which we must consistently search. The search itself may also be an aesthetic experience. We first encounter it as babies who gaze upon the mother. However, it can be elusive, and perhaps because it is so, we turn to the concrete, material world rather than the abstract, spiritual one. The consumer society in which we live compels us onward, to keep looking for what eludes us and to buy what we think will help resolve the aesthetic conflict, albeit by design and grand scheme only temporarily, for the things we attain and collect are never enough; worthiness or beauty or goodness remain just beyond our reach in the external world as advertisers and market researchers well know.

So what I think she learned up to this point is that she needed to validate what she thought she needed to look like in order to attend her prom and be considered acceptably attired. What bigger event in a high school girl's life could there be to reinforce cultural ideals of femininity? Eigen (1993) devotes a chapter in *The Electrified Tightrope* to Castaneda's notion of "stopping the world" (p. 151). Eigen (1993) relays Castaneda's tutelage under Don Juan and this so-called stopping of the world "to this suspension of attachment to collective view of reality, a process that creates space for new apprehensions and behaviors to emerge and be tested out" (p.151). In this process, an individual is tested to experience the moment and look beyond the cues society has trained him or her to see things by. Once able to do that, the individual should be able to work on a more powerful, confident self so as to be able to question truth, what is presented to us as truth, in a more meaningful way. At that point my daughter was unable to stop the world as Eigen (1993) sees it. She was still caught up in making herself over into the ideal image she has cemented in her head from all the magazines and pressures and influences from pop culture in our society despite the fact that she was an extremely competent and athletic young woman.

We do not outgrow being subject to influence. Influence helps us grow and go beyond ourselves, as well as opens us to exploitation. Malleability and power, twin capacities, contribute to our ability to survive, although they can become cancerous. That we are malleable beings capable of channeling great power calls for growth of respect and caring for our capacity to mold and be molded. (Eigen, 2005, p. 27)

This quote by Eigen (2005) is particularly meaningful in regards to the malleability of the teenage girl's mindset. Hillary was influenced and pressured, although she certainly wouldn't see it as such. And, if I am honest, I was too. She hadn't picked up on the cues to help her question the truth society presents her regarding who she should be and what she should look like on this night, and despite my conversations and tempering of the femininity machine with her, that machine held so much institutional power that it was admittedly difficult to break free from it.

Painstaking Preparations to Achieve Feminine Identity

With all the time, energy, and thought devoted to this experience called prom, has she not fallen into the trap of what the idealized image of a woman should represent? What has she learned to resist here? Interestingly, she seems to have given in for a time to this facet of her identity, the sexually attractive, desirable one, over that part of her identity that is athletic and strong and unconcerned with prom frills, fancies, and daydreams and would rather strike out batters while she's in control of the pitcher's mound. She hasn't gone completely over the edge, though, and it could be a lot worse. The other night I happened upon a show on cable television called *Toddlers and Tiaras*. The point of the show was to visit small town America and get to know local families who have taken up pageant contests in which their young children participate and their parents, usually the mother, runs the child ragged. One mother talked about the "glitz factor", which included fake tans, artificial nails, fake eyelashes, hair pieces and hair extensions, and, believe it or not, fake teeth overlays, pearly white and perfect.

Butler's (1993, 2003) work on performativity and gender and sexuality tells us that we are constantly performing gender, our identities are created through forced and

repeated performances influenced overtly and covertly by our cultural conventions and institutions. Norms, gender norms, create and regulate ideals of femininity and masculinity. And “femininity is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment” (Butler, 1993, p. 23). Butler (1993) says we all have to negotiate these performances of gender, and it is in the “working the weakness in the norm” where change can occur (p. 26). I have decided that it’s not the place, it’s not the day, it’s the heterosexualized, institutionalized ritual of getting the dress and getting the hair and getting the tan and getting the limousine. It’s the excitement of all the preparations and the spending of money that gets the adrenalin pumping. It’s the anticipating of an event that could very likely end in disappointment when the night of prom doesn’t meet her expectations. Hillary decided she can do without the fake nails; that would be a waste of her own money as she had softball practice or a tournament the next week. But she did run the course of wanting a manicure and pedicure, the hair and makeup, then the alterations for the dress, and a spray-on tan. Taubman (2006) tells us that our ego is:

conjured and shaped by the desires of others. Like a patchwork coat made of imaginary identifications, it allows us to make our way in the world but it also distorts our view of ourselves and the world. It is therefore incomplete and leaves us always feeling that who we are is not really who we are. (p. 27)

Pursuing this picture of what she wanted to be like on prom night was tapping into a part of her identity shaped by what others tell her she should look like.

The search for the perfect dress was also a search for what she considered to be her idea of idealized beauty. This dress will transform her into a sexualized being and

perhaps give her a glimpse of what she thinks she wants to be like in the future. Or she thinks it will. The dress seems to be all powerful. Winnicott (1971) relays one of his sessions in which a young boy had developed a preoccupation with a bit of string (p. 22). Winnicott (1971) determined that the string represented the boy's anxiety upon separating from his mother. In a way, I can look at my daughter and this dress in this situation in the same way. While it represented to her the stepping off into another reality, the reality of who she thinks she wants to be at this moment in regards to her femininity; yet, she has not stepped off completely without the aid or crutch of me by her side. That dress represents also her trepidation about moving into this world and her need to have reinforcement about her choices on everything from the dress itself to nails to hair to shoes to restaurants to jewelry and other accessories. This dress she is so fascinated by seems to consume her waking thoughts. She carried that dress in her car from friend's house to friend's house to show it and model it, like a badge of femininity and heterosexual allure to be shown off. In essence Hillary was balancing the outward appearance of confidence and the ideal of beauty with the inner struggle against feeling awkward and uncomfortable as she stepped into the shoes of the sexualized female, trying to come to grips with her feelings about how she think they look in the mirror and to others through this projected new reality.

All the playing dress up in the fancy gowns and shoes from my closet when she was a little girl have pointed her in this direction as have messages from glamour magazines that build on this particular rite of passage. She is still working on her true identity, still growing, still learning to balance fantasy with reality. As I read Pitt's (2003) book on the concept of play and the personal, I felt compelled to stop and think about

how true the metaphor of the detour is. In life and in our work with people and as doctoral students in this program we often encounter detours. Detours make us leave our intended way, and because we are negotiating uncharted territory, we are challenged to negotiate not only the path but ourselves as well. By watching my daughter as she moved through this stage in her life, negotiating her way, figuring out the identity she wants to become part of her whole self, she was working on herself indirectly. Eigen (1996) tells us:

It is useful to have the capacity for uncertainty and self-doubt built into true self feeling. It is a wonderful moment when one can say, “Aha, so that’s who I really am.” What a relief to catch on, to have a sense of knowing. Such moments can be definitive, and one can build on them. But they may fade and be qualified by other moments, other revelations of self. One may feel that an earlier version of self was wrong, or partly right and wrong, or right for that time but not for this.
(p. 167)

Just as I am not the same woman I was 30 years ago, Hillary will not be the same woman she will become in two, five, ten years. She is a work in progress, a work that through revision and editing and experiences will reveal the truest self she can possibly be. Pitt (2003) also suggests that we must negotiate the detours that life finds us on. But how do we know whether we are moving away from learning or toward it on these detours? Isn't this exactly what our journey through life is about? Negotiating the detours? Aren't the bumps and the potholes in the road along our journey just as important as setting the cruise control through life?

Pinar (2004) tells us “teaching from the point of view of curriculum theory...is a matter of enabling students to understand their own self-formation within society and the world” (p. 16). It is these lived experiences and the nuances of those experiences that make us who we are and who we are to become in this world. “Social institutions, even by their lacks, shape the self” (Wexler, 1996, p. 31). This is precisely why studying the events and rites of passage that shape young women are worthy of the attention of curriculum scholars. And that is adding to the “complicated conversation” about which Pinar (2004, xiii) speaks. Young women who resist normative discourses by not only playing sport but also demonstrating behaviors that stretch the boundaries of femininity ideals and binaries are working this weakness. Hillary chooses to play an aggressive sport, playing with and performing masculinity, yet she remains entrenched and caught up and messages about what she should be like if she does play. Kneading the weakness comes in incremental steps as one can see by the reflections I have shared about my daughter’s experiences. Hillary works on the weakness in the norm, yet she is still tethered to it; it remains, after all, a powerfully strong, institutionalized current against which or with which she must swim.

CHAPTER 4

CURRICULUM STUDIES, POWER, AND THE HIERARCHY OF A HIGH SCHOOL
SOFTBALL TEAM

In the previous chapters of this research, I showed that teenage girls and women who are athletes have faced and continue to face pressures from society to present themselves in particular ways so as to avoid the stereotypes that may come with playing sports which include being labeled as overly masculine or lesbian. Yet, the characteristics and attributes required for females to participate in sport and be successful are often at odds with such messages and pressures with which they may be bombarded. My own daughter worked to balance the competing sides of her identity both on and off the softball field, performing through both the masculine and the feminine aspects of her identity, working to achieve synchronicity throughout her sporting life. Chapter Four concerns how my daughter Hillary dealt with the issues of power and aggressiveness—both physical and verbal---that developed through her relationships on the softball field.

We in the field of curriculum studies are not always afforded the insight and opportunities to look at what can happen on girls' athletic teams, those considered particularly masculine like softball, and it is indeed an interesting world. Softball demands so much time that it is indeed an all-encompassing world in which these girls live for much of the year.

Many of us are fans of sports or participate in sports as part of our daily lives. What better place to turn to look for those stories that reveal so much about our lives? Morris (2008) tells us “it is important that we tell our stories. So many of us think our stories aren't worth telling. But to tell one's stories is to educate others” (p. 32). And

when we as curriculum scholars and educators and parents listen to the stories revealed by Hillary's world, we can learn much about the female student athletes who inhabit it and how their education may or may not empower them to become who they want to be in ways they want to be. When we listen to the stories of groups such as these girls, then we may come to know them better, to know them as thinking, feeling, desiring human beings who share this world with us. Curriculum should be watching and learning from students as they engage in activities that hold true value and meaning for them.

Curriculum should be about observing the metamorphosis young women experience as they begin their journeys through life, lives that extend far beyond the classroom walls to the softball fields, locker rooms, buses, and hotel rooms where they learn to negotiate relationships and jockey for power in a world of sport that is already fraught with power differentials simply because they are females and athletes. According to Riley-Taylor (2002), curriculum and education should be for students:

the fullness of life, the richness of relationships, the strengthening and broadening of skills and abilities. It is about nourishing their capacities for negotiation, discernment, and fairness, so that they may come to recognize their own responsibilities as members within a larger matrix of life. (p. 5)

Because girls who play competitive sports at the high school level often play in competitive travel teams, they spend many, many hours together, so many more than they spend in the classroom. And it is during these hours on the clay dirt fields, on the buses and in the SUVs, in the locker rooms and dugouts where relationships are formed, cemented, and, yes, broken and mended, over the course of playing and working together for months at a time year after year. Here is where they begin to come into their own as

young girls growing into young women. Here is where they begin to become conscious of perceptions and stereotypes. Here is where they begin to experiment with challenging some of those perceptions about masculinity and femininity. And here is where we would do well to focus our attention to see how girls like my daughter Hillary go about the work of ways of knowing who they are and whom they want to become. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997) write about women finding their voices and redefining their experiences, making their way in the world as they ventured on their journeys through institutions of higher education:

The eventual path a woman takes is, in large measure, a function of the familial and educational environments in which she is struggling with these problems.

Families and schools differ tremendously in the degree to which they reinforce risk taking or conformity behavior in women. (p. 79)

While higher education institutions may encourage more liberal thinking and risk taking with regards to one's pursuit of knowledge, public high school education does not necessarily promote the same risk taking with regards to one's education. Students are to conform within the classroom, and they are to conform to certain rules and expectations if they participate in sports. But what I hope to present is a picture of females, particularly my own daughter Hillary, as she searched for her own authentic voice and rebelled against such conformity behavioral expectations for women who play sports.

Sports and preparing for the athletic competitions that this education encompasses is about work, play, and knowledge of all sorts. And this education presents itself in various contexts. Private huddles on the school bus. Muted conversations on the athletic field. Sex talk in the locker room. What do these places and topics have in common?

Perhaps one's first and immediate answer is that obviously these have to do with the socially sanctioned places where boys congregate to learn how to go about becoming men. Lesko (2001) touches on some of these culturally dominant rituals of high school football, specifically those of the most competitive teams and how they can affect school culture. I think many people may agree many of the dominant discourses of high school sports belong to the males. We may all know about stories that glorify high school football and football players; this is the stuff of high school legends after all. But we must be careful here lest we essentialize what it means to behave like a male in organized athletics. The truth is, just as much of this type of behavior—aggressive, assertive, calculating, strategizing—occurs with female high school athletes, at least the high school softball players I have watched so closely over the last several years in my hometown. Some of these young women are rebelling against notions of conformity and risk taking with regards to the knowledges they accept. Dimitriadis (2001) tells us:

educators have traditionally claimed authority over knowledge, allowing them to defend curricula as transcendently “true.” Young people are, of course, seldom taught that there are multiple truths, that “reason” and “logic” are situated in particular times and places, for particular people with particular interests. (p. 87)

I agree with Dimitriadis (2001). Education is about life; it is also about forging one's identity. And this type of education is not the kind found in any textbook or in any lecture. It's found in the nooks and crannies and other places unsupervised at any local high school. Working with middle school and high school girls via the fast pitch softball networks has given me the opportunity to observe what goes on in the very spaces these authors touch on in their writings. Freed from the confines of the classroom walls and the

classroom routines of stay in your desk, follow the rules for the good of the order, it is indeed in these other areas where one can see girls learning multiple truths, jockeying for leadership positions and power, developing friendships, learning about sexuality, and, through all of these experiences, learning about themselves and what they define as truth.

“Friendship networks and their particular histories, especially as they play out in particular institutions, can radically shape the kinds of texts young people value and how they choose to talk about them in group contexts” (Dimitriadis, 2001, p. 36). The particular institution of a high school softball team is replete with texts by which young girls learn the value of the ordained characteristics of teamwork, self-discipline, and pride. But it might also include those types of texts that focus on the inner workings, the dynamics whereby, given the freedom to move about their own spaces, certain girls move silently and not so silently into positions of authority over others without being sanctioned to do so by the coaches. My intent here is not to generalize but to share my observations of the ways in which girls tapped into traditionally masculine attributes and characteristics to gain various measures of control over other players and how the girls on the team dealt with it.

Rosalind Wiseman (2002) wrote a popular book on aggressive girls and their relationships and what goes in our schools. That work focused on the nature of these relationships and the knowledge we have about them inside the school building. My goal is to show that similar behavior can and does extend beyond the bricks and mortar of the school building to the softball field and how some girls, like my daughter responded to it. Belenky et al. (1997) write:

all too often, neither the family...nor the educational institution she attends, recognizes the budding impetus towards change, redefinition, and application of her new ways of knowing and learning....Women begin to act on their new conceptions of truth and forge new rules and boundaries in their relationships. (p. 79)

It is on the fields of play, the locker rooms, the school bus and other places where girls like Hillary test out new roles, defy societal expectations of acceptable behavior for girls by demonstrating aggressiveness and assertiveness, and gain knowledge about their own authentic voices.

Having a Place to Play

Lloyd, Burden, and Kiewa (2008) recognize that Australian boys and girls have different needs to be met in their use of public spaces. Girls need the connectedness of their friendships and social interactions as they grow older and a place to do this in order to develop their identities. But the key is that they have to have a place of their own to do it. In this country Title IX, passed in 1972, addressed the issues of gender equity in sports. Since that time, the percentage of females participating in high school athletics has increased tremendously, a rise of 850% between the years of 1972 and 2002. Yet, despite the tremendous growth in opportunities for girls to play high school sports, the National Women's Law Center (2002) reports that women's facilities and resources still lag far behind those provided to male athletes. At our local high school, as is probably the case other high schools in the country, the girls who played softball were relegated to what I consider inferior fields, fields without lights or fences, until just a few years ago. Now that they've got an adequate and appropriate space of their own, they have that

place of their own to do more than the work required of their coaches as they hone their athletic skills and abilities. They have a place to do the kind of identity work Lloyd, et al. (2008) discuss in their research. The space of their own for the purposes of this paper are those places concerned with high school softball, the school buses and the athletic fields where these girls spend countless hours representing their school and playing a sport that they love. But within these spaces, something very interesting is happening, at least on this particular team.

Mary Jane Kehily (2004) tells us “school cultures can be seen as active in producing social relations that are contextually specific and productive of social identities” (p. 208). The social relations which are the focus of this research are produced and renegotiated as softball seasons come and go. Girls move up and graduate. They drop out for one reason or another. Meantime, girls continue to jockey for positions of power; and as the seasons play out, some will rise to dominant positions and others will be relegated to subordinate positions. Even more interesting are the methods used by some to gain power and the reactions of those who accept the positions to which they’ve been relegated within the hierarchy of power. Bettis and Adams (2003) assert:

although they are lacking economic or political power in the school setting, the one kind of power adolescents do possess is the ability to create peer status groups. It is therefore not accidental that teenagers come to be obsessed with status systems. (p. 129)

Females who are athletes are already working and playing within an institution that sends very strong messages about a girl’s place in sports. And what I hope to show in this

chapter is how the girls themselves set up hierarchal relationships that ebb and flow as the girls spend time together.

The Council

Jewett (2005) writes about the hidden curriculum on the school bus, geographic locations that are the site of developing identities. In “Girls, Power, and Position on the School Bus”, she explores what really goes on during the bus ride to and from school, asserting that because school buses carry students from a variety of ages, atypical social situations are presented. Too, power positions are jockeyed for on the public space of the school bus, where those with the most power, whether earned or taken, enjoy the seats at the back of the bus. Girls who get the back seats, the “bad asses” as Jewett (2005) calls them, run everything on the bus, which, interestingly, may not be the case inside the school building. It is much the same in other areas of the school, those areas free of the constraints imposed by teachers and administrators in the daily running of the school.

Dimitriadis and McCarthy (2001) tell us that people must continually refashion themselves and the worlds in which they live in order for a society to function well (p. 49). Some would suggest team athletics are, no doubt, miniature societies, mirroring at times how the real world works. Athletic teams have power brokers, worker bees, dominant and subordinate personalities, hidden agendas, etc. And they change from season to season with the graduating of senior players and the incoming of the freshman class. And the positions, from year to year and even during the season, more than those indicated on the team roster, are up for grabs. The positions, the social hierarchies about which I’m speaking, have to do with those in which girls exert power over one another beyond the authoritarian gaze of the coaches and teachers. Roy (2003) suggests “there is

important learning going on in nonregulated spaces, learning that is important for the lives of these young people” (p. 91). How could there not be? And that learning, the kind Roy (2003) suggests takes place in nonregulated spaces, can come in many shapes and cover many topics.

Bettis and Adams (2003) have conducted research on the sport of cheerleading; they write of the popularity and social hierarchy cheerleaders in school cultures hold. Also known as Preps, cheerleaders at the school at which Bettis and Adams (2003) conducted their study are viewed as school leaders and are considered the dominant social group:

One reason why high-status groups, such as the Preps, achieve power and prestige is that they outwardly operate within the boundaries of the adult world and reproduce the ethos of mainstream America. Usually, girls who become cheerleaders in middle school are already part of the in-group (e.g., Preps) at school; thus, a congruity exists between peer groups and the social status of an activity. (p. 130)

But this is not necessarily the case with all girls who play sports or specifically softball at Hillary’s school. Hillary maintained a level of popularity on the team and in the school population in general, but this did not extend to all girls on the team. She herself didn’t mention it, but Hillary did operate within the norms of the adult world during her time at high school—a good student, involved in all manner of activities, dually enrolled at a local college, working part time, respectful to authority, a class officer at one point. But she attributes some of this popularity amongst her peers to the fact that she just didn’t

stick to one group, nor was she labeled a whore or drama starter as she puts it. She didn't mention any value she placed on adult approval during her time at high school.

When my daughter Hillary made the varsity softball team during her freshman year, it was on the bus traveling to and from high school softball games where the leaders of the team group had preferential seating at the back of the bus; it was the “power center” where three or four girls met to discuss how their team played, who made careless mistakes, who had attitude when corrected about their performance. I have coined a name for this power center, this group of girls whom I have observed take on or earn leadership positions on the high school softball team of which my own daughter is a player. I call this group of girls The Council. The Council sits at the back of the bus. The Council always has the same seats, every time, just like the cool kids or the bad-asses in the backseats of the bus Jewett (2005) discovered when she rode school buses for her research. The two seniors on The Council, the team captains, always got the back seat. Even if the other players got on the bus first, they knew where to sit, they knew their places—from the middle of the bus to the front. Merten (1997) found:

the established members of the clique were not looking for competitors. They were willing to accept girls who were grateful for the opportunity to associate with them, but did not hesitate to be aggressive in putting them in their place if they overreached their acceptance. (p. 179)

Clearly, there was an established pecking order among the girls Merten (1997) studied, and so seems to be the case in this situation at this time. This particular group of girls did not seem to be interested in challenging that hierarchy this softball season. And while this

may be the case during Hillary's freshman year, the dynamics of the team will definitely change over the course of her time playing high school softball.

On the bus is where most of what I call "Council business" is managed. The focus of these talks I'm told is not always about the games. Council members do not leave the personal out of it. Yes, it's about the technical issues and what needs to happen, in their minds, to make the team more effective. But it's important to acknowledge that The Council and its business are not regulated by the coaches. Certainly the coaches know who their team captains. And the coaches know some responsibility is given to the captains for the leadership role on the team, but there is far more that goes on under the radar of the coaches when it comes to The Council disciplining or sanctioning or rewarding players for their performances both on and off the field.

But the bus seating is not the only way The Council reinforces its hierarchy. Freshman players are required to clean up after practice. They stow all the gear and rake the infield while council members and other seniors get to leave right after. The Council gets first choice in choosing the uniforms they want; everyone else battles for what's left. Council members, the team captains, help determine which players need to run additional sets of poles (running poles refers to the distance along the outfield measured by light poles installed there). The Council eats together during away games, and they cut in line ahead of younger players. They pick their places in the dugouts. For the most part The Council operates independently and under the radar of the team coaches, which seems only natural since their many of their interactions are away from coaches who might be driving buses, working on lineups, or coaching girls at the batting cages.

Teenagers develop their identities through social relatedness and individuation (Lloyd et al., 2008); naturally, public spaces, like the bus ride to and from games, locker rooms, and softball fields, those out of the eyes of many parents and coaches, are ideal places where young women try out their developing identities. It is in these public spaces where council members get to experience developing authority and leadership positions, using their power positively and negatively; yet, clearly, if they are in positions to exercise control over the actions of other girls, where does this leave those girls on the team who are in subordinating positions?

Lesko (2001) writes the very nature of male competitive sports has to do with domination (p. 159). A special type of social relation is formed: it separates the weak from the strong, mentally and physically. When we think of domination and sport, we may tend to initially think about domination over an opponent, male versus male, in a contest that privileges strength and competitive intellect. Sabo (1994) explains:

the intermale dominance hierarchy exploits the majority of those it beckons to climb its heights. Patriarchy's mythos of heroism and its morality of power-worship implant visions of masculine excellence and ecstasy in the minds of boys who ultimately defend its inequities and ridicule its victims. (p. 86)

However, domination within the very structure of the team exists as well (Fine, 1987; Lesko, 2001, Sabo, 1994). And I suggest this dominance hierarchy appears on Hillary's high school team as well and is something with which the girls on the team must contend. On this athletic team, clear lines of demarcation exist concerning which girls are in power and which are not. The Council is dominant. It has set itself up in a position of authority over the other girls. Domination and subordination, in its many forms, can reveal to us

the differential in power relations among the girls who play this sport together. But how is it that some come into power while others do not? What measures will they take to achieve that power?

Hillary was initially denied access into the inner sanctum of The Council; that is, until she proved herself to the older players. Notice I did not say until she proved herself to the coaches. She had to prove herself to The Council. The Council, a powerful entity that runs the workings of the softball team, operates at a level beneath the conscious eyes of the coaches and determines who is in and who is out. She recalls as a freshman that she had the same cleanup duty and had to wait her turn to assemble a uniform out of the forged-over pickings. But once she had an opportunity to work from the pitcher's mound during practice, she struck out the two senior council members with her change up pitch. It was at that moment that Hillary was accepted into that inner circle known as The Council.

One must know that a changeup pitch can be a difficult pitch to throw. The windmill arm swing remains at the same speed, but the pitcher fools the batter by releasing the ball at 40 miles an hour rather than at the usual fast pitch speed (normally anywhere from 55-65 miles an hour), accomplished by a change in grip on the softball. The point is to fool the batter waiting for a fast ball. Done correctly, it raises cheers from players and fans alike and is a pretty cool pitch to see thrown. Done incorrectly, the ball can take a nosedive into the dirt if released too soon, or it can do an "alley-oop" to the sky if released too late.

Once Hillary was able to hold her own on the pitcher's mound, The Council started, in Hillary's words, to show her some respect. Because she could keep pace with

them on the pitcher's mound, although they had four more years' experience at the plate and on the mound, she was afforded an opportunity to enter this group. These girls on The Council were successful on the high school team, their travel teams, and in school. Both had scholarships to play at the college level. Merten (1996) suggests:

in the ethos of mainstream American culture, hierarchy as such is not openly promoted despite the many rituals celebrating success. Thus individuals at the top generally seek to account for their success in a manner that does not challenge equality as a value. Perhaps the most common explanation for notable success is to suggest that one worked especially hard, was unusually dedicated, or was willing to sacrifice to achieve a particular goal. (p. 66)

Merten (1996) is writing about junior high cheerleaders and their experiences. But the same may be true for these high school girls. Because these girls on The Council are driven and committed to excel in sports and their academics, they perhaps felt they deserved the power and prestige afforded to them by their status on The Council. Because she proved herself to them before they ever stepped on the bus to go to an away game, Hillary was offered a seat near the back of the bus. Despite being a freshman, she was welcomed into the inner sanctum of The Council. She was invited to sit at the back of the bus, to eat with the senior leaders at away games, and invited out to breakfast at the local Waffle House before school during home games.

But even though Hillary was earning her way to a leadership position on The Council, she wanted leadership and power on her own terms. Getting a seat on The Council might have been important to other players. It may have provided for some the

primary benefits of recognition and popularity in high school. But Merten (1996) concludes the recognition and popularity that comes with being a cheerleader:

were but means to an important psychological end. Feeling that one was special was highly valued, but it was also the basis for feeling, for a time, invulnerable to the social vagaries of junior high school life. Since social circumstances made even the most popular early adolescent occasionally feel like a loser, being able to draw upon one's prestige as a cheerleader helped reduce one's sense of vulnerability. This possibility was predicated on cheerleading's capacity to enact and express highly valued attributes. (p. 66)

To Hillary, The Council represented separatism and segregation, the “haves” against the “have nots”, a tightly knit group focused just as much on mean girl attitudes as on bonding and working together as a team for a unified purpose. She seemed to be demonstrating what Merten (1996) found about some girls who don't fit the mold of conforming to the privileged position of high school cheerleader when they come from different social groups at school and make the highly visible cheerleading team, called “burnouts”. In some cases these girls, these burnouts, do not give up their other identities in order to fit in. “In the end, it was not Jackie's perceived rejection of cheerleading that made her so threatening but rather her indifference to the form which validated and expressed cheerleaders' specialness and allowed them to feel relatively invulnerable” (Merten, 1996, p. 67). Hillary wasn't necessarily indifferent as Jackie the cheerleader was, but she did not want to conform to the group as it was currently configured with a few girls running the team using methods with which she didn't agree. Whether Hillary was aware of these perceptions at the time it was happening isn't clear. It was years later,

when she and I were talking about my coined phrase for those in power that year of her freshman softball experience, she was able to analyze and make insightful comments about The Council and its purposes. She relayed to me that she understood the purpose of the group of girls in charge and was aware that some of things going on were things of which she didn't want a part (put downs, namecalling, isolation of some players, etc.). The protected inner circle mode of leadership was not something she wanted, not that way.

Noncouncil Members

So what about those girls who can't seem to crack the code needed to enter the inner sanctum of The Council? What has kept them out of the loop? What emerges is something akin to a freeze-out for those girls who do not meet the standard, whatever the reason. A player may not give her all-out effort during practice or may make too many errors in an already close game. She may be known for not swinging at strikes; rather, she'll let perfectly good pitches right in the strike zone cross the plate, waiting perhaps for a walk or simply unable to mentally and physically adjust to the pitcher's style. The Council members seem to know when a player is going to strike out—and it's usually because the player won't swing at the plate. So they tell each other to get their gloves ready to go out in the field on defense.

But there are other reasons a particular player may not make it to the level of council member. And it can do with the type of behavior a player exhibits off the field. But while those performances, actions, and choices may affect team morale and cohesion, it would seem the way The Council ostracizes players affects it as well. It is no surprise that the isolation and segregation that The Council hands out affects team morale and

stirs conflict. What I describe below is my assessment of roles to which some of the players, those in subordinate slots, have been pigeon-holed.

The Outsider

On many days in between the drills and pitching and batting practices, the girls can be seen joking, giggling, hooting, and hollering at and with each other. At the other end of the continuum, there are rude remarks traded and insults tossed around with the goal of striking fear or intimidation in a teammate. Out of earshot of the coaches, some of these girls curse as well as stereotypical sailors. Many teenagers go through this phase, it's nothing new. The ability to curse and use slang well may be a quality to be admired in some of these girls at least. But there's a fine line to be drawn between appropriate use of cursing and overkill to the point of putting yourself on the radar of The Council and others. One player in particular has the reputation of cursing to excess. This player is similar to the athlete Merten (1996) described as a "burnout" because she marches to the beat of her own drummer, holding steadfast to her own way of doing things:

Burnouts...represent the antithesis of many of the same mainstream values that preppies [cheerleaders] either enact or at least do not openly challenge. Teachers respond negatively to burnouts' cavalier attitudes toward their classwork and their, at times, defiant demeanor....Moreover, burnouts are categorized as such because they not only do things of which adults disapprove but they also talk openly about having done them. (p. 58)

Cursing spices up conversations on the field, the bus, the locker room, but it must be timed appropriately. Too much of it sets you apart from the rest. An overreliance on cursing makes a player a target for The Council. The outsider on the team, who also

happens to be deaf, has such a foul mouth, according to Hillary, that Hillary avoids her as much as possible. The outsider was on the radar of The Council because she was known to turn down her hearing aids to tune out the barking orders of coaches or council members, ignoring heads up calls and redirections. She smoked. She didn't bond with the other girls. She skipped practices. She remarked about her own sexuality to the other girls. She didn't seem to care what others thought. She was indifferent to the values the girls on The Council had. These markers caused her to be under the watch of the all the players not just The Council.

The Pot Stirrers

Conflict and drama arise when players bring something that happens outside softball to the softball field. It's hard to keep secrets when the team has to work so closely together. All the advances we have with technology these days make our lives so much easier, but technology certainly can make things difficult for some of the girls on this team. Text messaging, picture messaging, Facebook postings, etc. are instantaneously accessible and can wreak havoc on team dynamics when interpersonal conflicts make their way from those forms and traditional ones of whispered rumors and gossip to the softball fields and periphery areas like the locker room and the team bus and the Waffle House. And if council members know about it, they are going to talk about it, whether they bring it to the table originally or it comes through a subordinated player. Of course, this affects team dynamics. So if a player's behavior is not within the limits of normal, what The Council deems normal for team behavior and their own, then a level of regulatory isolation appears—the girl who brings the drama just earned herself a seat at the front of the bus, so to speak. Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz (2007) suggest in their

study of girls and relational aggression that meanness not only regulates the behavior of girls but also manages the production of girls' identities:

The power of meanness comes from the fact that it is “productive” as much as it is regulatory; within the school culture, the regulation of group membership 'produces' girls' social identities. The harm (and the power) of meanness as an attempt to regulate group membership comes by robbing the “othered” of control over defining “who she is” and “what she is all about”. (p. 26)

Catty comments and gossip shouldn't have a place on the field—but they do. Some players just seem to love drama and thrive on conflict. A couple of girls from year to year resort to bringing someone to task for their mistakes on the field; this was certainly acceptable. Taking personal potshots is also acceptable on occasion. Wiseman (2002) found that girls and cliques work out of using fear and intimidation to get and keep their positions of popularity or dominance. But some use it just to stir the pot on the field to see what may come of it. The girls who engage in this may or may not be council members. One might think team sports, so dependent upon cooperation and team building for success, would be immune to some of the behaviors we see in our schools among girls and the cliques to includes finding a girl's perceived weakness or flaw and using that against her. The problem with such tactics is that it flies in the face of what teamwork and cohesion and unity of mission are supposed to embody. This would be the case as Hillary entered her junior and senior years. However, the dynamics of the team changed, and those who vied for leadership positions continued to fall prey to backbiting, verbally and physically aggressive behaviors by some toward others, and self-serving

attitudes in subsequent years leading up to Hillary's senior year and beyond the final game of her high school athletic career.

The Nice Girl

Another identity or label I found during the high school softball season is that of the nice girl, or the team mother. If a player gets the nickname "team mom" from The Council or others, it's because she has perhaps taken on other duties as assigned by the coaches because for whatever reason, she cannot play to her full potential, usually due to a lingering injury that may get worse if she participates fully as an active player. So instead, she helps with the equipment in the dugout, keeps the books, or does whatever the coaches need to be done. Her job is a useful one, to be sure. And she may be a favorite of the coaching staff. But it's also a sure indication that she's not a member of The Council. The Council runs independently and under the radar of the coaching staff in most instances. After all, most girls already have mothers who regularly urge them to use sunscreen, to avoid eating certain foods, to pick up the locker room or the dug out or the school bus. Mothers have their roles, but it's on the other side of the ball field fence and the dugout. She's just a nice girl, well liked in the school, nice to everyone. Merten (1997) says about niceness: "Treating peers as equals and caring about their feelings reduced the social distance between individuals and made interaction more comfortable, but there was no denying that the ideal of niceness was frequently a victim of the competition around popularity" (p. 180). Niceness, in this situation at least, does not seem to outweigh the need for a competitive player holding a spot on the roster to help the team get to the state playoffs.

The Sexualized Player

In their study on sexual behavior and participation in sports, Miller, Sabo, Farrell, Barnes, and Melnick (1998) suggest that boys who participate in sports are culturally encouraged to “initiate sex, to be sexually aggressive with girls, and to regard sexual conquest as a validation for male adequacy” (p. 110). Fine (1987) also found that the boys expect each other to be sexually aggressive and knowledgeable. Such sex talk concerned both heterosexuality and homosexuality. While there was a lot of homosexual talk, Fine (1987) found it was not grounded in hostility toward another teammate; rather, “sexualized talk and action is an attempt by these boys to reveal they possess “maturity” even though they nor anyone else can point to it” (p. 116). Yet, the sexual behavior of female athletes is much less known. Do they participate in such sex talk, and do they use it for the same purposes as male athletes?

Kehily (2004) discusses the role that girl friendship groups can have on each other’s sexual behavior. She notes that girls seem to draw lines regarding what is considered acceptable or unacceptable behavior for the group regarding sexual experimentation. Too much talk about personal sexual practices or sexual exploration, and you’re relegated to a noncouncil position and likely never to get off it. Currie et al. (2007) found the same in their research with adolescent females. “What girls learn as a consequence is that although female sexuality can be a source of personal power, ‘good’ girls do not gain power by acting as sexual agents. In fact, sexual agency can earn girls social censure” (Currie et al., 2007, p. 33). It seems the girls on this team still rely on what society deems appropriate femininity to regulate their behavior. Unlike the legendary and stereotypical locker room talks, conquests, and escapades of high school

football players, these softball athletes don't venture to that particular topic. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that if they venture there, they don't tread water there too long.

And what if a female player tends to want to date girls or talk about other girls in a sexualized way? How is that received? Some stirrings or assumptions about the sexual orientation of one or two girls on the team crop up, but no one girl is "out" about her sexuality. And while there are openly gay young men/lesbian groups of students at the high school Hillary attended, that openness hasn't made it to the softball field yet. When it comes to the possibility of lesbians as team members, as with the heterosexual ones, the practice seems to be: leave your sex life off the field. This unspoken team philosophy falls in line with Kehily's (2004) research about how girls regulate sexual behavior amongst themselves, straight or not. And it falls in line with what I presented in earlier chapters about the invisible veil of silence that many lesbian athletes feel persists today in the world of sports. Be quiet. Be heterosexual in appearance. Be moderate in your experimentations—or at least be moderate in your discussions of it.

The Injured Reserve

Lesko (2001) writes in *Act your age* about the pain principle among male athletes, specifically, football players. Pain is to be mastered, dealt with, and channeled elsewhere. An athlete who gives in to the pain and must sit on the bench is typically rejected outright by others. Much the same is true of injured players on this softball team, particularly on the competitive tournament travel circuit. Sit out for too long or be perceived as faking it, then a player has set herself up for a seat on the noncouncil. Theberge's (1997) research on women ice hockey players reveals that playing with pain is just part of the game:

There is an important relationship between the players' experience of injury and pain and their sense of themselves as skilled athletes. Injury and pain are not an excuse for less-than-full effort or best performance. Rather, a measure of a player's ability is her capacity to play and play well despite these concerns. (p.78)

What I found with Hillary and her teammates was much the same. Hillary suffered many injuries during the seasons she played softball as did other players. Sometimes she played before she was mentally or physically ready. But if she didn't get back into the practices and the games, she knew she would be relegated to a place reserved for those players The Council deemed uncommitted to the game.

Switching Identities

Are these identities of both council and noncouncil members consistent from year to year? Can a player earn her way off The Council or onto it? Here's another interesting thought. What happens when a council member has a dry spell? Is she subject to being booted off The Council, and does that player get the same kind of treatment and a new identity? The answers to these questions is yes.

Apple and Buras (2006) tell us that subaltern groups display the elements of domination and subordination within their parameters. Elements of power rise to the top in any given snapshot of time within groups, and the girls who rally to leadership positions on this high school softball team do so with what seems to be consent from the other players. Pinar (2007) writes "self-formation involves learning how to position oneself in the place of the cause of one's own desire" (p. 86). The girls on this team take on and accept roles, either willingly or because they are foisted upon them by others, because they *desire* to be part of the team. Some have yet to learn to move beyond what

other students expect of them in an effort to break away from what Pinar (2007) terms “psychic sediment” (p. 21), those heavy layers of deep inside where our very selves are formed and cemented. But do the girls continue these roles elsewhere? Are the subordinating positions bestowed upon them by The Council the ones they carry with them the off the field?

Feuerverger (2007) urges educators to learn from what our students have to say, to hear their life stories and help them tell these stories in order to help them begin to change the world (p. 114). It is through this then they will be able to see how they want to fit into their world and what parts of that world may need changing. Softball and its hierarchies of power allow some to play with positions of authority, of dominance, of submissiveness.

In her book about the realities that adolescent girls face in their friendships, Rosalind Wiseman (2002) describes cliques as a natural part of girlhood. It is when the power brokers in these cliques, the queen bee for one, use fear and control to keep their positions that cliques show their dark side. Cliques can have strict rules, like what clique members are to wear and how they are to style their hair, and these groupings are highly exclusionary.

The Council is a clique, of course. A small group of girls is in control of decisionmaking although not sanctioned by any authority other than that of two team captains. The Council as a group of two or three members does not share all interests and time together outside softball. One or two smaller friendships may exist amongst these girls. On the surface The Council appears to be concerned with and focused on what’s best for the team athletically; it comes together to conduct softball business only for small

amounts of time. But it utilizes various tactics and methods— isolation, humiliation, namecalling--because it can. “Within peer culture, power comes from the ability to invoke the unspoken 'rules' that police the boundaries of acceptable behavior” (Currie et al., 2007, p. 24). This Council has the power to shift girls up and down the chain of subordinate positioning into the categories I have described. It does not seem to plot the complete social downfall of team members, but its intent is to curtail behavior detrimental to what The Council views as important whether it has to do with the team’s performance or a player’s behavior.

But the dynamics of The Council in place at the time Hillary was a freshman player would change dramatically as she continued to play during her high school years. In fact, while The Council switched hands as two senior players graduated Hillary’s freshman year, by the time Hillary herself was a senior, The Council would fall apart, laying wide open the positions of leadership to individual jockeying and maneuvering by other players who wanted to establish dominance in the social and athletic hierarchy of the team.

Coming Together When It Counts

I mentioned that some of the leaders on this team during Hillary’s earlier years did resort to putting each other down with insults and catty comments in order to humiliate each other and garner power. But this behavior is not simply reserved for the members of the team only. The competition is up for grabs as well as the players put players down on an opposing team. Example: The team always has a bitter taste in their mouths against one particular private school. The perceived common hatred for the particular team brings them together, united for two hours or more until the next game

against them. Apple and Buras (2006) tell us the “curriculum is always reconstructed at the level of reception as teachers and students engage in the unending process of sense-making, resistance, and day-to-day teaching and learning” (p. 25). Chanting, clapping, cheering, high-fiving are a display of the unfolding solidarity and a demonstration of resistance to another group trying to exert domination over them. When it’s game day, it’s time to resist and reject the lines and boundaries between council and noncouncil members. Those lines and boundaries dissolve or blur—at least for the next seven innings or so and only if no obviously erroneous behavior on the part of one’s own team members is demonstrated. No longer do the constraints of individual identities bestowed or earned by a player on home turf determine pecking orders. That has given way to the collective identity that is at that moment in time their team. Lesko (2001) calls this providing “a sense of communal identity in relation to outsiders” (p. 155). And while she is writing of football in American high schools and the allegory to nationalism, it is much the same for this high school softball team. It is the coming together to defeat the enemy of the day. It is to win the battle inning after inning. It is to build community amongst the girls. During that time on the field, they come together as one. It is interesting to note, though, that context and situation are temporal. Once the battle has been fought on the softball field, behaviors, attitudes, and actions revert to pre-game status. And sometimes, the coming together to defeat the opponent cannot be overcome by the effect on morale some of the players may feel. Sometimes they cannot shuck it off and concentrate on the game. For these girls, momentum and conflict can and do influence their actions on the field in some cases.

Closing One Season; Beginning Another

The high school softball season of Hillary's freshman year ended. Three of the players graduated that year, possibly opening up two spots on The Council for next year's team, if it was indeed to exist into the next year. Nicholas Ng-A-Fook, (2007), in writing about the Houma Nation summer camps of Louisiana, "saw the curricular landscape of the camp as a rich source of data" (p. 185). While the landscape of high school softball fields and related areas is far removed from the struggles of the Houma Nation, it, too, serves as a rich source of data. Here, too, there are indeed lessons one can learn to not only enlighten what we know about teenage female athletes and our perspectives about teenage girls who play sports but also, perhaps more importantly, to hear what they have to say about their own experiences in today's world of challenges. It is indeed in these unsupervised places--the locker rooms, the Internet, the long rides to away games aboard school buses--where teenage girls really learn about themselves and decide what part of themselves they want to share with the outside world, their communities, and their schools.

"Ubiquitous in all of those spaces are teenagers—almost always in groups and sporting hair, clothes, piercings, and attitudes that mark them as belonging to 'another tribe'" (Lesko, 2001, p. 1). And teenagers are of another tribe, just as we all once were. Hillary, too, is a member of a unique tribe that marks her growth into young adulthood. Lesko's (2001) quote provides one of the voices to which we should listen as to why we should devote our attention to writing about young people, particularly young women like my daughter. For how else will we come to know them if we don't turn our attention toward them and acknowledge that in which they find value?

The particular institution of this high school softball team is replete with texts by which young girls learn the value of the ordained characteristics of teamwork, self-discipline, and pride. But it might also include those types of texts that focus on the inner workings, the dynamics whereby, given the freedom to move about in their own spaces, certain girls move silently into positions of authority or domination over others without being sanctioned to do so by the coaches or even their teammates. A few of these girls, my own daughter being one of them, will not accept wholesale a subordinate status that positions them as unreflective, submissive, and passive females in their schools and larger society. “Far from being passive dupes of a girl-poisoning culture, many girls are actively engaged in resisting, challenging, and critiquing dominant ideologies” (Bettis & Adams, 2005, p. 274). Hillary will soon be tested and will step again outside the boundaries that enforce expectations for feminine behavior despite the group consensus on the team to wear ribbons in their hair and makeup and glitter on their faces on game days. And so it is with understanding that lessons about life and education occur beyond the school building that I share the struggles and successes my own daughter Hillary faced in this last year of her high school softball career.

Ready for Her Senior Year

It’s Hillary’s turn; it’s her senior year. It’s something she’s looked forward to since she started on varsity as a freshman four years ago, something she may have looked forward to long before that. The Council in its original form fell apart during subsequent years as players graduated and moved on, but I continued to see the types of personas I discussed earlier in this chapter. The drama and conflict ebbed and waned among the girls over the next couple of years, but it wasn’t until Hillary’s senior year that she moved

into a position to perhaps affect the outcomes of some of the conflict that arose. She herself struggled through injuries and surgery and physical therapy to her feet, back, and shoulder. And through all of that, Hillary knew she had to work extra hard to keep her spot on the pitching team so another younger pitcher wouldn't take her place. She knows because she is a senior she may be looked up to by the younger players. And she expects that she will take on a leadership role, which will turn out to include "negotiating, or helping others to navigate the complex, and sometimes conflicting relationships among girls" on the team (Shinew & Jones, 2005, p. 60). She will have the burden of responsibility for the younger players on the team. Additionally, she's got to balance her high school classes with softball practices and games on both her high school softball team and her travel ball team and dual enrollment at the local university; she misses almost half of those college classes because of the high school softball schedule and has to meet on other days with the professor who graciously offered to work with her through this season. Hillary definitely had her hands full.

During travel ball season in the spring and summer, the younger girls on the same team "franchise" watch the older girls play and the older girls in turn watch the younger girls. They have a big sister/little sister approach to mentoring. They all share tents that have been set up together to stave off the blazing summer sun or pop up rain showers. The softball community is a relatively small one. As families and teams travel from place to place, they get to know each other over the long weekends they will spend together. As the years go by, we watch each other's children grow up and develop the kinds of bonds that many other families and neighbors may not share.

When school started and because she was on half days at the high school, Hillary would occasionally come to visit me at my school next door. One of the middle school girls at my school told her older sister (who played on the high school and on travel teams with Hillary) that at the middle school team tryouts and practices she was trying to be like Hillary. She even grabbed Hillary's old middle school uniform number because she wanted to be so much like Hillary. The girls attending the middle school were always excited to see Hillary when she stopped by and have a chance to talk with her, and I think Hillary enjoyed this attention from the younger set, being able to be held in high esteem and as a role model for them. Yet, for all these positives to build Hillary's confidence as a leader, as someone to be looked up to and admired, she would face challenges that year, challenges that came in the form of taking on aggressive teammates and learning to negotiate her relationship with other players who wanted to challenge what she felt was her role of team leader.

Putting in the Time to Earn Respect

Prettyman's (2005) research the use girls make in various unsupervised spaces (like the lunchroom) in an educational program for teen mothers. Her work also has implications for female athletes and the unsupervised places they use. The lunchroom in that study was used as a social space by the girls; so, too, are the softball field and its peripheral areas. But, too, like the lunchroom, that space, and specifically, the pitcher's mound, is a political space for Hillary. It is here where she worked toward a position of power within her team as well as against opponents. "This control of space denoted relations of power and privilege, and served as a visual reminder of social status and hierarchy within the school" (Prettyman, 2005, p. 166). As the preseason picked up,

Hillary worked out more beyond regular practice after other pitchers and players long left the field. She worked with another younger pitcher to correct that pitcher's form problem, and she proudly showed off the six pack abs she's gotten back after a month or so off from travel ball workouts. She stayed to work from the pitcher's mound, help clear equipment, clean up the equipment room, and prep the field even though that's traditionally the job of freshman players. Hillary did these things because she said she wanted the other players to respect her for doing the same things she asked them to do. But, whether she knew it or not at the time, Hillary was marking those spaces politically, too. There will be tension to come, and "this tension [will play] out in their relationships with each other and in the social and political spaces they inhabit, and it will also serve to challenge their thinking about themselves, the school, and the world" (Prettyman, 2005, p. 171). The pitcher's mound will serve symbolically as a site for transformation for Hillary. But for all this respect she's trying to build as a leader, there is some trouble brewing that could challenge her leadership and affect and possibly destroy team morale and unity as had been the case in previous years on the team.

Early on in that school softball season there were already problems popping up with one of the other senior girls (there were only three the year Hillary was a senior). This girl has resorted to using intimidation tactics and sometimes physical aggression toward many of the other girls on the team, including the two other seniors, one of whom is Hillary. Hillary knows this girl; they have been in school together since middle school and have maintained an on-again, off-again friendship over the years during the times they have played on the same travel ball teams and middle and high school teams. To date, the senior girl cursed at a younger player and then threw water in her face after the

girl tried to dish it back to her by telling her to shut up. She has also taken to shoulder bumping other players, younger players, and snapping at them to move out of her way. She throws the gear of other players on the floor of the dugout if she feels it's in her spot. She's making for herself the reputation of the team bully, and many of the players give her wide berth whenever they can. All of these behaviors are the more interesting because they are demonstrated by a female. And this flies in the face of what we expect from female athletes. Where is the mentoring of younger players, the building of mutual respect, the teachable moments, and the team cohesion?

The Drama Presented by Cyberspace

In addition, other issues crop up which affect the dynamics of the softball team. Just as texting and social networking played a role in bringing drama to the field when Hillary was a freshman, so, too, did it when she became a senior. We are, after all, consumers of technology. A quick glance after a routine practice reveals girls checking their cell phones for text messages or Facebook for updates, responding to messages they have received during practice. They are rarely found without their communication devices. Because of the pervasive nature technology has on the lives of teenage girls, it is important to take a look at the role it may have in the unfolding drama that came to a head during Hillary's senior year of softball.

Even when adolescents are communicating with their friends, social networking sites such as MySpace may by their very nature be transforming their peer relations. These sites make communication with friends public and visible. Through potentially infinite electronic lists of friends and "friends of friends," they bring the meaning of choosing one's social relationships to a new extreme.

They have thus become an essential part of adolescent peer social life while leading to a redefinition of the word “friend”. (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008, p. 127)

But while electronic technologies such as the internet, cell phones, and instant messaging can serve to keep friends in touch when they are away from each other, adolescents also use these technologies to bully and victimize their peers, with girls receiving most of the harassment.

One might think that the World Wide Web and the high school softball field have nothing at all in common. After all, one can't play a seven inning game in the rain, get hit by 55 mile-an-hour pitches and have the bruises and ball seam marks to show for it when in cyberspace. But the influence of the Internet helps level the playing field for some members of high school softball teams. Sardoc (2006) writes identity construction is so important for those in education to understand. It is simply put something that cannot and should not be brushed aside. He speaks of the challenge of understanding the process of identity construction as it relates to consumerism and social relations (p. 48). I can't think of a better environment to take a closer look at than the world of teenage girls and their use of the Internet, specifically those areas in cyberspace that serve as social networks. It is on this type of public space where the playing field can be leveled out or it can be unbalanced.

Danah Boyd's (2007) work centers on researching teenagers' use of networked publics for social networking and identity work. Her research reveals, interestingly, that she found no differences in the consumption of this media across racial and class lines with the exception of some marginalized teens. She found that older girls use networking

sites more than older boys, but among all teens she met with, the majority said they use a site like MySpace and Facebook because it's the place where all their friends are. Her research tells us that there are three distinct ways in which teenagers use such sites. The first is for identity construction; the second is to discover teenagers' perceptions of public and private spheres; and the third focuses on the changes taking place in youth public spaces.

I was most interested in the section of Boyd's (2007) research that dealt with identity performance. Boyd (2007) argues that it is through impression management—how we present ourselves and self-regulate our behavior—that serve to have us accepted into social situations. In online social networks, teenagers filter out what information is presented to those accessing their Facebook page. Facebook is a place where teenagers develop their digital identities. Home pages change depending on the mood of the owner, the teenage girl. My own daughter's use of this site reflects her moods, interests, love life, music tastes at the time she updates it. The Internet is an important space to teenagers. Boyd's (2007) research shows that there is intense drama if one friend is not included in another's top 10 friend list, enforcing identity markers of announcing friendships and alliances:

The desire to be cool online is part of the more general desire to be validated by one's peers. Even though teens theoretically have the ability to behave differently online, the social hierarchies that regulate "coolness" offline are also present online. (p. 12)

With millions of teenage girls across the globe using the networked publics about which Boyd (2007) speaks, this is an important space for researchers on how these girls form

their identities. She suggests the desire to be cool, to fit in, is a phenomenon that is present online. As these girls who play softball in high school get older, some of them have discovered a website called Softball Showcase. Sport-oriented websites like Softball Showcase don't replace the ever-popular Facebook; there are probably dozens of sites like Softball Showcase with the same purpose: to allow softball players to create web pages that can be viewed by college recruiters. Smith (2006) writes:

A strong theory of identity inevitably sets up a social, political, and cultural architecture of insiders and outsiders, with insiders determined to maintain purity of identity by keeping outsiders at bay or by laying out the conditions of their acceptance as insiders. (p. xxv)

The unique thing to me about a site like Softball Showcase, and others out there like it, is that any girl can present herself as a competitive player by developing a web page highlighting her achievements and interests as an equal player. The World Wide Web does not care if the home page owner is a council member or not. It doesn't care if a girl is in a subordinated position on her high school softball team, an outsider. She can be whoever she wants online. Because it is a place for them to work out how to socialize in these public, mediated spaces, it's important for us in curriculum studies to continue to look at this space where teens spend so many hours learning about themselves and how they present themselves to others in order to be socialized into society. I mention this access to mediated spaces like Facebook and Softball Showcase because it might be an opportunity for those in subordinated positions to present themselves in another light off the field; many of the girls on the team at the time Hillary was a senior had these softball web pages. However, a problem with such social networking spaces, particularly

Facebook, exists. These sites can tend to become breeding grounds for hate and discontent among teenagers. With its real time access, Facebook and electronic data devices, in my opinion, have done more to damage interpersonal relationships amongst girls and cause bitter rumors and hurt feelings to arise. Hillary recalls about Facebook and text messaging that it often fostered tension among team members whether the comments were explicitly or implicitly stated. Girls might use the site in a passive aggressive way by displaying quotes or lyrics from songs that might reflect their feelings about another girl or things that occurred during practices. It would have been more like only the insider would know the relevance of the updated status posting. And with the ability to access such sites in real time, it certainly is true that the drama and conflict amongst some players would make it to the field before the coaches arrived. But covert measures are not always the methods used by girls on the internet. Hillary is watching the openly hostile Facebook postings of one of the other girls on the team. It is inevitable that the turmoil this creates will make it to the softball field. And the pot shots and put downs do continue to make their way to the field from this player. Hillary and this girl have maintained their lukewarm friendship due to playing on middle school, recreation league, and travel teams together and because they are two of the three seniors. The behavior is not new, not unexpected. Eventually the behaviors will escalate from verbal to physical, from online to offline, and Hillary will feel compelled to address it. Currie et al. (2007) write about the role of meanness that it is transformed into power:

When a desire for something highly valued (such as social power) cannot be openly expressed (due to the middle-class mandate of “nice-ness”), alternative forms of expression are often invoked. Meanness provides a way for girls to

covertly express and experience the feelings of personal power and invulnerability that make popularity so prized. (p. 27)

How will a girl like Hillary, who is just negotiating her leadership skills, tackle the sensitive issue of a team bully? Will this girl turn on Hillary, too? How will she negotiate the terrain of leadership and move the team toward her goal of going to State when the times get tougher, which they inevitably will? This is most difficult even for adults, but Hillary, just 17 years old, will see what kind of inner strength and fortitude she has to do what's right in her mind for herself and the team.

Long County game, early in the season. Hillary feels and looks in top form, physically and mentally. She has battled back from injury and surgery. She's got the benefit of several years of playing experience under her belt. She appears mature, looks like a leader on the field. She's strong and in command on the pitcher's mound, and she's backed by a catcher at home plate who can stop her drop ball from careening by to the backstop and therefore letting runners advance the bases. The team kept it to a one-hit game until the last inning when the bases were loaded. But the defense backed Hillary up on this day, and they took the win. The team looked tightly knit; if they can keep this momentum and maintain their focus on the game, they have a good chance of going to state playoffs.

Ware County, a week later. Jewett (2005) writes in her research of power play among teenage girls on the school bus that "were not necessarily popular, and backseat bad-asses were not particularly well liked by other passengers" (p. 45). Such would be the case after the team returned to the high school following a very long bus ride home from an away game.

After the team pulled into the high school from the Ware County game, the girls had to run poles (named so because the poles stretch the length of the outfield fence) because this same senior who has gained the reputation as the team bully for putting down players and using profanity towards them openly questioned the coach after he told them to report to left field. He called her out in front of the team. Hillary later said she'd never seen the coach as mad as he was at being questioned by a player. When everyone had gone, Hillary stayed and asked for extra pitching practice that night. And Ware County is a long two-hour ride from our school. The coach readily stayed with her an extra hour after the long bus ride back from Ware County and the poles that had to be run.

It was that night Hillary stepped out as a team leader. Hillary said she confided in her coach this night about some of the things that had been going on out of earshot and eyesight regarding this player, and he, in return, gave her something she may have needed to hear: that he held her in high regard and hoped that the players he has now turned out like she has when they are seniors—doing what was asked with a good attitude, demonstrating positive leadership qualities, and standing up for what she thinks is the right thing to do. Shiner and Jones (2005) describe identity as being contested and fluid among the girls they studied:

Their identities as leaders reside in the intersection between the regulated spaces of the classroom and the unsupervised spaces of the hallways, playgrounds, and sidewalks to and from school...in the tensions between the concepts of formal and informal leaders, and most important, in the zone of ambiguity between adult and child. (p. 65)

Instead of asking the coach to intervene with the aggressive player, Hillary decided to work on it on her own in an effort to step up and fulfill the expected role of a team leader. Perhaps instead of addressing the behavior with the girl privately and off to the side, his purpose in telling the team they should be “pissed” at her was to get them to manage the girl’s behavior on their own without his assistance and without crossing over and into boundaries that separate regulated and unregulated spaces. Was he passing the buck? Was this fair to put on a teenage girl? Whatever the case, Hillary felt it her mission to take on the challenge of how to manage what was happening on the team.

Watching your child grow and develop into a young adult is an amazing thing—amazing in that it can be stressful at times, but then there is that glimmer of maturation that allows itself to be seen. So it was a bit surprising to me to see my daughter employ several strategies or tactics after that Ware County game to handle the issues that cropped up with this teammate. Hillary seemed to take the coach’s words that night to heart, and she resorted to distinct and calculated plans to contain and control what she saw as a problem that would destroy team unity and keep the girls from advancing to region finals and beyond, her goal for her last year of softball.

Regarding the realities that adolescent girls face in their friendships, Wiseman (2002) describes cliques as a natural part of girlhood. It is when the power brokers in these cliques, the queen bees, use fear and control to keep their positions that cliques show their dark side. Merten (1997) suggests meanness sprouts from a sense of competition to gain or hold onto popularity. “To fail to mediate competition and conflict, as members of the clique often did, was perceived as taking an overtly aggressive stance toward interaction with peers” (Merten, 1997, p. 177). One would think this would make

mean girls unpopular, but it does not in many of the works I reviewed. But on this team and in this context, what I have found is that the aggressive player on the team is not respected or well liked but by maybe one other player, a junior who seems to be her new sidekick. I would agree with Merten (1997) that meanness stems from a sense of competition. But I think in this particular case the issue at hand is not so much popularity as it is to gain a sense of power on the team because she may feel it is owed to her; it is something to which she may feel entitled. So what is it about the team dynamics or the larger cultural issue that make this so? This girl enjoys some level of popularity outside the softball team. On some occasions she is addressed for her behavior but not in the form of benching her or even dismissing her off the team. It seems to be about social domination for this player. And while she does maintain some measure of popularity, that popularity is garnered through power and tied to meanness and so this player, as has been found with other mean girls in previous research “were also singled out as not well liked, primarily because they like to make fun of the unpopular people” (Currie et al., 2007, p. 27). Perhaps the coaches expect some of this type of behavior to occur and hope the team will work out punitive measures in its own way. It happens on the bus, on the field, during game time in the dugout, sometimes whispered so the coaches do not hear. It was not like this last year. Hillary seemed to think that a lot of this had to do with the girl’s status as a senior. When I suggested that we saw some of this same type of behavior during travel ball in the summer, Hillary responded that with a comment: “Well, after May 2009 she was a senior.” That’s quite insightful.

Much of the literature on girls who bully is centered on a group. The softball team is a natural group. Regarding the ways in which girls bully, girls tend to rely on verbal

and relational aggression; boys tend to be more physical. But in this case, the bully acts alone and doesn't care if she has an entourage to back her up or admire her, just one player. Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2004) write "girls...practice 'relational aggression' that is intended to damage girls' social status and relationships. In addition to practicing ostracism, female bullies spread rumors about, leave incriminating phone messages for the parents of, and hurl insults at their victims" (p. 45). But this student-athlete appears to display aggressive tendencies that research shows are more typical of boys—that is, direct verbal and physical aggression (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

Kavussanu and Roberts (2001) write some athletes have an ego-oriented perspective in achieving one's goals; that is, during competition athletes with an ego orientation do not consider sportsmanlike factors such as fairness and the consideration of opponents as worthy qualities to demonstrate. They also place value on intentionally intimidating an opponent. In this particular situation, this softball player has used this ego orientation in her dealings with her own teammates, not the opponents. She is not task-oriented, focused on getting the job done for the team. She is fulfilling some internal or external need to maintain superiority over the other girls on the team and ensuring what she feels is her right as an alpha male.

Aggressive behavior in sports is typically seen as a given among many fans and players of the game. Much of the literature in this area has taken the form of quantitative studies and concerns male athletes, and these should certainly be considered when discussing aggressive behavior in sport as it can give us an idea of the expectations society has for male athletes. I have observed females display aggressive behaviors toward one another during the ball season—whether it's due to competitive jealousies or

power brokering—and it does affect their interactions with each other as well as their own individual ways of coping and development and team performance both on and off the field.

While much research discusses the benefits of participating in athletics, Kreager (2007) found:

rather than building socially competent young men and women, it is suggested, the conditions of contemporary athletics embed youth in value systems marred by homophobia, sexism, racism, and ruthless competition. Within these contexts, middle class males have the most to gain, while disadvantage minority and female athletes are either marginalized or forgo long-term attainment in favor of short-term status benefits and illusory careers. (p. 706)

Aggression and violence are considered natural and expected parts of those contact sports. The literature is replete with studies on violence and male athletes. What is lacking, however, is an abundance of studies that examine females and aggression in sport. Are there marked differences in such behavior? Do violence and aggressive behavior among girls who play team sports exist on the same level as with boys as they reach adolescence? Messner (2007) found differences between the competitive nature of boys and girls, as early as age four: “Preschool boys and kindergartners seem already to know this, easily adopting aggressively competitive team names and an us-versus-them attitude” (p. 27). The same is not the case for girls who play team sports. Girls of the same age take a few more years before they tap into the competitive language on any level, an interesting conclusion drawn by Messner (2007) considering the number of opportunities for girls to participate at an early age in competitive sports has increased by

way of community and regional travel teams in the sports of softball, soccer, and basketball.

Fine's (1987) research on preadolescent males who play Little League baseball revealed that verbal aggression may be accepted among male teammates, but only by certain players and only across or down the social hierarchy, never up, especially when the higher status player on the team is present. Regarding physical aggression, Fine (1987) tells us:

although boys sometimes strike or push each other, serious fights rarely develop, and physically aggressive boys are often scorned. The boys with the most prestige in the five leagues were not those who were the most physically aggressive or who got into fights, and they had not become leaders because they had bested other boys. (p. 119)

Fine's (1987) work with little league baseball players shows that among the boys, physically aggressive behavior displayed by teammates is not a trait that lends itself to leadership or respect. Yet, this seems to be in contrast to what we know about sports and aggression being valued among adolescent and adult male athletes. The boys in Fine's (1987) research seem to have their own social boundary lines that should not be crossed. Perhaps environmental or parental influences made some of these boys withstand a commonplace practice of physical aggressiveness to achieve dominance.

Sport and violence are the topic of much of the research related to masculine identities. Again, we continue to hear the theme echoed that aggressive behavior is highly prized as is playing while one is hurt. And further, Washington and Karen (2001) write the social construction of gender requires men "to be well muscled, strong, unemotional,

and extremely oriented to a win-at-all-costs code of athletics, and women appear uninterested in sports” (p. 198). Coakley (1994) devotes an entire chapter in his book to deviance. Much of this was written about cheating and resorting to overly physical contact on the playing field and drug use:

Violence becomes a means for athletes to prove their worth and establish membership on their teams.... Within the social context of the team, the willingness to face and use violence and to endure its consequences creates an intense form of drama and excitement that can facilitate strong emotions among the members of the team. (Coakley, 1994, p. 179)

For many male athletes, violent behavior in sport can reinforce a player’s sense of manhood and secure his place on the team. Kreager (2007) asserts:

contemporary athletics embed youth in value systems marred by homophobia, sexism, racism, and ruthless competition. Within these contexts, middle class males have the most to gain while disadvantaged minority and female athletes are either marginalized or forgo long-term attainment in favor of short-term status benefits and illusory professional careers. (p. 706)

Contact sports like the ones in which males are involved promote violence and are seen as necessary to preserving male privilege and power. Eder and Parker (1987) report that among the football players and coaches they observed during their study, “a team member who was especially aggressive was often praised [and] aggressive behavior within in sports was an acceptable way to deal with interpersonal conflict” (p. 205).

Physical aggressiveness is prized by members of male athletic teams. To achieve the goal of sport, winning, there must be some violence involved in men’s sports (Messner, 2007).

Messner (2007) interviewed male athletes on the need for violence and aggressiveness in sport. To earn a reputation as being a hitter or aggressive or taking cheap shots or even playing fairly, staying within the sanctioned rules of the game or at least not getting caught, was to earn respect, to be a feared competitor, and to move up the chain in the hierarchy. Messner (2007) writes:

though sports participation may have initially promised “some kind of closeness,” (with other boys) by the ages of nine or ten the less skilled boys were already becoming alienated from—or weeded out of—the highly competitive and hierarchical system of organized sports. (p. 51)

But what does the literature show us about female athletes and the use of aggression and maintenance of hierarchy? Do female athletes use aggression to earn respect, establish dominance, and secure their places on the team? Coakley (1994) says there is little research on violence and women in sport. He concludes that women athletes stick to the rules and generally steer away from violence on the playing field and suggests that girls may be more inclined to view sports as a place to be more aggressive as they learn to define sports like boys are taught but women don't need what he calls a “masculinity badge” to help define themselves as women. Coakley (1994) writes about gender relations and sports as character builders: “Women would have to be aggressive, unemotional, willing to play in pain, and willing to sacrifice their bodies for the sake of a victory so as to be seen as having character” if they are to be treated and viewed equally on the playing fields (Coakley, 1994, p. 96). Clearly, though, society does not seem to be ready to accept females behaving badly as part of the sport. Those sports in our culture

that contain elements of verbal and physical aggression fit with what many consider to be masculine and powerful. Gorely, Holroyd, and Kirk (2003) observe the following:

The key physical competences required by and celebrated in elite sport, the forceful occupation of space and skillful control over objects, map directly onto conventional constructions of hegemonic masculinity. Muscularity acts in this context as a key signifier of masculinity. (p. 438)

The national news highlighted the unsportsmanlike conduct of University of New Mexico soccer player who committed some very aggressive acts caught on videotape; those actions included pulling the hair of an opposing player so forcefully that the player was taken to the ground, purposefully kicking another player when the player was already down on the field, and punching or elbowing another in the face. The player accused of such overly aggressive and unsportsmanlike conduct was a female athlete named Elizabeth Lambert. Her actions on the field were replayed over and over, bringing into focus the unease we as a society feel when females act aggressively in sporting competitions. Many in our society still expect women to be gentle, nurturing, and submissive. And when it comes to athletics, many feel women should demonstrate a certain level of class and repose that continues to contribute to the entrenched stereotypes that abound in our society. I can't even count how many friends and colleagues with whom I spoke and who saw this event replayed on national television and on the internet were appalled at the behavior of this girl. Never mind that she was an athlete. The fact that a female so openly displayed physical aggression toward the opposing players was what shocked those who saw the footage.

Americans love their sports despite the stories of excess we hear reported by the news media. As the mother of a female high school athlete and a fan of many types of sports, I was amazed at the behavior of this college player—and being in the field of curriculum studies, I probably should know better than to stereotype females in the way described above. But initially I did. Why wasn't I so as shocked when the Georgia football player got a jab to the eye from an opposing player about the same time?

About the same time as this event unfolded with the New Mexico soccer player, things were coming to a head with my own daughter trying to manage the behavior of another senior on the team who was wreaking havoc on team unity and morale. But in working through that process, what I would see emerge from my own daughter was an eye-opening experience for me as well.

Flexing Leadership Muscle--Psychological Warfare Begins

While the back seat of the bus may have been traditionally reserved for the senior leaders, Hillary calculatngly tossed a monkey wrench into those dynamics and the established pecking order of the seniors and a handful of other players being entitled and welcomed to ride in the back. She gave up her seat to disassociate herself from the fallout of this girl she's played ball with for about eight years. And the third senior, the Nice Girl, who is more passive and not playing due to chronic knee injuries, wants to join Hillary. Kinney (1993) writes "supportive talk and deep understanding of one another may be due, at least in part, to common experiences" (p. 35). Hillary and her friend had watched the actions of this third senior as the season unfolded, and they decided they had had enough. The next night Hillary and the nice girl left my living room to have some privacy in the garage to collude about a plan over how to handle the recent developments

with the other senior, the girl they've known since childhood, the girl who has become more aggressive in her quest to establish herself as a dominant player and power broker on this year's team. Bettis, Jordan, and Montgomery (2005) worked with African American girls who tried out myriad identities at school. The girls called themselves the Sex Mob, their identities fluid ones, dressing in trendy fashions like popular middle class white girls in the school at times and then viewing those same girls with disdain. "Members of the Sex Mob did not adhere to the Preps' cherished principles of femininity....They literally tried out different versions of womanhood, many of which were not considered appropriate by Prep and dominant standards" (Bettis et al., 2005, p. 77).

Unbeknownst to me until much later, the two girls were in the process of discarding those same principles of femininity when they devised a plan to shake things up on the next bus trip to an away game the next day. They are beginning to think calculatingly and in strategizing ways about how to manage conflict. They decide to move to the front of the bus to shake things up and send a message to both the bully and the other teammates that things needed to change. But their plan did not work on this bus trip; the nice girl who plotted with Hillary had been on crutches and so came late and missed the rendezvous point. Nonetheless, Hillary stuck to her plan and rode at the front of the bus as part of her strategy to reverse the tables on the bully and bring her around into the fold of what Hillary envisioned as appropriate behavior for a senior and leader on the team. Most of the other girls had adjusted their seats as well, moving to the front of the bus with Hillary and leaving the very back to the team bully and her sidekick.

Next on Hillary's list of things to do was to make every effort to strike out the team bully at the plate while she pitched to her during practice, in effect trying to secure her dominant position on the field. Hillary came home that Monday quite pleased with herself as she struck her out with a curve ball and an off-speed pitch. The bully slung off her helmet and threw her bat to the ground because she was unable to get a hit off Hillary. Hillary said the coach and some members of the team laughed at the girl's immature reaction. And, important for Hillary, she got the better of her at the plate. Still, Hillary was unable to make much progress in changing the girl's behavior. And, to this point, Hillary hasn't been able to come up with the courage to tell this girl face to face, directly, that there are problems with morale and team unity stemming from all the aggressive behaviors being dished out toward teammates. But since no one else will take this girl to task, Hillary decides she will have to resort to other tactics, tactics that will require she abandon the notion of niceness, tactics I gained a glimpse of as she planned them out in advance, working on the new identity she would be try in her efforts to restore balance to the team. Thompson's (1998) work with African American girls demonstrates they do not hold to the virtue of being nice as meeting markers for femininity: "The black cultural model for womanhood is...not about being nice, or being a lady, or upsetting people....It's about being capable and competent. It's about being someone to reckon with" (p. 536). Thompson's (1998) description may be an appropriate one for Hillary; she has tried to work through the issues by being nice and nonconfrontational, but those strategies will give way to another side of her identity.

Verbal Warfare—Striking Back

Up to now, what has occurred has been the intimidation of teammates with threats to “kick their asses” or hit them, but no follow through with the threats has occurred. To this point in the season it has mostly been just verbal intimidation. Merten’s work (1997) and others centers on girls in groups, but what about the individuals who act alone, without the support of sidekicks and foils? Such seems to be the case with this player. She does not seem to need the relational support of many other girls to carry out her actions. No other players seem to want to seem to join in on this. Some of the teammates would say things back to her, but that would only make things worse; she would then often continue the cursing and tirade about being a senior, which gave her a sense of entitlement to act how she wished—this was her year after all. For those who wouldn’t say anything back, things did not get worse. Their submissiveness was enough to make the girl move on. Hillary’s perception that the bully was tapping into her status as a senior falls into line with what Merten (1997) says about the role of hierarchy in relation to meanness:

Hierarchal position was an essential factor for the successful use of meanness in the sense that a girl’s effectiveness in being mean depended on her status in the clique...high status protected girls from the meanness of members with less social status and thus demonstrated their superiority. (p. 187)

Part of the way in which Hillary personally dealt with this issue was to play the scenarios out in her head and then verbally replay them with me as to what she would say to this teammate, who behaved as though her skills and attitude were beyond reproach. As she worked through how to best handle particular situations with this girl, Hillary took on the persona of one of her favorite teachers this year who uses a prissy, mocking tone (sort of

like Ben Stiller in *Zoolander*) to tease his students or redirect them as the case may be. Winnicott (2005) writes: “To control what it outside one has to do things, not simply to think or to wish, and doing things takes time” (p. 55). Here he is talking of playing in time and place as a way to work through her issues, trying on personas and acting out what she’d really like to say to this girl. Hillary has taken to playing, through words and deeds, in an effort to work out how she would like to see herself handling this situation with a team bully. Hillary decided that she wasn’t seeing much progress with her efforts at psychological warfare, which did give her a sense of satisfaction but seemed to be lost on the player who was the object of it since there was no direct confrontation about behavior. The only other option was to get verbal and physical herself. And it was during this time that I came to know a side of my daughter I hadn’t seen before. Ever.

Breaking Through

Once Hillary decided to take the next step and started using her new form of bully warfare, the bully’s behavior slacked off a bit. Hillary made sure she confronted this behavior or responded to it immediately in front of the younger players. But Hillary indicated to me she wasn’t getting the consistent results she wanted from this player or from herself and the rest of the team. They were working their way towards region playoffs still, and they didn’t have much time to spare. So she decided to have an outright and honest talk with her. But before she could do this, Hillary herself received some of this girl’s negative attention. On a long bus trip to one of the games midway through the season, the bullying picked up again, directing her hostility toward Hillary. The bully hit Hillary in the arm. That was it for Hillary, who hit her back and verbally shredded her until she backed down. Hillary said to her, “Do that again, we’ll be fightin’”.

Hillary finally had enough, knew she needed to follow up, and decided it was time for a face to face conversation about how the girl's behavior was affecting the team and their potential to get to the regions. Hillary invited the girl out to a local hang out and tried another tactic. She later relayed the conversation to me:

Hillary: Look, I'm your friend. I'm being straight with you. A friend is supposed to tell you when to stop. If the roles were reversed, I'd want someone to tell me I was bullying and making people scared. It's really got to stop; you're trying to intimidate them.

Player: I'm not. I'm a senior and they should listen to me.

Hillary: But they don't. Obviously it isn't working. Haven't you noticed? Have you thought about trying to listen to them as individuals and not treat them as cattle? That's what I do.

Player: Well, yeah, they do what you want because they like you.

Hillary: Well, it works.

Player: I'll try it, but if it doesn't work, I'm going back to the way I was before.

This conversation/intervention took place about the middle of the season. The bad behavior slacked off some; the outbursts and blaming of others became less frequent and only seemed to surface when the girl's anger flared up. Hillary said the player became more introspective and kept her opinions to herself a bit more. In sum, the situation had gotten better. Hillary said she didn't expect miracles and only hoped for some progress before the team got to regional playoffs. It seemed to be working, but it may have been too little, too late.

Whitaker (2006), in discussing what she considers to be our abusive curriculum and its continued legitimization in our public schools, tells us “control over another is most effective when executed subtly, even when controlling behaviors are intermittently aggressive. Sometimes controlling behaviors are tempered with expressions of affection and overtures of seeming support” (p. 42). She is speaking here of Western education and its reliance on maintaining balance for those who live in the mainstream of this country. Whitaker’s (2006) point is well taken, even when dialed down to the situation with which my daughter is trying to cope. Is Hillary caught up in this abusive curriculum, or is she perhaps generating new ways of knowing, new forms of knowledge? To me, it’s clear that she is striking out on her own, trying to break the cycle that she and the rest of the team have found themselves caught up in, moving toward change in team dynamics. She tried to exert control over another subtly, as Whitaker (2006) suggests, but it didn’t solve all the problems Hillary encountered this last season. Issues with other players cropped up which tested her resolve to continue working on her new ways of knowing as well as her leadership style. Belenky et al. (1996) write about women’s experiences in higher education, which sprang from complaints female students had about those educational experiences. They found through their work that women commonly use the metaphor of voice and silence to describe both their experiences and their development intellectually and ethically. The authors discuss rebellion as a turning point in some of the women’s education:

The student’s discovery that teachers respect her authentic voice is gratifying, of course, but for many...it came too late. Much time had been wasted being good,

and for many women the relentless effort to be good had prevented the development of a more authentic self. (Belenky et al., 1996, p. 211)

Hillary is working to find her voice, something Currie et al. (2007) found to be true in their research:

Lacking economic or political power in the school setting, the one kind of power adolescents do possess is the ability to create peer status groups...recognizing how social hierarchies are implicated in girls' aggression complicates our understanding of girls' agency, hence our notions of "empowerment". (p. 33)

She and the other girls are securing their positions in the softball team hierarchy. Pushing the boundaries of institutional and educational pressure to perform in certain ways, the girls are empowering themselves and finding their voices in ways that might never be known if we did not look closely at the worlds in which they live.

State Playoffs

Somehow the girls pulled it together and made it to the bottom seeding of the state playoffs despite the bumps and bruises along the way. They came together when it counted. But there would still be challenges to overcome from another player.

While Hillary carried equipment on and off the bus, she watched M, another one of the varsity players, avoid the work of the rest of the team as she sometimes did during the regular season. Hillary told her she was not exempt from working, helping with whatever needed to be done—they were in state playoffs after all. The player's response was mumbled under her breath but heard by some other members of the team: "Shut the fuck up." Those team members immediately came to Hillary. Was their point to stir drama? Or was it to let the leader know there was some challenge to her authority?

Hillary said she seemed to think it was the latter. So she confronted this player M, challenging her to say it to her face. A mumbled response was all Hillary got, but M began to shag the balls littering the field during the practice. Or, more accurately, she picked up one ball—perhaps to make a point to Hillary. At least that’s what Hillary thought. Hillary said, “This is why we cannot be a great team-because of the actions of people like you.”

Again the player told her beyond earshot to “shut the f*** up” a second time. Another player told Hillary that M said she was going to come hit her in the face before the first game. Had the stresses and the drama which affected everyone the entire season boiled down to this? Was it all going to fall apart before their eyes?

Hillary’s response was for the girl to “Bring it—I have on metal cleats. You have on rubber cleats—who do you think’s going to win?”

A player who was close to this exchange told Hillary she said to M, “The season’s almost over, go ahead and do it.” This was pot stirring at its best. But M mumbled again under her breath and stalked off to another end of the field.

When Hillary repeated this exchange to me, I was shocked. Where did this aggressive streak in my own daughter come from? Had it been there all along, hiding under the surface, waiting to be sprung from the constraints of the pressure to maintain appropriate levels of femininity and niceness? I have never seen this side of her before this last season of softball. At what point did she decide that verbalizing her feelings, obviously trying to intimidate a player into submission, happen? My own daughter was now resorting to tactics she so disliked in the senior earlier in the season and was directing those tactics toward someone lower in the hierarchy. Bettis and Adams (2005)

assert “girls are engaging in important identity work, and not in some abstracted manner, but situated in real places....[These] discursive spaces are where the meanings of ideal girlhood and sexuality are fought over, challenged, and recreated” (p. 272). Important gender work is being done in places such as this, and the school curriculum lacks connection to the importance such places have in the lives of girls.

During this second game of the playoffs, towards game’s end, this same player M had a “bad at bat”. She slung her bat and her helmet in the dugout, even after the coach previously said he didn’t want to see that type of behavior. Once again, he didn’t follow through with any kind of chastisement or benching of the offending player. But another player addressed it—player to player—by telling her to pick up her equipment and put it away. Player M told that girl to “Shut the f*** up.” During the huddle down the 3rd base line, after the second game, after they were done in the playoffs, the coach called this player out in front of the rest of the team, according to Hillary. Hillary said she was glad he finally “got a pair, calling her out about her attitude.” Obviously, Hillary had had enough of watching players get away with what she considered intolerable behavior without being held accountable for it by the coaches. Again, though, I saw my own daughter brutally honest and frank about how she felt regarding the inaction by the head coach. The whole season was wrapped in discontent and hard feelings.

Messner (2002) writes about preadolescent and high school boys who play sports, citing in his research that higher status boys “establish hierarchies, involve personal insults and put downs, often as calls to defend masculinity and honor, and often degrade objects as feminine” (p. 34). Rarely do these instances of insults and trash talking take place between two athletes alone. An audience is always a requirement. And I saw and

heard from Hillary and some of her teammates that this, too, was the case with this second player. As she tried to establish her dominance in the team hierarchy, she made sure she had an audience. M used sexual language, language demeaning to women (bitch, slut, etc.), and homophobia mirroring what Messner (2002) and others have found to be the case with male athletes as a way to express her displeasure with decisions Hillary and the other seniors made. So what we see here is one female athlete, in her quest to move to the top of the hierarchy, performing in ways typically associated with male behavior like Messner (2002) describes. Merten (1997) found “a girl's status in the clique influenced the degree to which her actions were perceived by another member as significant even with regard to meanness” (p. 186). This player will be a senior the next year and may be jockeying to move up the social hierarchy on the team. But Hillary decides enough is enough again and is determined to take action. She exhibits some of this aggressive talk towards teammates who at times move beyond the realm of what she considers appropriate and acceptable behavior for a member on this team. But Hillary's motivation, I think, stems not from a desire to garner power and maintain a clique of higher status girls by putting down others; rather, it seems she will respond to situations which require someone stepping in to right what she feels are certain wrongs. She is serving as the behavioral barometer for the team and is not tied to a group of girls like The Council of her freshman year.

Walking back to load up the bus, Hillary wasn't quite finished. She said to the girl, “I have a couple of things I need to say to you. You know how Coach tells us we're not a great team, we're only a good team 'cause we can't get over the hump? You are one of the humps. One day you are to cross someone who doesn't want to be crossed and

you're going to get it. Next year when your senior year sucks, I'll be right there with a big smile on my face saying I told you so." To that, according to Hillary, M's had no response.

They ended up losing the two out of three series against Northside High School in Columbus, GA, and were knocked out of the first round. I think maybe I was surprised they were able to get that far with all the challenges they had faced this season, the bullying issue not being only one that affected team unity. The team from that high school hadn't made it that far toward state in a number of years.

I watched my daughter all season and listened to the things she relayed to me. I was amazed that this young woman, my daughter, came into her own in a way I never would have known or thought had I not spent all these years and months and hours watching and listening to her. She comes off as being more confident, "not taking crap off anyone" (her words). Her salty language I've gotten used to; I recognize it's a part of her growing up....hopefully it's just a phase. But the fact that she tapped into an assertive and aggressive side of her personality was indeed interesting to watch. I am torn between feeling appalled that she has this side to her nature and feeling proud of her for saying things to people that I have difficulty saying because I feel I have to be so sensitive and politically correct as an adult.

Coakley (2004) uses the Greek word *hubris* to describe elite athletes' "sense of being unique and extraordinary" and how "it may be expressed in terms of pride-driven arrogance, an inflated sense of power and importance, and a public persona that communicates superiority and even insolence" (p. 173). The hubris in athletes can result in feelings of invulnerability. The senior player who caused problems at the beginning of

the season didn't seem to be committed to the good of the team. Bonding, for her, wasn't a prerequisite skill to maintain foundational cohesiveness and loyalty even though the context of sports provides for this through the fact that the team works and practices together daily, providing opportunities for the team to bond. And one would think that because many of the girls play on travel teams, some more elite or competitive than others, but all certainly with higher expectations and commitment to playing longer and harder than high school softball teams, that they would realize the importance of needing to do so. Any bonding that was occurring was despite how this player was affecting team dynamics and even demonstrated itself in a show of circling the wagons against her and her sidekick. Coakley (2004) suggests that elite athletes are more likely to succumb to hubris. And female athletes are no longer an exception to this. Additionally, Young (1997) tells us:

female athletes in power and performance sports, such as rugby, basketball, and wrestling, have embraced the physicality and potential violence within their sport, while still retaining their "feminine" identity. As a result, female athletes are moving away from current social definitions that women should not be involved in physical or aggressive activities. If hubris is prominent in male sports and female sports are evolving along the lines of male sports, then the potential for female athletes to exhibit feelings of invulnerability is greatly enhanced. (p. 115)

This is an interesting point to consider. The senior player, the rising senior, and Hillary herself played middle school ball and began on the more competitive travel teams at that same time. They've been playing ball long before that. So my point here is that they have been socialized into hierarchies of authority. If Hillary had been a different person, she

may not have been able to effect what she felt was her responsibility to tackle. The team may have continued to fall apart if someone other than the adults in charge didn't take matters into their own hands.

But Hillary, too, resorted to verbal aggression, at least to corral the negative behaviors of some of the players. And she suffered from self-doubt at times. Why was she not seen as a team bully? Perhaps we can learn more from McCormack's (2011) research. McCormack (2011) writes that bullying among boys, to include what he calls a fag discourse, serves to bring boys back into the fold of what constitutes the norm of the setting at hand. But at the English school that was the site of McCormack's (2011) research, dominance and other forms of traditionally masculine behavior were not the determining factors of placement in the social hierarchy of the school; rather, the hierarchy was maintained through one's popularity, and this popularity did not have to do with being an athlete or from a white, privileged background. It would seem that in Hillary's situation, this would be true as well. Hillary had a couple of factors working on her side. One of them was the fact that she didn't ask players to do anything she wasn't willing to do. She didn't demonstrate an attitude of entitlement merely because she was a senior player. Hillary was well liked by students and adults at her high school. Her friendship groups were not exclusive, not competitive with other groups. She had friends who came from wealthy, middle class, and lower income families. Her friends were African-American, Asian, Caucasian, multiracial, etc. She moved fluidly between athletes from all manner of sports to friends who were not athletes with interests other than sports. And she did not reign over a group of higher status girls on the team or off who translated their power into meanness and then maintained the popularity derived

from it that way. All of these are significant reasons as to how and why Hillary was not perceived as a bully when she tapped into and let show those other sides of her identity. McCormack (2011) writes that popularity is directly tied to race, gender, class, and sexuality. But he found “charisma, authenticity, emotional support, and social fluidity” as influencing factors on one’s popularity and place in the school’s social hierarchy (McCormack, 2011, p. 94). Exuberance, “being real” real and approachable, providing support to younger players, and having a variety of friends with interests other than softball and from varying backgrounds and ethnicities across the spectrum of high school groups are all attributes Hillary possessed.

The Season Ends--Softball Banquet

Some of the players on the high school team have branched off onto finding new travel teams. But tonight is the high school softball banquet, one last time for the girls to come together to celebrate and acknowledge the end of the season. It had been a long season one. But go we did.

It was interesting to note that this year Hillary wanted to sit at a table with her father and me. The last couple of years, she sat with her friends at the banquet while her father and I sat with other parents. The coaches progressed through the junior varsity awards and then recognized all the varsity players. Then a handful of awards were given out—defensive player, offensive player, best batting average, etc. Each player went to the front of the room to receive her trophy, and the obligatory pictures were snapped for the memory books. I watched Hillary out of the corner of my eye; she clapped and cheered graciously for each and every one of those girls called forward.

Finally, it was down to the last award of the evening, one voted on by the coaches not the players as with the other awards—the coach’s award. The head coach started by saying that this player was one he never had to worry about when he gave her a workout routine for the day. She never had to be checked on or redirected. She was, according to him, the third coach on the field and in the dugout, someone he could count on to help guide the other players. She was the bulldog on the mound. And then he called Hillary’s name to come to the front. She went to him, shook his hand, and accepted the award she never imagined she’d receive. When she sat back down at our table, her chin was trembling and she had tears in her eyes. I had to look away so I wouldn’t tear up. Proud mother moment. And the end of softball for our family.

It was a bittersweet ending to a challenging season for my daughter. Since that time, she has hung up her cleats and never looked back. Softball is over for her; she was ready to let go. She tested herself on the field of leadership, kicked up the dirt nested in the challenges of it, and managed it as best she could at the time with the skills she had at that moment in time. The stat books will be put away to gather dust, and the memory of her senior year of softball and the previous years will fade probably sooner than she thinks.

CHAPTER 5

LESSONS LEARNED

As I finish sharing this story of Hillary, it is only natural that I delve into whatever lessons are to be learned from her experiences. But she is not the only one with experiences; I, too, learned much from her and the years we spent together through this. As well, I believe there are lessons to be learned for those of us who read and write in the field of curriculum studies. It is these areas on which Chapter Five will focus.

Lessons for Hillary

Fall. Winter. Spring. Summer. Those seasons came and went all too fast to me now that I have the benefit of time to reflect upon them. The softball cleats, pitcher's mask and glove remained in the garage on a shelf for a long time after that final softball banquet of her senior year and they continue to do so. Never looking back, Hillary busied herself working two jobs, being dually enrolled in high school and college, enjoying the last few months of high school, and making her post-graduation plans. She graduated from high school, enrolled in college, and joined a sorority.

Whether it was Hillary or any of the other girls on the team over the years, they were challenging and undermining dominant ideals of femininity. Schippers (2002) points out:

In any social setting...people can go along with the rules for how to do gender or they can do gender in alternative ways. When people go along with the rules, the gender order remains safely in tact. When they don't follow the rules, or even better, make up a new set of rules, sometimes the gender order gets shaken up a bit. (p. 16)

That last year of softball was a tumultuous one for Hillary. But within the tumult, she came away wiser, and, unfortunately, for someone so young, with the beginnings of a bit of armor to layer, shield, and protect herself from unpleasant situations and conflict. But in order to get those callouses, she made a choice to resist and challenge institutional pressures as she reshaped her identity. So what do I think she learned?

Lesson One. For Hillary, it was okay to balance her femininity with masculine attributes. I was pleased to see on the news just recently the story of a female soccer player who was encouraged by her high school's football coach to go out for the team as a kicker. But the real "kicker" was this: On homecoming evening during the half time events, this young athlete was crowned homecoming queen, bedecked in her football uniform, pads, cleats, and all. After the crowning, she rushed to the locker room to be with her male teammates and finish the second half. In the television interview, she said the other football players weren't sexist at all; they accepted her. They all had the same uniform, pads, and equipment, after all...except for the cup, she said.

Distinct moments influenced Hillary's perceptions about this desire or need to achieve that balance. First, Hillary acknowledged purposefully making herself appear more feminine about the time of her sophomore year. The Columbus, GA, softball clinic she attended one summer and, later, the comments of one of her high school coaches made it explicitly clear to her that to go without some attention to your appearance reinforces lesbian or masculine female stereotypes. Second, it was also around this time, she recalls, that the Women's College World Series began to gain in popularity with increasing televised coverage. Hillary saw her college level softball idols appear in full make up, glitter, and bows on the softball field. She clearly denotes this as a time when

more attention was given to appearance by most of the players on her high school and travel teams. A few girls bought black and gold ribbons and glitter to pass out to other girls prior to a tournament. And while Hillary easily bought into this effort, she recalled she didn't quite care how she looked by the end of the game—tired, sweaty, dirty, makeup smeared, and bows initially perfectly placed hanging askew by the end of a game of pitching. Third, playing fast pitch softball gave Hillary the opportunity to experiment with balancing the masculine side of her being. Being on the mound, she had to appear assertive, aggressive, in charge and in command of the game. To appear weak was to be subordinated and dominated by another. These characteristics, considered traditionally masculine ones in sport, are not the ideals women are supposed to possess. And for women athletes to appear overly masculine, not feminine enough, is to open themselves up to scrutiny about their sexuality. Thus, the wearing of bows, glitter, and makeup offsets the requirement of a sport to demonstrate masculine traits in order to win. Pitt (2003) tells us:

the personal is not merely a set of attributes that can be pointed or named, nor is it a blank of experiences to be drawn upon unproblematically to render the world visible. Rather, the personal is constituted within a web of relations that includes relations of time (how the past works on the present) and relations with others, knowledge and authority. The hide and seek of the personal is played out on this terrain, but its movements may exceed the force of the ideological or the institutional. (p. 88)

Pitt (2003) elaborates that the personal is a way for us to see how we experience ourselves in this world. Indeed, Hillary's play with the personal, flirting with various

identities—both the femininities and the masculinities—over the years on the field and off the field, afforded her opportunities that she may not have been able to have otherwise. She probably didn't know it at the time, but she was pushing and nudging at boundaries and seams that had her knitted up within institutional constraints of who she was supposed to be because she was a female who played sports. Messner (2002) discusses the center in sport as being a place of power and domination on two levels. In some sports such as baseball, basketball, and football, the center controls the actions and reactions of all others and is the focus of the gaze of spectators. He writes:

through most of the twentieth century, sports was clearly one of the less contested, core institutions in which heterosexual men's embodied power was enabled and celebrated in ways that supported and naturalized patriarchal beliefs in male superiority and female frailty and dependence. Once generated within sport, these conservative ideas were then liberally transported into other core institutions such as the military and the state and used to support the "naturalness" of men's rule....The patriarchal ideas generated by sport continued to be used as a damper on women's quest for full respect, equity, and power. (Messner, 2002, p. xx)

If the center is the source of power and domination for men, then is it the same for women like Hillary who work from the center, the pitcher's mound? With the increasing numbers of females playing sports, they surely must be challenging patriarchal ideals of the gender order from within the institution which has worked to keep them at bay since the women of generations before them tried to cross over its boundaries and into it so many years ago. It may come later when Hillary realizes the myriad ways in which

playing this sport affected who she was in particular places and times and how those moments influence who she has developed into being. She experienced detours and circumventions on her journey forward, just as Pitt (2003) describes. It was a dynamic process that she experienced, fashioned out her performances and experimentations with the masculine and feminine sides of herself demanded by context and relationships.

Lesson Two. Hillary learned how to stand up for herself. This lesson is closely tied to Lesson One in that she had to tune into the masculine side of herself to accomplish what she felt needed to be done. Hillary could not be soft spoken, submissive, or described with any other adjective when faced with some difficult situations like thwarting or corralling the team bully and other players as she tested herself in various leadership situations. To be 17 and to face the issues she faced, of which only a few have been related here, indeed challenged her, to be sure. The strategies she used to cope with and manage it were varied and creative. But those coping strategies required her to set aside the emotion and tap into the intellectual side of herself, the side that calculated and put into place responses and actions to conflict and behaviors with which she took issue. Granskog (2003) indicates:

Participation in athletic activities has provided us with the opportunity to find ourselves, to become more integrated, whole, and empowered as individuals. Embodiment, realizing the physical strength and centeredness of our bodies, has meant empowerment in an emotional as well as physical and mental sense of well-being. (p. 51)

When she was at her peak, Hillary found this centeredness. She was strong and empowered, both physically and mentally. If she had not been, I doubt she would have

had the intestinal fortitude to face the issues that affected team morale and, therefore, progress toward the state championships during her senior year. Giving into the emotion, acting like a stereotyped female, would have derailed her ability to get to a leadership position on that team and, subsequently, make it to the state playoffs. Yet, Hillary had to involve herself in emotional work to accomplish this. Evans (2002) explains:

while it can be helpful to pay attention to the emotional work that everyone engages in, I argue that it is incumbent upon those who are part of historically privileged groups to consider the qualitatively different emotional work that those on the margins engage in....Where there is social pressure to be the same, not different—where difference is branded as deviance—I believe the brunt of the emotional work borne from double consciousness rests with insiders. (p. 32)

Evans (2002) is writing of the need for teachers and students to not just accept diversity in the classroom with regards to working and teaching and learning side by side with gay and lesbian students and teachers but to welcome and make safe those environments we share. She suggests more of the burden of emotional work needs to be done on the part of those who belong to dominant identities (heterosexuals and males) even though they may find this point difficult to accept because they typically are not in situations in which they must perform this emotional work. I take Evans's (2002) suggestion a step further as it has application to Hillary's situation. Female athletes like Hillary who are self-assured, contemplating, assertive and aggressive players on the softball field have to conduct emotional work about which Evans (2002) speaks. They exist in a double bind. Perhaps she could only use those traditionally male character traits and be fully accepted in this place and in this time because she took the extra steps to project her femininity

outwardly. We do not know how she would have been received by teammates and coaches if she were a lesbian player exhibiting these characteristics. Would the reaction to her be so different?

Lesson Three. Hillary learned, too, she did not have the desire to commit to softball at another level. This was enough for her. After seven years, she was tired of the long hours and practices required to play softball at competitive levels. Knowing what it was going to take to play at the college level, even a small college, Hillary was aware that she didn't want softball to be her life for the next four years. That last year of softball included not only games and practices but lessons, too, and dual enrollment at the local university and two part time jobs.

Hillary received quite an education during those years she pursued sports. She learned much about herself, and as I spoke with her in the writing of this last chapter, she demonstrated a level of maturity I am pleased to see unfold. Riley-Taylor (2002) shares with us:

Education begins with each individual being, not only “turning inward” but also “moving outward”; a search for self and also self’s relation within the larger frame of community, society, world. It is also about children and those who would guide them toward a “becoming” of their own—into the fullness of life, the richness of relationships, the strengthening and broadening of skills and abilities. It is about nourishing their capacities for negotiation, discernment, and fairness, so that they may come to recognize their own responsibilities as members within a larger matrix of life. (p. 5)

In the years Hillary pursued playing fast-pitch softball at the middle school, high school, and travel ball levels, she turned inward as she negotiated from within the type of player she wanted to be. She learned to make decisions for herself regarding what she considered fair and equitable treatment of players (to include herself), how to negotiate situations to make the best of them, how to handle her disappointments. Did she struggle with this turning inward/moving outward journey? Of course she did. She stumbled at times, reacted to things and situations without the benefit of age and wisdom, resulting in emotional reactions to perceived or real slights. But she did indeed learn from all her encounters—those she might claim as successes as well as those she might claim as disappointments.

While Hillary decided not to pursue competitive ball at the college level, she took away from the game skills that will serve her well in life--discipline, a sense of competitiveness, a positive work ethic, and a sense of autonomy. Society looks to our schools to promote such qualities in our students to make them productive workers and citizens. Yet, Hillary learned these attributes through sport not schooling. If she and the other girls who play sports did not have the opportunity to do so, we need to consider how and why education and schools alone are not enough to achieve what sports has for them.

Lessons for Me

Morris (2008) points to the need for narcissism in reflecting upon one's life through autobiography. She writes "isn't narcissism necessary in order to understand the Other within the self as well as the self within the Other? How else do you understand Others if not through understanding yourself?" (Morris, 2008, p. 3) So why write about

this? Clearly, I am not writing autobiographically here, but I did learn about myself. Early on in my doctoral work, I came across a book in one of my classes as part of the required readings. It was a collection of work edited by Pamela Bettis and Natalie Adams (2005) that concerned the exploration of local places and contexts and practices in, around, and outside school which influenced the development of adolescent girls and struck a chord with me. By that time I had spent years and years with my daughter Hillary on the travel ball and high school ball circuit and knew the things she was learning while playing ball were at work in the development of her identity. This was far more easily seen to me than talking with her about what she learned about biology, algebra, Spanish, or any number of courses she took toward graduation in 2010. Bettis and Adams (2005) found that the identity work girls conduct shifts and shapes itself according to the places and spaces they inhabit, use, and control.

As my story of Hillary has unfolded, I have tried to convey the various hierarchies in existence at the time she played ball and the pressures she may or may not have felt as she struck out on her own with establishing her own identity/ies. McDowell (1999) tells us about places and practices:

Places are made through power relations which construct the rules which define the boundaries. These boundaries are both social and spatial—they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of the experience. (p. 4)

I have written and learned about boundaries in this work, boundaries both historical and contemporary--boundaries women have faced since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution as they tried to cross into sport; boundaries that have encircled

young women through societal messages dictating acceptable forms of feminine behavior and appearance; and boundaries Hillary has faced as she nudged herself into performances that typified femininity and stepped into areas of masculinity.

Lessons for Curriculum Studies

It is our goal as students of curriculum studies to bring to the forefront the voices of those from whom we don't often hear. Whitaker (2006) writes:

Isolated from perspectives other than those enshrined in the abusive curriculum, students' (and teachers') subjectivity is absent from the content and process of schooling. They begin to see a world in which they do not belong and they may come to believe a narrative that does not include their stories. (p. 44)

As educators and students ourselves, we need to continue to pay attention to the voices and stories young women have to share with us. It is only through listening to their perspectives that we can even hope to understand how they may view the world in which they have to live.

Why should curriculum studies be interested in the subcultures that young women move through like organized sports? Remembering things and places from the past make the present something to which we can belong and become. But I would urge that one has to do more than just remember things from the past. For if we don't use filters to help us screen our thoughts and memories, then we are merely becoming caught up in nostalgia. There has to be more to it than that. And so I think Paula Salvio provides additional advice that we should heed. In analyzing a photograph of Anne Sexton and her family and the turmoil in their lives that played about their faces, Paula Salvio (2007) tells us "one has to look beyond what is available to ordinary perception. One has to sustain

engagement with the image and what lies beyond it. One has to be willing to complicate what appears evident or straightforward” (p. 82). This is what we as students and scholars of curriculum studies must do in our work. We must go beyond what is presented to us at the surface, urging and probing to uncover the real stories underneath our daily machinations. For it is here that we come to know ourselves through others. It is here where real education happens.

Sport holds value in many people’s lives. It is a topic covered by other disciplines like psychology, history, anthropology, and sociology. Despite the burdens of financial hardship so many of us have faced these last few years, we continue to cling to the hours of escape from daily burdens that sporting events provide us. It would seem a natural place for curriculum scholars to turn to hear and share the stories. What is unfolding here does concern education as we know it; it has to do with education, an alternative one, but education nonetheless. This has nothing to do with math or science or English. What it has to do with is so much more important for these girls and my daughter in particular. It was during these few months of the last high school softball season that Hillary was truly tested. Not by SATs or ACTs or end of course tests. But tested by what life is going to throw at her--dealing with challenges and deciding how to face them, working with people you may not like or respect, making a decision and sticking with it, learning from mistakes, discovering who you are and what you value and find important in yourself and others. Parker Palmer (1993) writes about education as a spiritual journey:

In the conventional classroom the focus of study is always outward—on nature, on history, on someone else’s vision of reality. The reality inside the classroom, inside the teacher and the students, is regarded as irrelevant; it is not recognized

that we are part of nature and of history, that we have visions of our own. So we come to think of reality as “out there,” apart from us, and knowing becomes a kind of spectator sport. (p. 34)

For my daughter, it was working on the outside from within. Hillary, whether she was cognizant of it or not, was turning inward and running her own course, running the course Pinar (2004) calls *currere*. Hillary created meaning in the *extracurricular*, not the curricular presentations of lectures and textbooks.

The dominant discourse of sports is alive and well in American high schools. For young women, dominant discourses of sport are widespread—no longer are they relegated and pigeon-holed into socially acceptable sports like cheerleading and gymnastics and figure skating. Now they play field hockey, rugby, softball, basketball, and even football—not necessarily sports considered to embrace traditional notions about femininity in Western society. But the discourse that surrounds young women who play sports, at least in the experiences Hillary has had, are replete with power and privilege.

The places and spaces young women use to explore their identities are beginning to gain more attention in the field of curriculum studies. I have attempted to uncover the places and spaces where Hillary was able to do this as well as layers of identity that have become part of Hillary. If we as teachers, parents, and curriculum scholars understand the complexities that are our daughters, then perhaps we can move toward developing practices and ways of thinking and educating which help us become better able to see how young females become adults through institutions that attempt to regulate their development. Adults may not think that softball fields, locker rooms, bus rides, hotel

rooms, and restaurants are significant sites of identity work for young women. But they are. Dimitriadis (2001), in writing about the hip hop culture, tells us:

young people must typically traverse places defined and policed by adults—for example, schools and shopping malls. Understanding how young people map their own lives here, how they create their own sense of personal place within and between these sites, is of crucial importance if we are to begin to develop policies and institutions most relevant to and for their lives. (p. 37)

Hip hop culture is far removed from the world of softball, if taken at face value and initial glance. But the point is the same. Beyond the scope and sequence of the curriculum, beyond the regulation of behavior, we find groups of young people fashioning their identities *despite* what education does to them or expects from them. Whether bound by politics, race, or gender, young people must negotiate their way through their education. On the softball field, girls must negotiate the way they've been socialized to be females in this society. Girls who play softball cannot play softball and be successful if they are passive, emotionally and physically weak, and indecisive. Boys do not have to negotiate their masculinity in this way—unless they are gay men. But then, the question of sexuality is not treated the same. Girls must work to prove they are heterosexual; boys must not.

The idea of liminality and liminal spaces has to do with thresholds and the crossing over boundaries. But this concept of liminal spaces has application and merit to the field of curriculum studies and to my research in particular on young female athletes. Sydnor (2000) discusses of liminality and sport culture:

In liminal spaces there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence, to be famous for a few seconds, to speak the forbidden, to reverse the social order, to tease social taboos. Liminal spaces are becoming places where the old rules may no longer apply, where identities are fluid, where meanings are negotiated....The liminal can apply not only to rites of passage of individuals or groups, but to the liminal spaces, the “not here, not there” that are in culture at large. (p. 226)

Hillary resides in many groups not just one; she resides in and between and beyond boundaries on purpose or not to make sense of the relationships she has had and the place and space in which she dwells, as do the other girls on the team. Masculine and feminine, passive at times and assertive, aware of her sexuality and not, depending upon the contextual frame. Talburt (2000) suggests this might be a way of questioning fixed places and locations (p. 145).

Hillary carved out and moved into and among spaces that most young women won't ever experience. Like so many other girls who play sports, she wrangled at levels consciously and subconsciously with messages about who she was supposed to be. Because they play sports and because they are girls, they are assumed and expected to behave and appear in particular ways; these girls who play softball and indeed any other sport may internalize such expectations and assumptions about who they are supposed to be, which creates what Janet Miller (2005) calls social sedimentation. Internalization makes social sedimentation become psychic sedimentation; yet, it is precisely because such assumptions and expectations are internalized that they can become a site for change within the individual. And this is what I saw Hillary attempting to manage. She was

effecting changes to her psychic self, attempting to pry herself away from those messages about femininity and softness and submissiveness. And so she did.

Hillary, and many of the girls with whom she played ball, recreated themselves. They resisted and challenged the roles society had set up for them, and they tried to achieve balance within themselves as they worked on their individual identities and found the power within themselves to challenge gender roles on some level, attempting to level the playing fields on which they work and play.

We spent hundreds of hours together discussing and listening to each other about the game, power and hierarchies, meanness, masculinity, and femininity, most of these were reflective discussions and sessions as she decompressed and regrouped after practices, games, meetings, bus rides, surgeries, and physical therapy appointments. I was merely an outsider looking in, peering over the boundaries and catching glimpses of her working on who she was becoming. And through that process I hope to have provoked further questions about the lived experiences of girls in our public schools and how they negotiate their identities. Adams (2005) urges:

for Girl Power to be a truly progressive step in rewriting the cultural scripts for girls in the new millennium, the continuance of a narrowly defined construction of girlhood must be challenged, and multiple ways of being a “normal” girl must be encouraged. Only then will all girls, regardless of their race, class, or sexual orientation, have the opportunity to experience what it means to be a self-actualized, emotionally healthy, socially competent woman (p. 111).

Whether Hillary knew it or not, she found ways within the confines of her education to resist the roles and messages which had been ingrained within her through a patriarchal

society's messages. She pushed and nudged boundaries, resisting and reinventing identities as she saw fit. Had I not been watching, observing, listening, and discussing these resistances and reinventions with Hillary, such switching of identities may have slipped by unnoticed and I would have missed a once in a lifetime experience to come to know my daughter that probably would not have been revealed to me otherwise. My work as a researcher, as a parent, as an educator would have not been so informed, and the opportunity to explore and query how young girls like Hillary make sense of issues related to power and gender would have escaped me. "Sports provides opportunities for us to observe, reinforce, redefine, invent, and transgress 'boundaries' of all manner" (Dyck, 2000, p. 31). Because sport is full of complicated and challenging contexts and issues as I have described, it is a rich and fertile area for further research.

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