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Full Court Press(ure):
Negotiating Gender & Sexuality in Women's Collegiate Basketball

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Full Court Press(ure):
Negotiating Gender & Sexuality in Women's Collegiate Basketball

By

Michelle J. Manno
M.A., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2008

Advisor: Amanda E. Lewis, Ph.D.

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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Doctor of Philosophy
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2014

Abstract

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By Michelle J. Manno

In this project, I explore how race, gender, and sexuality on a structural level impact the everyday experiences of female athletes on an individual level, as they work to negotiate multiple, and sometimes conflicting, identities. Drawing on data from a year-long ethnography with a Division I collegiate women's basketball program as well as over thirty in-depth interviews with current and former elite-level female athletes, I examine whether, in the contemporary, post Title IX moment, the female athlete is still considered a "cultural contradiction" and if so, how female athletes negotiate with their conflicting identities. Moreover, I explore how the changing socio-political context around sexuality impacts the use of lesbian stereotyping to police female athletes' expressions of their gender and sexual identities. Previous research has argued that because athleticism is defined primarily by characteristics we associate with hegemonic masculinity (i.e. strength) rather than hegemonic or idealized femininity (i.e. passivity), female athletes experience what has been termed "dual and dueling identities." As a result of these conflicting identities, scholars have argued that female athletes engage in strategies to over-emphasize their femininity such as wearing bows or make-up during sporting competition or more severe body modifying strategies such as limiting weight training. Unfortunately, however, little scholarly work has examined this phenomenon with an intersectional framework that recognizes these athletes' experiences to be also racialized. My findings suggest that while some female athletes do experience conflicting female/athlete identities, many do not. Most do, however, grapple significantly with lesbian stereotyping and the strict monitoring and policing of their expressions of gender and sexuality through various forms of intricate boundary work at the individual and institutional levels. Ultimately, and somewhat ironically, at the very same moment that the shifting socio-political landscape moves towards more acceptance of LGBTQ individuals generally, the institutional context of sports has dug in its heels, leading to heightened awareness and stricter policing of female athletes' gender and sexuality.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

"If You Play Basketball, You're Gay": Gender, Sexuality, & Collegiate Women's Basketball

Another Kind of Pep Talk

With time quickly winding down and just seconds left in the half, Rowan dribbled up the court, looked ahead and found Kameron open near the basket. Kameron caught the pass and as time expired, finished the play with an easy lay-up giving Midwestern State University (MWSU) a 38 to 26 lead over their opponent at halftime. As the sound of the buzzer echoed through the stadium rafters, the MWSU players slowly jogged in unison down the long stadium tunnel to their locker room. One by one, the players filed into the team meeting room and sat down in their assigned chairs, their warm-up jerseys draped over the backs and cups of water and sports drink ready and waiting on the tables in front of them. Despite being in the lead, their expressions were dejected and serious with their eyes turned down and heads hung low. As the players settled into their seats, Eve, who was sitting at the front of the room, turned her head and shouted "Man, we're a bunch of bitch asses!" Seemingly egged on by Eve's comment, others chimed in, emphatically stating "We gotta pick it up!" or "Come on, ya'll!" The players put their warm-ups on and replenished themselves with the drinks in front of them, some taking slow sips while others guzzled the liquid in two or three quick gulps then crushed the thin paper cups between their sweat-glistened fists. The room fell silent. They waited.

The MWSU coaching staff gathered in the lobby of the locker room picking apart first half statistics. Head coach Jessica King's screams could be heard clearly over the muffled voices of the other coaches as they discussed offensive rebounding differentials,

assist to turnover ratios, and fast-break points. Listening from the other room, none of the players said a word. A moment later, the door flung open and Coach King stormed in, brow furrowed and red-faced. The rest of the MWSU coaching staff tiptoed in hesitantly behind her. As she slammed her clipboard down hard onto the table in front of her, she shouted, "You're just a bunch of WUSS ASSESS! I've never had a team with no toughness and no heart! I'm trying to find some toughness but I got a bunch of PANSIES out here! You guys just sit there and take it up the ass. You don't even try to be tough. This is sissy league shit. We should get you skirts instead of shorts!" Furious, she stomped over to the trashcan and kicked it hard with the point of her brown, snakeskin, high-heeled shoe. She turned back around, her piercing eyes scanning the players in front of her, and said, "I don't have a bitch. I don't have a bitch. I got a bunch of *nice* girls. And you can't win games like that!"

Coach King then honed in on Jizeal, a lean 6'3" post player who struggled rebounding in the first half despite going up against much shorter opponents. Pointing at Jizeal, she yelled, "*Everything* is more important to you than this, than your basketball career. You're too worried about getting your hair done and going to do this and that. You're not a competitor, a baller." Jizeal argued back "I am!" but Coach King continued, unfazed. "You're not committed," she said accusatorily. "You're laughing on the plane, not watching film, eating the wrong things." Jizeal attempted to respond but Coach interrupted. "I need you to be nasty. Be a *bitch*, a baller. You're nice and sweet and kind but be that off the court!" Jizeal, defeated, did not respond.

Coach King then directed her anger at Tiffany, a 6'5" post player with a large frame. "And YOU!" she shouted. "You can't even catch the ball! All you do is fumble

the ball." She then walked to the back row of seats where Tiffany was sitting, leaned directly in front of her, and mimicked fumbling a basketball with her hands while she pursed her lips and squealed "Ooh, ooh, meh, meh!" in a high-pitched tone. She paused for a moment and then, continuing to mock Tiffany through exaggerated hand gestures and awkward fumbling motions, she purposefully knocked over the cups of water and sports drink on the table, spilling the contents everywhere. Tiffany and her teammates sat stunned, unmoving, as the liquid spread across the table, onto the floor, and into their laps. Coach King continued to scream at Tiffany to which her only response was "Yes, ma'am." Unsatisfied, Coach scoffed and as she turned around to walk towards the front of the room, mimicked Tiffany's "Yes ma'am" in a whiny, high-pitched, sarcastic tone.

With each passing second, Coach King became more enraged. She told Jizeal she should just stay upstairs in the locker room for the second half and put her feet up in the massage chair. She looked directly at Sara and told her that the team's poor performance "starts with your fucking ass." She then went around the room pointing at individual players, saying "and your fucking ass…and her fucking ass!" Coach King then grabbed the stat sheet from assistant coach Grant Williams and sat down hard in the chair at the front of the room. Clenching the sheet tightly in her hand, she listed off players' stats- "Jizeal, two rebounds!"- and commentated on their poor performance- "They're almost out-rebounding us!" She then stood up, crumpled the paper in her hand, and began shouting more. Her voice got louder and higher with each exasperated scream, at times cracking and strained. Her face was flushed red and her eyes were piercing as she glared at the players, squinting in disgust. The room was so strikingly silent that you could hear the heaviness of Coach King's breathing, her chest visibly moving up and down with

each strenuous inhale and exhale. She continued to pace around the room, occasionally sitting down in her chair and then popping up again quickly, agitated. The rest of the coaching staff stayed huddled by the door, seemingly afraid to completely enter the room. With just over three minutes left before the start of the second half, the team was released and headed back down to the floor. Some of the players attempted to re-energize the team with shouts of "Let's go!" and "We got this!" When Jizeal ran out of the locker room and past the coaching staff, Coach King turned to the other coaches and asked, "What's wrong with her? Is she having a boyfriend problem or something?"[1]

The above locker room narrative describes one moment in the life of a collegiate women's basketball program. I provide it here in full detail not because it is particularly unique in the life of the MWSU women's basketball players, but in fact because events like this were commonplace during my year-long ethnography of the team. Coach King's expletive laden diatribe is imbued throughout with gendered references that denigrate femininity- are these women "pansies", too "nice," too feminine, too focused on boyfriends? In this way, the coach's rant begins to capture the nuanced and complicated ways that gender and sexuality get constructed, performed, contested, and most importantly, policed within the institution of sport. Within the context of this Division I women's basketball program, how players perform gender and sexuality is regularly subject to comment and intervention not only by coaches but by fellow players as well. Importantly, the players' performance of gender and sexuality is always racialized as is

[1] Some of the direct quotations in this narrative were drawn from other, related events in which Coach King was addressing her players (e.g., watching film, practice). I chose to combine some of those select quotes with the ones from this particular event in order to create a more comprehensive account of common and reoccurring coach-player interactions at MWSU.

the commentary and modes of intervention that serve to police their expressions. In this way, larger structures of gender, race, and sexuality intersect with one another and work simultaneously to impact the everyday lived experiences of these elite-level female athletes.

In this project, I sought to explore how highly successful female athletes navigate the demands of sport and of societal expectations that they enact particular kinds of racialized femininities/masculinities. Moreover, given the ways in which socially constructed identity categories are constantly in flux, I sought to explore whether and how those demands are different than they were in the past. What I found is a highly contested terrain in which negotiations around race, gender, and sexuality are regularly part of the culture and structure of sport. Through this close examination of the experiences of these collegiate female athletes, we see how structures of race, gender, and sexuality get reproduced in the everyday practice of "doing gender" within a non-feminine domain through explicit negotiations, subtle challenges, and strict enforcement.

The Gender & Sexuality Relationship

Gender has long been understood as a social construct rather than a biological entity. In their now infamous article "Doing Gender," West and Zimmerman (1987) situate the social construction of gender in the realm of social interaction, arguing that gender is a "routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment" (126). Different from sex (a biological classification of male or female given at birth) and sex category (the social proxy for one's biological sex), gender is the process by which individuals perform masculinity or femininity based on their own and others' expectations of their biological sex. The successful doing of gender in which gender expressions align with sex and sex

category ultimately reinforces the "naturalness" of gender by making those connections appear seamless rather than constructed. Other scholars have argued for conceptualizing gender as an "institution" that is "built into the major social organizations of society" (Lorber 1994: 1) or a "structure" in which gender is used primarily as a stratification system that privileges men over women (Risman 2004). One of the important implications of understanding gender as a social construct, whether from an interactional, institutional, or structural perspective, is that both masculinity and femininity can be expressed and experienced by individuals of any sex (Halberstam 1998; Pascoe 2007).

Multiple femininities and masculinities, ranging from the hegemonic to the marginalized, exist in relation to one another. White, middle-class masculinities or the type of masculinity valued in sport, for instance, can be considered hegemonic whereas non-heterosexual masculinities are subordinate and non-white masculinities are marginalized (Connell 2005)[2]. Similarly, white, middle-class femininities can be considered hegemonic (Pyke & Johnson 2003) compared to "pariah" femininities like lesbian, "slut," or "bitch" (Schippers 2007). Ultimately, there are various ways to perform or "practice" gender (Connell 2005), which serve to both challenge and reinforce relations of domination between and within groups of men and women.

Scholars have also argued that like gender, sexuality is a socially constructed phenomenon and that the two categories intersect in important ways. Ingraham (1994), for instance, argues for a reframing of the concept gender to "heterogender" in order to understand how both are socially constructed as well as how they are "inextricably bound

[2] The sporting context is particularly interesting when considering the relationship between race and hegemonic masculinity since, as Connell (2005) argues "black sporting stars become exemplars of masculine toughness" (80) despite representing a subordinated masculinity when compared to white masculinity.

up" (204). Much like the ways in which cultural narratives about gender associate masculinity with only men and femininity with only women, commonsense understandings of sexuality are both heteronormative (assuming everyone is heterosexual) and neatly connected to sex and gender binaries. As Schilt and Westbrook (2009) argue, "heterosexuality- like masculinity and femininity- is taken for granted as a natural occurrence derived from biological sex" (443).

Part of the importance of the relationship between gender and sexuality is that gender transgressions are often interpreted as threats to heterosexuality. Thus, gender policing is always also about policing (hetero)sexuality. For instance, in their case study analysis of cisgender men and women's reactions to transpeople in the workplace, Schilt and Westbrook (2009), demonstrate how the most negative reactions to transgender men and women occur in sexual situations. Discussing the experiences of transmen in the workplace, they argue:

> Heterosexual women's perception of a mismatch between their colleague's biological sex and gender identity comes to the forefront in (hetero)sexualized interactions. Women can accept transmen as men when doing masculine roles at work- heavy lifting, killing spiders- but not in sexualized relationships with female-bodied people" (Schilt & Westbrook 2009: 450).

These types of sexual situations are threatening to heterosexual women because they disrupt the neat associations between sex, gender, and sexuality in which male and female are biological, dichotomous, and complimentary categories. In these instances, cisgender men and women attempt to neutralize threats to their normative understandings of gender and sexuality by policing others or "through the deployment of normatively gendered tactics that reify gender and sexual difference" (Schilt & Westbrook 2009: 442).

As Coach King's halftime speech illuminates, the relationship between gender and sexuality is an intricate one. Coach King deplores her players for acting like "pansies" or "wuss assess" and likens their perceived lack of effort to "taking it up the ass," a submissive sexual position. She threatens to replace their uniform shorts with skirts due to their seeming lack of toughness. In all of these instances, Coach King is criticizing her players' performance by critiquing and devaluing their femininity. Using language such as "pansy"- a feminized concept- is intended to undermine their toughness by highlighting their weakness and frailty- also feminized concepts. Such language is similar to the "fag" discourse often used to police the gender expressions of heterosexual boys and men.

As C.J. Pascoe (2007) argues in her work on masculinity and sexuality in high school:

> Fag is not necessarily a static identity attached to a particular (homosexual) boy. Fag talk and fag imitations serve as a discourse with which boys discipline themselves and each other through joking relationships. Any boy can temporarily become a fag in a given social space or interaction. This does not mean that boys who identify as or are perceived to be homosexual aren't subject to intense harassment. Many are. But becoming a fag as has much to do with failing at the masculine tasks of competence, heterosexual prowess, and strength or in any way revealing weakness or femininity as it does with a sexual identity (54).

Coach King thus uses language like "wuss" and "pansy" in order to demean her players' revelations of weakness and femininity as demonstrated by their perceived poor athletic performance. At the same time, she implores her players to enact masculinity by being "bitches" or "ballers," words commonly associated with toughness and competitiveness within the sporting context. As she says, she doesn't want "a bunch of nice girls" who

care about getting their hair done, like she perceives Jizeal. She wants "a bitch," a player that will be "nasty" on the court.

By invoking the "fag" discourse through her use of parallel language like "pansy" and "wuss," Coach King is policing her players expressions of gender by drawing on cultural narratives about the differential value of femininity, masculinity, heterosexuality, and homosexuality. That the "fag" discourse is being used in this case as a critique of female athleticism in meaningful because it highlights that in the sporting context, female athletes are not thought of as "normal women" and that the demands placed on them to succeed in sport require specific gender transgressions, as will be outlined in the following section. Moreover, I argue that basketball, unlike any other sport, offers an especially relevant site to examine how gender and sexuality gets created, contested, performed, and policed as well as how those experiences are always racialized.

Between a "Pansy" and a Hard Place: The Female/Athlete Contradiction

One of the central questions driving this study is whether there is, in fact, a fundamental contradiction or tension for female athletes between athleticism and femininity. Past research has suggested that because the characteristics associated with athleticism (e.g. toughness, competitiveness) more closely align with traits of hegemonic masculinity than femininity, female athletes will experience a tension between their identities as women and as athletes (Del Rey 1978; Blinde & Taub 1992; Malcolm 2003; Krane et al. 2004; Enke 2005). Of course, this type of tension is always in flux, as the major impact of Title IX continues to transform the nature of women's participation in sport and the increasing popularity of fitness programs like CrossFit continue to alter notions of what it can mean for a woman to be and importantly, look "fit." Still for many

female athletes, particularly those participating in male-identified sports like basketball, they are participating in an institution that was created by and for men, and their performance is constantly compared to that of their male counterparts. Being successful in such sports involves enacting and embodying characteristics of masculinity such as toughness, aggressiveness, and competitiveness. Failing to do so can lead these athletes to be viewed as not measuring up as players in addition to not measuring up as women.

In order to be considered competent athletes- not "pansies"- by their coach, the MWSU women's basketball players must enact masculinity (e.g. aggression, nastiness). Coach King's use of a high-pitched, whiny tone to mock Tiffany for fumbling the ball is about devaluing her expressions of femininity- her seeming *daintiness* (the way she attempts to catch the ball) and her *incompetence* (her inability to catch the ball). Indeed, female athletes are already considered to be playing less exciting, adapted versions of male sports because they are incapable (biologically) of playing the "real thing" (Shakib & Dunbar 2002). Even when playing "adapted versions" of "real sports," however, female athletes must still enact masculinity or, in other words, are still masculinized by sports.

As athletes who are also women, however, female athletes are bound by societal expectations that they enact, or at least embody, hegemonic femininity. This cultural contradiction has led some scholars to argue that female athletes possess "dual and dueling identities" (Krane et al. 2004). Moreover, as Del Rey (1978) suggests:

> What should be evident is that the characteristics necessary for sport performance are those that match the masculine model in our society; feminine characteristics are dysfunctional for achievement in sport. Since femininity is dissonant with the qualities necessary for sport participation, a woman who deviates from the norm or rejects the concept of femininity

> will experience dissonance between her own desires and her motivations to fit into society (9).

Even while demanding "nastiness" from her players, Coach King also acknowledges their need to be feminine when she tells them to be "nice, sweet, and kind"- characteristics of femininity- off the court. And while it is undesirable for female athletes to *act* feminine during competition, it is still expected that they will *look* feminine. Of course, given the relationship between gender and sexuality, female athletes' expressions of femininity are intimately tied to their sexuality; they must look heterofeminine. Pressures to appear heterofeminine within a masculine sporting context leads many female athletes to engage in strategies to mediate the tension by overemphasizing their femininity and heterosexuality.

"Fake It Till You Make It!": Female Athletes & Gender Strategies

One of Coach King's most frequent expressions was, "fake it till you make it." She often repeated this saying to her players during practice when they were showing signs of being tired. For her, this meant that a player should never show signs of weakness (e.g. being tired) but rather, "fake it" by appearing strong on the outside and eventually, she will recover and actually be strong. Coincidentally, this saying also encompasses the process by which many female athletes attempt to negotiate the tension between their "dual and dueling identities." That is, because sport participation is still perceived to lead to masculinization (in action and appearance), many female athletes will engage in specific gender strategies in order to place themselves back within the boundaries of hegemonic heterofemininity.

Arlie Hochschild (1989) defines a gender strategy as follows:

> A gender strategy is a plan of action through which a person tries to solve problems at hand, given the cultural notions of gender at play. To pursue a gender strategy, a man draws on beliefs about manhood and womanhood, beliefs that are forged in early childhood and thus anchored to deep emotions. He makes a connection between how he thinks about his manhood, what he feels about it, and what he does. It works in the same way for a woman (15).

Women and men engage in gender strategies for a variety of reasons and in a variety of situations[3]. According to Hochschild (1989), working mothers use a diverse array of direct and indirect strategies, depending on their ideological stance, when attempting to encourage their husbands to assist more in housework and childcare. Some women directly expressed their needs to their husbands while others strategized passively by acting helpless when it came to certain tasks like paying bills, using physical illness as a "signal of distress," or withholding sex (194). Other women engaged in strategies such as "supermoming"- taking on all the tasks themselves- so as not to impose on their husbands, others acquiesced to overwhelming demands by either cutting back at work or home, while still others sought out outside help such as housekeepers or babysitters (Hochschild 1989).

The men in Hochschild's study used strategies that were both similar to and different from their wives' strategies. Some of the men engaged in cooperative strategies such as being "superdad" or cutting back at work so that they could take on their fair share of the "second shift." Others, however, engaged in various strategies of resistance- disaffiliation, need reduction, substitute offerings, and selective encouragement- that ultimately left their wives carrying the majority of the household burdens. Men who "disaffiliated" completed tasks at home but did so in a distracted way "so as to get credit

[3] Importantly, gender strategies are emotional, not just behavioral (Hochschild 1989; Hamilton 2007) and an individual can engage in more than one strategy simultaneously (Hochschild 1989; Chen 1999).

for trying and being a good sport, but so as not to be chosen next time" (Hochschild 1989: 201). Those who engaged in "need reduction" claimed that they let their wives take on the tasks that dealt with things they "didn't need." One man, for instance, claimed he did not take his clothes to the dry cleaner because he "didn't mind wearing a wrinkled shirt" whereas his wife did (Hochschild 1989: 202). Other men were so emotionally supportive of their wives' efforts that they felt they did not actually need to help- their emotional support worked as a "substitute offering" for their actual assistance at home. Similarly, some men substituted praise for their wives' planning or organizational skills- "selective encouragement"- for actually helping with planning or organization at home.

Anthony Chen (1999) similarly highlights how Chinese American men utilize gender strategies to "achieve" masculinity despite negative racialized and gendered stereotypes about them as men. Some men attempted to achieve masculinity by conforming as closely as possible to the white hegemonic ideal of masculinity, a "compensation" strategy. Participating in and excelling at sports is a form of compensation strategy because athleticism is a key component of white hegemonic masculinity, especially when compared to stereotypes of Asian Americans as only academically driven. Other men engaged in "deflection" strategies or attempts to "divert attention away from self-perceived stereotypical behavior" by (Chen 1999: 591) whereas others outright denied the existence of negative stereotypes or claimed such stereotypes did not apply to them ("denial"). Someone engaging in "denial" will, for instance, claim that the reason he did not get a promotion may be about race somewhat but is more so about the particular structure of the company. Another strategy used by Chinese American men is to altogether reject white hegemonic masculinity ("repudiation"),

thereby absolving them from the task of achieving such masculinity. Being proud of being Asian and therefore not aspiring to achieve white hegemonic masculinity is one ways in which the men in Chen's study engaged in "repudiation."

In a more recent study of gender strategies, Hamilton (2007) demonstrates the various practices used by heterosexual college women in order to situate themselves high on the "erotic hierarchy" of the Greek party scene. In order to receive attention from men, these women must construct their appearances based on the privileged position of "the blonde" as well as socially distance themselves from lesbians. Illustrating the importance of having a "blonde body," (e.g. white, tan skin, light-colored hair) Hamilton notes:

> The seemingly organic nature of the "blonde" appearance belayed the extensive bodily work that went into managing a "blonde" body. For example, navigating the line between "good" and "bad" tan (looking "orange," as the women put it) involved knowing how to tan and when to stop. Many women struggled to maintain slender physiques while engaged in a party lifestyle that involved drinking a lot of beer and eating late-night pizza. Money was also essential; women often used colored contacts, hair straighteners, and salon hair coloring to appear more "blonde" (2007: 155).

The types of strategies these women use to be more "blonde," are similar in many ways to Chen's (1999) compensation strategies as they are attempts to align more closely with white hegemonic or ideal forms of feminine appearance and, as a result, heterosexuality. In addition to these appearance-based compensation strategies, many of the heterosexual women in Hamilton's study engaged in various forms of social distancing from lesbians. Interestingly, these same women simultaneously supported and participated in same-sex eroticism for heterosexual men's entertainment and pleasure. Ultimately, these strategies served to marginalize lesbians on campus and make their experiences invisible as well as

bolster the social location of heterosexual, "party" women in the erotic hierarchy of a Greek-centered campus life.

Female athletes, like women in other contexts, use gender strategies[4], or plans of action, in order to solve the "problem" of female athleticism given the available cultural notions of femininity. Such strategies involve the deliberate process of attempting to exaggerate one's femininity in order to counter the masculinizing effects of sport participation. While there have been relatively few studies that have explored this phenomenon, past research has shown that female athletes will engage in gender strategies- like Chen's (1999) compensation strategies- such as paying particular attention to presenting oneself as feminine through the use of hair ribbons, make-up, having certain (long) hairstyles, wearing jewelry, shaving their legs/armpits, and wearing stereotypically feminine clothing (Del Rey 1978; Malcolm 2003; Krane et al. 2004; Enke 2005). Female athletes will also occasionally downplay the importance of competition, aggression, and other masculine-athletic traits while emphasizing the more feminine characteristics involved in sports such as teamwork and cooperation.

Of course, since gender strategies involve processes aimed at getting closer to the hegemonic or ideal, these strategies are also (always) about appearing heterosexual. For instance, Blinde and Taub (1992) note, "given the factors that lead to the indiscriminate stigmatization of women athletes, both lesbian and non-lesbian athletes adopt strategies to manage the lesbian stigma" (527). Female athletes may also attempt to counter the association between being "too masculine" (read: lesbian) by discussing their

[4] Importantly, this work has been situated outside of the larger sociological conversations on gender and sexuality, and as such, has termed such strategies "apologetics" or the "apologetic defense." I choose, in this study, to engage instead with the language of "gender strategies" not only because of its more common usage and broader reach but because to engage in a "strategy" is an active process, involving agency, which I believe to be an important element in female athletes' decision-making processes.

relationships with and/or desire for men open and often (Del Rey 1978; Blinde & Taub 1992). As stated in the previous section, one of the central questions driving this study is whether female athletes' experience a fundamental contradiction between their athleticism and femininity. Given the widespread use of gender strategies by women and men in various social contexts, another central question of this study is to what extent female athletes in the contemporary moment engage in various forms of gender strategies to negotiate conflicts between their identities or "achieve femininity."

"If You Play Basketball, You're Gay": The Importance of Sport-Type

Whether female athletes experience a cultural contradiction between their athletic and gender identities and how they negotiate with such conflicts through gender strategies has much to do with sport-type. Embodying heterofemininity is not as necessary for all female athletes across all sports because all sports are not similarly gendered (or racialized). Team and contact sports, like basketball and hockey, are perceived to be more masculinizing than individual and non-contact sports like tennis or gymnastics both because they are more likely to be played by men and because of the physical contact involved (Blinde & Taub 1992; Griffin 1998). As a result, these types of sports are also more likely to be labeled lesbian and why when I asked one of the athletes in my study which sports are likely to be stereotyped as lesbian she said, "*especially* basketball."

It is not, of course, that female athletes who participate in contact sports like basketball are inherently more masculine than other female athletes. Masculinity is a process, not a possession of the male body. As such, the "constellation of behaviors" (Pascoe 2007) involved in playing basketball is read as varyingly masculine and then

superimposed onto female bodies. Thus, as Pascoe (2007) argues, "…it is important to attend to the manipulation, deployment, and enactment of varieties of masculinity, not just as what men do, but as how respondents recognize it" (166). The lesbian stereotyping of female basketball players is thus as much about how women employ or embody masculinity as about how others recognize masculinity in/from these women.

While past research has attended to the ways in which the cultural contradiction of the female athlete varies based on age (Malcolm 2003) and sport-type (Blinde & Taub 1992; Griffin 1998; Adams & Bettis 2003; Ross & Shinew 2008), this work is largely outdated and has primarily been comprised of small studies with narrow populations (e.g. adolescent girls, white women). The purpose of this work is to build upon and address the limitations of past studies by examining how elite-level female athletes negotiate the demands of sport, race, gender, and sexuality in the contemporary moment.

Full Court Press(ure): The Study

The rich, descriptive data for this study come from a year-long ethnography and a series of in-depth interviews with elite-level collegiate athletes. In the following chapter, I discuss the details of these methodologies, including why I close these particular methods for exploring this topic as well as how I went about implementing them in practice. In addition, I describe the specific site-related challenges I experienced during data collection such as access issues and gatekeeping as well as the implications of those issues for the study overall.

In chapter three, I set the stage for the study's main argument by demonstrating how the Midwestern State University players' gender and sexuality was policed at both the individual and institutional levels. Specifically, I describe how such policing was

done in service of promoting an image of the team as heterosexual in order to secure highly sought after recruits. These practices occurred on a day-to-day basis as well as during particular "crisis moments" in which the team's image was particularly at risk.

I explore the lesbian stereotyping of female athletes- the driving force behind the policing practices outlined above- in detail in chapter four. Here, I highlight the pervasiveness of the stereotype as well as how it is variously applied and experienced by different female athletes. Most importantly, I discuss how the construction of the imagined contagion of lesbianism works to continually police female athletes' into expressions of gender that align with the hegemonic ideal of heterofemininity.

In chapters five and six, I deal specifically with the main questions driving this study- the "cultural contradiction" of female athleticism and female athletes use of gender strategies. I explore the various ways in which female athletes experience a contradiction between their athletic and gender identities- if they do at all- as well as how those experience vary along the lines of race and sexuality. Then, I discuss the different types of gender strategies these athletes engage in to mediate such conflicts. More importantly, perhaps, I posit that gender strategies are not merely the products of individual female athletes' "choices" but are in fact institutionalized. And as in the chapters before, I highlight the various methods of policing used to contain and constrain female athletes' gender and sexuality through the institutional imposition of gender strategies.

In the final chapter, I discuss the theoretical implications of these findings by highlighting how the experiences of female athletes exist in relation to structures of race, gender, and sexuality and serve as important examples of larger sociological questions regarding the relationship between structure and agency. Moreover, I discuss the irony of

such intense surveillance and policing strategies used within the institution of sports when considered within the current societal and political context that is everyday expanding to afford more rights and privileges to gays and lesbians than ever before. It is my hope that by shedding light on the processes through which structural inequalities around race, gender, and sexuality get reproduced within the institution of sports, we will not only be able to more fully understand the lived experiences of female athletes but discover new ways to encourage resistance and enact meaningful change.

CHAPTER 2

"Observe Anything Good Today?": Research Methodology & Study Setting

This study examines the ways in which larger structures of inequality around race, gender, and sexuality get reproduced in the everyday lives of female athletes through the construction and performance of gender and the contestation and enforcement of boundaries. Because I was interested in the micro-level experiences of female athletes, I chose a methodology that would allow me to explore the nuance of their everyday-ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviewing. In addition to selecting a methodology that was the most appropriate for my research questions, I similarly made careful, theoretically-informed decisions about the setting. As I outline in the following sections, each element of the study setting and aspect of the methodology were selected in service of my research agenda.

The Setting

The ethnographic portion of my research was conducted with the Midwestern State University[5] (MWSU) Division I women's basketball team. Located in a large metropolitan area, MWSU has a student population of approximately 20,000 and a number of elite athletic programs. While much sociological research on sport has focused on middle and high school girls (Malcolm 2003; Enke 2005), much less has examined collegiate female athletes (for exceptions see Blinde & Taub 1992; Krane 2004; Ross & Shinew 2008) and none (published, as of this writing) has focused on the everyday,

[5] For reasons of confidentiality, all names and other identifying information have been changed. Most pseudonyms used were chosen by the individuals themselves during the interview portion of this research. For those not interviewed or those who did not want to choose, pseudonyms were chosen for them.

micro-level, lived experiences of this unique group of athletes from an ethnographic perspective.

Previous research in this field, however, has documented the complicated relationship between age and gender thereby making the university a particularly relevant site in which to examine my research questions. As Malcolm (2003) argues "because society's expectations regarding what is appropriately feminine changes according to the age of the actor, girls and women of different ages experience different pressure to demonstrate appropriately feminine behavior" (1398). The leeway in gender expression afforded to pre-adolescent girls vanishes rapidly as age and expectations of heterosexual dating increases. Examining a setting in which young girls are becoming adults- and particularly as they come of age within a setting like the university with a latent function of heterosexual matchmaking- and societal expectations around gender expression are changing, is an opportunity to further investigate the connection between gender and age at a point in which the stakes have arguably never been higher.

In addition to the benefits of conducting ethnographic research in a university setting, this specific research site was chosen for two primary reasons. First, the university's sports programs compete at a Division I level. While there are many nuances that differentiate Divisions I, II, and III in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), schools competing at the Division I level are arguably the most competitive because they compete at a national level, sponsor the most sports for men and women[6], have the strictest recruiting regulations[7], and perhaps most importantly, offer full and

[6] DI schools are required to offer at least seven sports for men and women.
[7] DIII schools have no recruiting regulations, for example.

partial athletic scholarships[8], among many other reasons[9]. To be sure, elite-level athletes are certainly competing in all three divisions within the NCAA. The strict regulations and financial incentives for competing at the Division I level, however, fundamentally make those schools the most competitive and highly sought after by the most talented student-athletes. In fact, only 2% of all high school athletes receive athletic scholarships to compete at the collegiate level[10]. Secondly, the MWSU women's basketball team was, at the time of data collection, nationally ranked within the top 25 women's basketball programs in the nation. While competing at the Division I level represents the elite in and of itself, considering that there are 348 Division I schools[11] in the U.S., a top 25 ranking demarcates the elite and super-elite athletes in the nation.

My desire to conduct research with such high-level athletes is two-fold. First, given the immense disparity in media coverage between men's and women's athletics, it is only the most elite women's athletic programs that have visibility outside of their immediate school context and certainly only those programs whose games are televised nationwide (unless during the NCAA national tournament, most women's games are televised locally rather than nationally). With increased visibility comes more opportunities for outside critique. As a result, it is possible that female athletes competing at elite-level institutions who are exposed to the general public more than those competing at lower-level universities will experience greater tension between their athletic and feminine identities and increased pressure to alter gender expressions

[8] Division II schools only offer partial scholarships and Division III schools cannot offer athletic scholarships at all.
[9] http://www.ncsasports.org/who-is-ncsa/newsletter/newsletter-archives/december-2005/
[10] http://www.ncaa.org/wps/wcm/connect/public/NCAA/Resources/Behind+the+Blue+Disk/How+Do+Athletic+Scholarships+Work
[11] http://web1.ncaa.org/onlineDir/exec2/divisionListing

accordingly. It is equally possible that female athletes competing at this level will also experience more pressure than their counterparts at other levels to maximize their athletic potential, despite societal pressures around gender and sexuality.

Second, one could argue that the more elite the program a female athlete participates in, the stronger her athletic identity will be. And, the stronger her athletic identity, the more potential there is for conflict with her other identities and, again, a felt pressure to change some aspect of her gender expression in order to conform to societal standards. Participation in top-level athletics, while obviously requiring an extraordinary amount of athletic ability and skill also requires a kind of commitment that almost demands an exceptionally strong athletic identity. In this sense, basketball is not just something an athlete "does" but is a central part of how that athlete defines herself- what she "is." The women competing at this level are trying to be the very best athletes, the most elite competitors in the country and, in doing so, commit themselves to training and using their bodies to accomplish extraordinary feats. Put simply, competition at this level of athletics is not for the half-hearted. The MWSU women's basketball team represents the coalescing of all of these potential pressures and a prime environment in which to explore these athletes' everyday negotiations around race, gender, and sexuality.

Financial incentives such as athletic scholarships do play a significant part in an elite-level athlete's athletic identity. All of the athletes at MWSU told me that they felt like basketball was their "job," in part because of the general commitment but also because they were receiving financial compensation. Athletic scholarships are substantial investments by institutions as they are, on average, very costly. For instance, the average (some being much less and much more) full athletic scholarship at an in-state, public

university costs $15,000, $25,000 at an out-of-state public university, and $35,000 at private universities annually[12]. At Midwestern State University specifically, the total cost of athletic scholarships in 2012 was approximately nine million dollars[13] for all student-athletes. Having an athletic scholarship, I argue, serves to enhance an athlete's athletic identity, even though it usually is not the sole incentive in their decision to participate in elite-level athletics. Compared to athletes at Division II and III schools who cannot receive monetary compensation for participating in sports, Division I athletes' identities are tied to real, material resources potentially making their perceptions of themselves as athletes all the more valuable.

Ultimately, my justification for conducting this research within the specific setting of the MWSU women's basketball team is not only because female collegiate athletes represent an understudied subpopulation, especially from an ethnographic perspective, but also because these women are the ultra-elite- the very best at what they do-. Moreover, such a setting represents a unique atmosphere in which these athletes must negotiate with race, gender, and sexuality in a way that other female athletes in different environments may not. The athletes in this study are highly visible, under intense scrutiny, and have strong athletic identities all of which suggests, interestingly, that they occupy a positionality that would make them the most and/or the least likely to experience a cultural contradiction between their athletic and gender identities and engage in behaviors to moderate or alter their expressions of gender and sexuality.

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[12]http://www.ncaa.org/wps/wcm/connect/public/NCAA/Resources/Behind+the+Blue+Disk/How+Do+Athletic+Scholarships+Work

[13] Dollar amounts provided are approximate in order to maintain confidentiality.

The People

At the time of data collection, the Midwestern State University (MWSU) women's basketball team was comprised of 15 players and 17 staff members. The staff consisted of seven coaches (including the head coach, several assistants, and the director of basketball operations), two full-time academic advisors, two team managers (myself and another MWSU student), one film coordinator, one athletic trainer and one student-apprentice trainer, one team physician, one strength and conditioning coach, and one program administrator. The team also had at its disposal a number of other relevant volunteers and booster club members who played both major and minor roles in the team's daily functions but were not officially considered on staff. For example, Diane, a booster club member, volunteered her time to assist in tutoring players and often traveled with the team (sometimes at her own expense) to away games and tournaments to assist in various, as needed capacities (i.e. handing out pompoms to fans, setting up food for the team's pre-game meal, etc.).

In addition to personnel, the team had access to a plethora of other material resources including flying to away games and tournaments on charter planes; traveling to such places as the Caribbean, Europe, and South America; receiving gifts such as flat screen televisions for participating in select, conference tournaments; dining privately at exclusive restaurants; and other varying rewards such as when MWSU head coach Jessica King, gifted Wii video game systems- priced at approximately $150/each- to every player for winning a big game against a conference rival.

The team's locker room, described below in an excerpt of my field notes, offers another example of the magnitude of the MWSU program:

> *…You step off the elevator and make a quick left. In front of you are two wooden double doors, with controlled access (an electronic card is needed for entry). On either side of you are framed team posters and program covers from previous years. When you enter the double doors, you immediately walk into a foyer area. Directly in front of you and on both sides are navy blue leather couches. Above the couch in front of you is a giant, flat screen TV. On the wall to your right is a large team photo of this season's squad (it covers the entire wall). On the left are enlarged, framed action photos of the players and coaches. On either side of the main couch are side tables made out of actual basketball rims, covered with round, glass table-tops. As you walk in closer, there are two sets of double doors, one to your left and one to your right. Entering on your right, takes you into a hallway leading to the training room area, with training tables where the players get their ankles taped, get stretched before practices and games, and have other, minor procedures done. Across from the training room is the equipment room, packed full of uniforms, practice gear, sweat suits, shoes, socks, t-shirts, shorts, hats, jackets, wristbands, headbands, basketballs, monogrammed towels, bags, and other equipment. Past these two rooms is a larger, tiled bathroom consisting of a full size hot tub and showers. Further inside is the laundry room- complete with a washer/dryer. Just past the laundry room, is the team's changing area. Each player has an individual wooden locker with a mirror and a stool- their names on placards placed above the lockers. Directly off of the changing area is another door leading to the "hang out room" complete with a pool table, pinball arcade game, full-sized, leather massage chair, refrigerator filled with food and drinks, and a treadmill with its own drop down TV that comes from the ceiling. To the right sits three more navy blue, leather couches and another big screen TV, Play Station and Wii video game systems, video games and equipment such as a guitar for the game "Rockband," and a number of DVDs. On the wall near the couches is a display of framed photos of former MWSU players who have played/are playing in the WNBA. Also in this room are long wooden tables and chairs set up in front of a whiteboard and drop down screen for film viewing and pre/post-game meetings. The room next to the "hang out room" is the "study room" which consists of a leather recliner, another leather couch, and a set of three Mac computers for the players to work on coursework. Past the study room is the coaches' changing area, complete with a separate bathroom, individual wooden lockers, and a refrigerator full of Gatorade, Coke, and bottled water…*

To be sure, many top-level, Division I programs boast elaborate locker rooms for their players- the University of Oregon football team's lockers cost $26,667 *per locker* and are outfitted with fingerprint biometric locks (Smith 2009)- but access to these types of

resources is not simply a perk. Rather, these MTV Cribs-style locker rooms are but one example that further illustrates the importance of examining athletes who are both highly invested in their programs and highly invested in by the university. Such circumstances, especially for female athletes, make their everyday decisions and performance (both athletically and otherwise) all the more consequential. As was repeated almost daily by MWSU's Coach King: "To whom much is given, much is expected."

Gaining Site Access

At the outset of this project, I attempted to gain access to a number of Division I women's basketball programs nationally without success. Gaining access to the MWSU women's basketball program was an equally difficult and complicated process and took, from my first attempt at contact to my start date, approximately five months. After several unsuccessful attempts at contacting one of the assistant coaches at MWSU[14], I made contact with the program administrator who advised me on the best way to get in touch with the coaching staff. After following her advice but getting no response, I contacted my former college coach who, to my surprise, happened to know one of the other assistants, Coach Grant Williams, at MWSU. It was only after my former coach putting me in touch with Coach Williams that I was able to get a face-to-face meeting. Shortly after meeting with Coach Williams, I received a call from another assistant, Johnny Jacobs, saying that the staff had approved the project and I would begin in August. Three weeks later, I received a call from Johnny telling me that, while two out of

[14] Based on my experience with collegiate basketball and knowledge of the immense time demands and responsibilities placed on head coaches, I decided to contact one of the assistant coaches in the hopes I would have better luck getting a response. I also contacted this particular assistant because I saw that she had previously coached at a university near where I went to college and thought I might be able to have some connection with her based on that. Unfortunately, I learned shortly thereafter my attempts to contact her that she left the program so I do not know if my assumptions would have been correct.

the three administrators agreed, the athletic director had vetoed the project and that there was nothing more he could do. Not wanting to give up on almost four months of work, I contacted the athletic director and set up a meeting. My mentor and I had a lengthy meeting with the athletic director in which we discussed my background and experience with collegiate basketball, my reasons for wanting to conduct this research, the details of the project, issues of consent and confidentiality, the role of the university, and other logistical matters. After a week or so of deliberation, the project was finally approved and I began conducting the research.

Put simply, access to MWSU was not easy. It took months of unanswered phone calls and emails, meetings, reaching out to contacts, and ultimately a little luck. My reason for elaborating on my journey through gaining access to MWSU is two-fold. First, without the personal connection my former coach happened to have with Coach Williams, I would have had a much more difficult time getting a meeting with a member of the coaching staff, if I would have been able to at all. My personal network opened the door for me that my experience alone could not. Second, once in the door, I was faced with the challenge of convincing a top-level administrator (Elizabeth Mason) to allow me access to one of the fastest rising women's programs at the university and in the country. Wanting to protect the image and reputation of the team, the athletic program, and the university as a whole, Elizabeth was wary of my intentions and concerned about the personal and institutional risk associated with a potential expose.

Indeed, Elizabeth was not alone in her concerns. While attempting to make contact with a staff member at MWSU, I was also pursuing several other top programs with no success. Elizabeth's hesitation is, in many ways, not a concern unique to MWSU.

All elite-level programs clearly in the public's eye are under incredible scrutiny and, understandably, are wary of outsiders. Elizabeth's ultimate support for the project, I believe, was in large part due to her believing that research on female athletes is important and because she wanted to support me as a former athlete. Being able to use common language and reference points (i.e. knowing about the game, naming teams and players) and being able to speak from first-hand experience about the lifestyle of a collegiate female athlete proved invaluable in my access process and throughout my research. I believe that my insider status resulting from my past experiences greatly impacted my ability to be trusted and enhanced my credibility. Of course there is no way to know for certain how much my personal connections and past experiences impacted whether or not I was given access but it seems more likely than not that without them I would have been unable to conduct my research at this particular site, if at all.

Insider/Outsider Status

My insider status as a former collegiate basketball player was beneficial beyond the access process as well. Being able to draw on those experiences allowed me to form connections with the players that I would not have been able to do otherwise. As a former player, I was able to commiserate with the athletes about the cruelty of "suicides" as they sat in their ice baths after a long, grueling conditioning workout. I was able to connect with the players through a shared experience as I shared my own stories about how my coach used to set up garbage cans on the baseline and make us run until we puked. Swapping "war stories" about the daily challenges of being an athlete became an exercise in bonding. One of the players I became closest to, a senior named Eve, spent the entire season rehabilitating from an ACL tear during the previous year. Sitting with her in the

training room before and after practices while she received various treatments, I could empathize with her struggle because, as I showed her from the scars on my knee, I went through the exact same thing many years before. While possessing the literal battle scars of college athletics was perhaps not necessary, I do believe that our shared experience allowed us to gain a sense of rapport that would have been difficult to create otherwise.

While having insider knowledge and experience was crucial, I always remained an outsider to be sure. My age, race, and sexuality (among other things) highlighted my outsider status. For instance, I was between 4 and 10 years older than the players, making it difficult to connect in many ways to their cultural reference points in the same way I could connect to their experiences with basketball. Moreover, with 14 out of 15 players being black, being white was, in obvious and not-so-obvious ways, a point of disconnect. There were times, for instance, where the players would be telling stories and make mention of "all white people" or "that white girl from Northeast State" and turn to me and say "Sorry, Michelle. No offense." While none was taken, of course, the moments when the players explicitly acknowledged our racial difference highlighted my outsider within status. While the players felt free to tell stories in front of me, their after-the-fact apologies for potentially offending me was a reminder that, despite having been an athlete, I was not "just like them."

Finally, being an out lesbian was something I believe made me both an insider and outsider, depending on the situation. For instance, talking with lesbian and bisexual players about bars, clubs, and girlfriends may have deepened my connection with them while simultaneously putting distance between some straight players and myself.

Ultimately, my insider/outsider status more than likely opened up some doors while keeping others partially closed.

Ethnography: Justifying Participant Observation

At its core, ethnographic field research is premised on observing some natural social setting in order to describe a particular way of life focusing on the activities, behaviors, and values of those within that social world (Emerson 2001). While there exists a spectrum of ways to conduct ethnographic fieldwork, I chose to employ participant observation by immersing myself into the daily lives of the Midwestern State University women's basketball team. More than merely gaining intimate access to a community in a physical or spatial sense, I chose this particular method of ethnographic fieldwork because I wanted to enter the social world of elite-level female athletes in order to experience the nuanced ways in which they attach meanings to their behaviors, interactions with others, and the world around them more generally (Emerson 2001).

As will be outlined in the following sections of this chapter, my research comes out of nine months of participant observation with the Midwestern State University (MWSU) women's basketball team. During this time, I immersed myself into the team's culture and everyday activities in order to gain an empathetic understanding of the athletes' daily, lived experiences. I participated in team events and formed relationships with the players and staff. In short, I became part of the team. Following the completion of the ethnography, I teased out and expanded upon emerging themes from my data by conducting a series of in-depth, individual interviews with various members of the MWSU program (players, staff, coaches, administrators) as well as a set of former female athletes who competed at other Division I universities.

There are a number of practical limitations attached to participatory observation ethnographic research worth outlining briefly. Observation and description are complex and the representation of the "reality" of the social world under study is always reflexive. Participant observers must acknowledge that any and all descriptions of observations are always partial and selective (Emerson 2001: 28). During the course of an ethnography, there are countless events, interactions, and other commonplace activities that could be observed. Deciding to focus specifically on a certain subset of those events and interactions are both theoretically and culturally driven and necessarily means that a number of other important observations will be ignored. Moreover, the representation of what is observed is not merely an objective description of reality. Ethnographic representation, rather, is a process of constructing reality through observation. As Emerson (2001) notes:

> An ethnographic description can never be an exact, literal picture of some "thing" such as an event or social action. It is always a theory informed *re-presentation* of that "thing," a rendering of the event that transforms it in particular ways (e.g., by presenting "what happened" in purposive, partial, and selective ways) (28-9).

By transforming the event through the process of deciding what and how to observe and describe it, the ethnographer is an active participant in the construction of its reality. Events, therefore, do not just exist for describing in some objective fashion by anyone who cares to try. They are constantly being shaped by the individuals involved within them and then re-shaped in the process of their re-telling.

As a participant observer as MWSU, I brought with me into the field a series of theoretically driven research questions that I was interested in pursuing. As a result, my interactions with and observations of the team were always filtered through the lens of

my research objectives. Moreover, the particular happenings I chose to carefully observe compared to the ones that were overlooked were informed by those same questions. Had I possessed a different set of questions, I most certainly would have "discovered" a different set of realities. Those differences may have in fact led me to investigate another setting altogether. Thus, my representations of MWSU- its players, staff, and events- are a compilation of many people's experiences, interactions, perspectives, and decisions, including my own, which were then carefully sifted through my specific research agenda in order to produce what is written in the following pages.

Conducting ethnographic research also brings about a number of ethical issues, such as informed consent, deception, and confidentiality, that remain important, and sometimes challenging to negotiate with during the course of data collection (Bailey 2007). Informed consent- acknowledgement by research participants that they understand they are involved in a study and give their consent to participate- is a foundational aspect of any research on human subjects. Ethnographic research demands that informed consent is gained not only at the beginning of the research but also kept continuous throughout. Because ethnographers often spend long periods of time embedded in the communities they are studying, it would not be unreasonable to imagine how participants may lose sight of the fact that they are being observed. Informed consent cannot be assumed to last indefinitely. Rather, it is something that must be continually sought after.

When I first joined the MWSU women's basketball program, I was introduced as a volunteer team manager (I will outline the specific duties of my role below) who was also interested in observing and recording the day-to-day activities of the team for a research project. I explained the purpose of my project to the team and gained their

consent to make observations[15]. Because of the extended period of time I was involved with MWSU (approximately nine months), however, I had to ensure that the players, staff, and others involved were occasionally reminded of my dual-roles of team manager and researcher and that they could, at any time, remove themselves from participation[16].

Gaining continuous consent from the MWSU players and staff was important to also avoid issues of deception. While at no time did I consider concealing my purpose for being involved with the team (they were informed of my agenda from the beginning), it was also important for me to be clear about the focus of my project. Often times, players would come up to me and ask what I was observing, what I had written down, and other questions related to my research. It was not uncommon for me to get a question like: "So what are you looking for again?" or "Observe anything good today?" These moments, while sometimes awkward, represented opportunities for continued informed consent (I was reminding the players and staff they were partaking in a research study), avoiding deception (I was as forthright as possible about the observations I was making), and initiating some informal interviewing (I could use their questions as jumping off points to explore their experiences in more depth).

Finally, as will be outlined in more detail in the sections that follow, my entrée into the social world of the MWSU women's basketball team was contingent upon my ability to assure (and reassure) top level administrators and staff that their identities would remain anonymous and that the information I gathered from my experience would

[15] Because of concerns over confidentiality, I was given IRB approval to receive verbal, rather than written, consent from participants.

[16] Because it is impossible to avoid observing people, participants were informed that if they did not want to be involved in the study, they did not have to be. If they were involved in an activity with other members of MWSU who did consent, they would be omitted from the recording of those observations. Thus, while I could not guarantee that I would not observe those who did not want to be involved, I could assure them that their actions would not be recorded and used at data.

be confidential. While the context of MWSU is important for understanding my data, it is equally important to ensure that the identities of those who willingly shared their lives with me for over nine months remain concealed. More than an issue of IRB requirement and institutional access, confidentiality is ultimately about trust.

Ethnography: Data Collection

The ethnographic portion of my research began in August 2010 and ended in May 2011. For those nine months, I engaged in participant observation of the MWSU women's basketball team on a daily basis, for an average of 40-60 hours per week (the hours varied greatly depending on whether the team was traveling or not). My specific role on the team was as one of the team managers. My access to the team was dependent on my willingness to "help" in any capacity necessary. Because entry into the program was so precarious, I knew that I would not be allowed to merely sit back and "observe." Thus, I volunteered to fulfill any needed roles on the team, no matter the demands or time commitment. Essentially, I traded "help" for "access."

Day to day, my primary responsibilities included setting up the gymnasium for practice (i.e. turning on lights, bringing out equipment from the locker room, setting up the time clock), running the clock and taking statistics during practice[17], and cleaning up the gym and locker room afterwards (i.e. picking up practice clothes and doing the laundry for that day). Set up began around noon each day, practices ran from approximately 1:00-4:00pm, and cleanup lasted usually until 5:00 or 6:00pm. Game days were typically much longer (usually lasting 12-14 hours) as the team had a shoot-around in the morning, team meal in the afternoon, and games at night. My responsibilities on

[17] NCAA DI regulations prohibited me from actually being involved in practices (i.e. passing during drills, rebounding for players, etc.) since only a set number of individuals may be involved during each practice.

game days included: set up/cleanup of the pre-game meal; hanging each player's uniform at their locker; set up of the opposing team's and the referee's locker room with towels, water and ice buckets, coolers full of Gatorade, bottled water, and soda; set up/clean up of the team's bench (towels on each player's assigned chair); handling of equipment (i.e. basketballs, clipboards); and preparing the team's uniforms for the laundry service after the game (uniforms were professionally washed unlike practice gear which was washed in the locker room).

I also assisted in various other functions that did not necessarily occur on a daily basis. For instance, before each road trip to an away game, every person traveling (players, coaches, other staff) was provided with a bag full of drinks and snacks to supplement their daily meals. These bags had to be prepared the night before each trip and be on the bus/charter plane on the day of travel. I also occasionally drove players to and from their classes, practice, or dorms. While my duties often varied, the purpose of my participant observation was always the same: to examine the everyday, micro-level experiences of this specific group of elite-level female athletes. Working as team manager for MWSU, while often repetitive and mundane, provided me with a level of access to these players lives (albeit a circumscribed viewpoint since I only observed them within the context of athletics rather than all aspects of their lives) that I would have never been able to access otherwise. The level of intimacy I was privy to was not accessible to the average fan, reporter, friend, or parent and, as the following section details, was not as easy to come by as it might appear.

One of the biggest challenges I experienced in my participant observation was balancing my daily responsibilities with the team and collecting data. Taking field notes,

one of the most important aspects of ethnographic data collection, was a particular challenge since my responsibilities required me to be both physically and mentally present every second. For example, while the logistics of running the clock during practice became routine very quickly, I had to remain alert at all times so as to never let the buzzer sound at inopportune moments, a particular pet peeve of Coach King. Attempting to take notes on an interaction during practice meant risking losing focus on the task at hand and suffering the consequences. For example, during one practice, I accidentally let the buzzer go off while Coach King was lecturing the team. As the loud blare of the buzzer echoed through the stadium's rafters, Coach King turned to Johnny, pointed at me, and screamed, "If she doesn't know how to work that damn thing, get me someone who can!"

As a result of the particulars of my involvement with the team, I was usually unable to take field notes in any traditional sense; at no time during the course of my data collection was I able to sit back and write notes while making observations of the team. Instead, I depended heavily on other techniques and strategies such as making jottings, most often by sending myself quick text messages via my cell phone that I kept in my lap. In moments where an event occurred that I felt needed a more thorough description of at the time, I would quickly escape to the bathroom and scribble notes on a piece of toilet paper or paper towel.

Indeed, there are many ways in which to conduct participant observations within ethnographic research, some of which would make it much easier to collect data during periods of observation. Because I was so directly involved in the activities I was observing, however, I was required to adapt my data collection strategies by using more

unconventional methods. Rather than attempting to alter my role so as to have more opportunities to take notes, it was more valuable to me to focus on my responsibilities and doing them well in order to demonstrate my commitment to being a member of the team. Placing primacy on my role as team manager was a way for me to establish rapport and become accepted as a true member of the team.

Gatekeeping

The morning of the first day of my ethnography, I wrote a memo, which I ended with the unknowingly foreshadowing phrase: "Stay positive. Tread lightly." The previous five months of back-and-forth attempts at gaining access had left me frustrated but I was determined to stay positive about the project and the possibilities ahead. I also understood from that experience that I was walking on thin ice. I had been given a gift and was hyper-aware of the fact that it did not come easy or cheap; I would be working hard and under close scrutiny and was prepared to do so. What I did not expect, however, was that I would also be dealing with countless gatekeeping efforts by the one person I was assigned to report directly to, assistant coach Johnny Jacobs. I quickly learned that being given access to the team did not mean all-encompassing access but rather tightly controlled, circumscribed access that could change at any moment.

My first encounter with gatekeeping came when I attempted to attend a day's worth of classes with senior and star player, Rowan Dawson. Rowan and I met up to attend her first class of the day and afterwards, went back to the building where the basketball offices were and where the players ate meals so that Rowan could print some articles she needed for her next class. On our way out of the building, we ran into Johnny

and, as the excerpt of field notes describes below, he intervened and proceeded to block my shadowing Rowan:

> *As we were walking out, we ran into Johnny. He asked what I was doing there, saying something like, "You're early!" and I told him I was going to sit in on class with Rowan and that she invited me. He face immediately turned white, his eyes got big, and he frowned. Still surprised, he asked "Did you get approval?" I said, "Oh yeah, the professor ok'd it." He tried to reply but stuttered, stumbling over his words. "Well, um, you just gotta run this stuff by me because I gotta make sure there's a paper trail…" I told him I'd make sure I ran it by him next time and we left. Right after we get out the door, Rowan's phone rings. It's Johnny. He asks to talk to me so Rowan hands me her phone. I say, "Hello" and Johnny replies, "I can't let you go today." … I told Rowan I couldn't go with her and she hugged me saying, "Aw, man. I was having fun."*

In addition to attending classes with the players, I also expressed to Johnny my desire to attend the team's weight lifting sessions. I explained that even though there were no managerial duties to be performed during these sessions, they were important to the everyday experience of the athletes and as a result, important to my research. Similar to in the above excerpt, Johnny denied me access to weight lifting workouts citing broad, ill-defined NCAA regulations as his explanation. When I inquired as to which specific regulations would not permit me to attend classes with the players, he revealed that my presence could draw suspicion of providing extra help or cheating onto the players and the program (and, I suspect, get him into serious trouble). I never went to another class. As for the weightlifting sessions, Johnny's explanation was simply that it was his understanding that my observations were to take place at practices only.

I decided to confirm Johnny's information and emailed the athletic director, Elizabeth, to ask for a meeting to clarify my clearance for certain activities. The morning after I sent that email, I attended the team's 6:00am shooting practice and afterwards was approached by Johnny, as described in the interaction below:

> *Johnny came up to me in the gym and said, "You emailed Elizabeth." I told him I did because … Elizabeth told me to contact her directly if there were any issues. He stood in front of me- I was sitting in a folding chair- with his legs spread more than shoulder length apart, and in a pained voice, said "Well, you know, you GOTTA run this by me. I can't have you emailing Elizabeth. If Coach finds out something happened and she didn't know about it, it's on me."*

The following day, without explanation, Johnny told me that I could go to weightlifting that afternoon if I wanted because it was one of the last team lifting sessions for the season. I did not, however, go to another class.

There were other instances of gatekeeping I experienced during the course of my ethnography that were curious and frustrating from the perspective of a participant observer, detailed in the following excerpt of field notes, two weeks into my ethnography.

> *As I was setting up for practice, Johnny mentioned that the team would be watching film of the scrimmage from the past Sunday (I wasn't there that day). I asked if I could sit in and Johnny said, "I can't let you do that right now." I said, "Okay" and turned to leave the room. Just as I was about to walk through the door, Johnny says reluctantly, "You know, you can watch." I said, "You sure?" His speech slow and hesitant, not looking at me, he replies "Yeah, it's fine. Just sit in the back." …*
>
> *… I rushed to set up the gym and get back upstairs for film. When I got up to the locker room, Johnny, Coach Grant Williams, and Coach Dee Dee Ray were all sitting in the couches in the locker room foyer. They were talking quietly about the men's practice team, trying to brainstorm ideas about how to get more guys to want to come and play. I thought it was strange that they were sitting outside when Coach King was inside with the players. After five minutes or so, one of the players opened the door and said, "Coach said you could come in now." They all stood up and began walking in the room. I whispered to Johnny, "You sure it's okay still?" Barely turning around he responds, "Yeah, sit in the back," his voice low and hushed.*

After these first few uncomfortable encounters with Johnny so early on in my data collection, I attempted to circumvent him by simply attending what I wanted to attend,

without asking, since asking almost always brought with it an immense amount of anxiety for Johnny and awkward interactions between us. This strategy worked for a short while until Johnny began arbitrarily calling me out of important team meetings and, on numerous occasions, literally intercepting me as I walked into team gatherings in order to have me do minor tasks such as inflate basketballs or fold towels.

Highlighting the nuanced ways in which I was blocked from gaining full access to the team during my research is interesting methodologically but more importantly, is substantively relevant. While bothersome in many ways, these instances were data since they illuminated the nature of hierarchy in the program. Additionally, although I believe part of the reasoning behind the gatekeeping I experienced was personal for Johnny[18], I also believe that its purpose was broader and more institutionally focused. Elite-level programs and their athletes are under constant scrutiny by the NCAA, the media, and the public. Scandals around illegal recruiting[19], extra-benefit violations[20], and athlete "misconduct" occur consistently in NCAA sports, albeit usually within men's programs. Accusations of sexual assault against male athletes are perhaps the most publicized, and certainly the most egregious, of such scandals[21]. In a cultural context of sport saturated with countless instances of misconduct on a personal and institutional level, it is hardly surprising that a nationally ranked athletic program would covet a certain level of

[18] Having been a film coordinator his first few years and getting a shot as being an assistant for the first time, Johnny desperately wanted to prove his worth and secure his career with the MWSU women's basketball program. As a result of this, he was very anxious most of the time and worked extremely hard at making sure he never made any mistakes or did anything to upset those higher up, especially Coach King. In fact, despite having a wife and newborn baby at home, Johnny often slept in the locker room so as to maximize the amount of time he could spend working.

[19] A Google search of "recruiting violations" brings up pages of examples of NCAA recruiting violations by major universities such as Saint Mary's, USC, Oregon, Marquette, and many others.

[20] The University of South Carolina recently received penalties for providing $59,000 of impermissible benefits to its football players. Source: http://espn.go.com/college-football/story/_/id/7863243/ncaa-cites-south-carolina-gamecocks-failure-monitor

[21] Scandals at Duke, Boston University, the University of Missouri, and Notre Dame represent a few of the most recent cases in which male athletes have been accused of sexual assault or rape.

secrecy, even when committing no violations themselves[22]. A program like MWSU does not want even the appearance of impropriety. In this sense, protecting the image of the players, the program and the university becomes just as important as winning games. Thus, while the gatekeeping I experienced throughout my research at MWSU was frustrating and methodologically limiting, it is not unexpected given the institution's ever-precarious standing on the national stage.

Interviewing: Justifying In-depth, Formal Interviews

While most ethnographic projects consist of various amounts of informal interviewing, my specific research questions required a series of in-depth, formal interviews as well. The ethnographic portion of this research was designed to examine everyday, micro-level behaviors of elite-level female athletes within an institutional or cultural context, particularly as it relates to their experiences with race, gender, and sexuality. Previous research has demonstrated, however, that female athletes are not always cognizant of the fact that they are negotiating with identity conflicts and may be engaging in gender strategies subconsciously- that their gender expressions are a reflection of their inherent selves and that they are simply doing what is "normal" or "just what they like." Because of the way gender is structured into society, many women feel as though their particular presentations of femininity are merely manifestations of what is a natural part of their being women- a naturalization that gets reinforced until it becomes effortless. As a result, if asked about whether and how they engage in gender strategies in an interview setting, it is possible that many female athletes may not make any mention of negotiating with cultural contradictions because they genuinely believe they are not

[22] The previous year, however, MWSU player Prince was caught stealing from a large national chain and spent one night in jail.

engaging in such behaviors. Since much of this negotiating seems to happen on a subconscious level, observing female athletes in their day-to-day routines becomes especially important. Observation alone, however, does not provide a complete enough picture of these women's experiences.

The in-depth interviews allowed me gain the athletes' perspectives on their experiences- how they see themselves interacting with the world around them- in their own words, unfiltered through my personal observations. The interviews also allowed me to interrogate and explore points of contradiction between what I observed the athletes doing and what the athletes said they were doing (or not doing). For example, if I asked a particular athlete whether she felt like she ever did anything explicitly to avoid weight training and she said she did not, I could then compare what she said to what I observed her doing. It was not uncommon in my study, for instance, for an athlete to tell me that she did not put on make-up solely for competitions- that it was something she just did automatically- when in fact I watched her before games doing this exact thing.

I do not mean to suggest by any means that the purpose of utilizing both ethnography and interviewing was to catch my participants in some sort of lie. I do not believe that such contradictions represent falsehoods at all. Rather, a contradiction within athletes' behaviors and their subjective descriptions of those behaviors illuminates the extent to which gender is so deeply ingrained within our collective imaginations as something that is an essential part of who we *are* and what we *do.* The purpose of exposing and examining contradictions is to illustrate how structures permeate the thoughts and behaviors of individuals. Overall, the combination of ethnographic

fieldwork and in-depth individual interviews within this research design allow for data that provides both depth and breadth to my research questions.

Interviewing: Data Collection

I conducted 32 semi-structured[23], in-depth interviews with individuals involved in the ethnography as well as those who were not[24]. After the season finished and my ethnography ended, I wanted to interview the players and staff I observed in order to gain an understanding of their perspectives of their experiences as well as to determine if there were points of disconnect between what I observed and what was said. While I would have ideally interviewed every member of the MWSU program, I was not able to. Only 12 of the 14 MWSU players and three of the 19 staff members[25] agreed to be formally interviewed. I attempted several times, for instance, to set up a formal interview with Coach King through her assistant but was given various excuses each time as to why she was unavailable (e.g. traveling, too busy). I also set up interviews with assistant coach Grant Williams and Johnny Jacobs but both interviews were cancelled and never re-scheduled. Not being able to formally interview the coaching staff, with the exception of one member, was frustrating and limiting to the project.

It is worth mentioning for methodological and substantive purposes that most of the MWSU players I interviewed admitted that had I not spent the season with them and formed relationships with them, they would have been unlikely to volunteer to be interviewed. Because they knew me, they agreed to devote the time necessary for an interview and felt comfortable talking with me about various aspects of their lives. The

[23] While I utilized an interview guide with a specific set of questions, I also allowed for interviewees to alter the course of the interview based on what they felt was important to discuss.
[24] Characteristic breakdown of those interviewed included in Table 1.
[25] The staff members I interviewed were the athletic director, strength and conditioning coach, and athletic trainer.

importance of having established rapport with the players through my participant observation therefore acted as a gateway for my interviews with them. Not having spent such an extended period of time forming relationships with these women, I would have likely been unsuccessful in being connected to them at all, let alone having them volunteer to be interviewed.

In addition to conducting formal interviews with those involved in the ethnography, I also interviewed a subset of former Division I female athletes in order to determine if their experiences differed from current athletes' experiences. One might expect, for instance, that athletes in the contemporary moment- a time in which girls and women are participating in sports at unprecedented levels- do not experience the same challenges with balancing conflicting identities that former athletes did. In order to investigate this issue, I interviewed 17 former athletes[26] who competed at the Division I level[27]. Again, comparing these two groups allows for an examination of differences in the extent and level of self-consciousness around conflicting identities and negotiation strategies between women who are active currently within the sporting context and those who are reflecting retrospectively about their experiences within that same/similar context. Including interviews with former athletes who were not a part of the MWSU program also allows for an exploration of differences between institutional contexts.

[26] Of those 17 former athletes interviewed, 15 played collegiate basketball at the DI level (keeping sport-type constant is important theoretically) and 2 participated in track and field. All of the former athletes interviewed had graduated no more than 10 years at the time of the interview. Some of the former athletes were still competing at the time of the interview. They are still considered former, however, because they are no longer competing at the collegiate level.

[27] I utilized a snowball sampling technique in order to connect with the former athletes I interviewed.

Content Analysis

In addition to the ethnographic and interview portions of this project, I also include data gathered from content analysis of popular culture materials in order to provide a broader historical and cultural context to my data. Various forms of difference such as gender, race, and sexuality are structural in nature and our commonsense understandings of them are continually constructed within popular culture. Therefore, I examined and analyzed a vast amount of newspaper and magazine articles, blogs, videos, and images in order to situate my findings within the appropriate cultural context. For instance, while understanding that female athletes at MWSU engage in gender strategies may be interesting in and of itself, placing such behavior within a broader historical and cultural context that perpetuates the notion of the modern female athlete as strong *and* sexy allows us to more fully understand how such behavior persists and also how we might approach efforts for change and progress. The data from this content analysis is interspersed throughout the findings chapters in order to add even more breadth and depth to the experiences of the female athletes in this study.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this project was fundamentally inductive in nature. Throughout the course of my participant observation, I examined field notes and wrote memos about major themes and patterns that seemed to be emerging. Doing this not only allowed me to organize and make sense of what I was experiencing on a daily basis but it also served to inform how I would proceed with future data collection. I utilized what I was witnessing as important issues for the players as a stepping stone off of which I wrote my interview guide. I was also able to bring in specific examples from my memos

about incidents I observed and wanted the players' perspectives on. For example, one of the patterns that emerged early on from my memos of observing practice was how much policing of gender through physical appearance came from the coaching staff, particularly Coach King. Drawing from this theme, I was able to construct a series of questions about appearance and whether the players felt pressured to look or act a certain way. Rather than merely ask about this in my interviews, however, I was able to recall specific instances in which I personally observed this type of policing happen and then ask my interviewees to respond to those observations.

After all interviews were completed and transcribed, I analyzed them using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA. For this analysis, I utilized an open coding scheme in which I created codes based off of substantively relevant topics that emerged from the data. Coding the data in this way, I repeated the process several times, going up a level of abstraction with each pass. After coding each interview, I was able to draw connections, identify patters, and extract overarching themes between interviews and across the data overall. The patterns that emerged through this coding process make up the story being told throughout the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER 3

"Don't Be So Blunt About It": MWSU, Recruiting, & The Policing of Sexuality

"Girl on Girl Action"/The Crisis Moment

It was winter break and the MWSU campus was quiet. Classes were suspended until the new-year and most of the students were away, visiting home or traveling with friends. The MWSU basketball players were required to stay on campus, however, since the break between semesters falls mid-season. While much of their time was filled with practices, traveling to opposing universities, and playing games, the players did have some occasional free time since they were not attending classes. After practice one day, some the players gathered together in one their dorm rooms to hang out and listen to music. While they playfully danced and sang along to their favorite songs, they decided it would be fun to film a reenactment of a popular rap music video.

In this video, a series of rappers are shown singing, dancing, and interacting with a number of scantily clad women. One rapper, shirtless and in boxer shorts, is shown getting out of a bed full of women in their underwear and singing while he puts on a tight tank top. He then walks into another room where more women are watching television, shooting pool, and dancing. Two other rappers are shown playing cards and throwing money excitedly while women in cut-off jean shorts and transparent midriff shirts dance behind them. Another rapper is depicted laying in bed and singing while taking photos of a woman who is straddled on top of him, slowly undressing to the beat of the music. In a scene that cuts in and out throughout the video, several of the rappers are shown together, standing in front of a swimming pool, wearing sunglasses, leather jackets, and gold

jewelry, dancing and singing to the music. At the same time, several women in bikinis are getting sprayed with water guns while others are playfully pushed into the pool. Another woman is shown sitting in the lap of one of the rappers as they float on a large, colorful raft. She is smiling and kissing his cheek with her arms wrapped tightly around his neck while he raps to the music.

In order to properly imitate these scenes, the MWSU players took on the various roles of the actors in the video. Some of them like Eve, Kyle, Nikki, and Prince played the "rappers," dressing in fitted baseball caps, tight tank tops, and baggy jeans. Other players including Jizeal, Karolina, Naomi, and Tiffany acted as the "women," wearing elaborate make-up, short shorts and revealing tops. Using their dorm suite as the stage, the players enacted parts of the video described above while the song played in the background. They sang and danced with each other in the living room area and lounged on the beds together.

Thinking it was creative and funny, one of the players posted the video on Facebook[28] to share with their friends. Unfortunately for the players, the MWSU coaching staff thought the video was anything but funny. Alerted to the video by an unknown source, the coaches forced the players to remove it from the Internet immediately and called an emergency team meeting. During the meeting, the players had to watch the parody on a large projector screen (typically reserved for watching game film) in front of the coaches and "explain themselves."

The MWSU coaches' reactions to the music video reenactment represents an important "crisis moment" in which the boundaries around gender and sexuality are clearly pushed and promptly reinforced. The scenes in the video are clearly sexualized, as

[28] A popular social media website.

the men are often shirtless and the women are all in either revealing clothing (e.g. short shorts, tank tops, bikinis) or no clothing (e.g. underwear) and almost all of the interactions between men and women in the video involve sexualized touching (e.g. provocative dancing, kissing, stripping) or sexual innuendos (e.g. water gun fights). Moreover, the song itself is about sex. However, the players were reprimanded for making the video not because it mocked a series of sexually explicit interactions but because those interactions were taking place between women. Some of the players appeared to be "acting like boys" and all of them appeared to be gay. Thus the players' expressions of gender and sexuality through their role-playing of specific characters in the video disrupt the sex-gender-sexuality continuity that permeates cultural ideologies of "appropriate" gender expression.

Of course, the coaching staff's reaction to the video was not just about gender and sexuality, but about race as well. The fact that the players were imitating a rap music video as opposed to, for instance, a country music video is important. Rap music has been widely critiqued for promoting misogyny, homophobia, and violence. Additionally, the portrayal of black women in rap videos often perpetuates gendered and racialized stereotypes or "controlling images" (Collins 2000) of black women as hypersexual. In this context, the MWSU team's video reenactment not only promoted perceptions of lesbianism in a general sense but of a very specific and controversial racialized hypersexualized lesbianism. Thus, the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality in this particular rap video led to a "crisis moment" that, I argue, would not have otherwise occurred had the team imitated a video of a different musical genre.

This seemingly harmless attempt at having fun with teammates turned into a crisis

moment not only because it created the impression that the MWSU women's basketball team promoted "girl on girl action" (discussed in more detail in this chapter) but because in a cut-throat sporting context heavily dependent on securing highly sought after recruits for success, such a reputation could be immensely damaging to a program. The MWSU coaches' insistence that the video be removed from the Internet hinged on the fact that it could be used by rival programs as an anti-gay recruiting strategy to dissuade potential recruits from attending MWSU. The importance of recruiting is the primary driving force behind the strict- often ruthless- policing of players' expressions of gender and sexuality. During my time spent at Midwestern State University and through my interviews with MWSU women's basketball players, I discovered a sporting context in which coaches promoted a culture of "don't ask, don't tell" and players were encouraged to "tone down" or otherwise hide their sexuality in an effort to present the program as heterosexual (or at least not "too gay") and as a result, land the nation's top recruits.

As I will demonstrate throughout this chapter, MWSU players' gender and sexuality was policed at both the individual and institutional levels from their day-to-day interactions with each other to implicit and explicit team policies around handling recruits to the sanctioning of certain kinds of behavior in their down time (e.g. making music videos). These practices, on their own and in conjunction with one another, create a climate in which the boundaries around gender and sexuality are continuously contested, reinforced, and recreated.

Individual Policing of Sexuality

At the time of my research, the MWSU women's basketball team consisted of approximately six players who self-identified as straight, six who self-identified as gay or

lesbian (the players used these words interchangeably), and two who chose not to identify with any label (but who most closely align with traditional understandings of bi-sexuality). The almost perfectly even split between gay and straight players might lead to the assumption that the team's climate around sexuality was open, if not altogether inviting for queer-identified players. Indeed, with such a significant number of out gay players, it would seem implausible that the day-to-day environment was anything but gay-friendly. What I found, however, was a climate that was mostly lukewarm, at best tolerant of gay players as long as certain boundaries were maintained. It was also, however, a climate that some described as explicitly homophobic. Moreover, drawing on shared, yet vague, notions of "crossing the line," MWSU players policed themselves and each other in order to maintain clear boundaries around sexuality.

Perceptions of Acceptance

In trying to gauge their understandings of the team's general climate around questions of sexuality, I asked MWSU players whether or not there was ever any tension between gay and straight teammates. Straight players mostly described a team environment free of judgment and a context in which gay players were openly accepted. Most began their responses with statements such as Sara's, who told me: "*I mean you're going to get one [gay player] eventually. Why should your sexual preference matter above someone's talent? That's just like discriminating because of your race or discriminating because of your gender."* Similarly, the coaching staff described an open and accepting team climate. For example, MWSU coach Dee Dee expressed the following in our conversation:

> *I know for a fact that our girls don't have any issues with that [tension between players around sexuality]. Like irregardless if you gay or*

> *whatever, you like men, whatever, like I don't think it's a problem because they care about each other as people and not what whomever preference is.*
>
> Right. So you don't think there's ever been any problems about that?
>
> *[Shakes head] Unh-uh. Not at all. Not since I've been here. Not from what I've seen. You know, I'm around the girls a lot and to be honest, you would think that they all sisters the way they act with each other. [Laughs]*

From Dee Dee's point of view, the players are "like sisters," which she assumes means they have a close bond and that their relationships are devoid of negativity or judgment. Importantly, Dee Dee's perspective as a coach is limited, as she typically only spends time with players during structured activities (e.g. practice, study hall, travel) as opposed to during more casual, "free time" moments (e.g. dorm rooms, parties) where the players are likely to present different versions of themselves.

While it is meaningful that straight players and coaches believed that the program was accepting and open, it was not necessarily an accurate depiction of the situation. In fact, most of the straight players' responses were contradictory and conditional. While they talked broadly and in the abstract about openness, more concrete conversations about the daily life of the team included numerous expressions of feelings ranging from passive awkwardness to explicit homonegativity.

Tolerated, At Best

Some of the straight players at MWSU discussed the team climate as one of openness and acceptance but what they were actually describing was a more muted form of tolerance. For instance, when asked about tension between players on the team surrounding sexuality, Tiffany shakes her head and tells me:

> *Mmm mm. [Shakes head back and forth] Not tension. I mean one thing*

> *that I like about our team is that everybody respects each other. We don't judge. I'm not gay, but I'm not going to judge you for being gay. You make your own decisions. I guess it's just harder because when you come from like different environments where everybody's family maybe not agree with that, it's a little bit harder. But I mean I know my mom loves my teammates.*

Tiffany describes a climate in which all teammates respect each other and straight players ("we") don't judge their gay teammates for being gay. She then goes on to talk about how it is often more difficult for those who come from "different environments," presumably like one in which she grew up, where diverse sexualities are not welcomed or understood. Sara similarly talks of mutual acceptance by gay and straight players: "*We're acceptant to it. Like the ones that are straight we're acceptant to, the ones that are gay they're acceptant to us*." She goes on, however, to describe what she means in more detail and, in doing so, highlights an important contradiction:

> *Like they [gay players] know like if we go to a gay club- which we've been before because we all wanted to have fun and it's more acceptable if a straight girl goes to a gay club than vice versa- if a girl tried to hit on us, one of our teammates will be like, "Nah, man. Nah, she just here to have a good time. Leave her alone." You know? They'll sort of come to our defense, and if it gets like to a point, she'll be like "Well, she with me." You know? Like it's more accepting within a team, you know?*

Despite claiming that the team's players accept each other, regardless of sexuality, Sara's generalized description of a night spent at a gay club underscores that such acceptance is circumscribed and should not be confused with openness more generally. That is, while straight MWSU players have no problem going to a gay club, they do have a problem being perceived as gay at the club and being hit on by other women. Sara's attempt to valorize her gay teammates for coming to their "rescue" if/when "it gets to a point" in actuality proves a very different point.

In telling me that there are no tensions between players regarding sexuality, Isis similarly illuminates several contradictions:

> Is there ever any problems or some tension between people because of that [sexuality]?
>
> *I mean I think the ones, the relationships that people are most comfortable with- like regardless of their lifestyle- are the ones who actually know and are not ashamed of it and don't try to hide it. If you don't know in the beginning, but then when they actually decide to tell you, it's then a little weird. But then after a while, it's kind of like "Okay."*
>
> Yeah, because you just don't expect it and you're like, "Oh! Okay."
>
> *Right, it's not expected at first, so you're kind of like, "Oh, I didn't know." And for a while it's kind of like weird. But like I said, we still love each other the same and we know that- I mean when you're older you know that it's a process and some people just have to figure it out. And like I said, in the end, we still love each other.*
>
> Yeah, because I'm thinking sometimes you hear stories like teammates will have problems…
>
> *Not here. Like the teammates who are straight will actually for their birthdays go to the club with them. We just pretty much for the most part understand everybody is comfortable with who they are and they're not going to disown or discredit anybody for being who they are. And that's a good thing about it. I think that's why a lot of people actually decide to come here because they see that like we're actually a family. We don't judge. I mean some people just are different.*

For Isis, the MWSU team is like a family and the players love each other, regardless of "lifestyle." At the same time, Isis talks of occasional tensions around players who are not totally out or come out unexpectedly- as she says, "it might be a little weird for people." For her, players who are most confident and come into the team context already feeling certain of their sexuality are less threatening than those who are unsure, are in the process of exploring variations in their sexuality, experience the coming out process after already being a part of the team, or do not neatly identify into available categories of identity and

behavior. Such perceptions treat identity as fixed rather than something that often changes over time and across contexts. Isis' sentiments, while well intentioned, speak to a context of tolerance that is contradictory and conditional. In this way, the MWSU environment may be family-like but it is not as open and accepting as some players insist.

Crossing (Symbolic) Boundaries/Conditional Acceptance

The notion of boundaries in relation to team climate was a key element in the narratives of many of the MWSU players. While social boundaries between straight and gay players existed, the players also actively created symbolic boundaries around sexuality and maintained those boundaries through the enforcing of (straight players) or abiding by (queer players) an agreed upon, albeit usually unspoken set of rules. Social boundaries are "objectified forms of social differences" whereas symbolic boundaries are "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space" (Lamont & Molnar 2002: 168). Moreover, symbolic boundaries are important because they act as "tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality" (Lamont & Molnar 2002: 168). Such boundaries are reinforced when "cultural gatekeepers use…sociocultural indicators" to delineate between acceptable and non-acceptable behavior (Carter 2012: 11).

At MWSU, symbolic boundaries around sexuality were meaningful because they acted as a script that, barring some improvisation, the players enacted in order to maintain a neutral or tensionless team climate. That is, diverse sexualities were accepted under the condition that all players abided by the (symbolic) rules of engagement. Many of the straight players at MWSU thus spoke of an accepting team climate as long as boundaries *do not get crossed*. Many of the gay players, on the other hand, spoke of an open team

climate because boundaries *have never been crossed*. And, while some active boundary policing did take place, more often than not, symbolic boundaries were maintained effortlessly; the team's symbolic boundaries became commonsense so that explicit daily boundary work was unnecessary. The "rules" were so embedded in the everyday relationality of the players that most willingly fell in line or quietly acquiesced.

What counts as "crossing the line" of the team's symbolic boundaries varied for each player. For some, the boundaries seem to be drawn squarely around vague inferences of potential physical advances by gay players towards straight players. For example, Nikki, a gay freshman, tells me there is no tension between players on the team because, "*We don't never see any, you know, crossing no lines of our teammates.*" Other players described "crossing the line" in more context-specific ways, suggesting that the boundaries are governed by multiple sets of rules. Star player, Rowan, tells me there is not tension between players based on sexuality "as long as you don't cross the boundary," which she explains to me in the following way:

> *For instance with me, don't go, don't be in my space with all that, like kissin' on your girlfriend. Like don't bring that around me.*
>
> In front of you, yeah.
>
> *Like I mean, it's cool, you can do it on your time, but like…and then like just flat out just walk around naked. Like why would you do that? I understand it's our locker room and we're all teammates and we're supposed to be cool with it, but like, just at least walk around with a towel or somethin'. Everybody don't want to see that. Like we all got the same stuff, but still. Like cover up or somethin'.*
>
> So do you think it's just because players are gay they're like "Oh, I can walk around naked and it's cool"?
>
> *Yeah, I think that is.*

For Rowan, what counts as "crossing the boundary" can include a variety of behaviors by

gay teammates such as a gay player kissing her girlfriend ("being in my space with all that") to walking around the team locker room naked- behavior she reads as somehow tied to gayness. While Nikki's expression of boundary crossing was somewhat one-dimensional (sexual advances), Rowan's explanation is layered and includes a number of possibilities. Whether she feels similarly about straight players being openly naked in the locker room is unknown but it is clear that she feels as though gay players feel more open to be naked because "we all got the same stuff."

Kameron, another straight player, echoed similar sentiments as Rowan but described different qualifications for symbolic boundary crossing:

> Is there every any drama between the team? Obviously some of the players are gay, some aren't. What is the environment like in general, like around sexuality?
>
> *Oh, I mean I feel like everyone seems pretty accepting of each other and their preferences. Nobody has ever crossed the line with anybody. You know? What you do is what you do in your personal life. So I feel like, I mean there's no real drama surrounding that. Of course, every team has their drama regardless if you are gay or straight, but just surrounding sexuality in general. I mean like, I feel like if you came in here closed minded- like if you came in here and you've been raised a certain way, or if you grew up around certain things that you may not be used to once you get here, then it may be a little bit different. But after time you get more comfortable and you realize that, hey, their sexuality really doesn't matter to me. You may be uncomfortable sometimes with the stuff that you hear, because you may not be used to all that, but at the same time it's like whatever. If you're going to the gay club, I'm not going with you because I am not interested in that, but I'm not gonna be like be downing you because that's what you want to do. That's what you want to do, alright. See ya!*

As Kameron illustrates, she does not perceive any drama between teammates because everyone is accepting of each other's "preferences" and "nobody has ever crossed the line." She admits that sometimes she is uncomfortable with what her gay teammates talk about and that she would never go to a gay club but presumably does not perceive gay

teammates' conversations as too problematic. Kyle, a freshman who has been out since she first began at MWSU, similarly tells me there are no problems between teammates because of sexuality:

> *It's no animosity, it's no kind of anything towards each other. I mean nobody really cares. I mean as long as we don't act different because of how we are, and they don't act different, it's no big deal. We'll still go out, all out to the movies together, we'll still joke with each other and we'll say things that nobody really cares.*

As Kyle notes, there is no tension between players as long as no one acts "different" because of "how they are." In other words, as long as gay players do not cross any boundaries, real or imagined, and as long as straight players do not act bothered by the presence of gay players, there are no problems and "it's no big deal."

Importantly, none of the players (gay or straight) who invoked the theme of boundary maintenance did so exclusively. That is, boundary maintenance was always accompanied by the inclusion of other elements of acceptance such as "you are who you are" or "it's just what they like." Couching such sentiments within boundary maintenance, however, is important because it illuminates a climate of conditional acceptance (what the climate is *actually* like) rather than outright openness (what the players *believe* the climate to be). It is clear from these players' statements that if certain boundaries were to be crossed, acceptance would dissipate. That is, players can be out and gay yet they shouldn't be "too out" (openly kiss their girlfriends). Such narratives are similar to those offered by whites in defense of color-blind ideology or the belief that race no longer matters despite the persistence of immense racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2001). On the surface, belief in and support of colorblindness- a society in which race really no longer mattered because racial equity has been achieved- seems ideal. In

actuality, however, that is not the society in which we live. Therefore, belief in colorblindness, while well-intentioned, results in disastrous effects because it obscures the reality of racial inequality.

Similarly, the team climate at MWSU seems accepting as most of the straight players express belief in and support of "queer indifference"[29] when in actuality, the context is one in which the creation and maintenance of symbolic boundaries around sexuality leads to the persistence of homonegativism. While straight players may perceive such conditional acceptance to be an open environment for all, the message that is sent to gay players is quite different. Gay players are aware that their presence is tolerated if and only if they don't cross certain boundaries- boundaries that are often ambiguous, shifting, and coincide with multiple sets of rules that vary from player to player.

The social boundaries or actual categories of difference may separate straight and gay players in some ways. But, the symbolic boundaries or the agreed upon definition of reality- what is crossing the line versus what isn't- regulating the players' behavior are what makes the social boundaries materially consequential. This is, symbolic boundaries, not social boundaries, determine such things as what kinds of relationships and ways of expressing oneself are normative and valued. As such, players who do not adhere to the team's agreed-upon symbolic boundaries (such as those who choose to change clothes openly) are subjected to policing and sanctions (e.g. verbal objections from teammates like Rowan). They are aware that some of their teammates find it offensive when they

[29] I use the term "queer indifference" to refer to heterosexual expression of "not caring" about queerness in the same way whites express "not caring" about race. A term such as "sexuality blind" is not as effective as "colorblindness" in this case since markers of racial difference or racial signifiers can be "seen" whereas sexuality cannot be "seen" (gender conformity/non-conformity is what is "seen" as therefore often used as a signifier for sexuality).

have their girlfriends present or talk about their relationships and they certainly know that they can never be perceived to be hitting on or otherwise expressing sexual interest in straight teammates. Indeed, for many of the MWSU gay players, their responses about tension between teammates involved feelings of partial acceptance interspersed with perceptions of explicit homonegativism.

Team Homonegativism[30]

While all of the straight MWSU players and a small number of gay players told me the team environment was generally open and accepting of its diverse sexualities, other gay players talked about a more hostile environment. Far from accepting, these players discussed a climate that was explicitly homonegative. For instance, Eve describes her complicated experience as a gay player at MWSU:

> So you've always been out with your team?
>
> *Yeah.*
>
> Has it been a positive experience?
>
> *I mean, yeah, for the most part. You know, like I've had a couple teammates who-like Rowan-that's why we're not that close.*
>
> What was her issue?
>
> *It wasn't an issue, she was just real like homophobic and I was the only one who was like always out, like I never hid it and so we just never were that close.*
>
> Yeah. Would you say the team overall though is accepting?
>
> *They're accepting. They're just a couple of them a little judgmental but not about me because I've been out since I've been there, but like ones who do like kind of transition into it. You know cause like I guess when you're younger, you know you're like really sheltered and like once you get to a place where like you can do whatever you want to when you want to do it like things happen. So like the ones*

[30] Drawing on the work of Krane (1997), I am using the term "homonegative" rather than the more common "homophobia/homophobic" because I am referencing discrimination against LGBT individuals (homonegativism) rather than some irrational fear of those individuals (homophobia).

who like I guess transition into it, they're like really judgmental against them…

Why do you think that is?

People don't like change, so.

How do you deal with the teammates that are homophobic? How do you negotiate with that?

I mean there's no like real negotiating. It's like if you don't want to be around me, you don't have to but I'm not fittin' to change who I am. I didn't change for my mama, what make you think I'm gonna change for you?

Eve describes experiencing explicit homonegativism from some while feeling generally accepted by most others. Interestingly, she attributes a lot of that acceptance to the fact that she has been out from the beginning of her career at MWSU compared to some of her other teammates who have come out while on the team ("transition into it"). And, while Eve ultimately feels no desire to change or hide her sexuality because she experiences judgment from her teammates ("I'm not fittin' to change who I am"), she is still operating within a hostile team climate.

Jizeal, who at the time of the interview had recently begun a relationship with a woman, similarly describes having problems with one particular teammate, who cannot understand her "transition":

So what's that like in terms of the team? I mean do you ever have any problems?

I feel like Isis doesn't like it or whatever. But I feel like how can you be mad at me- like to this day we don't even like- we'll talk a little bit but come in a room, won't say anything to each other, because she's just been being rude about it and stuff like that. Like everybody else they've been cool with it to my face but you know like her she's just mm-mm [shakes head] my roommate so she been acting like real funny. But I don't really care obviously, because that's what I want to do. But like yeah, you can tell it probably bothers her.

Okay…

> *Mmm, I don't know. It's weird but I mean I don't think nobody else has a problem. I mean everybody knows I talk to her.*

Jizeal doesn't believe that any of her teammates have a problem with her dating a woman because no one has explicitly said anything to her about it ("they've been cool to my face"). She feels, however, that Isis has treated her differently since she began dating a woman. Despite being roommates, they no longer speak to one another apart from short, occasional pleasantries. Bisexual player, Naomi, discusses related reactions to her having recently begun dating a woman:

> Is there ever any kind of tension between you guys on the team?
>
> *Oh. We have some close-minded people. We definitely do. And I mean close-minded as like in general makes me mad. I mean I can't help it because some people just come from that background, and that's how they're raised, so I can't really be mad at them. But I feel like you should know better than—I don't know how to explain it. It can be like people look at you differently or…*
>
> Oh, you've experienced that?
>
> *No, I mean like—well, when I first started dating Brittany I guess some people were like "Naomi?" I'm like "Why are you shocked? Why? Like you know how I am as a person. But that doesn't change me—I'm not different. I haven't changed."*
>
> So maybe there's people—it might not be any serious arguing or anything, but there are some people who…
>
> *Yeah, and I haven't been directly asked about it, but I've heard what people been saying like behind my back I guess or have heard comments like "I don't understand like why would she date a girl? She can have any guy she wants." I mean like that's stupid. I don't know. It's like you're only with a girl because that's what you can get? Like what are you trying to say? I don't know.*

Here Naomi describes a climate of general, if low-level homonegativism from her teammates. She feels insulted by her teammates' general close-mindedness as well as assumptions that her sexual object-choice is a shocking since she could "have any guy

she wants."[31]

Echoing the sentiments expressed by her other gay teammates, Prince describes a team climate that has changed over time but one in which she has felt consistent policing around her expressions of gender and sexuality:

> What's your experience been like on the team with that?
>
> *Um, I feel like over the years it's gotten better. I feel like my freshman year it was like a "don't ask, don't tell" kinda thing. And then like from freshman year to my junior year, it was more like, "Oh okay, you know, it isn't so bad" kinda thing. But I feel like for us to be the type of team that we were, so close and you know, stuff like that, it really didn't bother nobody because nobody really tried anybody. You know, and I feel like we all kinda grown so it's like if you did take it to that next level with somebody and you decided to date, like one of your teammates, it's because they wanted to. It wasn't like you kinda turned…you know, turn somebody gay kinda thing.*

Prince highlights several important aspects of the team's climate around sexuality in her response. She references symbolic boundary maintenance by discussing how things "aren't so bad" because "nobody really ever tried anybody" meaning, symbolic boundaries between gay and straight players were not crossed and rules were not broken. She also brings up the way in which the institutional context worked in a "don't ask, don't tell" fashion and that players' were expected not to be "too blunt" with their gender expressions or sexuality, outlined in detail in the following section.

[31] Statements such as these are insulting to LGBTQ individuals in part because they involve assumptions that individuals choose to be in same-sex relationships because they cannot attract a member of the opposite-sex. Thus, in a heteronormative and homonegative context, because Naomi is perceived by others to have the ability to attract men or more significantly "any guy she wants," others are confused as to why she would consciously choose to enter into a same-sex relationship.

Institutional Policing of Sexuality

"Don't Be So Blunt With It"

At MWSU, maintaining an image of the team as heterosexual or, at the very least an image of "not all gay" was crucial and the coaching staff often explicitly communicated this message to their players. Such policing of players' sexuality was most often done with an eye toward recruiting, as demonstrated in this chapter's opening narrative. Team staff viewed portraying an image of heterosexuality as necessary in order to make the program more appealing to top recruits[32], something coaches in top programs often keep "in the foremost of their minds" (Wellman & Blinde 1997: 66). In order to construct such an image, the MWSU coaching staff created a somewhat passive "don't ask, don't tell" environment in which it was "okay" for players to be gay as long as they "toned it down," especially when in the company of highly sought after recruits. As Prince told me (continued from the above quote):

> When you say it was like "don't ask, don't tell," like where was that coming from?
>
> *I feel like it was more of like, Coach would be more like, "Okay, if you're gay, you're gay, but don't be so blunt with it." Like you know what I'm saying? Like one time I got in trouble for allegedly using the boy's bathroom, but I really didn't use it, I just walked around the corner, but I didn't go in there. I was just joking around. I just had opened the door and I closed it, but I didn't go inside and when me and her had a talk it was more like, "You know, everybody knows you're gay, but you don't have to be so, you know, blunt with it." You know, like trying to kinda, just, I guess be like "Hey, I'm gay, I can use the boy's bathroom because I look like a boy" kinda thing, but I wasn't really thinking like that. I wasn't really trying to do that, I was just joking, you know what I'm saying? But I guess that's what she was saying like, okay, cause I look like a boy that don't mean you have to sag your pants so that the whole world knows you're gay or wear a big rainbow watch and you know all this extra stuff to bring attention to yourself.*

[32] Of course, such an endeavor is based on the problematic assumption that all or most recruits desire a team context that is all heterosexual.

> Does that ever bother you that you…
>
> *It did bother me at first. I felt like she was just saying that I wanted the gay attention, which I really don't. Like, I mean, I feel like everybody already know, so I don't have to be overly about it, but at the same time, I understood what she was saying. You know, I kinda, I understood, like you know, I don't have to go over and beyond just to say "hey, I'm gay," even though I wasn't trying to do that. But it just made me realize more when I got older that I don't have to go all out, you know, to make it known. It's already there kinda thing.*

As Prince highlights, the message she received from Coach King was that it was fine that she was gay as long as she wasn't "blunt" or obvious about it. For Prince, whose gender presentation is hegemonically masculine, this message was particularly in reference to her clothing (i.e. dressing like a boy) and her flamboyant personality (i.e. pretending to use the men's restroom as a joke).

In conjunction with messages that players should not be "too blunt" about being gay, players often received reminders from the staff about being "respectable" or "presentable." In other words being "too blunt" or open about one's sexuality was not a respectable and appropriate way to represent MWSU as a program or institution. As a result, the coaching staff's policing of players' sexuality and some of the policing done by the players themselves (as mentioned in the previous section) was done under the guise of the politics of respectability and representing the institution well (e.g. being decent). The staff also engaged in more active policing of players' behavior both on a daily basis and in reaction to particular "crisis moments" (e.g. the music video described at the outset of the chapter) in which their image was perceived to be especially at risk.[33] Importantly, this type of policing and crisis management occurred within a larger culture

[33] One can argue that the institution's image is, in many ways, always vulnerable, which is why programs engage in policing in the first place. Crisis moments merely represent particular points in time in which an unforeseen event creates a situation in which the program may be seen as especially at risk.

of silence surrounding MWSU's own coaches' sexualities. Not only did staff closely monitor their players' behavior and intervene when they felt it was necessary to moderate it, but they also operated in consistent state of denial around the fact that top members of their coaching staff were gay.

"She Makes All Her Players Gay"/ Guerilla Warfare

In early 2011, EPSNW magazine ran a story titled "Unhealthy Climate" in which they discuss homophobic recruiting tactics used by programs to sway recruits to their program and away from others. As the article notes:

> Pitches emphasizing a program's family environment and implicit heterosexuality are often part of a consciously negative campaign targeted at another program's perceived sexual slant. In a survey of more than 50 current and former college players, as part of The Magazine's seven-month look at women's basketball recruiting, 55 percent answered "true" when asked if sexual orientation is an underlying topic of conversation with college recruiters[34].

While the article focuses on how these tactics are often implicit or subtle, with coaches using phrases such as "family friendly" or "wholesome," my experience at MWSU portrays a different story. When asked whether they thought other schools used the fact that there were gay players on the team against their program, almost all of the MWSU players emphatically agreed. Sara, for instance, said it happens "all the time" and when asked what she meant, she replied: "*If one university wanted to break down another one, they'll tell the parent the whole team's gay. Your daughter goes there, she's gonna be gay too.*" Kyle similarly tells me, "*Yeah, we've probably been- not probably- I know we've been stereotyped as 'Don't want to go there, the whole team is gay, the coach is gay,' you know.*" Reflecting on such tactics, Isis admits, "*certain people use like gay and*

[34] http://sports.espn.go.com/ncw/news/story?page=Mag15unhealthyclimate

lesbianism against others. It's becoming like a recruiting defense I guess. Which is sad but it's true."

Dee Dee, MWSU coach, acknowledged how she's heard people use homonegative recruiting tactics against the program saying, "*People go 'Oh, don't go there. You're gonna wind up gay*" or "*They're going to turn you into a dyke*." Referencing the fact that MWSU and rival university, Prarieview State often compete against each other for recruits, Jizeal, admits: "*And then Joel McQue from Prarieview, he be telling the recruits- you know we go after the same people- he be telling recruits, 'Oh, the coach is gay and she turns everybody else gay on the team.*'" Rather than homonegative recruiting strategies being undetectable, cultivated through coded language, the players at MWSU tell stories of blatant anti-gay recruiting tactics used by other programs against them. Studies done by scholars such as Wellman and Blinde (1997) and Krane and Barber (2005) present similar findings. For instance, in their study of identity tensions faced by lesbian intercollegiate coaches, Krane and Barber (2005) note that all 13 of the coaches interviewed brought up negative recruiting without prompting.

In discussing anti-gay recruiting tactics with Rowan, she admitted that when she was considering different schools to attend, she did not want to come to MWSU at first because she found out that two or three of the girls on the team were gay and was worried that she would be hit on by those players. When she brought her concern to the attention of Coach King, she describes an exchange between the two:

> *And I was like, "Coach King, no, I'm not fittin' to be around them." It was just bad. I had it bad. And so I was like "No." She was like, "No, you don't have to be around it. Don't even pay attention to it. I don't want you messing up your college career over such and such and all this type*

> *stuff." I was like, "I'm just saying, like I don't want to be around it." And she was like "They're not gonna bother you, you know, as long as you respect them, they're going to respect you. Like they're not going to throw it in your face." I'm like, "Okay, whatever" so I took a second chance and came here and I don't know, that kind of had me in a way, it was just like "Eww, I don't want to be around that."*

While describing how she gave MWSU a "second chance" after initially not wanting to attend because of the presence of and perceived threat of gay players on the team, Rowan also describes how Coach King combated the notion of getting "turned out" (a topic of the following chapter) by reassuring Rowan that "they're not going to throw it in your face." Indeed, as will be outlined in the following section, Coach King and the rest of the MWSU staff ensured that their players did not throw "it" in anyone's face.

Concerns about the presence of lesbians on a team can come from rival programs, individual recruits themselves, and parents. In fact, most of the MWSU players who talked about the reason why the presence of lesbians was such a significant issue during the recruiting process claimed that it was most often the recruit's parent(s) who brought up the "issue" with the coaching staff. The coaches in Wellman and Blinde's (1997) study similarly "felt that parents were probably the most common source of this questioning" (66). In order to defend against assaults by rival programs and inquiries by potential players and their parents while attempting to land top recruits, programs are left weaving a complex web of fear, silence, denial, (Wellman & Blinde, 1997) and hypervigilance (Krane & Barber, 2005) and MWSU is no exception.

The Best Offense is a Good Defense/Policing Self & Others

Guarding against anti-gay recruiting tactics by maintaining an image of heterosexuality is something that concerns the institution as a whole, yet much of the pressure falls on coaches. As outlined above, many programs will scare potential recruits

by telling them that there are gay players on the team or that the coaches "make their players gay." In order to combat such recruiting tactics, my ethnographic and interview data revealed numerous ways in which gay coaches closeted themselves, straight coaches acquiesced to a culture of silence, and the coaching staff policed players' sexuality both explicitly (e.g. during recruiting visits) and implicitly (e.g. generally promoting a culture of "respectability" by encouraging a "don't ask, don't tell" atmosphere). Such boundary work is not only damaging to the individuals involved, gay or straight, but reinforces a homonegative climate in women's basketball by conceding that there is a "problem" to be hidden and in which appearing heterosexual is worth any price.

Closeted coaches are not uncommon in women's collegiate basketball[35] and anti-gay recruiting appears to play a large part in whether and how long they stay closeted (Wellman & Blinde, 1997; Krane & Barber, 2005). A coach's decision to stay closeted is "both a competitive and job-security issue, because one player can be the difference between March Madness and an April pink slip."[36] That is, unsuccessful recruiting has material consequences in lost games and, if those pile up over consecutive seasons, lost jobs. Moreover, as Griffin (1998) notes,

> Given the overt hostility or conditional tolerance characteristic of many athletic departments, this belief is not merely a reflection of individual lesbian athletes' and coaches' internalized homophobia. There are real risks in revealing one's lesbian identity in athletics, and significant social pressures support the hostility and conditional tolerance most lesbians in sport face (134).

The reluctance or outright fear of being out for many women college coaches is thus twofold: (1) There is the very real possibility of losing one's job merely for being gay or

[35] As of this writing, Portland State University head basketball coach, Sherri Murrell, is the only openly gay female coach in Division I women's basketball.
[36] http://sports.espn.go.com/ncw/news/story?page=Mag15unhealthyclimate

perhaps more accurately for being out (Thorngren, 1990; Wellman & Blinde, 1997) and; (2) Being out, even if a coach retains her job, can negatively impact her future ability to land top recruits, which becomes a significant factor in the overall success of a team (Thorngren, 1990; Krane & Barber, 2005).

The MWSU coaching staff is not immune to such realities. During my time spent with the team, I witnessed how the coaches participated in a culture of silence around sexuality, especially when involving gay coaches and their relationships. While heterosexual coaches' wives, husbands, and children were part of everyday conversation, the partners of gay coaches were rarely spoken of. While partners were present at games and team functions, and were equally beloved by the players, they were never publicly identified as partners. For example, when I was introduced to Johnny Jacob's wife, Lauren and their new baby, Lauren was named as such: "This is Johnny's wife." Yet, when I similarly met one of the coach's long-time partners for the first time, I was simply told: "This is Emily." And when I asked one of the student managers who exactly "Emily" was she told me, somewhat awkwardly, "they live together and they have some house in Mexico."

Drawing on Griffin's (1998) identity management strategies for lesbian coaches, the MWSU coaches were, in some ways, "implicitly out," meaning they involved their partners in their careers and allowed others within the program to know about their sexuality while never explicitly naming themselves as lesbians. The atmosphere created by the coaching staff (both gay and straight) of never outwardly speaking of gay coaches' sexuality while simultaneously ambiguously including their partners in the everyday activities of the team was both awkward and confusing. This culture of silence was

ubiquitous yet, like a transparent fog, something you knew was there- at times feeling it viscerally- yet were never able (or allowed) to fully see. Its effects were both suffocating and, as the players explained, necessary.

One of the signs of just how effective the general culture and climate of "don't ask, don't tell" at MWSU was the way in which the players seemed to be able to know the "rules" even if they were rarely made explicit. For example, most of the players understood that a comfortable ambiguity around the coaching staff's sexuality was desired, especially when it came to interacting with recruits. As senior and team captain, Eve, told me, laughing, when I asked why no one ever talked about Coach King being gay:

> *It's no one really talks about it. But we always talk about Emily, yeah, her girlfriend, or wife. Like it's not hidden but it's not like out, you know? Clearly you can tell she's gay but like no one ever talks about it.*
>
> Why?
>
> *I guess because she's the head coach and so for kids that are comin' in, like you don't want—like you have homophobic parents, you have homophobic kids*.

Eve acknowledges the disconnect between "always talking about Emily," the coach's partner, but at the same time never talking about the coach being gay. The presence of Emily is accepted, even welcomed, while the recognition of who Emily actually is remains hidden, at least to those outside of the immediate team context. Co-captain, Rowan, echoes similar sentiments as Eve but attributes the silence to individual preferences for privacy:

> *No, it's not a secret, it's out there.*
>
> But nobody ever talks about it right?

> *No, I mean, I guess we don't but when things…okay, I guess we don't feel like it's our place to speak on her personal life so it's like we just let it ride, like "Okay, whatever."*
>
> Does she ever talk about it?
>
> *No, never. Never.*

When asked if anyone ever talks about Coach King's sexuality, Jizeal agrees with Rowan saying, "*No, it's not a discussion.*" When asked why, she finds it hard to formulate a reason saying merely, "*I guess it's just not the conversation she want to have*."

When I asked Rowan if she thought it would be okay if the coach's partner came to team functions like the end of year banquet like the other coaches' wives and husbands do, she replied: "*Yeah, I mean she comes to all of our functions, like we love Emily*." Rowan's acknowledgement that Emily can and does attend team events does not undermine the culture of silence. Rather, Emily's welcomed inclusion in team functions supports the "don't ask, don't tell" environment created by a coach who desires to remain only implicitly out. Griffin (1998) notes that compared to being completely closeted, coaches who are implicitly out will bring their partners to social functions and "though she would not introduce her partner as such, would not pretend that she is 'just a friend' either" (142). Straddling the line between being in and out of the closet, while seemingly vague, is actually an explicit, well-defined gender strategy for lesbian coaches. Consciously staying implicitly out- living life "in a way that allows others to see what they want to see without spelling it out explicitly" (Griffin 1998: 142)- represents a very clear plan of action designed to solve the "problem" of maintaining a heterosexual image within a sporting climate in which anti-gay recruiting tactics are widespread and the consequences run deep.

Some of the players directly attributed the lack of discussion around the gay coach's partners to experiences of negative recruiting and trying to maintain a heterosexual image of the program. For instance, Karolina, a freshman, talks specifically about Coach King's struggles with recruiting:

> *She has been talking about that it is hard for her and people don't come here because she is gay, and she has been going through stuff because she is gay, and it's just been hard. From what I heard, she got a girlfriend or whatever, but they don't show it too much because people are against it, I guess. I don't know. I guess maybe she'd had some players that wanted to come here but because she was gay they did not come or something like that. And then she just don't feel like it should be all out there.*

After being on the team for an entire season, Karolina had not yet met Coach King's partner and she attributes this to her coach's past experiences of not being able to secure recruits because of her sexuality. Naomi, on the other hand, believes that Coach King "chooses who she is open to," recalling that the coach had her partner, Emily, with her when she recruited Naomi. Like Karolina, Prince believes that Coach King hides her sexuality so that she can maintain the program's success:

> *Yeah, a lot of people don't talk about it. You know, I feel like with her it's just personal business. I feel like she knows that to a certain extent, everyone eventually is gonna know. But what she's hoping for is that it stays with the team. You know what I'm saying? Because it's…I mean, she's already successful, but I feel like that one slip through the crack and it's like now, a program that just did so great, going downhill. You know, you losing recruits kinda thing. Like she's not all out, "Hey, I'm gay", you know, starting gay parades, but you know. I feel like people know but they respect it more because she's not like, "Hey, I'm a gay coach and we're winning" kinda thing. It's more like, "I'm gay, but I'm doing…I'm not getting that involved and you know what I'm saying? My players lives, it's not affecting my players overall." And at the same time, you know, it's a business and I think a lot of people respect her for not mixing personal and business kinda thing.*

Prince recognizes the potential negative impact on recruiting that being out could have for Coach King. She also argues that being closeted may help Coach King gain more

respect from others because she's not "flaunting" her sexuality. Prince acknowledges this double standard when I asked if the same holds true for straight coaches. She says: "*I feel like they can do whatever the fuck they want. It's okay because they have a husband and kids. You know?*" In this way, being open about relationships and families for straight coaches is normative whereas merely being an out coach is "flaunting" or, as Prince claims, could be interpreted as "affecting her players."

Unfortunately, I was unable to interview any of the gay coaches about their personal relationships. I was, however, able to talk to one of the staff members about how the coaching staff fields questions about the presence of gay players from recruits. Dee Dee, former athlete and staff member, told me the following:

> *I think we had maybe a parent say, "Yeah so, you know, does maybe sexual preference matter here or you know, is that something that's going to be frowned upon or is this something that she may be forced into or whatever?" And I just, you know, I wasn't the one answering the question.*
>
> What was the answer?
>
> *I don't remember what she said, but I think if you came here, like, you should be free to be who you are and that's just the bottom line. Because if you are gonna go anywhere, regardless of what school you going to, if you're gonna ultimately end up trying to hide who you are, you're not gonna be happy. And second of all, how are you giving people the chance to get to know you?*

Given her position in the program, Dee Dee doesn't typically field these kinds of questions but she is deeply ambivalent about the kinds of vague answers likely to be given in response to parents' questions about "sexual preference." Tactics of avoidance such as "you should be free to be who you are" provide recruits and their parents the comfort and gay coaches the protection of ambiguity but don't give "people a chance to get you know you," as Dee Dee says. Thus, for the coaching staff as MWSU, being

closeted to those outside of the immediate program and creating a "don't ask, don't tell" environment within the program becomes a recruiting tool and a recruiting defense. Such image safeguards put in place by the coaching staff, however, merely represent the front lines of defense for MWSU. While such strategies might protect the program from verbal attacks by other programs they cannot, by themselves, control the program's image. In order to ensure the appearance of heterosexuality, the coaches must also rely on the players' willingness to partake in the charade and, when necessary, intervene to ensure their compliance.

"Whatever It Takes"/ Securing Recruits

The responsibility for successful recruiting is not something that falls solely on the shoulders of the coaching staff. The players are equally important to the equation and can often play a significant role in a recruit's decision about whether to attend their university. When recruits come on an "official visit," the players are responsible for hosting the recruit in their dorm room or apartment, taking them to classes, and otherwise "showing them the ropes" of their campus. More than that, players are often encouraged to sell their school by highlighting extracurricular activities such as going to parties or nightclubs. As MWSU co-captain, Eve, says: "*As players you're supposed to do whatever it takes to get the kids there*." For many women's basketball programs, including MWSU, doing "whatever it takes" is often less about persuading recruits on the wonders of their school's dining options or the campus arcade and more about convincing them (and their parents) that their team is "gay free."

As outlined in the outset of this chapter, the MWSU coaching staff reacted to the music video "crisis moment" swiftly by calling for the removal of the video from the

Internet and holding a team meeting to "discuss" what happened. While I was not allowed to attend the meeting in question[37], I was told about it from a number of the players shortly afterwards. Their reactions to the coaches' response illustrates the ways in which they resisted and felt constrained by the coaches' attempts to police their expressions of gender and sexuality. When I asked Eve to explain the situation to me during our interview, she had the following to say:

> *So, we made a video. And like all of us are like really close you know so like we have straight teammates who doesn't mind like dancing on us or dancing with us or just having fun with us so you know, we're lame so we reenact videos. So we did the video and she [Coach King] was like "This doesn't look good for the program." We put it on Facebook. She was like, "This doesn't look good for the program. You guys look like a bunch of lesbians!" And we just like "Who cares?" But then she was like "If one of our recruits saw this and they chose not to come here because of that…", you know.*

The players' attempt at "just having fun" was an assault on the MWSU program, not because it was slandering or offensive generally but because it appeared to promote a racialized form of lesbianism and could have potentially influenced a recruit's decision to attend MWSU. Jizeal, slightly more understanding of Coach King's perspective told me:

> *When we did that or whatever she was just like "That's not okay because that just gives, that just shows that, oh, it's girl on girl action"- me and Prince on the couch, she whispering in my ear, you know, we was just acting but I mean she was whispering in my ear. Naomi and Karolina in the bed with Eve, you know, half dressed. It was a nice video but like I understood where she was coming from, because it did make it seem like our whole team was gay because only two people wasn't in the video.*

Again, the issue with the video was that is appeared as though the "whole team was gay." Apparently, Coach King's concerns were well founded. Former MWSU player, Sophie,

[37] My being kept from this "emergency meeting" is another example of the gatekeeping I experienced during my ethnography but also speaks to the staff's insistence on controlling who knew about this video in the first place.

told me that another program's coaches actually got a hold of the video and used it to show recruits that Coach King "makes all her players gay." Despite this reality, most of the players thought the coaching staff's reaction to the video was unwarranted. Nikki, a freshman, told me: "*We was just all that comfortable with each other. I say if it was out of 100%, only like 20% of the people in there was gay. The rest weren't. So we was just like having fun. I don't see that there is a problem with that. I guess it's just a perception of how other people see 'gay.'*"

Kyle, another freshman, told me that she didn't think the video should be perceived differently just because it involved only women:

> *It was over winter break, gosh when it snowed really bad down here, and we were stuck in the room. We had nothing to do, and man, we made a video, because we were just so close and we made a video. We put it on the internet. It wasn't meant to be anything like that. It was just to be fun. So we put it on the internet and I guess it got back to our coach. It didn't seem that bad to us. But they called us in here to watch it in front of them…I mean it would be the same thing if they was a boy in the video. It might have been a big deal I guess because we're all girls, but at the same time, the speakers in the video were all girls but we're all teammates. It's not like we had random girls in the video that nobody's ever seen…It's probably mostly that we put it on the internet for people to see.*

Prince was similarly upset by the reaction to the video since for her, like Nikki, being perceived as gay is not a bad thing:

> *Yeah, I feel like, for recruiting and for her as a coach, but at the same time, I mean, it's college. You know what I'm saying? You gonna have fun, why sugarcoat? You know, why throw a whole bunch of guys in the video? Now we're ho's. I mean, either way it go, you know what I'm saying, you put guys in the video, you're a ho, you put girls in the video, you're gay. So I mean either way, you're gonna get criticized. Do you think it would've looked better if we put a whole bunch of football players in there and we're all dancing on them half-ass naked? What that look like? "Oh, at Midwestern State, they're fucking ho's and they're all over the guys," kinda thing. You know? Like I said, it's always something. So I mean, why not make it something. Shit. It's always something right? Why not give them something to talk about? But I feel like at the end of*

> *the day they'll respect us because they'll be like, "Well, at least Midwestern State was honest." You know what I'm saying? At least, before I knew I sent my child there, they knew what type of team they were. They were comfortable. They all were okay with their sexuality. They all knew what they wanted. You know? Some people that were in that video weren't even curious, you know what I'm saying, they're not even gay. But it's the whole, "I'm having fun with my teammates," you're not thinking about, "Hey, I'm being gay right now," you know, "Wow, my teammates look like she was kissing me on the neck" kinda thing, you know?*

In her response, Prince illustrates the ways in which women often face a double-standard around sexuality where men are congratulated for their sexual prowess and "achievements" and women are called "hos." Interestingly, while the "ho" and "lesbian" are both stigmatized identities, the reaction of the coaching staff suggests that they would have preferred if their players were perceived as "hos" to their being perceived as lesbians.

Not all of the players felt the same way as Kyle and Prince, however. Rowan, who herself almost decided against attending MWSU because she knew some of the players were gay, told me the video was "awful" and that when she found out about the video, she looked at her teammates like "you guys are fucking stupid." When I asked her why she felt Coach King was so upset about the video she said it was because the coach did not want recruits to think "that we're all just dykin." When asked to explain, she said:

> *Because that takes, that puts our program at risk, like, "Oh well, I don't want my daughter around that foolishness." You know and we could possibly lose a recruit from that just because we're acting like boys and kissin on another girl and some girls, like little girls now, they're like really uncomfortable with that. Like, "I'm not, I don't want to go to that college because they're all gay." Like eww, and you know, that could mess up our program, our reputation. So I see where she's coming from in so many ways and it's just like, I don't know, respect yourself. Like it's cool to do it behind closed doors, but like when you're representing an institution like just chill.*

Again, a seemingly harmless attempt at having fun with teammates turned into a crisis moment that put the program's reputation at risk because it appeared as though the were "all just dykin." The players were reprimanded for making the video not because it mocked a series of sexually explicit interactions but because those interactions were taking place between women. Some of the players appeared to be "acting like boys" and all of them appeared to be gay. Fear of the video being viewed by others centered on the fact that it could be used to negatively influence potential recruits and damage the team's credibility.

It is important to differentiate Coach King's reaction to the video- a crisis moment- from her reactions to everyday forms of player "misconduct." Indeed, on-the-court discipline- screaming at players, hurling profanities, and slamming clipboards- was not an uncommon occurrence during MWSU practices. Moreover, these types of reactions were only heightened during moments when players would "act up." If, for instance, the players seemed distracted or Coach King did not perceive them to be giving enough effort, she would force them to run "suicides" or in some cases, kick individual players out of practice.

During one particular practice following a "snow day" in which classes were cancelled and the players had free time, many of the players seemed especially sluggish. After repeated failed attempts at completing a relatively simple drill, Coach King stopped practice and made the entire team run as punishment. With veins bulging out of the sides of her neck, she hammered the players with insults as they labored up and down the floor repeatedly. She was certain that the reason the players were underperforming is because they spent the previous day off "acting up" and, as a result, she was forced to be harsh.

Coming over to the scorer's table for a drink of water, where I sat setting and re-setting the timer for each new run, Coach King said to me, exasperated: "*I'm not crazy. They're bored. Off of school yesterday and bored so they were acting like fools. And now I have to act like a fool."*

I highlight this incident not to critique Coach King's decision-making or coaching methods- such an analysis will be the subject of a future paper- but to demonstrate that intense reactions and harsh punishments are commonplace at MWSU. And it is because such behaviors are the norm that Coach King's alarming response to the video is all the more telling. For a coach who spends portions of every practice screaming at players, her being upset by the video is not necessarily surprising. What is revealing, however, is the intensity of her reaction both compared to her reactions to other moments in which players "act out" and that this reaction was in response to an event that was outside of the immediate sporting context (i.e. not in practice or during a game). A coach (sometimes kicking) and screaming during practice is routine. A coach engaging in intense forms of "damage control" over homemade rap video parodies is not. Yet, it is exactly the type of reaction had by the MWSU coaching staff to this "crisis moment" that underscores just how important recruiting is for programs and just how significant appearing heterosexual is for that program's recruiting success.

"Tone It Down"/ Portraying a Heterosexual Image

Managing crisis moments like the one involving the video parody is not the only way the MWSU coaching staff attempted to control the team's image through policing the players' sexualities. While the video debacle was an incident that demonstrated rather clearly how perceptions of gayness are viewed as damaging, this was not an isolated

theme. MWSU players spoke at length about the various daily ways in which they were expected to modify their behavior in front of recruits. Time and again, the players talked about coaches instructing them to portray an image, however false, of the team as heterosexual. Almost all of the players stated that the primary expectation from the coaching staff was to "tone it down." As Sara, MWSU senior, told me:

> *We've had the talk where we do have some gay females on our team, obviously. And our coaches told us, "Look, the parents are very homophobe [sic], the parents are very anti-gay. You have to watch what you do. You have to watch what you say." You know, in a sense "tone down being yourself." Tone down what you wear. Dress unknown so it's not bluntly out there that you're gay.*

Isis, a junior, tells me similarly: "*The only strategy is tone it down*." When I asked Isis what it meant to "tone down," she replied: "*They don't even give us examples. They just say 'tone it down' and basically you know where to go from there*."

Isis was confident that the players weren't expected to change the way they dress, act, or wear their hair. Others, however, believed that it was very clear what was meant by "tone it down." In fact, when asked, most of the players referenced avoiding wearing masculine gendered clothing, talking about girlfriends, and talking about or doing "gay things." Sara elaborates on what clothing is not appropriate:

> *[It's okay to wear] tomboyish stuff. Stuff that you really would, like a tight shirt, and if you want baggy jeans. Baggy jeans would be fine with some Converse [shoes]. But not like baggy shirt, baggy jeans, drawls showing. You know? Not stuff you would, not men's clothes. Don't come out with men's clothes on.*

Rowan, seemingly agreeing with the coaches' requests, tells me: *"[Players should] dress appropriate. Don't be having your boxers all out and saggin' and all that. Keep it up, keep it together.*" Reflecting on her own experience with "toning it down," former MWSU player, Sophie, laughing, told me the following:

> *This was the funny thing. Cause we had one of the top recruits come, you know, had a visit. And it was, like, for some reason known that we couldn't take her to anything gay. We had to act straight. I remember this night, we had to act…I have pictures of me in a little skirt, like, you know? It's just stupid.*

In addition to making sure they wore appropriate (read: feminine) clothing during recruiting visits, players also discussed how they were encouraged not to talk about their girlfriends in front of recruits or their parents. As Jizeal recalls, "*They was just like 'Y'all don't be bringing no girls around that y'all talk to because her mom just, she's not with that gay stuff.'"* Tiffany elaborated on similar restrictions:

> *You'll get a parent who comes on a recruiting visit with their child, and they kind of imply that they've heard that your school is—your team is full of lesbians- and so, if you know that you're coming—if as a coach you know that they're coming on a visit, you don't ask your players to change their identity or become something they're not, but as a coach, you're like, "Let's not do anything crazy." You know what I mean? You know? Like, "Don't have your girlfriend around and we have a recruit here," you know?*

Sara went even further to suggest: "*If you're gay and you have a friend there, don't introduce her as your girlfriend. Just be like 'This is my friend*.'" MWSU players also spoke of how recruits were often placed with straight hosts so, as Kameron describes it, they would remain open to coming to MWSU:

> *Obviously we will get information from them. You know, they are doing most of the recruiting. They will let us know, like maybe such-and-such's mom isn't okay with lesbians or maybe this player is a little bit more uncomfortable with lesbians. So in order to accommodate her and to maintain her interest, we're gonna put her with the girls who are not lesbians and who are more feminine, or we're gonna let the whole team know, 'Hey, this mom isn't okay with lesbians, so kind of moderate your behavior a little bit more.' You know? So yeah, absolutely. It's sad, but it happens.*

Supporting Kameron's story, Nikki tells me that a "certain selection of people", straight people, are chosen to show recruits around. Sophie, reflecting on how the coaches often

told hosts to take recruits somewhere "nice," a code for "straight," tells me: "*So they tell the host, 'Okay, make sure you take her to, like, a nice place. Don't get out of control,' stuff like that. And then, you know, I guess they told 'em, 'Make sure you don't take them anywhere that's gay.'*"

While not explicitly stated, the players seemed to understand that "gay places" included obvious spaces such as gay and lesbian bars and clubs, public places frequented predominantly by LGBTQ people (e.g. restaurants in certain neighborhoods), as well as apartments of gay friends. Nikki similarly describes how players are told not to say or do "gay things" (activities) they might normally do and how they "try to lean it towards what we think they are or what they tell us they are." For instance, Tiffany told me of a time when the players and coaches were discussing where to take a certain recruit who was presumed to be straight on a Sunday afternoon. Apparently, one of the coaches suggested a popular park that is in close proximity to the MWSU campus. Laughing, Tiffany, tells of the players' responses: "*And we were like, 'Mmm, no. Like no. No!' Especially, you know what I mean? Like, no. No! You wouldn't do that on a Sunday.*" In suggesting a visit to this particular park, the coaches didn't understand the dynamics of the park on Sundays in terms of "gayness." It is not that the park itself is particularly "gay" but rather that the *perception* of the park is that it is "gay." This perception comes from the park's close proximity to a well-known gay neighborhood (situated in a gay space) and the significant presence of gay people who frequent the park on Sundays. Thus the players knew that a visit to such a space would provide this recruit with anything but what the coaching staff expected: a "straight experience."

In addition to avoiding gay spaces, the players also knew that they should avoid talking about anything gay. When I inquired about this, the players often used the terms "gay" and "inappropriate" or "crazy" interchangeably. In talking to me about how she should answer a recruit's potential questions about the presence of gay players on the team, Isis tells me: "I mean if she has questions, answer them. Be truthful. Just don't say anything like completely inappropriate. Like that's the only thing". I asked Isis to explain since it seemed to me that talking about your girlfriend is differently inappropriate than, using the most contradictory example I could think of, talking about going to a strip club. Our exchange is striking:

> *Right. I think the strip club wouldn't really- I think more inappropriate in that situation would be talking about your girlfriend. And the strip club, well, straight people go to strip clubs.*
>
> So it would be more appropriate in that situation…
>
> *To talk about a strip club than talk about your girlfriend.*

Whether or not the coaching staff would actually find it more appropriate for the team to take a recruit to a strip club than to discuss their same-sex relationships is not as important as is Isis' perception. It is telling that she would choose such a seemingly drastic comparison to make her point and in doing so, she further illustrates the extent to which the program will go to promote and protect a heterosexual image (i.e. straight people go to strip clubs).

(Mis)Recruiting / The Downside of Portraying a Heterosexual Image

It is perhaps impossible to overstate the importance of recruiting for the success of a sports program that aspires to be elite. One or two recruits can, and often do, mean the difference between winning national championships and never making the NCAA

tournament. Top-level talent is sought after and fought over and the tactics have never been more vicious. Coaches are worried about these issues because, unfortunately, the use of lesbian stereotyping to sway recruits can actually work. As ESPNW magazine notes, "There are no data showing how many recruits are swayed by these negative characterizations. But there is plenty of anecdotal evidence."[38]

My interview data demonstrates the mechanisms through which players can be swayed by negative characterizations of particular programs. While Rowan was ultimately convinced by Coach King to attend MWSU despite her fears of being "turned" by the two or three gay players on the team, there are probably many who are not. For example, in talking about her own experience being recruited by MWSU and a rival program, Tiffany had this to say:

> *I was recruited heavily by Dawson State, and one of the reasons why we didn't go there is because she [my mom] didn't feel like I would fit in on that team. You see what I'm saying? Like, that's the kind of effect that it has.*
>
> Did you feel that way?
>
> *Um, yeah.*
>
> Just because…
>
> *There's just like not—when I was getting recruited there, there weren't any girly girls there, you know what I mean? Or just somebody I could go shopping with, you know? There was nobody there.*
>
> There weren't any gay people that wanted to go shopping with you?
>
> *Well, anybody who'd look like I'd shop- maybe I'm being a stereotype- there wasn't anybody who I know I'd be like, "Hey, you want to go to Banana Republic?" You know?*
>
> Based on how people are dressed?

[38] http://sports.espn.go.com/ncw/news/story?page=Mag15unhealthyclimate

And just talking to them.

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Tiffany ultimately chose MWSU over Dawson State because there weren't any "girlie girls" (code for straight) at Dawson State and she didn't feel as though she could relate to the players because of that.

Of course, false representations of programs attempting to appear heterosexual might also sway potential gay recruits who are looking for an inclusive environment in which they can be open about their sexuality. Commenting on the possibility of this and reflecting on her own experience when deciding which school to attend, Prince notes:

> *Yeah, like what if it's a gay kid and you're sending them to a straight environment, you know what I'm saying? Like a gay kid and you're putting them on a team with all straights, what about that? You know, how do they feel? Who they gonna go out with? You know, they don't know nobody. You know what I'm saying? Like you kinda gotta look at it in that way and I think that's what I kinda looked at too when I was coming in. Like, is there at least somebody gay that I know I can get along with kind of thing? And you know, just trying to get a feel out for who I was going to be around for the next four years of my life. You know what I'm saying? So that played a big factor.*

Here Prince critiques the assumption that it is okay to those in the "minority" to feel isolated (e.g. gay players on teams with majority straight players) but not the reverse (e.g. straight players on teams with majority gay players). For Prince, who is gay and was searching for a welcoming team, the presence of gay players at MWSU actually influenced her decision to attend. Jizeal similarly tells me: "*Half of the time that's why they [gay recruits] come. Because they see people that they can relate to*". Sophie, continuing her story of the time she put on a skirt just to appear straight for a recruit tells me, laughing:

> *She turned out to be the gayest of all, you know?! She actually committed. I played with her, and she was all, "Why did y'all do that?" "We don't know, we were told." We were told, the coaches actually told us, like,*

> *"Okay, make sure you take her to someplace straight. Don't do anything crazy."*

When I asked Sophie why she felt the coaches tried so hard to get the team to appear straight (or, not "crazy") when the recruit was gay, she responded: "*They didn't know it [that she was gay] at the time, and they didn't want to risk it.*"

For the MWSU coaching staff, appearing as they actually are- a team with some gay players- to a straight recruit was more of a risk than appearing as they thought they should- a completely straight team- to a gay recruit. Because heterosexuality is the normative sexual identity category, coaches default to assuming all potential recruits are heterosexual and attempt to construct experiences for them that are heteronormative. Doing this not only assumes that all straight players would desire a "straight only" environment but, more importantly, obscures the possibility that recruits may possess non-normative sexualities and ignores their potential desires or interests. Focusing so intently on constructing a heterosexual image might win over some recruits, like Rowan, Tiffany, or the top-recruit in Sophie's example, but it might also result in the loss of others who are themselves gay or are merely looking for a place in which difference is embraced rather than shunned.

Straightness, Thinly Veiled / Collateral Damage

The irony in a highly sought after recruit being "the gayest of all" after the team went to such great lengths to present the program at heterosexual is something that was acknowledged by many of the players at MWSU. Additionally, most of them recognized that even when they tried to present an image of compulsory heterosexuality to recruits, they were thinly veiled at best and downright lying at worst. Karolina, a freshman, laughs at the contradiction: "*Yeah and like half of our team you know that they are gay by*

looking at them. So it's not like Prince would walk up here and wear a dress just because a recruit is here…Why should we act like we are not but we really are? And then when she gets here she will be in shock." Jizeal, reflecting on the difficulty of appearing like something you are not says:

> *Our coaches was like, "You can't be…" you know, but basically we were saying, "How are you going to get this girl to come here when we can't be ourselves?" Because this team, half us are gay and the other half, well now it's like a few straight people left or whatever but you know. But then when she gets here she's going to be like, "Damn, all y'all gay. All y'all talk to girls or whatever."*

Discussing the fine line between "toning it down" and "putting on a show," the latter she sees as problematic, Isis says, "*But it's not like putting on a show, because if they're going to come here, eventually they're going to see anyway. So you don't want to just outright lie to somebody.*" Nikki, unsympathetically commenting on the nature of the recruiting game, states:

> *Yeah, I guess it's just like recruiting is just like a game you play until you get in, you know. Like with the interview, if you got a job, you gone fake it till you make it and as soon as you get the job, that's when you just become who you are. So like we trying to get who we can get, and then when they get here, they get a taste of reality. It's the way it is.*

Obviously, there are numerous negative consequences of the type of policing MWSU does around its players' sexuality within the context of recruiting. Such institutional boundary maintenance harms potential recruits both gay and straight, gay players (and coaches) who are forced to closet themselves, and straight players who want to be part of a team environment that is inclusive. All of the gay players at MWSU and many of the straight ones discuss the damaging effects of attempting to construct facades of heterosexuality for potential recruits. Nikki, claiming that her sexuality does not define

her personality, says: "*Just because I'm like that, that don't change the person I am. That don't mean I'm trying to make your child like that, or your child is going to become like that. I'm still the same person if I was or if I wasn't.*"

Upset while reflecting on being asked to hide who she dates for recruits, Naomi likened such requests to being asked to hide her race:

> *Why I am I supposed to hide who I am as a person or put on? It's kind of like saying "Oh she doesn't like…"—I mean it's not the same thing, but- "Oh, she doesn't like black people, so don't act black". For me it's kind of the same thing. I feel it goes back to people thinking that homosexuality is a choice, so you can hide that…I don't think people should have to change just to—and like, you seriously think—like if you're scared that your daughter is going to be gay because she plays basketball. She's probably gay already. I'm sorry. Like if you really think a sport is gonna influence a person's sexuality, then I mean you're kind of twisted I feel like. [Laughing] And I mean I don't like ignorance, and I feel like that's ignorance, so that kind of pisses me off.*

Other players spoke of feeling uncomfortable and like Sophie admit that pretending to be straight "wasn't a good feeling." Of course, like all individuals working within a structure, the MWSU players have agency and arguably could choose not to engage with pressures to present a heterosexual image to recruits. They could, in theory, sag their pants, show up with their girlfriends to team BBQs, and talk only about "gay things." But, as Jizeal admits:

> *We don't say anything to them, because I mean we have no say-so obviously.*
>
> So you just got to do what they tell you?
>
> *Yeah. Basically.*

In fact, while many of the players lamented having to perform heterosexuality during recruiting visits, none spoke of resisting such performances. It is possible that the players individually resisted in small, symbolic ways, to be sure. None, however, questioned their

coaching staff explicitly nor refused to "play along". They may laugh at the absurdity of wearing skirts to "appear straight" or rhetorically ask "why should I hide who I am?" but the reality is that they are working within a sporting context that is determined to heterosexualize them or, at the very least, tone them down. As a result, the "choice" to opt-out of partaking in the charade of recruiting is really no choice at all.

Widespread Panic / Best Practices?

The existence of anti-gay recruiting tactics is not a new phenomenon. A handful of scholars have documented its impact on athletes and coaches (Thorngren 1990; Wellman & Blinde, 1997; Griffin 1998; Krane & Barber, 2005). The data from my study show continued concern with perceptions of lesbianism in the recruiting process while also detailing the mechanisms through which those concerns become justifications for intense policing of players' sexualities at individual and institutional levels. And while there is hardly any empirical data (and no ethnographic data at the time of this writing) about how widespread such policing of sexuality is in women's college basketball, several recent media examples demonstrate how many programs across the country monitor and control their players' sexualities.

Former Penn State head women's basketball coach Renee Portland was notorious for her explicit "no drinking, no drugs, no lesbians" policy during her 27 year tenure with the program.[39] Talking about recruits, she was quoted in the Chicago Sun Times saying, "I will not have it in my program. I bring it up, and the kids are so relieved, and the parents are so relieved."[40] Former Baylor University star and WNBA top draft pick Brittney Griner also claims that she was encouraged by the Baylor coaching staff,

[39] Portland resigned in 2007 after settling a lawsuit brought about by former player, Jennifer Harris, who says she was kicked off the team for being a lesbian.
[40] http://www.clubs.psu.edu/up/psupride/articles/Chicago%20Sun%20Times%2006161986.pdf

particularly head coach Kim Mulkey, to keep her sexuality private "because it would hurt recruiting and look bad for the program."[41] Describing her sexuality as an "open secret," Griner goes on to explain that while she was out to her teammates and coaches from the time she was being recruited by Baylor and Coach Mulkey, she kept quiet about her sexuality outside of her immediate team context in order to preserve the program's image (of heterosexuality) at a Christian school that is explicit about its views of "homosexual behavior."[42] Griner goes on to say:

> It was a recruiting thing. The coaches thought that if it seemed like they condoned it, people wouldn't let their kids come play for Baylor… It was more of an unwritten law…it was just kind of, like, one of those things, you know, just don't do it. They kind of tried to make it, like, 'Why put your business out on the street like that?'[43]

While it is tempting to admonish individual programs or coaches for enforcing discriminatory policies onto gay players, the reality is that homophobia and homonegativity plague college athletics on an institutional level. More specifically, the intersection of homophobia/homonegativity and recruiting (the importance of successfully recruiting the most talented athletes) leads to an institutional climate that results in teams, such as MWSU and Baylor, working to actively police players' sexualities and present images of heterosexuality (however illusory). And while the

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[41] http://espn.go.com/wnba/story/_/id/9289080/brittney-griner-says-baylor-coach-kim-mulkey-told-players-keep-quiet-sexuality

[42] As stated in the Baylor University "Statement on Human Sexuality": Baylor University welcomes all students into a safe and supportive environment in which to discuss and learn about a variety of issues, including those of human sexuality. The University affirms the biblical understanding of sexuality as a gift from God. Christian churches across the ages and around the world have affirmed purity in singleness and fidelity in marriage between a man and a woman as the biblical norm. Temptations to deviate from this norm include both heterosexual sex outside of marriage and homosexual behavior. It is thus expected that Baylor students will not participate in advocacy groups which promote understandings of sexuality that are contrary to biblical teaching. The University encourages students struggling with these issues to avail themselves of opportunities for serious, confidential discussion, and support through the Spiritual Life Office (254)-710-3517 or through the Baylor University Counseling Center (254)-710-2467. (http://www.baylor.edu/student_policies/index.php?id=32295)

[43] http://espn.go.com/wnba/story/_/id/9289080/brittney-griner-says-baylor-coach-kim-mulkey-told-players-keep-quiet-sexuality

methods of policing range from the explicit (e.g. Renee Portland) to the subtle (e.g. "tone it down" at MWSU), the consequences are always damaging.

Anti-gay or "negative" recruiting has not gone without critique. In 2006, hosted by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) top sports organizations, leaders, and key personnel from colleges and universities around the country participated in a think tank on the problem of negative recruiting. Out of that think tank, Helen Carroll (NCLR) and Pat Griffin (Women's Sports Foundation It Takes a Team! Education Campaign for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Sport), published a report[44] in 2009 outlining the impact of negative recruiting in sport and offering "best practices" for eliminating such tactics. The report- "The Positive Approach: Recognizing, Challenging, and Eliminating Negative Recruiting Based on Actual or Perceived Sexual Orientation"- highlights the sobering reality that negative recruiting is "a persistent problem that undermines the principle and practice of ethnical behavior and contributes to the continuation of the well-documented problem of homophobia in sport" (1).

In order to remedy the problem of anti-gay recruiting, Carroll and Griffin encourage programs to focus on stressing the positive aspects of their school and what it has to offer individual recruits while disengaging with any discussion around sexuality apart from acknowledging the "value of diversity". For example, in a section titled "Best Practices for Coaches," the authors list the following recommendation:

> Make it known that you value diversity. Be proactive by telling parents and recruits that your school's teams are made up of athletes from different religions, races, ethnic groups, economic classes and sexual orientations and that the core value on your team is respect for one another. Explain that diversity is an integral part of the athletic experience

[44] http://www.nclrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Final_Negative_Recruiting_FINAL.pdf

> at your school and that this diversity is a positive and desirable part of the educational aspects of collegiate athletic participation. It helps prepare students for the diverse workforce they will encounter in their careers (Carroll & Griffin, 2009: 9)

Emphasizing the value of diversity by grouping together various forms of difference obscures the specific problem of anti-gay recruiting. That is, while negative recruiting on the basis of race or religion may indeed be going on, this report was designed to address best practices for eliminating negative recruiting based on "actual or perceived sexual orientation". The favoring of some abstract, universal notion of diversity over concrete references to homonegative recruiting practices muddies the picture that is supposed to be in focus. Critiquing diversity discourse surrounding race, Bell and Hartmann (2007) argue:

> …diversity without oppression, functions to shift the focus away from an explicit disavowal of race and racial inequalities toward a rhetoric that aspires to acknowledge and even celebrate racial differences. At the same time, the diversity discourse conflates, confuses, and obscures the deeper sociocultural roots and consequences of diversity. In other words, if colorblind racism reproduces racial inequalities by disavowing race, the diversity discourse allows Americans to engage race on the surface but disavow and disguise its deeper structural roots and consequences (910).

Engaging with sexuality in generic "we value difference" terms while not addressing the problematic nature of anti-gay recruiting- the origins of which are rooted in a homonegative culture- is inadequate in truly combating the persistence of negative recruiting in sports. Celebrating difference is not the same as welcoming LGBT student-athletes and recruits and working towards making sport a safe place for those athletes. Therefore, promoting diversity discourse as best practice for challenging negative recruiting, well-intentioned as it may be, appears merely as "happy talk" (Bell & Hartmann, 2007) without offering any direct challenge to homonegativity in recruiting.

Perhaps encouraging coaches, administrators, and players to emphasize the value

of diversity to potential recruits and their parents would be positive if it were coupled with encouragement to engage in explicit dialogue about sexuality as well. In this report, however, Carroll and Griffin list a series of "best practices" for managing inquiries about sexual orientation that are centered on deflection and avoidance. For example, when coaches are asked by a recruit or parent(s) about their own or others' sexual orientation, the authors recommend: "…tell them that you prefer to focus on the accomplishments and qualifications of your staff and team and that respect for difference is a core value in your program" (10). Deflecting questions about the presence of lesbians in sport means implicitly accepting widespread homophobia/homonegativism and serves to perpetuate the foundation upon which anti-gay recruiting thrives. The deliberate "unseeing" of sexuality is, in this way, similar to "racism without racists." As Bonilla-Silva argues:

> Most whites assert they "don't see any color, just people"; that although the ugly face of discrimination is still with us, it is no longer the central factor determining minorities' life changes; and, finally, that like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., they aspire to live in a society where "people are judged by the content of their character, not by the color of their skin" (1996: 1).

Advising coaches and student athletes to ignore sexuality when asked by recruits or their parents encourages an "it doesn't matter" approach to the problem of homonegativity both within sports generally and in regards to recruiting specifically. Best practices for student-athletes fielding questions from recruits or parents are equally "queer indifferent":

> 1. During campus visits, if a recruit or parent asks about your coach's sexual orientation or whether there are lesbian or gay members of your team, tell them that your team includes many diverse members and the most important thing is that you all respect each other and everyone focus on making their best contribution to the team.
>
> 2. During campus visits, if a recruit or parent asks about the sexual orientation of a coach at another school or about lesbian or gay members

> of another team, tell them politely that in recruiting the focus should be on the positive attributes of your own school, athletic department, and team.
>
> 3. If questioning persists, politely take the approach that the sexual orientation of any coach or player is not relevant to their coaching or athletic talents (Carroll & Griffin, 2009: 13).

On the one hand, of course sexuality has nothing to do with an athlete or coach's sporting abilities and it is important to recognize this. Moreover, it is certainly desirable to aspire to live in a society where athletes and coaches can be judged by their talents and accomplishments and not their sexuality or sexual object choice. On the other hand, athletes and coaches are being judged because of their sexuality and such differences have meaningful consequences, especially within the context of recruiting. As a result, engaging in open dialogue about sexuality with recruits and their parents- tackling the issue head on- seems like a more effective strategy than partaking in deflection, avoidance, and exalting of some generic notion of "diversity." This type of strategy is more difficult, to be sure, especially considering the importance of recruiting and the cost associated with taking chances engaging directly with difficult issues. It would certainly seem as though many coaches might prefer a more "color-blind" approach to handling questions of sexuality from recruits and parents if the alternative could mean losing a top recruit.

Importantly, much of the focus on challenging negative recruiting focuses on inter-program problems- schools using anti-gay tactics against other schools. As my research illustrates, however, intra-program problems also exist. Schools such as MWSU use anti-gay recruiting tactics against themselves through the perpetuation of "don't ask, don't tell" climates and the policing of symbolic boundaries around sexuality. Whether the elimination of anti-gay recruiting tactics between programs will lead to a dismantling

of the policing of gender and sexuality within programs is an empirical question. In the meantime, there are practical methods for challenging the "benefits" of anti-gay recruiting. Carroll and Griffin's best practices for athletic administrators focus on "prevention, policy development, education, enforcement procedures and consequences" (2009: 11). But, while individual programs may have excellent awareness and reporting systems in place, only until consequences are meaningful will teams be compelled to change.

Effective elimination of anti-gay recruiting requires a two-fold strategy. First, programs must be willing to address anti-gay recruiting explicitly and openly engage in dialogue around sexuality with all individuals within a program but especially with recruits and their parents. Rather than deflecting questions about sexuality during a recruiting visit and promoting a climate of indifference around sexuality, coaches and athletes should be prepared to partake in direct conversation about the presence of lesbians within the program, despite the fact that sexuality does not have any relationship to talent or the potential for accomplishment. Second, formal policies against anti-gay recruiting must be developed at the individual program and NCAA levels and sanctions for violations of these policies must be implemented. Because the financial incentives for landing top recruits (i.e. increased revenue, coaching salaries[45]) are so great, consequences for taking part in anti-gay recruiting need to involve sanctions similar to those set forth for other recruiting violations such as fines, scholarship reductions, bans on postseason competition, future recruiting restrictions, and vacation of records. Aside

[45] Median salaries for men's and women's basketball coaches are $329,300 and $171,600, respectively, with several top men's coaches earning in the two million dollar range and a select few of women's coaches earning in the millions. Source: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/03/sports/ncaabasketball/pay-for-womens-basketball-coaches-lags-far-behind-mens-coaches.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

from the ethical incentive to comply with policies prohibiting anti-gay recruiting, programs must view participating in anti-gay recruiting as a risk with potentially costly outcomes and those costs must outweigh any perceived benefits of willingly participating.

Beyond individual-level dialogue and institutional-level policy/sanction measures, enduring change must come at the societal level. As long as queer identities are more stigmatized than homophobia/homonegativism and the threat of "gayness" can be used as an effective mechanism for inciting fear, anti-gay recruiting tactics between and within sports programs will persist. The goal is not for sexuality to become irrelevant but for it to be an unusable or unnecessary tool in the recruiting game- what may or may not make a program attractive to potential recruits. As will be demonstrated in the following chapter, however, lesbian stereotyping is deeply entrenched within women's sports, especially basketball, and any agenda for change must seriously contend with this phenomenon.

CHAPTER 4

"Everybody Knows That One": Lesbian Stereotyping & The "Dyke" Discourse

Rowan Rowan Dawson stands at just over six feet tall and weighs 185lbs. She wears her shoulder-length, dark brown hair straightened and tied low in a ponytail just above the base of her neck. She has numerous small tattoos located in inconspicuous places like her wrists and ankles. Rowan possesses a muscular body that is both physically strong and clearly defined. The contours of her arms highlight her broad, dense shoulders and high-peaking biceps. Distinct striations separate each one of her abdominal muscles like tiny boulders splayed across her stomach. Her legs are thick and powerful. In terms of pure physical strength and well-developed musculature, all of her teammates and most of her competitors pale in comparison.

Nikki Nikki Randall is a five foot six inch guard with a quick first step and impressive ball handling skills. She is relatively muscular for players her size and sweeping tattoos cover her arms from shoulder to elbow. She wears her short black hair in thin tight braids. During practice, Nikki wears her jersey loose and her shorts baggy, hanging low on her waist and falling slightly below her knees. After workouts, she leaves the gym usually wearing a backwards, fitted baseball cap, loose MWSU t-shirt, and large, baggy sweatpants, bunched at the ankles against her brightly colored high-top sneakers.

Prince Nicole "Prince" Davis is a lean, six foot two inch forward with long muscular arms. She has long, black dreadlocks that she often pulls up high on top of her head. Often described as "extra"[46] by her teammates, she has a strong, boisterous personality and is almost always dancing, joking, or otherwise entertaining. Prince has a loud, raspy laugh that is heard often echoing throughout the locker room. The most aggressive player on her team, she is not afraid to knock over an opponent during competition. Her athleticism and fierceness make her a menacing presence on the court. Off the court, she is wild and likes to have a good time, especially with women.

In her book *Dude, You're a Fag*, C.J. Pascoe (2007) argues that use of the word "fag" highlights the powerful relationship between gender and sexuality or, more specifically, the connection between masculinity and homophobia. Boys are called "fag"

[46] A common term for being "over the top" or "dramatic."

not because they are actually gay (although also true) but because they lack a certain amount or type of masculinity. All boys are subject to the "fag" discourse based on their ability to perform hegemonic masculinity (and in doing so, reject femininity) since masculinity for men is synonymous with heterosexuality. Like the "fag" discourse, the lesbian stereotype in sports is used to assess and regulate female athletes' femininity. Female athletes are perceived to be lesbians not because they all actually are but because they lack a certain amount or type of hegemonic femininity. Female masculinity is thus read as lesbian. And, while some athletes may experience lesbian stereotyping more than others (outlined in more detail below), all female athletes are subject to the "dyke" discourse based on their ability to perform an idealized femininity. Moreover, the specific sport context fundamentally alters the way the "dyke" discourse gets played out, with some sports more likely to be perceived as "gay" than others.

Each of the players described above embody and enact masculinity in one way or another. Rowan embodies masculinity through her musculature and physical prowess, Nikki performs it through her clothing choices, and Prince enacts it through her demeanor. Their individual failures at femininity make them subject to lesbian stereotyping. Lesbian stereotyping of female athletes highlights the powerful relationship between gender and sexuality. As will be described throughout this chapter, the various ways in which female athletes perform gender- masculinity and femininity- matters greatly in whether and how they are labeled "dyke." Gendered and racialized signifiers such as clothing and hair taking on meaning and become important both to the athletes' felt performance of themselves as women and to others' perceptions of their successfulness as women. Importantly, however, the "dyke" discourse thrives within the

institutional context of sports, namely basketball, and leads to intense policing of athletes' gender and sexuality. As outlined in the previous chapter, the fear of lesbian stereotyping, specifically within the context of recruiting, led the MWSU coaching staff to police the boundaries of their players' expressions of gender and sexuality. In this chapter, I will outline the how the lesbian stereotype is ultimately based on female athletes' performances of gender- specifically masculinity- and show how the "dyke" discourse is used to police female athletes' gender and sexuality.

Moreover, while past work has documented the existence of the lesbian stereotype within sports (Blinde & Taub 1992a, 1992b; Cahn 1993; Krane 1997; Griffin 1998; Krane et al. 2004; Kauer & Krane 2006), none of it has adequately addressed the way this stereotype is racialized, partly because this work has been focused solely on white women[47]. My findings illustrate that perceptions of "successful" gender performance gets filtered through a racial lens and as such, the lesbian stereotype does not apply uniformly to all female athletes. Additionally, past work has not focused on female athletes' feelings about being stereotyped[48]. These findings are important because they offer examples of how female athletes find various ways to resist boundaries around gender and sexuality imposed by others.

When asked whether they believed any stereotypes existed about female athletes, almost all of the athletes I interviewed responded immediately with statements like former athlete Christina's: "*Um, you're gay. [Laughs] That's the biggest one. If you're good at sports, you must be gay!*" or former athlete Denise's: *"They think that everybody that plays basketball is gay. Every female that plays basketball is gay."* Similarly, former

[47] For an exception, see Cahn (1993).
[48] For an exception, see Kauer & Krane (2006).

athlete Tiffanie and I had the following exchange when discussing stereotypes of female athletes:

> So, do you think there are stereotypes about female athletes?
>
> *Mmm…probably. Yeah, I mean I would totally say so, yeah.*
>
> What are they? What's the most prominent one?
>
> *Um, the most prominent one? I would say that the biggest thing when you say "Oh, I'm an athlete" or whatever, the first thing that comes to mind, I would think to most people is that you're probably gay.*

In their study of stereotypes and female college athletes, Kauer & Krane (2006) have noted similarly that, "without exception, the idea that female athletes are lesbian was the first stereotype recognized by the women (46). Indeed, the lesbian stereotype is so central in these athletes' minds that when I asked former athlete, J.F., if stereotypes about female athletes existed, she confirmed the lesbian stereotype and definitively claimed: "*Everybody knows that one."*

The Gendered Meanings of the Lesbian Stereotype

"Exhibiting Traditional Masculine- Whatever Those Are -Traits"/ Sport-Type

Social psychologists have thoroughly demonstrated how status beliefs about gender lead to negative perceptions of women who excel in traditionally masculine domains (e.g. the workplace) and who value and exert traditionally male characteristics, like competition (Ridgeway 2001; Heilman 2012). As Cecelia Ridgeway argues:

> Status beliefs create a sense of the kinds of people others expect to be authorities in a particular situation and, therefore, who seems normative and legitimate for such a role. Acting on this implicit sense of legitimacy, actors may resist or penalize people from lower status groups who attempt to assert authority over others in the situation (2001: 648).

Women who are assertive, competitive, or aggression- all traditionally masculine traits- are violating notions about how women should behave and often experience backlash as a result (Heilman 2012). Because, according to Ridgeway (2001), "the effects will be strongest in contexts culturally associated with men" (648), it is unsurprising that female athletes operating in a male-dominated sporting context will experience lesbian stereotyping when exhibiting masculinity. Thus, "normal" expressions of gender by men (e.g. competition) get read as differently when engaged in by women because such traits represent cultural counter-narratives about gender. As Heilman (2012) notes, successful women are "seen as interpersonally hostile, selfish, and cold, characterizations that are antithetical to the prescribed female stereotype" (126).

As a male-identified, contact sport athletes who play basketball are required to express masculinity. Aggressive behavior- crashing into other players, diving after loose balls, and hitting the ground hard are commonplace- and many of the athletes I interviewed mentioned how performing masculinity in this way played a role in perceptions of female athletes as lesbians because they were perceived as essentially trying to "act like guys." For example, Naomi, a current athlete at MWSU, states, "*basketball is a very physical sport. So you need to be very physical and tough to play, and I guess that's what they [other people] zoom in on."* Professional basketball player, Carmen, similarly argues:

> *In basketball, we're allowed to beat each other up basically. You know, it's tough in a game. And basketball is, you know, 80% of the time you're in physical contact with your opponent in a more rough than not so rough way. So, and I think that just the nature of the sport, that it calls for more of a masculine player.*

As Carmen states, basketball "calls for" a more masculine player, meaning that in order to succeed at the sport, a player must enact masculinity through physical contact with opposing players. Basketball players are not only "allowed to beat each other up" as Carmen notes but such a high level of physical contact is unavoidable based on the structure of the sport and is, in many ways, required for success in the game. As Griffin (1998) argues, "lesbian participation is associated with…sports that are not consistent with traditional feminine expectations of appearance and performance" (55).

The performance of traditional femininity does not include being aggressive or, as Beckett states, powerful:

> *I think it's [basketball] more of a physical sport…You know men are supposed to be strong and powerful, women aren't supposed to. They're supposed to be petite and thin and you know, feminine.*

The power and strength exhibited by female basketball players does not align with normative understandings of how women *should* behave and this failed femininity leads to lesbian stereotyping. According to Rowan, failed femininity leads to perceptions that female athletes want to be men: *"Mm, like females are portrayed to act like a dude, play basketball like a dude, or want to be a dude, you know? I don't know, I guess it's just the feminine side gets pushed to the side just because they play basketball."* Playing basketball "like a dude" (masculine) gets equated with wanting to "be a dude." That is, female athletes who embody and enact masculinity (looking like and acting like men) through sport participation are seen as wanting to be men and thus lesbian. Kauer and Krane (2006) found similarly in their study of female athlete that "the other dominant stereotype acknowledged by all of the athletes was that they were considered masculine, 'manly,' 'boyish,' 'butch,' or 'like a guy'" (47).

Former athletes Sofia and Kat discuss how highly valued athletic behaviors are interpreted as masculine. When asked why she thinks basketball players face a stigma other female athletes do not, Sofia tells me:

> *Well, I mean I think in some sense, you know you're talking about like exhibiting traditional masculine- whatever those are- traits. And I think that threatens people. They don't really know how to make sense of it. And then okay, obvious explanation is you just don't fit the traditional notion of what it means to be a woman that, well then you must be gay. Right? Because that's the only alternative.*

Here Sofia clearly articulates the ways in which "failed femininity" becomes synonymous with lesbianism. Female athletes who enact masculinity through sport participation by being aggressive and powerful contradict hegemonic ideals of what femininity should look like and this violation of womanhood is threatening because it disrupts commonsense notions of what women (and men) should do. While Sofia mocks the simplified way that female masculinity gets read as gayness ("because that's the only alternative"), the connection is important because it highlights how popular understandings continue to support ideas about gender as dichotomous and static.

Kat makes a similar argument as Sofia, illustrating how behaviors become gendered within the sporting context and result in differing perceptions of sexuality:

> *Well women aren't supposed to be aggressive. Women are supposed to be passive and nice and pretty. So like to be able to be really strong, that's like a masculine thing. To be delicate, that's a feminine thing. And so when you have women that are doing masculine things, because of people's fucked up understanding of sexuality, they think "Oh they must be a lesbian."*

Kat clearly outlines how the relationship between gender and sexuality plays out in the sporting context, with female expressions of masculinity resulting in perceptions of them as lesbians. Moreover, Eve, takes things one step further by illustrating how female

athletes are not only perceived to be lesbians but, in many cases, thought of as wanting to be like guys:

> *I feel like most people think that female athletes are these butch dyke lesbians, when that's not the case. Although there are a lot- that's not the case and I feel like that's a stereotype that you almost have to overcome. And like I think a lot of people think that female athletes want to be like guys but that's not the case. We just, we love sports, like we're competitive. And they feel like all female athletes are arrogant and cocky like most men are.*

Perceptions of female athletes as "acting like guys" engages status beliefs about what is normative and legitimate for women (and men) and, as such, leads to lesbian stereotyping despite the fact that, as Eve notes, they "just love sports." As all of these examples illustrate, the sport itself (e.g. male-identified) and the demands of the sport (e.g. physicality, aggression) require the embodiment and enactment of masculinity. Therefore, when female basketball players abide by the demands of their sport in order to succeed as athletes, they fail at femininity and heterosexuality.

"I've Never Seen a Butch Volleyball Player" / Sport-Specific Clothing

Performing masculinity through clothing represents another important element of the lesbian stereotyping of female athletes. Much like the way female athletes must enact masculinity through aggression and competitiveness within the sporting context, they must also embody masculinity through sport-specific clothing. Wearing such clothes, however, leads to lesbian stereotyping, especially for athletes in male-identified sports such as basketball. While some of the athletes I interviewed spoke of being read as masculine in certain clothing in a general sense- like Jizeal who discussed how others' call her a "stud" (a common term referring to black lesbians who are masculine or butch) when she wears cargo shorts- most of them referenced how basketball uniforms and other

athletic gear like sweatpants signifies lesbianism. For instance, Kyle talks about how just wearing basketball shorts, especially if you are not about to compete, leads to the perception that female athletes are gay:

> *I know a lot of people who aren't gay and they grow up and they're more comfortable with wearing -- walking around in basketball shorts and sweat pants because that's what they've always been in. And people automatically think they're gay. Which most of the time, sometimes it is and a lot of times it's not the truth. And then they just automatically looking at her and saying, "Oh, she's gay. She plays basketball and she has on basketball shorts and she's not about to play."*

Kyle's quote highlights how performing masculinity through wearing basketball shorts and sweatpants leads to lesbian stereotyping. Former athlete, Beckett, similarly discusses the connection between gender and sexuality through clothing:

> *I don't know honestly [why basketball players are stereotyped as lesbian]. I guess, I don't know if it's because we wear baggy shorts and clothes. Obviously, I think when you look at tennis or volleyball, they wear skirts and volleyball they wear spandex and you know…You know, men are supposed to wear baggy clothes, women aren't supposed to wear baggy clothes.*

Since men are "supposed to" wear baggy clothes, women basketball players who wear baggy shorts (even if it is required of them as part of their uniform) are performing masculinity and subsequently stereotyped as lesbian.

Importantly, many of the athletes who mentioned clothing or uniforms being an important part of the lesbian stereotype drew on volleyball as their counter example. That is, compared to basketball players who enact masculinity through their loose fitting, often long, below-the-knee shorts and big jerseys, volleyball players embody femininity through their form-fitting, often short spandex and tight shirts. Former athlete, Danielle, for instance argues:

> *I think it's more certain sports. It's like I said, I don't know if it just coincidentally is the uniforms, but I've never heard volleyball players*

> *referred to that way. Cause it just happens to be that they're in super tight, super short shorts, little tops, whatever.*

Former athlete and coach, Jackie, tells me similarly: "*I mean, comparing even just the uniforms for women's basketball versus women's volleyball. We have longer, baggier shorts. You know, it's not the stereotypical feminine look, showing off the figure, that type of junk."* And current athlete Sara says: "*...volleyball is more girly. It's indoor. It's more acceptable for men because you're wearing tight spandex that ride up. I've never seen a butch volleyball player. I've seen plenty of butch basketball players."*

Volleyball uniforms represent successful displays of femininity (compared to the masculine basketball uniforms) and as such, volleyball players are perceived to be successfully heterosexual. Again, however, such signifiers of gender are built into the structure of the sport itself. Volleyball uniforms are tight in part because players often have to dive and slide their bodies across the floor in order to save the ball. Sport-specific uniforms are clearly meaningful to female athletes as they can be a primary source for lesbian stereotyping (Kauer & Krane 2006). For the female basketball players in my study, their loose, baggy shorts and jersey tops were a key factor in their being perceived as masculine (especially when they chose to wear that clothing outside of the sport context) and particularly when compared to volleyball players' tight spandex, tennis players' short skirts, and track runners' skimpy uniforms. In this sense, clothing acts as an important signifier of gender much like hair and hairstyles, outlined in the following section.

"If They Have Short Hair"/Hair & Hairstyles

In addition to the gendered meanings attached to their uniforms, many of the athletes I spoke with talked about the importance of hair and hairstyles to lesbian

stereotyping. It was almost unanimously agreed upon that performing masculinity through short hair and certain, racialized hairstyles (described below) leads to lesbian labeling. Rowan, for instance, tells me that stereotyping can come from "*always wearing your hair in a ponytail*." Interestingly, for female athletes with long hair, wearing it in a ponytail is often the only option during sport participation. It seems, however, that while this is understood as an aspect of the game, wearing a ponytail outside of the sporting context, is read differently.

At the other end of the spectrum, former athlete Tiffanie argues that lesbian stereotyping of female athletes most often comes from their having short hair:

> *I would have to say like the biggest reason that I would say majority of the females get judged upon is because if they have short hair. It's like an automatic, you know to a lot of people. I mean, yeah that could be true for half the time…Yeah, I mean you can go to a game and you can look at somebody, and this girl will have short hair, and probably every single person that you're with would be like "Yeah, she's probably gay."*

Short hair is read as masculine or "mannish" and "associated with 'looking like a boy'" whereas "long, flowing hair becomes a powerful feminine trait" (Banks 2000: 90). Put simply, hair is gendered and as a result, masculine hairstyles (short cuts) are automatically read as lesbian or gay whereas feminine hairstyles (long, flowing) are not. As Banks (2000) poignantly claims, "Even if hair is only one of many makers of femininity, or lack thereof, it is definitely one of the most powerful" (93). Thus, while the athletes in my study discussed wearing their long hair in ponytails "too often"- usually outside of sport competition- as an indicator of lesbianism, having long hair made them less likely to be read as lesbian than their short-haired counterparts. Kauer and Krane (2006) found similarly that "having short hair evoked stereotypes about athletes" (48).

In addition to being gendered, hair is also racialized. Our ideas about what kind of hair is feminine or masculine are based on standards of beauty that valorizes white, heterosexual femininity. The long, flowing hair, usually unencumbered by a ponytail, that keeps an athlete from being perceived as lesbian is an indicator of hegemonic, white femininity and thus, inherently keeps black female athletes outside of the boundaries of normative, "appropriate" femininity. As Patricia Hill Collins notes:

> Because femininity is so focused on women's bodies, the value placed on various attributes of female bodies means that evaluations of femininity are fairly clearcut. Within standards of feminine beauty that correlate closely with race and age women are pretty or they are not. Historically, in the American context, young women with milky White skin, long blond hair, and slim figures were deemed to be the most beautiful and therefore the most feminine women. Within this interpretive context, skin color, body type, hair texture, and facial features become important dimensions of femininity. This reliance on these standards of beauty automatically render the majority of African American women at best as less beautiful, and at worst, ugly (2005: 194).

Thus, while black athletes who choose to wear long, straight hair align more closely with the hegemonic feminine ideal and are therefore less likely to be perceived as lesbian than their short-cut wearing counterparts (black or white), they will always remain slightly outside of the norm. Importantly, to be read as feminine, not only must hair be long but is also must be *flowing*- black women who wear their hair naturally do not align with hegemonic femininity Many of the black athletes in my study, for instance, discussed how dreadlocks were perceived as masculine.

In the same way that long hairstyles are racialized and thus perceived differently for black and white women, so too are short styles. While short styles are generally perceived to be more masculine, the athletes in my study discussed how "black hairstyles" such as "fades" or "cornrows" were seen as more masculine than white

players' short haircuts. For instance, Brenee, a former athlete who now plays semi-professional basketball and wears her hair in cornrows most of the time, told me that she thought predominantly black teams were thought to be more masculine than white teams. When I asked her why, she responded:

> *They [other people] look at how they carry themselves or you know how they [black athletes] hair is or how they might act. They might talk a little masculine or if they got a fade or you know, just different aspects that people look at just at the time if this person is gay.*

For Brenee, having a "fade"- a cut that is short on the bottom and gets progressively longer towards the top of the head- is read as masculine and therefore gay.

Dee Dee, former player and coach, tells me similarly that perceptions of short haircuts as masculine and "gay" are racialized:

> *Say if you see a girl that might have some braids or whatever or a low cut fade, you just automatically think she gay. [Laughs] Just because of what she look like. But I think like- and I don't want to sound racist, but…with some of our white girls on our team, really pretty, always was cute and they was gay, but people would never assume that about them because of what they see.*

As Dee Dee highlights, race and gender intersect in important ways to impact perceptions of gender performance. Since perceptions of hegemonic femininity (e.g. "really pretty, always cute") are associated with whiteness, black athletes are fundamentally less successful at performing normative femininity. Moreover, those who perform masculinity through hairstyles like a "low cut fade" are more likely to be read as lesbian than their white counterparts who perform masculinity.

Of course, Brenee's and Dee Dee's comments are situated in a larger, historical context in which black women have been automatically read as less feminine than white women. The historical construction of white womanhood in which white women were

seen as delicate (physically and emotionally), sexually pure, homemakers has always stood in contrast to cultural constructions of black women who were "simultaneously defeminized as overly aggressive and hypersexualized as actively promiscuous" (Glenn 2002: 254). Moreover, controlling images of black women as "hot mammas" or "jezebels" continue to situate black women outside of the boundaries of normative, femininity and sexuality "expressed via the cult of true White womanhood" (Collins 2000: 83). Thus, black women have always been perceived as more masculine or "mannish" compared to white women (Cahn 1993). If the standard for female athletes not to be perceived as lesbian rests on their ability to perform an idealized version of white femininity through long, flowing hair, all female athletes are going to be situated outside of these ideal boundaries. Black female athletes, however, must negotiate with ideals that privilege white hair textures and styles and are thus less likely to successfully situate themselves within the boundaries of standards of femininity that will keep them from being labeled lesbian.

"Girls Who Play Basketball are Obviously Bigger"/Body Size

In addition to clothing and hairstyle, female athletes' performance masculinity through their body size- namely musculature- represents another major aspect of lesbian stereotyping. When asked why she thought basketball players have "a pretty bad rap," as she says, former athlete Elise tells me: "*The girls who play softball and basketball are obviously bigger than your gymnast and your cheerleader*." Compared to gymnasts and cheerleaders, Elise argues that the larger body size of basketball players- a trait that generally assists these athletes in excelling at this particular sport- contrasts norms of hegemonic femininity and makes them more susceptible to lesbian stereotyping.

Interestingly, while gymnasts are commonly known for their musculature, they are not as subject to lesbian stereotyping as basketball players in part because they are usually shorter (e.g. not as big) and the sport context of gymnastics is feminine-identified. Again, the sport context- type and demands- is meaningful to lesbian stereotyping of female athletes.

Clarke, a former athlete who competed at two different Division I programs, similarly tells me why basketball and softball players seem to be perceived differently than women in other sports:

> *I think that a lot of softball players, everybody thinks they're gay. And they have a certain body type that everybody thinks- and I think a lot of people think that like somewhat of basketball players too because I feel like those are – you know like, volleyball is more of a girl sport I feel like. Like, I feel like people stereotypically think that volleyball players are these tall, skinny, more feminine girls. I don't know. For whatever reason like, basketball and softball players, I feel like more people see as like more masculine. Like, bigger girls.*

Again, Clarke highlights the disconnect between athletes' actual bodies and perceptions of what their bodies *should* be based on normative understandings of femininity. In order to fit within the boundaries of hegemonic femininity, athletes can be tall, like volleyball players, as long as they are also thin or toned (and wear spandex that accentuate their bodies) but they cannot be tall and muscular, like most basketball and softball players. The presence of muscle mass is a significant point of contention for female athletes as it is a major factor in whether they are stereotyped as lesbian. Many athletes struggle with their body size internally because they are aware of the ways in which their bodies do gender in non-normative ways resulting in their being judged by others, especially in comparison to female athletes in other, more feminine, sports.

Can't Lesbians Be Cute?: Gender, Sexuality, & Attractiveness

Interestingly, when discussing why the lesbian stereotype applied mostly to sports like basketball and softball, the majority of athletes referred to volleyball players' "cuteness" as an "obvious" counter-example. Volleyball players were seen as embodying femininity and performing femininity in ways that were socially desirable. Volleyball players' "cuteness" stood in direct contrast to the generic "uncute," masculine basketball player. In reflecting on the different between her collegiate basketball team and her school's volleyball team, Clarke tells me:

> *Yeah, I don't know. I mean, I guess just looking like at our basketball team and looking at our volleyball team, I don't know if it has to do with training or what, but we were all a lot more muscular compared to them. And they were probably like, a lot prettier, which doesn't really mean anything, but I don't know why that is.*

Despite saying that it "doesn't really mean anything," Clarke's comment that the volleyball players were "a lot prettier" is in fact very meaningful. This is because cultural notions of what types of men and women are attractive are directly connected to those individuals' ability to perform hegemonic masculinity and femininity, respectively.

Whether the volleyball players at Clarke's school were somehow objectively prettier than the basketball players is unknown and somewhat unimportant. What is important, however, is that they are *believed* to be prettier because they do gender better. And because the volleyball team more successfully performs femininity, they are less likely than their counterparts on the basketball team to receive lesbian stereotyping. That is, while gender performance is constructed, complex, and varied and is not an indicator of sexuality or sexual preference- feminine presenting women can be and are gay just as

masculine presenting women can be and are straight- shared cultural narratives of gender and sexuality suggest otherwise.

It is important to point out, however obvious, that perceptions of attractiveness have nothing to do with sport performance and, as such, should be irrelevant to female athletes' experiences in sport. The fact that they are not merely highlights the demands placed on women in society, especially those who find themselves in male-identified contexts such as sports. Female athletes are judged as much by their ability to perform femininity as they are by their ability to excel at their sport.

"One or Two in the Bunch" / The Existence of Gay Players

Several of the athletes I interviewed discussed how the existence of gay players, coaches, and fans leads to the stereotyping of all female athletes as lesbian. Kameron, a current athlete at MWSU, articulates how the presence of a few gay players can lead to an over-arching stereotype about all basketball players:

> *I think because there actually are people who are gay. Maybe even sometimes there is more than that, or maybe sometimes because you continue to see the more masculine players, who like are all- I'm sorry, no offense- all tatted up, or like, just yeah. Once again, it's more like a blanket statement. Okay, there is one or two in the bunch, or maybe there is some that outweigh, some who are the majority. Then you know what? "Hey, boom, they're all lesbians."*

Jizeal similarly argues, *"When you look around like you go to an AAU tournament or just a basketball game, you're gonna see gay people in the game and gay people supportin' the teams or whatever."* Clarke, a former athlete, also speculates on how self-selection might play a role in the presence of gay athletes and the resulting lesbian stereotype:

> *Maybe it's more like people with individual personalities that persuade them to go into a certain sport. And maybe that's why you have those stereotypical people because it is like, a majority of that personality or that type of person in that sport.*

Of course, that *some* female athletes are actually gay doesn't ultimately have anything to do with the lesbian stereotyping of *all* female athletes. As I have outlined in the previous sections of this chapter, lesbian stereotyping of female athletes results from the way in which these women perform gender- their lack of femininity- not from their sexual identities, object choices, or practices. That some players believe the presence of lesbian athletes or fans is why all athletes are stereotyped as such is meaningful, however, because it is a form of blaming the victim and places the responsibility for change onto individuals rather than institutions and structures.

In the previous sections of this chapter I have outlined how the relationship between gender and sexuality results in the lesbian stereotyping of female athletes. Female athletes' are labeled lesbian because their gender performances- specifically of masculinity- is perceived as "failed femininity." The power of the lesbian stereotype, however, ultimately lies in the way in which others' utilize the "dyke" discourse to police the boundaries of (hetero)sexuality. In the following section, I will outline two mechanisms through which such policing occurs: (1) getting "turned out"/imagined contagion and (2) the role of "jokes."

The "Dyke" Discourse & The Policing of Gender/Sexuality

"You'll Get Turned Out"/ Imagined Contagion

Similar to the ways in which the MWSU players' expressions of gender and sexuality were policed by teammates and coaches in the previous chapter, these athletes also experienced policing by family and friends, albeit somewhat differently. Like the "fag" discourse teenage boys use to discipline themselves and others into enacting

hegemonic masculinity (Pascoe 2007), I argue that a kind of "dyke" discourse[49] is used to discipline female athletes into enacting hegemonic femininity and heterosexuality. Specifically, the female athletes in my study discuss various ways others' attempt to enforce and reinforce boundaries of idealized heterofemininity by invoking both the notion of being "turned out" and by the imagined contagion of lesbianism. Importantly, this type of policing is more explicit and aggressive than other types outlined in this study. In the previous chapter, for instance, MWSU coaches asked their players to "tone down" their gender performances so they didn't *look* gay. That is, it was acceptable if they were gay, they just needed to take precautions not to appear as such. The form of policing I will describe in this section, on the other hand, is not just about others' concern over whether female athletes look gay but concern over the belief that by participating in sports, they might actually *become* gay.

The notion of getting "turned out" and the imagined contagion of lesbianism are distinct, yet related, concepts. Both concepts refer to straight women becoming lesbians, either by being "turned gay" or "catching gay." The way in which others use these concepts to police female athletes, however, suggests that they are related and somewhat interchangeable. In the sporting context, contagion can come merely from sport participation or from close contact with others (lesbians). That is, a straight woman can get "turned out" or "catch gay" because she partakes in a sport that is either perceived to by a "gay sport" for women (because it is masculine-identified) or because she is in close proximity to actual lesbians in the sporting context. Importantly, both of these concepts also perpetuate stereotypes of lesbians as sexual predators (Hart 2005; White 2013) who

[49] While the actual word "dyke" is rarely used, especially compared to the commonplace usage of the term "fag," this term is an effective representation of how and why female athletes experiencing discipline and policing around their gender and sexuality.

take advantage of unsuspecting straight women either directly (i.e. turning them into lesbians through sexual advances) or indirectly (i.e. exposing straight women to lesbianism).

Current athlete, Rowan, tells me clearly how the idea that a player can be turned out is central to lesbian stereotyping of female athletes:

> Do you think that there's like stereotypes about female athletes?
>
> *Yeah.*
>
> Like what?
>
> *If you play basketball you're gay.*
>
> Really?
>
> *Yeah. And if you're not gay, then you're bi. But, and then on top of that, oh and if you're not gay, you will get turned out.*

For Rowan, the pervasiveness of the lesbian stereotype is three-fold. First and foremost, female athletes are perceived to be gay. If they are not gay, then they are perceived to be at least bisexual. If not gay or bisexual, it is assumed they will eventually get "turned out," ultimately confirming the original stereotype. Sara, who expressed being occasionally bothered by the lesbian stereotype, talks about how men she encounters often believe that spending enough time with gay teammates will "turn her":

> *Like it's funny. Most men when they find out I play basketball, the first question is "Am I gay"? Like all gay girls play basketball. I'm like, "No." It's like, "Oh, you gonna get turned out. Don't go there. Don't do this. Hang out with your teammates long enough you're going to be gay." And it's like, "No, those are just the people I'm surrounded by 24/7."*

Sara's experience highlights several important elements of the notion of being "turned out." First, as she says, when people find out she plays basketball, they ask her whether she is gay or not, further demonstrating the relevance of sport-type in the application of

lesbian stereotyping of female athletes. Then, when Sara responds that she is not gay, others assume that she will eventually get "turned out" by spending time with her (presumably gay) teammates.

The warnings given to Sara (e.g. "don't go there, don't do this") represent explicit attempts at policing her (and others') gender and sexuality by instilling in her a fear of "becoming gay." This type of policing was expressed by other MWSU athletes, like Tiffany, who told me that her cousin often asked her questions about whether she had been "turned out":

> *So I have a cousin who lives near Dawson State and you've seen their basketball team. Like fits the stereotype perfectly [masculine presenting female athletes]. So, she came to my game [when the teams played] and I just felt like she was like looking to make sure that I was still feminine. You know what I mean? And not that I feel like I have to prove anything. I just don't want to be given the same label that—you know what I mean? Like I don't want basketball to define my identity.*

Here Tiffany expresses her own internal dilemma about appearing appropriate feminine and heterosexual. Not wanting basketball to "define her identity" means that she does not want her participation in the sport to signal to others' that she lacks femininity. Like her cousin who asked her about whether she'd been "turned out" and comes to her games "looking to make" sure she is still feminine (and especially not masculine like the opposing team that "fits the stereotype perfectly"), Tiffany feels concerned about being labeled a lesbian. In this way, Tiffany polices herself as much as others police her, like her cousin.

Jizeal, tells me similarly how her cousin monitors her sexuality by "checking up on her." She says: *"Like my cousin calls me all the time, 'Oh, you better not be…'—I hate this word bull-dyke" or whatever like that.* She goes on to tell me how her cousin

has questioned her about her sexual experiences: "*Like my cousin asked me when I went home, 'Oh, so you liking—have you ever kissed a girl before?' Like she asked me that and I'm like 'Why is that any of your business?'"* By calling and questioning Jizeal about whether she has ever kissed a girl and warning her that she better not be turning in to a "bull-dyke," her cousin is engaging in aggressively policing of her gender and sexuality.

While some athletes were policed through presumptions of their getting "turned out" by lesbian teammates, others spoke more specifically about their experiences with the imagined contagion of lesbianism. For instance, as former athlete Christina, told me of her experience coming out to her father:

> *Um, but even like, the great example – so I told, finally came out to my Dad two and a half years ago. And I finally told him and he blamed it directly on my Mom because she put me into basketball all my life. And I'm like "There's no way, Dad. I've chosen to play basketball my whole life, and it made me happy, and it has nothing to do with me being gay." Well obviously he thinks that I was – he's probably stereotyping saying "Oh yeah, basketball players are gay. You're surrounded by a few of them at least on each team. So, you know, rubbed off on me or whatever."*

Christina's father, like Tiffany's and Jizeal's cousins, believed that as a result of playing basketball, lesbianism "rubbed off" on her, making her gay. In this way, he believes that if Christina's mother had not encouraged her to play basketball at an early age, she would not presently be gay because she wouldn't have been exposed to lesbianism (by the few on each team) and subsequently "caught" it.

The ways in which the boundaries around gender and sexuality are policed through the use of concepts like being "turned out" and "imagined contagion" are important because they highlight how such policing can be both explicit and aggressive (compared to other forms discussed in the previous chapter). The use of these ideas to police gender and sexuality are also meaningful because they illuminate how

commonsense understandings about sexuality are complicated and often contradictory. On the one hand, these examples provide support for understandings of sexualities as fluid, social constructions. If lesbianism is perceived as a contagion, capable of permeating institutional contexts like sports and "turning" unsuspecting straight women gay, then sexuality must not be an essential, biological quality of an individual. On the other hand, the close association between female masculinity and lesbianism in these examples (e.g. Tiffany's cousin "looking to see if she was still feminine" or if she had been turned gay by exposure to predatory, masculine lesbians) supports a more one-dimensional, dichotomous, essential, and congruent sex/gender/sexuality system.

"I Thought It was Funny"/ The Role of "Jokes"

The "dyke" discourse, perpetuated through the role "jokes" about lesbians, is a second mechanism in which others, specifically heterosexual men, police female athletes' into performing heterofemininity[50]. I argue here that "joking" about lesbianism is a separate mechanism through which female athletes are polices because while only some of the athletes told stories about being explicitly "checked up on" like Jizeal or Tiffany, many of them told stories of how close friends or significant others would "joke" with them about "turning" gay. These "jokes" about getting "turned out" discipline female athletes in the same ways as direct confrontations and suggestions but they do so in a more passive aggressive way. In this way, the boundary maintenance appears playful despite its serious consequences.

[50] Previous work on lesbian stereotyping of female athletes has discussed the role of "jokes" or gossip in perpetuating lesbian stereotyping but has done so by highlighting how lesbian athletes are often the subjects of gossip or how straight athletes use "joking" about lesbians as a means to distance themselves from lesbian athletes and avoid lesbian labeling (see Blinde & Taub 1992; Krane 1997; Griffin 1998).

Former athlete and current coach Danielle, for instance, talks about how her high school friends would "joke" about her becoming a lesbian when she went to college to play basketball:

> *People in college never said anything to me, but in high school, my friends, especially my guy friends used to give me a hard time. And I know it wasn't intentionally mean. I didn't take it personally and I thought it was funny. But once it was clear that I was going to play college basketball, they would always give me a hard time like, "Oh man, Danielle, don't spend too much time with girls, they're gonna make you turn, they're gonna make you switch." We'd be joking like senior year, who's gonna be the first to do this, who's gonna do this and it was all "Danielle's gonna be the first one to turn lesbian, that's for sure." Comments like that. Obviously I didn't take it personal, but that is the stereotype that's out there is girls– especially college sports, not necessarily high school, but college female athletes are considered majority gay.*

These "jokes" about Danielle "turning gay" once she went to college to play basketball work to policing her sexuality and to negatively stigmatize being gay, even though she "didn't take it personal" and "thought it was funny." One reason Danielle may not have taken such commentary personally is because she is heterosexual and expresses her gender in a hegemonically feminine way. Because the "jokes" make it clear which identities are stigmatized (e.g. lesbianism), Danielle does not feel personally attacked by the comments. While her friends' lesbian "jokes" do not threaten Danielle because she understands they are "not really about her" (as a straight woman), the intended effect is to police her current and, most importantly, her future behavior as she enters into the masculinizing sport context of collegiate women's basketball.

In a similar vein, former athlete Elise talked about how she experienced "joking" about her sexuality from the men's scout team during her collegiate career and how she continues to experience such jokes in the present moment:

> *You know, some of my friends would joke about it, you know. We had a men's scout team that we would practice against. And we ended up getting like super close with them and being really good friends with these guys. Like, they would just joke about it like light-heartedly. Nothing serious. But I feel like it happened more so like after I was done playing, you know? Like, I would be like "Oh yeah, I played basketball in college" and then my friends would be like "Oh…" just like light-heartedly say, "Oh, you must be a lesbian then." You know, I'm like "Okay, that's a stereotype." …It bothers me when they take it to a different level. If they're just joking about it light-heartedly, and I know they're just messing with me, that's fine. But if they're like – I mean, I never really had, I mean most of the time people are just messing around. I've never really had anybody who's actually said it to me and meant it, you know. I guess if I met somebody who actually said it to me and actually meant it, I maybe could see where that would infuriate me a little more.*

As Elise says, she's not bothered by lesbian "joking" because she knows they're just "messing with her" and, probably because she is not actually a lesbian and presents her gender as traditionally feminine. If, on the other hand, she was *actually* confronted by someone who *meant it,* Elise admits that she would be bothered. What is unclear to Elise, however, is that the role of the "joke" in this case is to indeed "mean it" or, in other words, police her gender and sexuality while simultaneously negatively stigmatizing lesbians. "Jokes" are powerful tools with which to police gender and sexuality because they act as a way in which to deliver a serious message (e.g. don't become gay) without consequences since jokes are playful and fun. In this way, Elise's friends do not have to "mean it"- actually call her a lesbian or insinuate she is a lesbian because she played basketball- in order for the joke to have it's desired effect: policing the boundaries of her gender performance and sexuality by reminding that she should be heterofeminine even as a female athlete.

Another former athlete Jackie, like Elise, discussed how she gets joked with presently about being gay when people in her life, typically men, find out she was a collegiate athlete:

> *I mean, I will occasionally get- people make the remark "Oh you play basketball. Oh, you must be gay" type thing. Or, you know – okay, so it's more like that's the joke to make. Like, for some reason that's like, an acceptable joke to make. Like "Oh you played college basketball" or "Oh you played college softball." "Oh you're gay." So it's not necessarily they're like questioning, coming out and questioning, but it's more like they think that's an acceptable joke to make, knowing that, you know, I played basketball in college.*

Here Jackie highlights one of the important aspects of using "jokes" as a tool to police gender and sexuality. She notes that when others "joke" about her being gay because she played basketball, they are not actually questioning her sexuality like Jizeal's cousin who told her directly that she better not turn into a "bull-dyke." Under the guise of a "joke," others' can police Jackie's sexuality without having to actually question her sexuality. Clarke, a former athlete and teammate of Jackie, also talks about experiencing questions about her sexuality posed in a "joking manner." Interestingly, as she is telling me about this experience, she begins to wonder if, in fact, people were joking at all:

> *I mean, I've had people joke with me about before too, and like, maybe it was just because of like, basketball and stuff. Or maybe they were joking to like, really be serious?*
>
> What?
>
> *Well, you know how like, people joke around about stuff that they're really actually like, not really joking about? They're really like tryna ask you questions, but they like, make it into a joke. [Laughs]*
>
> Okay, so that's happened to you before?
>
> *Yeah, like just about basketball and, you know, if I was a lesbian or something.*

Okay, and who asks you these kind of things?

Um, I would say probably, you know, mostly guys.

Here, Clarke recognizes that questions about her sexuality posed as "jokes," while appearing to not be serious, may represent actual concerns from others' about the possibility of her being or becoming gay. She is aware of how "making it into a joke" often serves as a cover for serious inquiries and serious efforts to police her gender and sexuality.

Notably, the athletes in my study who spoke about experiencing "jokes" about being or becoming gay all self-identified as straight (or at least identified as straight when the joking occurred), further reinforcing the notion that these types of "jokes" are actually a means to police sexuality. None of the athletes who self-identified as gay were joked with because the "jokes" would have not served their dual purpose of policing gender and sexuality while simultaneously stigmatizing lesbians. That is, only by having the power to impact thought and behavior does a "joke" become a useful tool with which to discipline. Lesbian "jokes" are unnecessary and ineffective when used with gay athletes because such homonegativism cannot be successfully disguised as "jokes." Used in this way, lesbian "jokes" seem most necessary and effective in attempting to prevent straight athletes from falling outside the boundaries of heterofemininity.

Interestingly, only two athletes, Prince and Kyle (both gay and out), offered criticisms of the notion of being "turned out" and of "jokes" about being "turned out." They did so, however, by drawing on essentialist notions of sexuality. As Prince tells me: "*I mean, if you gay, you gay. But don't try to blame it on 'Oh, it happened because I was around a whole bunch of gay girls' I mean, you're either gay or you're not.*" Kyle

similarly tells me: "*It wouldn't be the players on our team or coaches that would make your child gay. If she's going to be gay, she's felt that way obviously before."* Most of the athletes, however, seemed to take "jokes" about lesbianism or being "turned out" in stride, being vaguely critical (e.g. "stereotypes are wrong") yet ultimately accepting as if such jokes merely come with the territory of being a female athlete. For instance, even as Elise says, "*I tell them it's not funny anymore*" she also admits that "*If they're just messing with me, that's fine.*"

The lack of more critical reactions to others' "jokes" about getting "turned out" or "catching" lesbianism, reflects the ways in which female athletes' have gotten used to experiencing lesbian stereotyping because of its pervasiveness within the sporting context. The consistent and persistent policing of their gender and sexuality over time has resulted in many athletes feeling as though such experiences were "no big deal." Research on the pervasiveness of everyday forms of racial discrimination among African Americans over the life course reveal similar findings, with experiences of discrimination being as commonplace as it being hot in July (Forman et al. 1997). Moreover, as Feagin (1991) argues, because racial discrimination occurs at every turn (e.g. at restaurants, on the street, at work or school, while shopping), most blacks don't have the time or energy to confront it at every turn, leading to a "resigned acceptance" of the situation (103). Given their everyday experiences with lesbian stereotyping, that more female athletes are not expressly outraged by the policing of their gender and sexuality points to a generalized form of "resigned acceptance."

Indeed, Krane (1997) argues that the female athlete's in her study who did not experience *excessive* (e.g. physical) homonegativism felt "lucky." Thus, homonegativism

is so commonplace in the sporting context that not only do female athletes' often consider it "no big deal"- like cold weather in winter- but some of them even feel fortunate that they do not experience more severe forms. We know of course, that while "jokes" may seem harmless, in reality they serve to perpetuate vitriolic messages about sexuality; "jokes" are used by others to police female athletes' gender and sexuality and keep them firmly within the boundaries of heterofemininity, even long after they're no longer actively participating in athletics.

Felt Impact of Stereotypes

As numerous studies have shown, stereotypes are powerful not merely because they exist but because of their power to impact individuals lives, even those who claim not to care or believe in them (Steele 1997). The female athletes in my study, both former and current, spoke at length about how lesbian stereotyping of female athletes (particularly basketball players) affects them. Their responses were varied and contained important nuance; lesbian stereotyping bothered some athletes because they felt stereotyping was wrong generically while others had more specific reasons (outlined below). While a few of the athletes felt personally offended by being stereotyped, the majority identified feeling bad about stereotypes for other people and not for themselves. Ultimately, however, whether or not the athletes feel bothered by lesbian stereotyping personally, it is likely that they impact them nonetheless. Regardless of their reasons, what none of these athletes question- perhaps an effect of the pervasiveness of lesbian stereotyping- why their sexuality is up for discussion in the first place. A player's sexuality is irrelevant to her ability to perform athletically yet most athletes and many

others spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about, questioning, defending, and policing sexuality.

"I Hate That!"/ Rejecting for Self

Many of the female athletes I interviewed spoke about how lesbian stereotyping bothered them either because an "inaccurate" identity was being placed upon them and/or because they were being associated with the stigmatized identity of "lesbian." Many of them felt as though they needed to constantly defend themselves as a result. Current athlete Tiffany, for example, says: "*I really don't like it. And I don't have anything against gay people. Some of my closest friends are gay. I just don't want to be put under that same label if that's not who I am.*" Here, Tiffany is sure to note that her dislike of lesbian stereotyping is not because she thinks negatively of gay people but that the stereotype is not reflective of, as she says, "who I am." Of course, even though Tiffany "doesn't have anything against gay people," her rejection of lesbian stereotyping is at least in part because she does not want to be "put under that same label" as actual lesbians.

Similarly, Kameron, an MWSU sophomore, becomes increasingly animated as she explains why she "hates" being stereotyped:

> *I think the biggest stereotype with female basketball is that we are all extremely masculine or lesbians. I personally hate that statement just because I know who I am, and it's not that.*
>
> You've had people say that to you?
>
> *Well yeah! I've had people say, "Ya'll play basketball? Ya'll all lesbians!" Or I have guys who talked to me saying, "I was scared to say something to you or scared to really try to talk to you because I figured you might be a lesbian." Because I play basketball. I hate that!*
>
> What do you say to people when they say that to you?

I say, "Really? Really? Seriously?! Not every girl that play basketball is a lesbian. Or, you know, is masculine or whatever." You know?

Like Tiffany, Kameron "hates" the lesbian stereotyping of female athletes for two reasons. First, the stereotype is inaccurate- as she says, "I know who I am and it's not that." Second, being attached to the stigmatized identity of lesbian has made heterosexual men "scared" to try and talk to her, potentially limiting her available dating pool. Her response, in this way, is at least subtly homonegative. Tiffanie, a former athlete, tells me how she also gets upset when confronted with lesbian stereotyping:

Well, I just hate like being stereotyped. I don't like that, you know? I've had people question me, and I don't like it. I've had people question other people, and I don't like it.

Like your friends or something?

Just um people that don't necessarily know me. I mean yeah my friends, but at the same time people that don't necessarily know anything about me, like maybe I just met them a couple of times.

And they're assuming things about you?

Right, right. Or they assume something about somebody else just cause, you know, we play a sport and the sport that we play, you know? I don't understand that, and yeah that does bother me, but unfortunately that's just the society that we live in right now.

How do you respond to people?

Um well, I usually don't respond that well.

Like Kameron, Tiffanie admits "hating" being stereotyped in a general sense yet when asked specifically about how she responds to people in those situations, she tells me she "usually doesn't respond that well." Thus, while it appears as though Tiffanie is responding negatively to generalized stereotypes, by claiming that her reactions don't usually escalate until she is confronted personally, she illustrates that her dislike is

actually about her being perceived as a lesbian. In her study of lesbian athletes, Krane (1997) found similarly that many of them express feelings of anger or annoyance when confronted with lesbian stereotyping. Tiffany, Kameron, and Tiffanie's response, however, are not just expressions of anger or annoyance but explicit rejections of lesbianism.

Another former athlete, Clarke, while not angered by being stereotyped like Kameron or Tiffanie, admits that being stereotyped makes her feel negatively about herself because of the inherent meaning behind those stereotypes. When asked if gay stereotypes about female athletes bother her, she told me, laughing: "*Um, a little bit. Like, so I was out the other week and this guy told me that he thought I was a softball player. So…*" When I asked Clarke to explain why being thought of as a softball player bothered her, she responded: "*Cause I was like 'Well like, am I really stocky for a person? Like, is that what you're trying to tell me?' Because like, that's the picture that comes to mind like, you know, my mind.* For Clarke, being asked by a man if she played softball conjured up a host of stereotypes that she interpreted as him perceiving her as "stocky"- a masculine characteristic- and therefore unfeminine and presumably unattractive (to him). This is unsurprising in a culture that frames women as objects rather than subjects and trains women to be hyper-aware of how they are being viewed by others (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997). In this way, the intent behind the man's comment (he could have been complimenting her) is not as important as the message Clarke received.

Even athletes who self-identify as gay felt bothered by lesbian stereotyping, not because the stereotype was an inaccurate reflection of their identities but because she feels as though stereotyping is wrong. Eve, a gay athlete at MWSU tells me: "*Even*

though I am a lesbian, I don't want you to assume that I'm one just because I play basketball." Prince, similarly admits: "*It bothers me and I mean, I'm gay…I just don't think it's right."* Naomi, rejecting lesbian stereotyping because it is based on ignorance tells me: "*I mean I don't like ignorance, and I feel like that's ignorance, so that kind of like pisses me off.* Former athlete and coach, Dee Dee, asks rhetorically: "*Why you just can't enjoy playing a sport because you want to play the sport? Why does it have to be an underlying type thing."*

Like Eve and Prince, Naomi and Dee Dee dislike the idea of overarching stereotypes on principle- a belief that it's wrong to be ignorant and make assumptions- rather than because they feels personally affected by them since. Importantly, while the athletes mentioned in this section all reject lesbian stereotyping, they do so for very different reasons. Prince, Eve, Naomi, and Dee Dee are bothered by such stereotypes on principle whereas Tiffany and Kameron reject being perceived to be gay- a homonegative response- not that the stereotype exists in the first place.

"She's Not Gay"/ Rejecting for Others

Interestingly, many of the self-identified gay athletes I interviewed told me that lesbian stereotyping of female athletes bothered them because of its negative impact on others, especially their straight teammates. As Eve tells me:

> *I mean it bothers me because I have teammates and friends who aren't gay and that's how all women are perceived. But all women aren't like that. It's a lot of women who love men but play basketball and are great at it, you know. But it's just a stereotype that's placed on em.*

Nikki, a current athlete who is gay, tells me that while she does not care about the stereotype personally, she is bothered because such assumptions hurt her straight friends:

> *Nah, honestly I don't care, because like – uhh, it does bother me, because like I have a lot of friends who is not gay, and that, plays basketball and*

> *it's sad that as soon as you hear that they play basketball, somebody say, "Oh, they're gay" or something. And you know, I don't really like that, because everybody's not like that. And it hurts people that are like that to hear every time they turn around, people think that they're gay or whatever.*
>
> It hurts people who are gay or who aren't gay?
>
> *Aren't gay. Like I'd be upset just because I play basketball, you think I'm that way.*
>
> But it doesn't really bother you?
>
> *Nah, it doesn't because I mean it is what it is. It's my life, so.*

Nikki doesn't feel personally upset by gay stereotyping because, as she says "it's her life" meaning, she is actually gay. She believes, however, that such stereotypes are hurtful to those who are not gay and are forced to hear those comments "every time they turn around." Kyle similarly tells me:

> *It like used to bother me when people used to say stuff about people I knew weren't gay and they would say "Oh, she's gay. Look what she has on. She has on baggy shorts." You know, I would be like "She's not gay, she's just comfortable, just like you're comfortable in what you wear. Because you don't play sports and you're used to wearing clothes all the time." We don't, that's not what we do. Our paid job 24/7 basically is to play basketball.*
>
> So it more so bothers you in terms of other people?
>
> *Yeah.*
>
> But you personally, like you don't care?
>
> *I don't care.*

Again, Kyle, presumably because she is gay, does not care about being stereotyped except when those stereotypes are placed upon people she knows are not gay. In this way, she sees stereotyping as wrong when it is "incorrectly applied."

Despite being couched in terms of care and concern for others, there is homonegativity in these responses. The only reason lesbian stereotyping "hurts" Eve, Nikki, and Kyle's straight friends is because of the perception that there is something "wrong" with being a lesbian in the first place. Moreover, the overarching devaluing and stigmatization of lesbians means that, while they may not recognize it, lesbian stereotyping "hurts" lesbians athletes just as much as it "hurts" their straight teammates.

"Regardless of What You Tell Them" / Resigned Acceptance

A number of athletes I interviewed approached their feelings about being stereotyped from a more passive stance- like the "resigned acceptance" outlined by Feagin (1991)- believing that since they did not have much control over whether they were stereotyped, they did not feel as though it was worth worrying about. In their minds, people were going to think what they wanted, so even if being stereotyped initially upset them, they quickly realized there was nothing to be done. Importantly, this type of resigned acceptance perpetuates homonegativity in much of the same way as in the above sections. Claiming there is "nothing to be done" and quietly acquiescing to others' opinions further perpetuates the notion that there is something about lesbianism that should be stigmatized and something about it that the athletes would "do something about" if they could.

Rowan and I had the following exchange in which she admits feeling "pissed off" about being wrongly stereotyped by others before ultimately concluding "she could care less":

> Why do people think that?
>
> *I really don't know. But, I really…I can't call it but it's been said to me and it's just like "Whatever." And like they all, I mean, every guy that*

> *comes to me, is like, "Oh, you like guys?" "Yeah." Like what type of question is that? "Oh, you sure you're not bi?" "I'm positive, like what do you…?" It really pisses me off, but then again, it's just like "Okay, whatever." Just brush it off.*
>
> How do you deal with that?
>
> *Hm, I don't know. It's just, if I know I'm not something, I won't get mad about it. Like I just "Oh, whatever. He think I'm gay, let him think what he wants, I could care less."*
>
> You don't care?
>
> *No. Like people are going to think what they want regardless of what you tell them, so.*

Rowan is ambivalent about how to feel; she is clearly bothered yet frames the situation as one in which she has no control, believing that people who hold stereotypical views will not change their minds even if she attempts to confront them. As a result, she feels it's best to "just brush it off."

Former athlete, Brenee, discusses a similar sentiment when she tells me: "*People are gonna say what they want regardless and the ignorant mind can't be changed.*" Former athlete and current coach, Dee Dee, talks about how she used to be bothered when she was playing but eventually got so used to the stereotypes that she stopped feeling negatively affected. Laughing as she reflects on how long she's been involved in sports dealing with stereotypes, she tells me:

> *I mean at first it did, but after awhile I just was like, "whatever." Because honestly I feel like people gonna think what they want to think about you regardless. And like I said, when I first started getting those comments or whatever it kind of bothered me because I was like "What?" But then after awhile I'm like "whatever" because honestly, to this day, like I still, you know some people still may stereotype me in that group and I just be like "whatever!" Honestly, I might have felt that way when I was younger, but I don't care now. Because I'm so used to it, I guess.*
>
> Ten, eleven years is a long time to be dealing with stereotypes…

> *I don't want to say I'm to a point where I don't care, but I do, I am and I'll just be like "whatever." So…there used to be a time where I used to be like "I'm not gay, but just because I play sports, you gonna automatically assume that about me?" But now I just got to a point where I just be like, "Whatever, nobody got time for that," you know? "I've got other things that I need to be worried about, aside from you. And you, one little person that I don't really care about." So I'd be like, "whatever."*

After a decade of dealing with stereotypes Dee Dee has acquiesced to a position of ambivalence- a resigned acceptance- since she believes people will think what they want regardless of what she might try and tell them. Like Rowan, Dee Dee used to attempt to defend herself, but has been worn down by the persistence of the stereotype and now spends her time worrying about other things.

"I'm Comfortable with Myself" / Self-Confidence

Many of the athletes I spoke to told me that they were not bothered by lesbian stereotyping because they had self-confidence and were comfortable with themselves. Similar to Rowan and Dee Dee in the above section, these athletes claimed to not be affected by what others thought of them but took a more subjective approach; that is, rather than focusing on the notion that "you can't change others' minds," these athletes turned their perspective inward and spoke of feeling self-assured and secure with their own identities. Again, as in the above sections, this type of response is still partially homonegative since these athletes are implying that if they weren't confident in their identities, they would be more bothered by being associated with the stigmatized lesbian identity. While at one point admitting that "certain times you get offended" and "sometimes it really upsets her," current athlete, Isis, explains:

> *No, but like I said, like me, I'm comfortable with myself so I know what I am, and I know what I can do. And anybody that knows me or any man that's ever going to try to come into my life, he's going to know that, right?*

> *Or I'm going to let it be known. And it's never bothered me, because some of my teammates, you know, we all live different lifestyles and being that I'm comfortable in mine, I don't mind embracing theirs or what they're doing, because they're still -- we're all just human. We play basketball, but we still women, regardless of our lifestyles or what we know how to do and what we don't know how to do.*

For Isis, her self-confidence in her own identity acts as a buffer against lesbian stereotyping so much so that she believes that any man who might attempt to date her will automatically know she is straight or, as she says, she will "let it be known." In this way, her personal comfort is reassuring for her and for others who might have questions about her sexuality. Being comfortable in her "lifestyle" also allows her to more fully embrace her gay teammates "lifestyles." Interestingly, Isis' comment that "we play basketball, but we still women," puts the identities "athlete" and "woman" in direct contrast and, in doing so, she is not only highlighting the cultural contradiction between athleticism and femininity (or womanhood) but is also acknowledging the perception of female basketball players as somehow not fully women and/or lesbian.

Elise, a former athlete, echoes Isis' belief and tells me that she's not bothered by stereotypes because she's "comfortable in her own skin":

> *It doesn't really bother me because I'm confident with who I am. And, you know, I've been doing this, I've been playing sports since I was, you know, little. Like, I am very proud of who I am and what I've done and what I've accomplished. And just because I might be a little boyish and, you know, I might have muscles, but you know I've grown up with that, and I actually like being athletic. I enjoy working out and, you know, I'm very comfortable in my own skin, and if people make comments like that, I just look at them and I'm like "You're being stereotypical. That's not true." I just kind of brush it off. I'm not worried about what people think about me just because I played basketball. You know, like, it's made me who I am. I, you know, went to college for free. Not a lot of people can say that. I got a great education, and it's made me a better person I feel like. So, if you're gonna judge me based on that, then that's your, it sounds like a you-problem.*

Elise acknowledges the negative perceptions of female athletes who, like her, might be "a little boyish and have muscles" but engages her self-confidence by stating that she "actually likes being athletic." Elise's use of the term "actually" highlights her awareness of how pervasive lesbian stereotyping is- contrary to how she feels about herself, she knows that there is a possibility that others will not like her athleticism (e.g. muscles/masculinity). Elise is able to "brush off" what others think of her because she is proud of who she is and what she has accomplished through playing sports.

Having or expressing self-confidence does not mean that the negative stigma associated with lesbian stereotyping does not matter. Rather, self-confidence and feelings of being "comfortable" with oneself become important buffers against the potentially debilitating effects lesbian stereotyping and disciplining by others could have. Unfortunately, not all athletes may be in the position to exert their self-worth in such a way. Younger athletes and those in more vulnerable positions- for example, "questioning" athletes living in more hostile team or regional climates- may not have "self-confidence" at their disposal. More importantly, female athletes should not have to be "comfortable" or "confident" in themselves in order to navigate freely in the sporting context. That the sport and our larger societal context is one of hostility and inequality is the problem, not whether female athletes possess enough self-worth to guard against the negative impact of lesbian stereotyping.

"There's Nothing Wrong with Gay People"/ Rejecting Homonegativism

A small subset of the athletes I interviewed offered progressive viewpoints on lesbian stereotyping when asked if being perceived to be gay bothered them. For these athletes (who interestingly all identify as heterosexual), the real "problem" with being

perceived to be gay is the underlying assumption that there is something wrong with being gay in the first place. Current athlete Karolina, for instance, tells me she does not care about gay stereotypes because she is secure in her identity and importantly, does not see it as a "bad thing":

> *No, not really. I don't really care cause I know what I am. I know some people on our team too are mad about it [lesbian stereotyping]. If people think I'm gay that don't really matter to me because so what? Cause I don't see like- it's not a bad thing to be gay so if people think I'm gay then well, they'll probably find out that I am not. I have nothing against gay people, so I don't see it as a bad thing.*

While also expressing feelings of self-confidence, similar to Isis and Elise in the above section, that serve to combat the lesbian stereotype, Karolina also removes much of the power within the stereotype by turning it on its head. That is, if there is nothing wrong with being perceived to be gay then, as Karolina asks, "so what?" if someone thinks that you are. As she admits, people will probably find out that she is straight but presumably, even if they do not, Karolina will not feel negatively affected.

When asked why she is not bothered by stereotypes, former athlete Danielle makes a similar point, while highlighting the similarities between her straight and gay teammates:

> *I think because I don't see a huge difference between gay and straight female athletes. I don't take it – some people take it personally like "Oh, you can't, I'm not gay" like saying it like it's a bad thing or get defensive about it. Me and my gay teammates, if no one knew they were – you would not be able to tell the difference between us whatsoever. There is no difference. We don't play any differently. We don't talk any differently. I mean, we care about the same things. And to me I think because we're always on the same team and had the same goals and we're working towards the same thing, it was like, it does not make any difference whatsoever. And so to me, if someone called me that or referred to me that way, it was like, "So what if I am?" I don't see how that's a bad thing or any different.*

Interestingly, Danielle is expressing both her own perception of the normality of being gay (e.g. "it wouldn't be any different") and her general feelings about gayness (e.g. "it's not a bad thing"). Similar to Karolina, asking "so what if I am?" highlights a more progressive perspective than offered by the other female athletes I interviewed. Although taking a different approach, former athlete, Jackie, illustrates this point when talking about why she is bothered by lesbian stereotyping:

> So, when you say that it bothered you for your teammates, what do you mean?
>
> *In terms of maybe not the stereotype, but in terms of just the reality of them [gay teammates] being masculine or them being gay, that that had to somehow interfere or even come into play into athletics. I just think it's ridiculous. I mean, I know it's a reality but the fact that it's somehow used as a negativity. That, you know, that when people joke about, you know, basketball being Ooh you must be gay" they don't do that in a positive light. So the fact that if this, you know, for my teammates if it's true, that they truly are homosexual and then people would joke about it, it's something that's actually real. To me, it's just not right cause I didn't have to deal with that because no one jokes about "Oh you must be heterosexual." No, you know? I can just go out and play. Big deal. Like I didn't, none of that added stuff had to factor into once I got out on the court.*

What Jackie is ultimately expressing here is discontent with the larger structural context of hostility towards gays and lesbians and inequality between straight and non-straight individuals. Jackie is bothered by lesbian stereotyping because her teammates who are gay have to be confronted with their sexuality within the homonegative context of basketball whereas, as a straight person, she does not. As she says, she can "just go out and play" while her gay teammates have to deal with an assault on their sexuality, something "that's actually real." Jackie is also questioning the perception of gayness as negative and does so by directly comparing it to perceptions of heterosexuality (e.g. "no one jokes about being heterosexual"). For Jackie, jokes about being gay are problematic

because they directly affect her gay teammates' lives in ways that her own life is unaffected.

Karolina, Danielle, and Jackie questioned the lesbian stereotype in important ways that others did not. Many of the athletes I spoke to object to stereotyping in general and questioned why female athletes are perceived to be gay (at all). In doing this, however, these athletes are not questioning why being perceived to be gay can be used as a negative stereotype in the first place. While objecting to stereotyping/being stereotyped, they are not objecting to the idea that being a lesbian is "a bad thing." Athletes like Karolina, Danielle, and Jackie on the other hand, are questioning lesbian stereotyping by attacking its premise- the notion that there is anything wrong with being perceived to be gay (and presumably anything wrong with actually being gay)- and, in doing so, dismantle the heart of the stereotype. The statement "it's not a bad thing," while seemingly simple, holds tremendous power when a stereotype directly depends upon the belief in "it" (being gay) being a "bad thing." Asking "so what?" is damaging precisely because the lesbian stereotype hinges on female athletes' (and others') fear of the "what" or "what that means."

Understanding the ways in which female athletes feel personally impacted by lesbian stereotyping is important. As the data in this chapter demonstrate, some female athletes feel significantly bothered by the lesbian label while others do not. Moreover, there exists important nuance in individual athletes' reasons for why stereotyping does or does not bother them. Specifically, some athletes feel angry because the lesbian stereotype does not accurately reflect their identities and they are being associated with a stigmatized identity, others detest stereotyping on principle, and some feel most strongly

about the way such a stereotype impacts teammates and friends. Unfortunately, whether these athletes *feel as though* they are affected by the lesbian stereotype or not does not impact whether they are *actually* affected.

Indeed, research on stereotype threat- the social psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies- demonstrates that an individual does not have to believe in a particular stereotype about themselves (or a group to which they belong) for that stereotype to have a negative impact. As Claude Steele (1997) argues: "To experience stereotype threat, one need not believe the stereotype nor even be worried that it is true of oneself" (618). Belief in a stereotype does not make the impact of that stereotype any less of a "life-shaping force" (Steele 1997: 618). This does not mean that the female athletes who expressed not being affected by lesbian stereotypes because they felt "self-confident" or because there was nothing wrong with being perceived gay are not important. It does, however, highlight the impact that commonsense cultural narratives about gender, sexuality, and race can have on female athletes, regardless of whether they personally feel affected. As has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, whether female athletes feel impacted by lesbian stereotyping or not, they are subjected to strict policing of their gender expressions and sexualities, some times subtly and other times explicitly and aggressively. This type of policing takes it toll and, as will be outlined in the detail in the following chapter, impacts the degree to which female athletes feel like they embody a "cultural contradiction."

CHAPTER 5

"Not a Lot of Leading Ladies Have Muscles": Exploring the Cultural Contradiction of the Female Athlete

Missing the Point

The buzzer sounded signaling the end of the drill and the MWSU players made their way off the court for a quick water break. Some sat, resting and rehydrating, high-fiving each other over made shots and clever passes. Other players refastened headbands and tightened shoelaces, shaking out their arms and legs to stay loose. I sat at the scorer's table, mid-court, tallying statistics from the drill, carefully calculating how many shots Kyle took, whether Jizeal secured at least five rebounds, and how many steals Nikki had.

As I counted the final numbers and prepared to hand the sheet to Johnny for review, Rowan walked over to me, stuck her arm out in front of her, looked down at it briefly, and casually asked, "*Are my arms getting smaller?"* Surprised, I smiled, and after looking at her arm for a second or two said, "*No. Do you want them to be?"* Rowan quickly responded, *"Yeah!"* I asked her why and she said, "*I look too manly. Like when I get dressed up and wear a shirt like this…"* she continued, pointing to just above her bicep, "*…it doesn't look good."*

I looked at Rowan quizzically and shrugged. *"Isn't that the point, to be big?"* I asked her. *"No. I gotta look sexy,"* she replied plainly. The buzzer sounded again to signal the end of the water break. Coach King blew her whistle and motioned for the players to line up for the next drill. As she walked away, I shouted, *"You can't be both?"* Rowan turned, looked back at me, and with a slight, sympathetic grin on her face, shook her head from side to side as if to say "no."

When Rowan shook her head "no" to my question about whether she could be sexy *and* "big," she articulated the essence of the cultural contradiction of female athleticism. Simultaneously expected to perform heterofemininity as women and hegemonic masculinity as athletes, past work has argued that many female athletes possess "dual and dueling identities" of "heterosexual woman" and "athlete" (Blinde & Taub 1992; Malcolm 2003; Krane et al. 2004). More recent research examining female athletes' conflicting identities argues that contemporary female athletes may not feel *as conflicted* as in the past, in part because of shifting definitions of womanhood that allow for varied expressions of femininity or femininity on an "as needed" basis (Ross & Shinew 2008).

What past work has not done, however, is demonstrate the mechanisms through which female athletes feel such a contradiction. While the embodiment of masculinity through sport participation may lead some female athletes to feel a tension between their identities, my findings suggest that many athletes do not feel conflicted "on their own" nor are such conflicts all-encompassing. Rather, I argue that female athletes feel variously conflicted between their identities as women and athletes because of the ways in which they are constantly surveilled and policed, specifically through lesbian stereotyping, as discussed in detail in the previous two chapters. It is within this context of relentless monitoring and the continual reinforcement of boundaries (by self and others) that female athletes experience various internal dilemmas of identity.

Moreover, past work on the cultural contradiction of female athleticism has focused solely on white athletes, ignoring the importance of race as a central organizing principle of social life (Cornell & Hartmann 2007). Historically and contemporarily,

black women have been defined outside of the boundaries of hegemonic or ideal femininity (Cahn 1993; Collins 2000; Glenn 2002). At the same time, black female athletes are working within a context that holds as commonsense understanding the cultural myth that the biological composition of black bodies make black athletes better suited for physically strenuous sports and thus more likely to be represented in high speed and strength sports like basketball or track (Cahn 1993). As such, the cultural contradiction of female athleticism, based on a definition of heterofemininity that is white, does not apply uniformly to all athletes in all sports.

Thus, rather than there being one, unified cultural contradiction that all female athletes feel, I argue that in the contemporary moment, female athletes experience a variety of different types of contradictions, with some expressing "standard" dilemmas and others focusing more on "embodied" tensions. All of these athletes, however, experience their internal dilemmas within a larger institutional and societal context that surveils them pervasively and consistently intervenes when they- for any number of reasons- cross over the boundaries of hegemonic heterofemininity.

"Caught In the Middle" / Standard Tension

Many of the athletes I interviewed discussed what I am calling "standard" tensions in which their conceptions of what it means to be athletic and feminine are in direct conflict. For instance Danielle, a former, articulates an almost textbook response when asked if she has ever felt tension between her identities while she was playing collegiate athletics:

> *I definitely think so. I mean it, just like, culture and society, and the way you see girls on TV and movies. Like, there's nothing about female athletes out there. It's not something that when you're born as a little girl that you will think– you dress up as a princess, you don't dress up in a*

> *basketball uniform. [Laughs] It's not the norm. And it's hard to balance it because you do want to maintain femininity and you want to still be considered a girl but at the same time, sports – you can't change what you love to do.*

Danielle expressing feeling a personal dilemma between maintaining femininity and performing masculinity through playing basketball- doing what she "loves to do." She still wants to be "considered a girl" but feels as though as an athlete, her womanhood is in question, especially because images of female athletes are not prevalent in the media. In their study of collegiate female athletes, Krane et al. (2004) found similarly that femininity was always contrasted with conceptions of athleticism and masculinity and as such "in negotiating an reconciling the social expectations of femininity with athleticism, sportswomen develop two identities- athlete and woman" (326).

Former athlete, Clarke, discusses feeling similarly conflicted between her two identities- athlete and woman:

> *Like, I always felt like I was caught in the middle between like – I loved wearing sweats and showing up sweaty to class, but like, that's not really the typical female, you know? And then you're caught between, I also like to be more feminine and dress up and like, look nice, too. But you're kinda caught in the middle because of what people expect you to be like as a female, which is not wearing long shorts and basketball shoes and cutoff t-shirts. You know? Most of my friends were like that. That's just how we were, but also like, I wanna look nice as a person, you know? I'm obviously not gonna wear that like, to work. You're just kinda caught between, in the middle.*

As she outlines, even though Clarke enjoyed wearing sweatpants and "showing up sweaty" to class, she understands that performing masculinity by engaging in those behaviors is inconsistent with definitions of traditional femininity. She expresses a difference between what she wanted to do as an athlete versus what she knew was expected of her as a woman thus leaving her "caught between" her conflicting identities.

Clarke acknowledges that there are circumstances in which she likes to "be more feminine and dress up and look nice" like at work and also times where she enjoys "wearing long shorts, basketball shoes, and cutoff t-shirts." These differential displays of gender, however, do not align with conventional understandings of how women *should* behave. Indeed, Clarke's response illuminates the many layers inherent in the female/athlete contradiction and the numerous, unrelenting ways female athletes exist "caught between."

Another former athlete, J.F., similarly tells me: *"To be a strong athlete somehow diminishes you as a female or makes you more masculine. I've definitely experienced that."* Again, J.F. illustrates how a female athletes' expression of masculinity through, in this case strength, diminishes her femininity and her femaleness. She states further:

> *And so there's a whole, like that if I walk like an athlete, and I play like an athlete, like just an athlete, then that's considered masculine, which is weird for me, kind of. Like, I'm a basketball player, I'm supposed to like wear basketball shorts when I play, you know? It's kinda weird. So I think that's always an issue.*

Here, J.F. locates the contradiction of the female/athlete inherently within the definition of "athlete." As she says, playing like "just an athlete," is considered masculine because perceptions of what it means to be an "athlete" are fundamentally gendered (masculine). Experiencing this contradiction unremittingly leads J.F. to tell me: "*And, you know, sometimes it's a source of anger and frustration. It's just sometimes you just get sick of it, of always having to feel like you have to break down all of these barriers just to play."* Of course, even when female athletes perform masculinity by playing "like an athlete," they are often criticized for not performing it well enough. As Coach King's locker room rant illustrated in the introduction, female athletes are often critiqued for not being "tough

enough" or playing "hard enough"- not being masculine enough- while simultaneously criticized for failing at femininity.

Importantly, the female athletes in my study who expressed feeling "standard tension" between being athletic and feminine- caught between- were all white, former athletes[51]. It is possible that the athletes participating actively in collegiate athletics in the early 2000s have drastically different experiences with female/athlete paradox than do contemporary female athletes. This difference reflects, at least in part, shifting cultural ideals about just how far female athletes can teeter towards the masculine on the female/athlete (feminine/masculine) tightrope. As Heywood and Dworkin (2003) argue: "there is a definite trend in the ideal image repertoire that emphasizes male femininity and female masculinity. The appearance of such images points to a larger cultural shift…that must be taken into account" (82). Of course, change is often slow and partial making it possible that larger cultural shifts that have embraced the athletic woman are just now beginning to impact some female athletes' perceptions of whether they can be athletic and feminine (or whether they should have to care at all). My findings suggest, however, that larger cultural shifts have not done away with the cultural contradiction of female athleticism precisely because larger structures of race, gender, and sexuality continue to shape the everyday lived experiences of female athletes.

Additionally, the female/athlete paradox is a racialized concept. That is, when discussing the general cultural contradiction between being "female" and being an "athlete," the female (and femininity) in question is typically white. However, as previously stated, since past research on the female/athlete paradox has examined this

[51] It is possible that this finding is a result of my particular sample given that almost all of the current athletes in my study were black and almost all of the former athletes were white.

phenomenon solely through a "white lens" it is possible that "dual and dueling identities" only exist in this form for white athletes. Psychological research on racial differences in perceptions of beauty have demonstrated that white, black, Latina, and Asian women have significantly different relationships with their bodies, despite the overarching assumption that "what is true for White women is also true for Women of Color" (Poran 2002: 66). Maya Poran (2002), for instance, found that black women had higher overall body esteem scores than both white and Latina women in her study. Similarly, Evans and McConnell (2003) discovered that black women report more positive self-evaluations and less dissatisfaction with their bodies than do Asian and white women.

Moreover, these studies illustrate that mainstream standards of beauty are less relevant to black women than other women, especially whites. For example, Evans and McConnell (2003) found that black women "only compared themselves to Black in-group standards" rather than comparing themselves to mainstream, white ideals of beauty (162). In addition, Poran (2002) discovered that while white women do not acknowledge cultural standards of beauty as racialized, black and Latina women do (to varying degrees). As she argues:

> One of the most striking differences within the definitions of the cultural standard of beauty is the perception of race as a component of the standard. Black women were most likely to mention Whiteness overtly as an important part of the cultural definition of beauty, Latina women sometimes mentioned Whiteness, and White women rarely did (Poran 2002: 73-4).

Whiteness scholars have documented the ways in which whites do not recognize their own race or think of themselves as having racial identities, despite being a racial group that receives substantial material and non-material advantages (Lewis 2004). Part of the

"invisibility" of whiteness plays out within commonsense or hegemonic understandings of beauty as well. Again, as Poran (2002) notes:

> Beauty must be *reconceptualized as a raced experience* in order to understand and explore fully the diverse experiences women have in relation to, and within, cultures. Previous assumptions of the uniform standard of beauty must be reconceived because although the standard may be uniform, perceptions of, and responses to, it are not [Emphasis in original] (79).

Given that cultural notions of "beauty" are "raced," it is not surprising that the non-white athletes in my study did not express feelings of a "standard" cultural contradiction between their identities "female" and "athlete"; the standards for those identities, as defined by the dominant white culture, simply do not apply to them. As will be demonstrated in the following sections, however, both non-white and white athletes expressed internal dilemmas around *embodying* masculinity, specifically as it relates to associations with lesbianism.

*"Big, F**king Man Legs" / Embodied Tension*

Like Rowan in the opening narrative, the athletes in my study who expressed dilemmas around an embodied tension spoke specifically about how embodying masculinity through the formation of muscle mass (as a result of sport-specific types of training such as weight lifting) made them feel unfeminine and unattractive to men. For example, former athlete Kat, bluntly states:

> *Well, I don't know that I identified it so clearly but I did not like having really big muscles. And I just didn't feel it was beautiful to have big, fucking man legs. And that's just kind of how…that's the language I would have used then.*

Kat's response highlights several important elements of embodied tension. First, she describes very clearly how the actual changes in her body- in this case, her legs – through

an increase in muscle mass, presented a conflict for her because muscle mass is physical trait of hegemonic masculinity. Second, she demonstrates how normative understandings of heterofemininity and notions of what is "beautiful" do not correlate with, as she says, "big, fucking man legs." Put simply, big, muscular legs are masculine and for men. Thus, when Kat began to develop muscle mass in her legs, she felt as though she was embodying masculinity and losing beauty (read: heterofemininity).

Former athlete, Danielle, similarly tells me:

> *If you want attention from guys, you look at what they pay attention to, and they don't pay attention to Serena Williams and her big muscles everywhere. They, I mean, it's just natural. You see the girls that most guys look at or are drawn to or talk about…and even in movies, not a lot of the leading ladies have muscles in movies.*

Here Danielle uses the example of tennis star, Serena Williams, to illustrate that embodying masculinity through "big muscles everywhere" is not only unfeminine but unattractive to men. This is why, she argues, "not a lot of the leading ladies have muscles in moves." That is, to be a "leading lady" requires one to embody hegemonic heterofemininity- as aspect of which involves having a body that is thin and toned, not bulky and big.

Muscles are gendered and as such, have become a "popularly acquired paradox of gender" (Dworkin 2001: 333). "Too much" muscle mass (e.g. body builders) is never acceptable, to be sure, but some muscle mass is and usually only when it is accompanied by other expressions of hegemonic femininity (i.e. long hair, make-up, feminine dress)- a point that will be elaborated on in the following chapter. Despite the fact that categories such as "too much" and "just enough" are highly subjective and fluid, most women, like

the athletes I interviewed, understand the limit or the location of the glass ceiling on their muscular strength (Dworkin 2001). According to Dworkin:

> On the one hand, "commonsense" ideologies tell everyday women in fitness not to fear the weight room because natural, biological difference from men prevents them from getting "too big." At the same time, many women *can* and *do* experience gains in muscle mass when lifting weights, particularly women who do so regularly. The tension that results from the difference between common sense and knowledge of one's own bodily experiences is compounded by widespread bodily ideologies about what women's bodies *should* do (2001: 334).

This cultural tightrope is one in which actually reaching the ideal becomes close to impossible for most women, especially athletic women.

For athletes like Rowan, Kat, and Danielle, muscular arms and legs are "manly" and therefore "not sexy" or attractive to men. Having big legs or arms thus excludes these athletes from the boundaries of "appropriate" femininity and causes them to feel an embodied form of tension between their identities. My asking Rowan whether or not having big arms was "the point" was an attempt to call attention to the fact that in order to succeed at her sport- which by all measures, she did and had the desire to- she somewhat *had* to possess muscle mass. Her response- that the point was to "look sexy"- is telling. In order to be a successful athlete, Rowan needs to weight train and develop strength. A typical result of such training and an indicator of strength is muscle mass. Muscle mass, however, is not heterofeminine and therefore not sexy. Thus, a female athlete, like Rowan, can be a successful athlete or a successfully heterofeminine woman. She cannot, it seems, be both.

During our interview several months later, I recalled this instance and asked Rowan about it again to see if her thoughts had changed, especially as she was about to embark on a career in the WNBA:

> I remember you said once…you said somethin' about your arms are getting big, in the season, and that you didn't like it 'cause it didn't look sexy.
>
> *It doesn't. It's so like unattractive. I'm not tryin to knock Kameron's [teammate] hustle, but like, when she dresses up it's just so like bleh. It's just not cute at all.*
>
> Why?
>
> *Because she's so muscular and it's like, it's not cute. And so I don't want to… ew, it's just nasty.*

Like our exchange earlier in the season, Rowan expresses a similar perspective on having muscle mass. This time, she invokes her teammate Kameron to illustrate her point. Kameron, Rowan observes, embodies masculinity through her musculature and when she "dresses up" (just like when Rowan wears short-sleeved shirts), "it's just not cute at all" since to be "cute" is to be heterofeminine. As a result, Rowan perceives her own and other players' musculature as "nasty." Krane et al. (2004) found similarly that female athletes experienced tension around their muscular bodies:

> The athletes considered their muscular bodies as the primary hindrance to being perceived as heterosexually feminine in social settings. When they considered their athletic bodies in comparison to "normal girls" or the culturally ideal body, the athletes felt "different." They were larger and more muscular, and they did not fit into trendy clothing (326).

Rowan, Kat, and Danielle's statements indicate immense conflict between what they *actually* look like versus what they believe they *should* look like or even *want* to look like. They are clearly articulating their awareness of there being a glass ceiling on women's muscular strength (Dworkin 2001)- an acceptable amount of muscle mass that does not make them feel "nasty" when wearing certain clothing. Of course, there is nothing biological about muscle mass that makes it only for men. Rather, our cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity have been defined in ways that reserve

certain characteristics for one category or the other, with little room for overlap. Muscle mass becomes synonymous with masculinity, a character trait these athletes detest not because they think it will harm them athletically (indeed, it will only help them) but because it will harm them as *heterosexual* women.

"Not the Aggressive Type"/ (Also) Embodied Tension

The above examples highlight female athletes' struggles with balancing the embodiment of masculinity- specifically through muscle mass- and of heterofemininity. These women experienced tension between their identities because their gender performance was not feminine enough. Other athletes, however, spoke similarly of struggles with balance but did so because they felt as though their gender performance was not masculine enough as athletes. These women did not embody masculinity in the way they thought was appropriate for elite-level athletes and as such, felt deeply conflicted.

For example, both MWSU athletes, Kameron and Jizeal, express trouble balancing femininity and athleticism because they do not possess the "masculine drive" that is so crucial to being a successful athlete at their level. When asked if she feels that her identities as a female and athlete conflict, Kameron states: "*Yeah. I think I'd say yeah because I feel like female athletes are severely stereotyped as these grungy, masculine people. And I'm not masculine at all. And I think that makes it a little bit harder to be a female athlete and still be the stereotypical woman*." Here, Kameron expresses struggling with performing the "athlete" in the female/athlete paradox. Similarly, MWSU player, Jizeal, tells me:

> *For me yeah because I'm not the aggressive type and I don't like contact when I play and stuff like that. But that's obviously a problem. My coach*

> *doesn't like that. And then there's things I want to do like I want to get my nails done. I want to get my hair done. But because of basketball I can't do it because it wouldn't make no sense because I'd just sweat it out, you know, and mess up my nails and stuff like that. But like some people it doesn't matter. Because I'm like really girly. If you're not really girly and you don't want those things it really doesn't matter I guess.*

For Jizeal, the necessary behaviors associated with athleticism- contact, aggressiveness- do not align with her image of herself. She does not believe she has the "natural" aggression (or the ability to perform masculinity in that way) needed in elite-level athletics. Moreover, she would like to be able to do traditionally feminine things like get her nails and hair done but feels like she cannot because it would not "make sense" or assist in her success as an athlete.

Unlike the athletes who offered responses that could be categorized as "standard tension," the athletes who discussed embodying the female/athlete paradox were not limited to one racial group or type of athlete (e.g. current or former). One way in which to understand why black athletes who presumably are not hindered by "standard" tensions because they do not abide by white standards of beauty are stifled by "embodied" tensions is by seeing the embodiment of masculinity, particularly through muscle mass, as the limit of the new definitions of what it means to be a "fit" woman. With the increased participation of more girls and women in sports, society is increasingly become more acceptable of athletic women and athletic women that posses musculature. The amount of musculature that is acceptable, however, is not unlimited. Muscles matter but they also must be mediated. While women are now free to possess musculature, they must remain ever-conscious of exactly *how much* they possess.

"The Femininity Issue Was Never An Issue" / A Straight Contradiction?

Because the performance and embodiment of masculinity is so closely linked to lesbianism, the athletes who were most likely to express feeling tensions between being an athlete and being appropriately heterofeminine were, perhaps unsurprisingly, self-identified heterosexual women. Unlike Rowan and Kat who were deeply upset by how developing muscle mass- the embodiment of masculinity- made them appear unfeminine and unattractive to men, openly gay, MWSU player, Eve, tells me:

> So did you ever struggle with that because I mean you call yourself skinny, but you also have defined muscles, right? Do you ever feel weird about that personally?
>
> *I never struggled with it because like really I don't like men so their opinion doesn't really matter much. And girls love my body, so.*

Eve's response underscores several important ways sexuality/sexual identity impacts the female/athlete paradox. First, she highlights the meaningful relationship between gender and sexuality in that most women's desire to appear hegemonically feminine is primarily about appearing heterosexual for and heterosexy to men. Since, as she says, she "doesn't really like men," Eve does not feel that her muscle mass is problematic because she is not attempting to construct her gender expression for male consumption or pleasure. Second, her admission "girls love my body," illustrates that normative understandings of what "sexy" women "look like," are fundamentally heteronormative. The way in which the "cultural contradiction" of female athleticism has heretofore been conceptualized has been based on this heteronormativity.

Rowan and Kat expressed concerns about whether their muscular bodies were going to be perceived as beautiful or sexy. And while the question of beautiful and sexy *for whom* is left unanswered, the implicit assumption in a heteronormative and

heterosexist society is: *for men*. Eve's discussion of how her body is perceived by men versus women ("girls love my body") and her affect around their opinions ("their opinion doesn't really matter much") complicates the heteronormativity inherent in the female/athlete paradox. For athletes such as Eve, whose sexual object choice is another woman, having "big, fucking man legs" (despised by an athlete like Kat who is straight) might just be a good thing.

Sexuality also mattered for, self-identified gay former athletes, Carmen and Christina, who expressed how the tension they initially felt between being athletic and feminine dissipated once they came out as gay. For them, the tension existed *before coming out* because they felt unable or unwilling (or both) to conform to a hegemonic understanding of femininity as ultra-feminine and heterosexual. Carmen illustrates her internal dilemmas through a team trip to Hawaii:

> *For instance, my freshman year, we had a tournament. We were going to Hawaii for a tournament, and my coach was like "Okay, everybody has to dress up." You know, we had to be presentable and what not. So I was like "Crap! What I'm I supposed to do? Am I supposed to be comfortable? Or…" You know, cause my really close friend in college was straight, and she was like "Oh, I'm gonna wear a skirt cause it's comfy" and blah blah blah, and I'm like "Hell no! I'm not travelling anywhere, let alone walking out of the house in a skirt!" For me, I definitely struggled with, "Do I need to portray being feminine? Do I need to portray being, you know, the girly girl even though that's not comfortable, that's not who I am?" And I think that, especially in the beginning, I definitely struggled with that.*
>
> So, once you got through that point and you were like "Okay, I am who I am. I feel comfortable with it." Then, it wasn't an issue anymore?
> *It was definitely not an issue. I was out. I was comfortable with myself. The people who mattered to me and cared for me and were comfortable with it. So it was never – the femininity issue was never an issue, I guess, to me.*

Before coming out, Carmen felt significant anxiety around portraying herself as "presentable," which for her translated into expressions of heterosexy femininity. She knew that what was comfortable to her would not be acceptable under those standards. After coming out, however, she was no longer concerned about appearing feminine because she placed herself comfortably outside of the boundaries of hegemonic, heterosexual femininity and was thus no longer constrained by the pressure to perform gender in that way.

Drawing on the stereotype that lesbians are "sportier" in general than straight women, Christina discusses how she feels as though the cultural contradiction of the female/athlete depends on sexuality and how she had an easier experience in college compared to high school because she was out:

> *I think it's different for lesbians and straight women, you know what I mean? Like, I think, personally, if you were to interview a straight woman, it would be a completely different thing…with regards to like, being able to separate the two. Because, not to like put down lesbians, but most lesbians are sportier, you know like, do more the guy scene type deal. I mean obviously I can't speak for all lesbians, but even them they seem to do, you know. I don't know, it just depends on who you talk to I guess, but in my, in my experience I had the hardest time in high school but not in college.*
>
> So you feel like it could be that for female athletes who are gay, it's easier to deal with that kind of balance because they don't necessarily care about being feminine?
>
> *Me, personally. I mean obviously I have a feminine side, when it's – I'm like half and half type deal. Obviously, it depends on who you talk to, I don't wanna speak for lesbians in general, but personally, yeah it's, it was easier for me.*

For Christina, her gender expression is both masculine and feminine- what she calls "half and half type deal"- and as such, made it easier for her to feel comfortable being a female athlete and negotiating with any potential paradoxes. She attributes the ease with which

she was able to ‘”deal with” contradictions between her identities in college to her coming out as gay. Once out, she no longer felt constrained by hegemonic standards of beauty that make the female/athlete a paradox.

The experiences of Eve, Carmen, and Christina suggest the cultural contradiction of female athleticism may be not only racialized but sexualized. As it has been conceptualized before now, the “female” in the traditional understanding of the female/athlete paradox is both white and straight. Because of this, it is possible that queer women feel less or differently constrained by notions of normative standards of beauty than do straight women (e.g. Eve’s perception of her body). Unfortunately, there is little research on whether and how sexuality impacts perceptions of normative standards of beauty and body image and the few studies that have been done present conflicting results.

For instance, some scholars argue that as a result of their non-normative sexual identities and involvement in lesbian communities that are more accepting overall of diverse physical appearances, lesbians and bisexual women are not constrained by a hegemonic standard of beauty based on a white, heterosexual imaginary (Myers et al. 1999). Others claim, in contrast, that despite divergent sexualities, lesbian and bisexual women are no less impacted by heterosexual beauty ideals than their heterosexual counterparts (Pitman 2000). As Pitman (2000) notes: “…many lesbians adhere to ideals of beauty which are upheld in mainstream culture. In some cases, as with many heterosexual women, the dissatisfaction that lesbians felt with their bodies had reached eating disorder proportions.” (53).

Myers et al. (1999) similarly suggest: "If lesbians are freed from the tyranny of the heterosexual beauty standard, one would expect them to report more satisfaction with their diverse body types than heterosexual women. Results from studies comparing lesbian and heterosexual women's level of body dissatisfaction have not supported this hypothesis, however" (17). For instance, in her study of body image, weight concern, and disordered eating in lesbians, Heffernan (1999) argues that "while lesbians were more critical of traditional social norms regarding the rights and roles of women in general than heterosexual controls, this difference disappeared in regard to norms concerning women's weight and appearance" (121). Indeed, half of the lesbians in her study reported dieting, dissatisfaction with their weight, and body esteem issues. Importantly, these studies did not involve female athletes are thus difficult to apply to the current study.

In addition to understanding differences between queer and straight women's perceptions of beauty ideals, little is known about how the process of coming out influences queer women's adherence to heterosexual standards of beauty. In their study of appearance norms in lesbian communities, Myers et al. (1999) argue that while appearance norms seem to constrain lesbian and bisexual women even after coming out, some queer women feel "freed" from traditional beauty norms after coming out:

> A number of women interviewed remarked that there is greater acceptance of physical appearances not consistent with dominant culture's norms within the lesbian community. They reported feeling freer both to abandon traditional female appearance styles and to experiment more with those styles (20).

Importantly, even for the lesbian women in their study who felt constrained by traditional beauty norms and were dissatisfied with their bodies overall, "the theme of 'freedom' from heterosexual appearance norms after coming out was a unifying factor" (Myers et

al. 1999: 21). Heffernan (1999) found similarly that "degree of involvement in lesbian/gay activities suggest that lesbians may begin to look more different form heterosexual women the more identified they are with lesbian/gay culture" (126). That is, there may be some connection between being involved in lesbian/gay activities, being out, and freedom from normative beauty standards.

Relatedly, in her study of bisexual women, Taub (1999) argues that coming out as bisexual impacted many of her respondents' beauty ideals and practices. For example, a third of the women in her study acknowledged that they altered some aspect of their physical appearance after coming out as bisexual such as shaving body hair or wearing make-up and others reported having an increased in self-acceptance after coming out. Interestingly, Taub (1999) also found that many of the bisexual women felt more comfortable with their own bodies when in relationships with women than with men, supporting the notion that lesbians and queer women do not always expect their partners to conform to heterosexual standards of beauty (Heffernan 1999).

It is possible then, like Carmen who expressed feel freed from the "femininity issue" after coming out as gay, that out, gay female athletes are less constrained by the female/athlete paradox than straight women because they have a different imagined audience. The shared experience as "women" in a patriarchal, sexist society does mean that in many ways, lesbians and straight women are impacted by hegemonic standards of beauty. Or, as Pitman (2000) claims, "…despite the fact that lesbian-feminist ideology challenges conventional standards of female beauty, lesbians still grow up as women in our culture and are exposed to and internalize cultural beliefs about female beauty" (51).

There is some evidence to suggest however, that lesbian communities offer some space for re-defining, contesting, and rejecting beauty ideals, and that the coming out process is a major factor in how one is impacted by normative standards of beauty. As Myers et al. (1999) conclude:

> Lesbian appearance norms are clearly different from heterosexual ones; however, the beauty mandate of the dominant culture has apparently been reproduced to some extent within women's communities. The heterosexual beauty mandate continues to affect lesbians and bisexual women to the extent that they continue to worry about their weight and other factors that make up the dominant culture's ideal. In addition, lesbians and bisexuals seem to create norms within lesbian communities. The degree to which women feel pressured to conform to such norms may be a factor of age and years "out," just as the degree to which heterosexual women conform to the dominant culture's norms changes over time (24-5).

Indeed, the lesbians in Pitman's (2000) study claimed that lesbian communities (and some subcultures within those communities such as S/M) "are general more accepting of women's bodies than mainstream culture," despite the fact that many individual women in those communities suffer from body and weight issues and the community seems to promote a "code of silence" around such concerns (58).

Importantly, as with the literature on the female/athlete paradox in general, the few studies that have examined lesbians and bisexual women's experiences with heterosexual standards of beauty have focused primarily on queer white women[52]. Thus, it is important to consider how these "sexualized" experiences with hegemonic, heterosexual, white standards of beauty are simultaneously racialized. Whether and how a queer woman is impacted by normative cultural beauty ideals may depend significantly on how that woman's experience is also racialized. As a result, the pressure queer

[52] For an exception see Pitman (2000).

women feel to conform to norms depends on factors such as age, years "out," and race, among others.

Sexuality is undoubtedly a significant factor in whether female athletes feel a cultural contradiction between their identities as women and athletes. It is possible that openly gay female athletes do not feel paradoxical because they have different understandings of what it means to be beautiful or sexy and attempt to express their gender in various ways that attract other queer women as opposed to heterosexual men. In this way, all of the "problems" associated with athleticism (e.g. muscle mass) that contrast those associated with hegemonic, white, heterosexual femininity (e.g. attractiveness to men) either do not apply to queer women or actually enhance their self-esteem and attractiveness. Thus, my data suggests that we should be problematizing the female/athlete paradox in a way that acknowledges how our commonsense understandings of "female" and "athlete" vary along the lines of race and sexuality.

"I Don't Care if I Look Masculine" / No Felt Tension

Contrary to the athletes in my study who expressed various forms of contradictions between their identities "female" and "athlete," an equal number of athletes expressed not feeling any tension at all. Interestingly, and unlike in the examples above, there were no clear patterns in who these women are; the athletes who expressed no felt tension were current and former, white and non-white, queer and heterosexual. What they did differ on, however, were their reasons why. Some of the women, like Isis, invoked feelings of self-confidence when explaining why she did not feel any contradiction (like she did when discussing why she wasn't bothered by lesbian stereotyping). As she says:

> *I think it is hard to balance if you're not comfortable, if you're trying to live up to whatever people may think. Because I think along with women's basketball comes a lot of stereotypes. I think it comes along with comfortability. Like if you are comfortable with who you are, I think other people will be just as comfortable with that. And that's what I've learned when I've gotten here. It doesn't matter.*

For Isis, being comfortable in her sense of self is an important part of why she does not find it difficult to balance being a female and an athlete. She does not deny that those identities can conflict- especially due to lesbian stereotyping- but believes that other people will be comfortable with you if you are comfortable with yourself.

Former athlete, Jackie, cites her family background as a reason why she never felt any tension around being a female athlete:

> *Once you get on the court, I don't care if I look masculine. That wasn't even in my kind of frame of mind. Like, that wouldn't even come into play. But, I think obviously my parents and my family encouraged sports so much, and basketball in particular, that I didn't really feel ever bad about myself or have that struggle between being masculine and being feminine because it was so acceptable in my family. So, if my mom was more maybe traditional and wanted me to, you know, play ballet or something then I could see it being more of an issue. But it was just like, I'd come home from basketball, and she'd be just as interested in how it went as my dad. It was just kind of like accepted.*

As Jackie illustrates, not only did she not care if she performed or embodied masculinity while playing basketball but how she looked was not even in her frame of mind. Since her mother was just as interested in her athletic success as her father and did not push her to participate in traditionally feminine activities such as ballet, Jackie felt accepted. Others, like former athlete Brenee, mentioned similarly about not caring about what others: "*I don't really care how other people perceive me. And that's all on you. And that's how I felt going into college. This is life, you know, and if you don't like it then you*

don't have to deal with it." Tiffanie, a former athlete, recognizes that while many female athletes do care how others perceive them, she does not:

> *I mean I really never put too much thought into all that. I mean mainly I don't really care what people think about me. I'm gonna be who I wanna be, and act the way I wanna act. I mean, I'm an athlete and yeah, I'm a female, but I don't need to be all dainty. Like that's how basically I think society pretty much wants females to be for the most part I'd say. But yeah, I just don't. I didn't have an issue with it. But I mean, I'm sure there are plenty of females out there that struggle with that.*

Tiffanie critiques traditional cultural expectations of women as "dainty" and resists those expectations by being who she wants to be and acting how she wants to act. Not caring what others think gives Tiffanie the freedom to do be and act "how she wants," something she knows does not come as easily for other female athletes.

Even Denise, who like Rowan or Kameron in the aforementioned section, embodies masculinity through significant muscle mass, never felt as though she was conflicted: *"In my junior year, I got really big…but it never occurred to me like 'this is not feminine.' Everybody [men] always said they liked it. I mean, I ain't never heard anybody ever say otherwise."* Denise was affirmed by men and therefore, as a heterosexual woman, never felt conflicted between being feminine and athletic. Elise, a former athlete, attributes much of her ability to avoid any identity conflicts to the context of her small town. As she says:

> *I was very fortunate cause I went to Western State. It's a small town but it's very supportive. The whole community loves sports, and if you were an athlete at WSU, everybody in the community knew who you were. Our posters and stuff were up all over, you know, in shops and whatever. It wasn't like taboo [to be a female athlete]. It was like the cool thing to be an athlete or whatever. I never really had a problem with fitting in or trying to maintain like, my feminism I guess at the same time as being an athlete. I never really felt conflicted with that at all in college. I guess I'm fortunate looking at it that way. I never really felt like I had to work at both, being an athlete and being a female.*

As Elise notes, being a female athlete was never "taboo" and in fact, it was "the cool thing" to be an athlete in her small, college town. The support of the community was important for Elise who never felt like by being a female athlete she embodied and kind of contradiction. Interestingly, Elise's gender presentation is hegemonically feminine and she is heterosexual so her understanding of the support of her community could be impacted by the fact that she never faced any criticism for non-normative gender expressions.

Context also mattered greatly for Jackie, who discussed never feeling a tension between her athletic identity and being feminine until she left a college atmosphere where she spent the majority of her time around other athletes:

> *So I can honestly say that I never felt any sort of conflict probably up until being done with sports. I was obviously always surrounded with other athletes and so taking kind of behavior from the floor to the classroom to, you know, a social event, it was very just kind of fluid, and I never noticed anything… Just even, for instance, like what I'll wear around. Like right now I have on long shorts and, you know, a bigger T-shirt. And on the weekends if we're around I'd put on sweats and like, kinda saggin' you know. I don't even think twice about that, you know? And yet, people will notice it and will comment on it like 'Oh my god, you're sagging!' I would never even recognize that my shorts are long or that my pants aren't pulled up to my waist. And I think that's more just acceptable throughout athletic culture, and I don't know if that's a masculine trait per se. I see it more as like an athletic trait. But I think other people outside of athletics view that more as a masculine type behavior I guess. Like, I'll just be in whatever, like sweats and stuff. And yeah, it's more like 'Oh. Your pants are falling down' almost like they're tryna help me out. And I'm just like 'No, that's just how I wear 'em. I'm okay with this.' More like catching people off guard I think. Cause you know, when people study at the library, they'll wear sweats, but it's more like, you know, stretch pants and stuff and I've just never been into that.*

While never feeling personally conflicted between her athletic and "feminine" identities, Jackie noticed how others perceived her differently when situated outside of "athletic

culture" in which wearing baggy sweat pants and big t-shirts is the norm (albeit a criticized norm). As Jackie says, others make comments when they see her sweatpants falling down as if they are helping her remain within the bounds of appropriate femininity. Compared to earlier work in which many female athletes expressed feeling as though their identities as women and as athletes were at odds, the athletes in my study expressed a wide spectrum of views, ranging from no felt- tension to a more standard tension, with variations of expressions in between. Similar to the athletes in Ross and Shinew's (2008) study, many of these athletes "have constructed their own definitions of acceptable gender displays" based on their identities as athletes (who are also women) (53). Most importantly, however, these findings illustrate the importance of understanding how the "cultural contradiction" of female athleticism is racialized and "sexualized." While previously ignored by past research, non-white female athletes and queer athletes experience meaningful differences whether and how they feel as though they embody a paradox.

However, because of the institutional and societal context that fosters the continual monitoring and policing of their gender and sexuality, even those female athletes who claim not to experience or embody a cultural contradiction between their athleticism and gender expressions engage in strategies to negotiate with that conflict. Because of the pervasiveness of lesbian stereotyping within the sporting context and homonegativity in society at large, all female athletes must contend, in some way, with efforts to police them into being appropriately heterofeminine since, as athletes, they are not fully "real" women. How they contend with such policing- what gender strategies they employ in their defense- is the subject of the following chapter. Moreover, because

felt tension- whether or not the athletes believed their identities were in conflict with one another- is not synonymous with *actual* tension- institutional pressures to reconcile a perceived conflict between their identities- the following chapter will also focus on how female athletes engaged in gender strategies subconsciously as well as how such strategies were placed upon them at the institutional level.

CHAPTER 6

"We Don't Want You Looking All Beat Up": Female Athletes' Use of Gender Strategies

Keeping the Fans Entertained

The room was cold and dark, except for the two large spotlights shining against a giant "green screen" in the center of the room. Camera equipment was placed strategically at the front and sides of the screen. The media team walked around hurriedly, checking microphones and testing lighting. Johnny Jacobs stood at the entrance of the room, directing the players as they entered one after another. Some of them were already wearing their jerseys while others rushed into the bathroom to quickly change. Once all of the players were gathered together, Johnny explained the nature of the video shoot. The MWSU women's basketball team would be filming a series of short video clips to be used during timeouts at their games. The clips were designed to make the atmosphere of the game more interactive so that the fans could connect more with the individual players and be entertained. The players stood in front of the green screen and were filmed doing a variety of things such as dancing, showing off their muscles for the "flex cam," and doing the limbo.

First up was Jizeal, who was wearing her hair down and straightened, make-up, giant gold hoop earrings, and several thin gold bracelets on each wrist. When she walked in front of the screen, the bright lights revealed the hot pink bra she was wearing underneath her translucent white jersey. She then tucked her bra straps under the top of her jersey so they wouldn't be seen on camera, showing off her matching hot pink nail polish. Right before the camera started rolling, Jizeal turned to Johnny, pointed at a small blemish under her left eye, and asked if he thought it was noticeable or if the editors of

the video could "do something about it." Johnny reassured her that she looked "fine" and told her they'd "take care of it." Finally ready to go, Jizeal held an iPod and listened to a popular song- "Party in the USA" by Miley Cyrus- while she swayed back and forth, smiling and singing along. When this clip was shown during the game, the chosen fan would watch the video of Jizeal singing and when the video paused, would have to guess the next word in the song in order to win a prize.

Next was Rowan, who was asked to do the "flex cam." Although not wearing any makeup, Rowan's hair was also down and straightened and she was wearing two pairs of small, gold hoops in her ears and two gold necklaces, one of which had a basketball hoop charm attached to it. Rowan stood in front of the screen and somewhat hesitantly performed a series of poses in which she flexed her arm muscles, playfully imitating the way a bodybuilder might show off his or her muscles in a competition. In between poses, she would dance a little, smiling, and say, *"Now you're turn!"* and then continue to flex more. While Rowan "flexed" for the camera, her teammates giggled on the sidelines. Rowan looked down at the floor, smiled bashfully, shook her head slightly, and then continued flexing. During the game, the camera would pan over the audience and stop at individual fans that would hopefully entice them to imitate Rowan by flexing their own muscles while the rest of the crowd cheered them on.

Isis walked onto the platform next, her hair down and straightened as well, wearing one small pair of gold hoops in her ears. Her makeup was subtle, barely visible even under the drastic camera lighting. Isis was handed a basketball and filmed shyly tossing it back and forth and smiling. Then, she began slow clapping and shouted, *"de-fense, de-fense, DE-FENSE!"* with each chant louder and more excited than the last.

Next, she shouted, *"MAKE SOME NOISE!"* while raising her hands higher and higher to encourage fans to continue to cheer. In between, she would clap and say *"Yeah! Keep going!"* and *"Come on! You can get louder than that!"* as she pumped her fist in the air. Unlike the other clips, these snippets were often played during the game to motivate fans to cheer loudly during crucial moments like when MWSU needed to stop their opponent on defense or when the game was tied close to the finish.

Other MWSU players like Nikki were filmed doing clips such as "three things I can't live without" where a chosen fan would guess the third "thing" from a list of options to win a prize. Some of the players were filmed in pairs or groups of three, leading chants like Isis, while others opted out altogether. Tiffany, for instance, refused to be on camera because she had a fat lip from getting elbowed by an opposing player in a game the weekend before. Although at times the players seemed embarrassed or shy- often apologetically giggling in between takes- they all completed their respective clips and promptly went to the gym to start practice.

The above video-shoot narrative offers a description of some of the ways the MWSU players engaged in gender strategies or "plans of action" designed to solve the problem of female athleticism (Hochschild 1989). The specific players highlighted in this narrative- Jizeal, Rowan, and Isis- seemingly engaged in strategies of *compensation* (Chen 1999) such as putting on makeup and wearing jewelry, in order to align themselves as closely as possible to hegemonic ideal of heterofemininity. Why Jizeal, Rowan, and Isis, three incredibly talented athletes competing at the highest level of collegiate basketball, felt the desire (or need) to put on makeup and jewelry and paint their nails for

the video shoot that would be shown during their games is the central question driving this chapter.

Past work has similarly documented the use of compensation-type gender strategies- bows, ribbons, makeup, jewelry- by female athletes in order to counter the masculinizing effect of sport participation (Blinde & Taub 1992, Malcolm 2003; Krane et al. 2004; Enke 2005). Engaging in these types of gender strategies is not just a phenomenon within the context of sports however. Social psychologists studying gender in the workplace have found that competent women are perceived less favorably than competent men because competence is a traditionally masculine characteristic. According to Carli (2001), women can lessen the resistance to their influence when they "temper their competence with displaces of communality and warmth"- traditionally feminine characteristics. (725). Similar to the ways female athletes are portrayed as masculine for participating in the male domain of sports, women leaders face scrutiny for being masculine when their behavior is "too assertive." Women who engage particular "influence styles" (Carli 2001) that more closely align with femininity than masculinity - smiling, niceness, warmth, and communality- or combine "positive social softeners" (Ridgeway 2001) with their expressions of assertiveness and competency can place themselves back within the boundaries of appropriate femininity and be more influential. In this way, "influence styles" for women in the workplace closely mirror gender strategies for female athletes.

Past work has not, however, adequately explored the variation in the types of strategies used by female athletes or the ways in which gender strategies become institutionalized. That is, while individual female athletes "choose" whether or not to

engage in efforts to overemphasize their heterofemininity, the pervasiveness of lesbian stereotyping and the persistence with which gender and sexuality are policed within the institution of sport provides a context in which female athletes feel as though they need to make such choices. Indeed, that many of the female athletes who said they did not feel any tension between their athletic and gender identities still engaged in gender strategies is meaningful for precisely this reason. Points of contradiction between what athletes say they do versus what they actually do further highlight the impact of this type of context on the everyday lived experience of female athletes. And as will be demonstrated in the second half of this chapter, gender strategies are not just individual behaviors engaged in by players but are, in many ways, enacted upon players institutionally.

A former student once asked me after giving a lecture on gender strategies in my Sociology of Sports class: "*What's wrong with bows*?" My short answer is, nothing. There is nothing *wrong* with female athletes wearing bows in their hair or putting on lip gloss. Indeed, Carli (2001) argues that the "influence styles" used by women in leadership positions in order to be perceived as more legitimate are pragmatic practices, not to be construed as weak but as a means to "reduce resistance to their influence and thereby achieve greater legitimacy as leaders" (736). While waiting for structural change- in the meantime- Carli (2001) claims that women can utilize particular influence styles to access power and resources not otherwise available to them because of gender stereotyping. Ridgeway (2001) similarly argues: "The positive consequences of such techniques are not trivial. They allow very competent women to break through the maze of constraints created by gender status to wield authority. This begins to undermine the structural arrangements in society that support gender status beliefs" (649-50).

What is wrong, however, is that normative, understandings of gender and sexuality structure women's lives so that they feel as though they either *must* engage in gender strategies to be "real women" or that engaging in such behaviors is somehow *natural.* As Ridgeway (2001) argues, while there can be "positive consequences" with engaging in stereotypical behaviors to gain legitimacy, such techniques reinforce gender stereotypes and require women to be "nicer" than men- or in the case of female athletes more feminine than athletic- " in order to exercise equivalent power and authority" (649-50). As I will describe in this chapter, female athletes engage in a variety of individual gender strategies and, at the same time, have strategies enacted upon them at the institutional level all in service of navigating the harsh and uneven terrain of a sporting context saturated with lesbian stereotyping and strict policing of heterofeminine boundaries.

Individual Gender Strategies

The athletes in my study engaged in two major forms of compensation type gender strategies in order to place them as closely as possible to the ideal of heterofemininity and counter lesbian stereotyping. The first type, which I call "appearance based compensation strategies," most closely mirror the types of strategies uncovered by past work (Blinde & Taub 1992; Krane et al. 2004) such as wearing makeup, feminine clothing, and hair ribbons, among others. The second, more severe type, which I call "body modification compensation strategies," are designed to physically alter an athlete's body for the sole purpose of decreasing muscle mass in order to appear closer to the heterofeminine ideal of "toned" rather than the masculine form of "bulky." Importantly, as I outline each of the compensation strategies used by the

athletes, I will discuss how such practices have become subconscious and normalized, leading them to make sense of their behavior as something that "just what they do."

"I Make Sure My Eyes and Hair is Done" / Appearance Based Compensation Strategies

A number of MWSU players engaged in appearance based compensation strategies, ranging from wearing makeup and headbands to covering tattoos. Rowan, for instance, explained to me that she chooses to get tattoos that are small and can be covered up because they are "un-ladylike." She also noted how her future coach in the WNBA was glad to know that her tattoos weren't visible:

> Do people ever say anything to you about your tattoos because you're a woman?
>
> *Oh no, no. Not at all. But like my coach for [WNBA team], she said, "How many tattoos you got?" I said "15." She said, "Where they at?" I said, "That's good that you can't see them huh?" She's like, "Yeah, that's great." And then she's like, "See, most girls they have them on their forearms, everywhere." I'm like, "Nah, I'm not like that. She's like, "Good, good, good."*
>
> Did you choose not to do that [make them visible]?
>
> *Yeah, I don't like that.*
>
> How come?
>
> *It's just un-ladylike. Like I understand, I see, you know, getting "a" tattoo is un-lady like and you shouldn't. But having it all over like, come on. You do have to get a job in the future.*
>
> Right. So you're kind of like, "Well, I'll just get em kind of strategically, small…"
>
> *Yeah, to where I can make sure they are able to be covered up.*

Rowan's decision to get only tattoos that are small and in places easily covered by clothing is an appearance based compensation strategy. She uses this strategy to solve the problem of being "un-ladylike" or embodying masculinity by having tattoos. Importantly,

Rowan received positive reinforcement from her future WNBA coach for her "plan of action" to cover her tattoos and be more heterofeminine.

Unlike Rowan, who clearly articulated her attempts at covering her tattoos as an explicit strategy designed to place her more closely to the heterofeminine ideal, most of the MWSU athletes understood their compensation strategies as efforts to simply "look good" or "look presentable." Jizeal, for instance, tells me of how she always has her eyes and hair done before games:

> So do you think that you feel like you need to look a certain way when you're playing?
>
> *When I'm playing I know I look a mess. But if I'm sitting on that bench, I want to look presentable. So, I mean, I make sure my eyes is done, my hair is done. But I mean when I play, I know I'm just gone look a mess. [Laughter] I know it. Regardless.*
>
> Do you do your nails before the game, sometimes?
>
> *No, I usually—actually I do like when I be in the room and stuff I just, you know, I do 'em.*

Jizeal describes her pre-game makeup and hair routine as her effort to "not look a mess" while on the bench. She does not explicitly discuss needing to overemphasize her femininity. Yet, for her, looking "presentable" when not directly in competition is important. Jizeal interprets her desire to have her hair and make-up done as strategies of self-presentation, not compensation, highlighting how unnatural practices like putting on makeup become normalized over time. Moreover, while wearing makeup may make Jizeal "look good," it is still a very specific performance of hegemonic femininity. When I asked Jizeal why her other teammates, like Naomi, wear makeup during the game, she says: "*Nobody wants to sit over there looking a mess."*

Similarly, when I asked Sara about her teammates' use of make-up before games, she had this to say:

> *You never know who's watching. You want to be cute. Yeah, they do it because they want to be cute. And it's a natural thing. It's like, I don't know, putting on makeup for them is like brushing your teeth in the morning. It's repetitive. It's like embedded in their system.*
>
> So can you be cute and not have makeup on during the game?
>
> *[Laughing] I hope so. If not, then I'm in a world of trouble.*

Even though she doesn't wear makeup during the games, Sara believes that her teammates do in order to "be cute," and, importantly, because for them "it's a natural thing." She believes that for those teammates, putting on make-up is the same as brushing their teeth in the morning- a regular aspect of their everyday routine. Karolina spoke similarly about feelings of what is "natural" when telling me about using makeup during her pre-game ritual:

> *I don't know. I always wear mascara because my eyes just look so tired if I don't. That's what I feel like...I mean, of course, I want to look good or whatever, but it's not like I'm doing like, I'm just…yeah.*
>
> You're not doing anything extra that you wouldn't normally do? Cause I notice that sometimes it seems like people really try…
>
> *Yeah, I know that people are but like when I go out, I don't do that much, so what I am doing for the games I couldn't do a lot more cause I don't want to overdo it or whatever. But I know a lot of people want to look good when we have like TV games.*
>
> Cause you're on TV?
>
> *I guess a lot of people are watching and people are coming to the game, and you want to look good. I mean, the people that does that are probably the same people who do that outside of basketball too.*
>
> You don't think anybody does it just for the games?

> *Maybe they do it a little bit more, yes. I don't know. Yeah, I mean, I don't feel like it's that much on this team, but I had one girl on my team back home she would like always flat iron her hair hours before the game and put on makeup and everything. It's probably a lot of people that does that, but I don't really feel like on our team it is such a big deal. I mean everybody is doing their hair and all that, but it's not too much.*

Our back and forth is revealing on several levels. In referencing her own use of gender strategies, Karolina tells me that she puts on mascara because her eyes look tired, not solely because she wants to look good, although admittedly, "of course she does." When pushed a bit, she then qualifies her behavior further saying that she does not "do a lot more" for the games than she does in her everyday because she does not want to "overdo it." Karolina's decision to put on mascara for the game is thus about doing what she feels is routine for her (e.g. she does it every day), not about doing anything extra or feminine for competition that might make her appear masculine.

She utilizes similar reasoning in talking about others' decisions to wear make-up as well (e.g. "the same people who do it outside of basketball"), although when pushed, admits that some of that behavior might be more purposeful and less a matter of routine (e.g. "maybe they do it a little bit more"). Just as important as interpreting gender strategies as "natural," Karolina also distinguishes between strategies that are seemingly over the top and ones that are "not too much." Compared to her former teammate in her hometown who would flat iron her hair before games, Karolina and her teammates' emphasis on just doing their hair is interpreted as "not too much." Ensuring she and her teammates look presentable for televised competition by having their hair done or "just wearing mascara" is different for Karolina than her other teammate intentionally flat ironing her hair and "putting on make-up and everything."

The act of wearing make-up or styling one's hair on its own is not interpreted by most of the athletes at MWSU as conscious attempts at appearing (extra) feminine. Most of those behaviors are explained away as merely a result of their normal routines or as part of their individual personalities and what feels "natural." The degrees to which those behaviors are engaged with create distinctions between what is purposeful and what is natural and allow the athletes to separate themselves and their behaviors from others who are doing "extra" or doing things "on purpose." Of course, whether Karolina and her teammates are doing *more* for the game than they would otherwise (or more than other players on other teams) is not the point. The point, rather, is that even though putting on makeup is not at all about athletic performance, these athletes have to look "presentable" all the time.

More than just being something that is "natural," a number of MWSU athletes made sure to explain that their behavior was not an effort to "prove" anything. For example, as Tiffany explains:

> *I mean I think if there's a TV game, somebody might make an extra effort to go get their eyebrows arched, but that's just because you want to look nice on TV, not because you want to fit some mold or trying to go against the grain, you know what I mean?*

While Tiffany does not interpret someone making an extra effort to get their eyebrows arched as trying to "fit some mold" but rather, sees such behavior as an attempt at looking nice on television, the fact that most people who get their eyebrows arched are women is not a coincidence. Looking good, in this way, is really about looking feminine, despite Tiffany's objection. Arched eyebrows may "look good" but they don't *just* look good and they certainly don't look good objectively and devoid of meaning. Arched eyebrows look good precisely because they look feminine. And because they look

feminine, arched eyebrows become a symbol of attractiveness. Arched eyebrows (or mascaraed eyelashes), rather than being inherently attractive, are attractive because of the meanings attached to them, because of the mold they were derived from. Thus, while the act of getting her eyebrows arched might be meaningless for Tiffany- or, at best, a simple attempt to look nice on TV- the consequences of having arched eyebrows (or perhaps more importantly of *not* having them) are anything but meaningless.

Echoing similar sentiments as Tiffany, Naomi tells me how she wears make-up because it is "part of her personality":

> *I don't know how to explain it. It's weird…I mean I put makeup on before a game. I do that. I did that back home, too. But that's just like how I am as a person. But I don't really care about how people see me on the court.*
>
> So you don't do it because you want to look a certain way for…
>
> *No. No. I mean, I put makeup on all the time. That's just like how I am as a person, but I don't know. It's weird. I'm not going to like—if I want to wear heels, I'm going to wear heels today. But that's not because I'm trying to prove to you that I'm feminine. Or if I wear baggy clothes and stuff like that, that's because I mean that's just how I feel, and that's not because I'm a cool athlete or something like that. I mean...*
>
> You're not trying to like demonstrate anything.
>
> *Yeah. I'm not trying to prove anything to anyone*.
>
> Do you think that other people do things like that though?
>
> *I think so, yeah.*

Naomi sees her decision to wear make-up as an extension of her personality, obscuring the ways in which gendered behavior is learned behavior. As she says, she wears make-up "all the time" and compares choosing to wear make-up or heels to when she chooses to also wear baggy clothes- decisions based solely on how she feels in that particular moment. While she admits that other people probably engage in gender strategies to

prove or enhance their femininity, Naomi does not feel as though her actions are about trying to prove anything. Again, Naomi's interpretation of her actions is telling. Like Tiffany, Naomi views her decision making merely as the result of her individual personality or what she feels is "natural"- as she says, "If I want to wear heels, I'm going to wear heels today"- without recognizing that heels are a quintessential signifier of femininity. Wearing heels for Naomi might not be a deliberate attempt to "prove her femininity" but, by default, her femininity is proven by wearing them.

Moreover, while many of these athletes interpret their use of makeup as mere attempts at "looking good" or doing what is "normal" for them, this strategy is an important (albeit unconscious) act of agency in a context in which these women's gender performance and expressions of sexuality are continually surveilled and policed. Dellinger and Williams (1997) argue that women in the workplace offer a variety of reasons for why they wear makeup such as looking healthy, looking attractive for men, and to express competence (among others). Importantly, the authors argue that wearing makeup is a way to "assert autonomy within the structural constraints imposed by social institutions" where these women's gender performances are monitored and policed by their coworkers (153). As the authors argue, "women's use of makeup at work illustrates how women act as knowledgeable agents within institutional constraints" (Dellinger & Williams 1997: 175). Thus, even though the female athletes in my study did not view their use of makeup as much, like women in the workplace, these women are enacting agency within an institutional context that monitors and constrains them; performing heteronormativity through the use of makeup might be a form of self-policing as well as a way to access power and resources (Carli 2001; Ridgeway 2001).

In addition to makeup, many of the MWSU athletes discussed having their hair done as an important part of the appearance based compensation strategies they engaged in for games. For instance, Rowan and I had the following exchange when talking about whether she feels the need to look a certain way for competition:

> *No, um, I don't know. The most important thing I worry about is my hair. I don't know why but…*
>
> Like having it look good?
>
> *Uh, just not trying to go out there and be all nappy headed like a thug. Like be decent, like don't- uh, just have your hair done. Like I don't want to go out there and be like "Ugh, look at her. Like, Do you see her hair? Like she looks tacky." Like no, I need my hair done. Some guys have to gel it down, I have to have my hair done. But like if it's for practice, okay whatever, like my team is the only one that's goin' to see me. But if it's a game, no. There's millions of eyes out there so you know, I have to have my hair done.*
>
> Do you think other people feel like that? Or do you think that's expected of you?
>
> *I wouldn't say it's expected of me, but it is expected that I carry myself well. Other people, I don't know. I don't know. Cause some people go without doing their dreads, just nappy headed, I don't know.*

For Rowan, concern about having her hair done is about, as she says, looking "decent" and "not all nappy headed like a thug"- gendered and racialized concerns. Rowan is focused on whether other people- the millions of eyes out there- will see her and think she looks "tacky," rather than see her and think she looks unfeminine. Again, Rowan is not explicitly concerned with appearing feminine but with looking as though she "carries herself well," something she believes is expected of her.

Kyle echoes a similar sentiment when asked if she does anything special before games to look a certain way:

> *No. As long as I'm not looking a hot mess. I mean as long as I'm fine, my hair is okay, it's not perfect, but you know, I throw it back in a pony-tail and put my headband. I mean I wear headbands, so you're not really going to see much.*

Like Rowan, Kyle worries primarily about "not looking a hot mess" rather than looking masculine. Again, however, the line between looking a "hot mess" and looking unfeminine is blurry, at best. Therefore, what these athletes are perceiving as attempts at looking "decent," "presentable," are very much gender strategies, just as explicitly putting on make-up would be. While their motivations may appear different- wanting to look "good" versus "feminine"- the reality of gender means that for a woman to look good she must look feminine.

Prince tells me interestingly that she thinks being focused on "presentation" is something unique to MWSU:

> *Well, I feel like at MWSU, we kinda all do, but I think it's mainly at MWSU, you know? And I don't think it's so much as trying to look a certain kind of way, I think it's just kinda cleaning up for the game, you know? You don't want to go out there hair all nappy and stuff like that. You know, it just be like more to it than just about trying to put on kinda thing. It's more to it like, you know, I want myself to be presentable kinda thing whether I'm playing or whether I'm on the bench kinda thing. You know?*

Again, drawing on racialized notions of hair and hairstyles, Prince claims that her emphasis on her hair is about "cleaning up for the game," not about "trying to put on" (be feminine). Like Rowan, Prince's focus on her hair is about "cleaning up" and not wanting to "go out there all nappy." Looking presentable during competition, even if for just sitting on the bench as Jizeal mentioned, is the driving force behind Prince's attempt to maintain her dreadlocks. Offering a more practical explanation for why she feels like she needs to style her hair before the games, Karolina tells me:

No. I mean I always put my hair in a braid.

Just because?

Because I can't just have my hair in a ponytail. When I sweat, my hair gets stuck on my face and it gets in my eyes and stuff. So, I always like to put either a braid or a scrunchie in. I guess I make a braid before the games because that looks better than just putting like a scrunchie, but I really don't care. And I always put mascara on.

Karolina braids her long, blonde ponytail before the game so that it does not get in her eyes when she sweats, a practical solution to be sure. She does, however, acknowledge at the end of her comment that she tends to braid her hair rather than just use a scrunchie before the games because it "looks better." Her mention of also wearing mascara is a telling afterthought. It is clear that, for Karolina, her hair and make-up decisions before games are practical and about "looking good," whether consciously or not about looking feminine.

Sara similarly talks about being worried about how her hair looks. Unlike her teammates, however, she makes the explicit connection between ideas of looking "presentable" and being attractive to men:

No. No. I don't think about who's watching. The only thing I worry about is my hair. That's probably the most girliest I would get. My hair has to be at least presentable when the game starts. Because if I'm wearing my real hair out, by the time the game ends, it's horrible. That's why I keep braids all the time, because after workouts I like to look somewhat presentable. Because you know there are guys around this campus that you're going to have to be around all the time and sometimes you'll see right when you get out of workouts and you don't want to look rough because, you know, that's what you're attracted to. You don't want to look too bad.

Sara's keeps braids in her hair rather than having her real (natural) hair out because it is more manageable and because she perceives braids to be more "presentable" both during games and afterwards when there is a possibility she will run into men on campus. Sara

recognizes that her attempts to look "presentable" are directly linked to her desire to appear attractive to men and in doing so supports the notion that to look presentable means to look feminine and heterosexual.

Ultimately, most of the MWSU athletes engaged in some type of appearance based compensation strategy at one time or another. For these athletes, however, the distinction between purposefully engaging in strategies to appear feminine and taking part in routine feminizing activities was important. Hardly any of the athletes I spoke to outwardly acknowledged doing things in order to construct a feminine image for others. They spoke, rather, of doing certain things in order to "appear presentable," not to "prove anything." That these athletes are making sense of what they do by claiming they are just trying to "look good" or "look presentable" speaks to how gender becomes routine and naturalized. Rather than being unnecessary, performing heterofemininity has become less effortful and conscious and more routine. Engaging in strategies to appear feminine within the masculine sporting context is internalized as natural and normal- something they "just do."

Importantly, the use of appearance based compensation strategies- even when subconscious- can represent a form of agency. Like women who wear makeup in the workplace (Dellinger & Williams 1997) or "soften" their communication strategies to appear "nice" and competent (Carli 2001; Ridgeway 2001), female athletes who wear makeup and focus on how their hair is done are doing what they can within an institutional and societal context that surveils and constrains them. That they experience their own behaviors as natural and normalized does not necessarily mean they are not enacting agency. Rather, such interpretations highlight the ways in which structures of

gender and sexuality impact the everyday lived experience of women. Such practices can, however, reinforce inequality (Dellinger & Williams 1997; Ridgeway 2001) especially, I argue, when they take the form of more "severe" compensation strategies like body modification.

Some of the MWSU athletes' use of appearance based compensation strategies like wearing make-up and styling one's hair in a particular way in order to align closely to the hegemonic heterofeminine ideal might also be understood as a form of resistance. Given the ways in which black women have been historically kept out of hegemonic notions of femininity, it is possible that efforts by black female athletes to conform to idealized notions of (white) femininity through their appearance routines represent strategies of resistance rather than compensation. That is, it is possible that by engaging in these types of strategies, black athletes are rejecting notions of hegemonic femininity as belonging solely to white women.

While none of the athletes expressed explicit intent to engage in appearance based strategies in order to disrupt the ways in which normative understandings of femininity are racialized, it is more than likely that such efforts represent attempts to "maintain or regain some agency in their lives as they try such human rewards as pleasure, fun, and autonomy" (Cohen 2004: 38). As Cathy Cohen (2004) argues, "people living with limited resources may use the restricted agency available to them to create autonomous spaces absent the continuous stream of power from outside authorities or normative structures" (40). As such, black female athletes' use of appearance based strategies represent efforts to carve out autonomous space within a context in which they have always been situated slightly outside.

"I Don't Want to Get Freaky" / Body Modification Compensation Strategies

In addition to appearance based compensation strategies, a number of the athletes in my study engaged in body modification compensation strategies, the purpose of which was to diminish bulky muscle mass and achieve the ideal of female muscularity: slim and toned. As outlined in previous chapter, the athletes' bodies were a major point of contention for many of the women in my study as it represented the embodiment of masculinity. Possessing a significant amount of muscle mass was a key aspect of whether the athletes felt as though their athletic and gender identities conflicted and one of the primary reasons behind engaging in compensation type gender strategies for both former and current athletes. Feeling ambivalent about their bodies- simultaneously empowered and hindered- was a consistent theme throughout the athletes' interviews. Seemingly contradictory discussions about bodies often involved competing and unresolved feelings. These athletes recognized that their bodies represented an enormous achievement that they worked incredibly hard to develop and felt proud of what their bodies were capable of. However, most of the athletes also knew that their bodies placed them outside of the boundaries of heterofemininity and, in various ways, attempted to construct and curtail their training in order to mediate their contradictory selves.

The MWSU women's basketball team lifted weights regularly throughout the season, following pre-determined training regimens constructed by their strength and conditioning coach, Brandon Gray. During one of my observations of their weight training, former athlete Sophie came into the weight room to work out. During her workout, we began making small talk and I asked her about why she was focusing so much on body weight exercises rather than using free weights or one of the many weight

machines. She told me about how, during her collegiate career, she was "big" but was not any longer and wanted to stay that way. When I asked her why she doesn't lift more and try to get big again, especially since she was playing professionally, she replied: "*I don't want to get freaky*."

Other athletes at MWSU had similar concerns and attempted to alter their lifting regimens to allow for less muscle mass build up. For instance, after the MWSU season was over, Rowan and I had the following discussion about weight training:

> Did you ever try to like do anything so that you didn't put on muscle?
>
> *Yeah, now.*
>
> Now you do?
>
> *Now I don't lift. I don't do anything upper body. I tried to lose my arms but they keep saying, "No, you're still big." I try to do everything lower body.*
>
> But if it was up to you, you just wouldn't lift arms ever again?
>
> *No. I haven't yet. Since my last game, probably. I guess I took a week off and then I started back that full week and did a couple upper body workouts. But other than that, after that one week I was like "No." But it's [her muscle mass] still not gone so.*
>
> So you want it to be gone completely?
>
> *I mean just flat, like…*
>
> Okay, no muscles?
>
> *Oh my god, yeah. [Laughs]*
>
> Right. Do you worry about how you look in that way?
>
> *Hm, no.*
>
> You don't?
>
> *It's whatever, I don't really care.*

But you don't want big arms?

Yeah, I don't want big arms at all. I mean if it's there and if it's going to happen, then okay, I'll have to deal with it. But other than that, no, I don't want big arms if it was up to me.

Rowan aspires to have arms devoid of muscle and attempts to adjust her workouts, focusing only on lower body exercises. She is attempting to place herself back within the boundaries of appropriate heterofemininity by losing her muscle mass. Kameron, who also possess a significant amount of muscle mass, echoes Rowan's feelings of body ambivalence, particularly in response to the nickname she received by her teammates, "Hulk":

This is more so just me personally. I feel like the bigger I get the less feminine I look. That always bothers me. Like "Oh, you're so ripped!" When a guy tells me "Oh, you're bigger than me here," that just bothers me to the point where I have had conversations with our weight trainer and I am like "Yo, you need to give me less reps or something. I cannot keep getting this big." So I guess that's me, my psyche on that. That's just how I feel personally about it. No, I really don't like the name Hulk, but it stuck. I don't allow anybody to call me that besides my teammates. You know? At the same time too though, although I don't really like it just because I feel like it takes away from my femininity, I also look at it like "Well I could be fat and sloppy, but yet you're making fun of me because I'm strong and I'm athletic and I'm fit."

You would prefer not to have muscles?

Just not as big. If I could still be strong and still be a great athlete and not be like as physically or visually ripped or as big as I am to the point where I've been deemed "Hulk".

At what point did you start feeling like, 'Okay, I like my body and I like the way it looks. I'm fit.' to 'Okay maybe this is a little bit too much.'?

Well I got the nickname "Hulk" like literally my freshman year so I was already pretty strong, definitely the strongest out of the freshman who came in with me. But I guess I really didn't express this concern until this year with Brandon, when I started to get feedback from people like "Oh, you're bigger than me."

Like men in particular?

Yes, in particular. They will see a picture and say, "Dang you need to stop lifting weights." And I think to myself "I would if I could but I can't. This is what I do."

So do men have a problem with that?

Yeah. "Shut up! Stop talking about my body. Stop talking about my muscles. Don't grab my arm!" I hate when boys go like this [squeezing arm motion]. Don't touch my arms!

Like strangers?

Not strangers but like guys I talk to. But I'm not insecure. It's just weird. I will definitely use to my advantage. Yeah, I'm bigger and I could beat you down or catch me on the court and I'll muscle you. In the weight room I'm competitive because that is who I am, but when it comes to being feminine or when it comes to men then it's kind of like "Yeah I don't really want to be this big." Yeah, I would say it's just with men in particular. I just feel like in that stereotypical man-woman relationship, the woman shouldn't be as big, or bigger, than the guy. And like some of the guys I've encountered recently, it bothers me when they continue to point it out all the time. I don't think they do it to poke fun. I have had a guy tell me he loves my body, he loves the fact that I'm so fit and muscular to the point where he's like "I gotta get bigger than you," so he's hitting the weight room every day too. I think he likes my body, but I personally don't like it when I continue to hear about it. Or, you know, I already get called "Hulk" every day. I don't need my guy friends to say something about it every day.

Our exchange highlights Kameron's deep ambivalence about her body, an ambivalence that stems from persistent monitoring and policing- by teammates and male acquaintances- of the way she embodies gender, specifically masculinity. One the one hand, Kameron feels proud and empowered by her body and its capabilities- the positive side of being the "hulk." As she says, "I could be fat and sloppy" but she's not. She is an incredibly powerful and talented athlete and she feels good about that. Moreover, she recognizes the functionality of having a strong body as an athlete; she can "muscle" (e.g.

push around) weaker opponents with ease. Her feelings are consistent with past work that has explored how female athletes are empowered by their athletic bodies (Heywood & Dworkin 2003; Krane et al. 2004). On the other hand, however, Kameron's embodiment of masculinity through her physique is consistently commented on, especially by men- the negative side of the "hulk." Male friends and acquaintances regularly and explicitly police her gender and sexuality by claiming she is "too big." In some cases, these men physically touch her body and, in doing so, enact an especially aggressive form of policing. By telling Kameron she should "stop lifting weights" because she possesses more muscle mass than they do, these men are sending messages that Kameron's muscular body is not heterosexually attractive because it is masculine (even more masculine than their bodies). Kameron is thus left feeling a deep sense of ambivalence about her body; she feels good about what her body is capable of and bad about how her body is perceived by others, mostly men.

Of course, the larger point here is that as an elite-level athlete, Kameron should only have to feel concerned about her body as it relates to her ability to perform athletically at the highest level possible. The fact that she, and so many other female athletes, are made to feel so ambivalent about their bodies that they seek to physically change them is unnerving and ultimately speaks to the absurdity of the way in which gender inequality works on a structural level. Nevertheless, the commentary Kameron receives from others makes her want to engage in strategies to decrease her muscle mass. As a result, Kameron enlisted the help of MWSU strength and conditioning coach, Brandon, to help her adjust her training regimen- a serious compensation type strategy of body modification. In fact, both Rowan and Kameron participated in different weight

training workouts than their teammates because they expressed so much distaste with their physicality and embodiment of masculinity. While their muscle mass and strength had positive implications for their athletic success, it had negative implications for their heterosexiness since muscle mass is so intimately connected to masculinity.

I asked Brandon about Rowan's and Kameron's reactions to their bodies and about female athletes' general perceptions of possessing muscle mass. Before I finished my initial question, he began smiling and nodding his head. When I asked him why, he said:

> *Well, it's just because you hear it all the time, especially and obviously definitely different between the women and the men. Women, they get nervous- "I'm getting too big and bulking up too much." And there is a fine line, don't get me wrong. And but one thing you have to do, you have to talk to them. You have to explain to them why we're doing things. I mean I'm not here -- we're not here to train people to be body builders. We're not training to be Olympic lifters. We're training to be better athletes. And so they have to be very fit. Now, everybody's body is different. Some people respond -- they blow up. Some people, they're real thin. They may be thin their entire time. I mean everybody's body is just a little different and how they respond is different. So there is a fine line. You try to work with them and tell them, for example, Kameron, and especially right now, she's really getting kind of big. Not in a bad way, but for her, she would be better off if she leaned up a little more… There are some that do. They get -- I mean they literally get too muscle bound. It doesn't help their game, especially with something like basketball and their shooting and things like that. If they get too muscle bound, it's not going to help their game. So there are some people, depending on how their bodies respond, yes, they do need to back off.*
>
> Do you think they're thinking that though? When Kameron comes to you and says to you, "Brandon, I'm getting too big," is that because it's messing up her shooting?
>
> *No. I don't think so. It's more about the look. It's like you said a minute ago- "I'm looking manly, I'm getting too muscular."*
>
> How many of them struggle with that issue versus how many like you said, accept it and feel confident in themselves about it?

> *I would say out of every team, there's always a couple. There will always be a couple that will have a problem, no matter what sport you're dealing with, especially on the female side. There will always be a couple that will have that problem. Yeah, no matter what sport it is, whether it's 10 athletes, 15 athletes there's going to be always be at least two that are going to have that type of issue.*
>
> Are they receptive to that?
>
> *Some. Some are not. Some will fight it. Some will fight it. It ends up kind of being -- a lot ends up being the individual and the sport. Like I've had some in track that felt that way and it got to be such an issue, it was like "Fine, we'll back off" because you get tired of hearing it and just allow them to let it go then. Some there will be, especially if they're in more of a team sport, then no, not so much. You can't just let it go. You've got to say "Well, I'm sorry, we're going to be doing something. I'll work it where if you want, we'll do some body weight stuff. I'm like but you've got to understand…"*

As a strength and conditioning coach, Brandon discusses the various ways he witnesses female athletes struggling with perceiving themselves as "too big" or "too bulky" and how they attempt to deal with embodying masculinity in those ways. As a coach, Brandon attempts to remind the players that they're training to be athletes, not supermodels- as he says "you've got to talk to them." He does, however, acknowledge that there are times in which their resistance becomes too difficult and he allows players to "back off" of training so they can alter the course of their body modification.

Interestingly, Brandon discusses how too much muscle mass from a practical standpoint is not good for any athlete but, when pressed, admits that the female athletes he works with are usually not concerned about their musculature from a logistical standpoint. Rather, these women come to him concerned about looking "too manly" and therefore, ask him for help in re-structuring their weight lifting regimens. Kameron and Rowan sought help from Brandon by asking him to alter their workouts and he did so by having them do exercises that focused solely on lifting their body weight or by doing less

repetitions or sets of a particular exercise, making it less likely that they would continue to develop significant muscle mass.

Brandon's role in the gender strategies utilized by Rowan and Kameron is meaningful because it highlights just how much pressure these athletes feel to not look masculine and to what lengths they, and their coaches, will often go to maintain femininity. Even someone like Brandon, a coach who has dedicated his life to training athletes to craft their bodies into tools with which to accomplish athletic feats, has trouble resisting the pressures from elite-level female athletes who are determined to alter their training in order to remain within the boundaries of appropriate heterofemininity.

Other MWSU athletes, while not specifically engaging in body modification types of gender strategies themselves, discussed understanding why their teammates would feel ambivalent about their bodies and want to change the way they look. For example, Eve, tells me:

> *Yeah, like it was at a point when we was doing weight lifting, where Brandon didn't have her [Kameron] or Rowan lifting anymore cause they didn't want to get anymore ripped.*
>
> So they just stopped lifting?
>
> *I mean they still did, like they worked out but they just didn't lift anymore.*
>
> Why?
>
> *I mean because like I guess they still want to feel like women…And you know like once you lift so much like- Rowan has pecks. Like she doesn't have breasts anymore but like she has pecks. So like once you lift so much like you stop having breasts, and that's very disturbing. But yeah so I mean, it takes off the womanly characteristics, I guess, because you become so muscular. And they don't wanna be- like they want to be toned but they don't want to be muscular. Which is so stupid to me.*
>
> Is it?

> *Yeah, cause like if you toned or muscular, same thing. Of course you don't want to look like a body builder…*

Eve claims that her teammates stopped lifting weights because they still wanted to "feel like women," something they presumably could not do if they embodied masculinity through muscle mass. She goes on to detail how Rowan's pectoral muscles had become so developed that her breasts looked like "pecks." In this way, not only is Rowan's body unfeminine, but it is bordering on un-female since her body is developing male characteristics such as "pecks." Eve's commentary is interesting because while she thinks the strategies used by Rowan and Kameron are "stupid," she simultaneously describes their musculature as "very disturbing." In this way, Eve understands why her teammates want to alter their weight training.

While many of the athletes I spoke to were theoretically "disturbed" by having the kind of muscle mass possessed by Rowan and Kameron (and thus, understood why their teammates would want to get smaller), many did not personally engage in body modification compensation strategies because they did not believe that their individual physiologies would allow them to achieve such mass. As Brandon told me in the above quote: *"Everybody's body is just a little different and how they respond is different."* Jizeal, who was initially nervous about developing muscle mass, tells me:

> *When I first started I was like "Oh my gosh I do not want to look like Rowan, like no." But I mean, I don't have that body type to get like that so I know I'm never going to get that size, so I don't really care. I mean I lift…*
>
> So what's up with that? Do you think that it looks weird?
>
> *Personally I wouldn't want to be walking around looking like that.*
>
> Okay, let's say that you had that body type, you wouldn't want to get that big, why?

> *That's too big for me. They have like nice stomachs. I would take they stomach but they arms are like mm-mm [shaking head]. I like being feminine. You know, I like my feminine body. I don't want to be all cut–I wouldn't mind being cut—but I wouldn't want to be big with it, too big.*
>
> Like mass?
> *Yeah like when you wear certain things you know you look like a man—which I'm not saying they look like a man- but like you just don't look as feminine with it on.*
>
> Do you think the other people ever give them a hard time about that kind of stuff?
>
> *Every time we go somewhere. Like last year we went to some park- me, Tiffany, Kameron, and Naomi- and three little girls walked up to us and was like "Oh my gosh you guys play basketball? Do you play football?" like to Kameron. But like a lot of people say stuff to her and every time we go somewhere if she have on like a little spaghetti strap shirt or something like that, people be like "Whoa" like, you know. You don't expect that from girls.*

Here Jizeal discusses the various ways female athletes' bodies get surveilled and policed, leading many to engage in strategies designed to modify their bodies and their resulting embodiment of masculinity. Karolina echoes Jizeal's sentiments when asked if she ever tries to cut back on her lifting workouts:

> *Uh uh [shaking head]. I want to get a lot bigger than I am right now.*
>
> You do?
>
> *And like, I don't think I will ever like- I don't think it is possible for me to be like Rowan and too big. I'm not saying that Rowan looks like a man, but I don't think I can get like- like my genes won't let me. So, I'm not scared that I will look like a man. If I looked like Rowan, I would probably look like a man because I don't have boobs or ass or anything [laughing]. But like right now, I want to gain weight and gain a lot more muscle. So right now I just want to lift as much as I can.*

Interestingly, Karolina says she wants to get "a lot bigger" but presumably only because she believes her genetic makeup will not allow her to get as big as her teammate Rowan

who she describes as "too big." While she claims she does not think Rowan looks like a man, Karolina believes that if she looked like Rowan she would herself look like a man because she doesn't "have boobs or ass or anything." It seems then that Karolina's desire to "lift as much as she can" in order to gain muscle is due in part to the fact that she thinks she isn't at risk of becoming "manly."

When asked if she ever felt the need to adjust her lifting workouts so she wouldn't get "too big," former athlete Tiffanie similarly told me:

> *Um, I was like "I wanna lift what I wanna lift and what I feel comfortable with." I mean, I wanted to get stronger, so and whether or not that meant "Okay, I'm gonna start looking bulky and huge, then I'll address that if and when that happens." So, but yeah, I always wanted to get stronger just because, you know, I'm small, and in order for me to I guess hold my own, I needed to be strong…I mean, some of us were like "Oh, yeah we don't want to lift a bunch cause we don't wanna get like huge." I mean, it's very rare I think, it's all genetic. So, if your body make-up doesn't allow you to get bulky, you're not gonna get bulky no matter how much weight you lift basically.*

At first Tiffanie seems to express no hesitation to lifting and that she approached her workouts based on what she felt most comfortable lifting. She does admit, however, that she and some of her teammates discussed being concerned about how much they lifted out of fear of getting "huge." Tiffanie did not engage in gender strategies by modifying her lifting workouts because she did not feel as though her genetic make-up would lead to her getting bulky no matter how much she lifted.

The responses from Karolina, Jizeal, and Tiffanie reveal that even though only some of the athletes engaged in body modification strategies such as altering weight-training workouts in order to counter masculinization, most (if not all) at one point or another thought about- were afraid of- whether they were getting/would get "too bulky." Even the athletes who did not believe their bodies were capable of getting "too big" were

prepared to engage in the necessary strategies, as Tiffanie said, "if and when that happened."

Like the appearance based compensation strategies outlined above, athletes' use of body modification strategies represent attempts at enacting agency within "structural constraints imposed by institutions" (Dellinger & Williams 1997; Cohen 2004). These strategies, however, are not subconscious and the athletes do not make sense of their behavior as doing what is "natural" or "normal." Rather, they see their behavior as attempts to get them *back* to looking like what is "natural" or "normal." Moreover, while the use of makeup or paying particular attention to one's hair is unrelated to athletic performance in any way, such practices are also not damaging to athletic performance (barring, for example, any temporary vision impairments from runny mascara or accidental headband mishaps). Not partaking in certain forms of training in order to lose muscle mass (and strength), however, is directly related and damaging to athletic performance. Thus, body modification compensation strategies are both acts of agency and acts of inequality reproduction; engaging in body modification may make these athletes appear as more competent heterosexual women but it also makes them potentially less competent as athletes.

"You Can Save That Shit for the Birds"/ Resistance Strategies

Not all athletes in my study engaged in compensation based gender strategies. Indeed, many of the current and former athletes engaged in various forms of resistance strategies, absolving themselves in some ways from the task of achieving heterofemininity (Chen 1999). These athletes acknowledged the pressure faced by female athletes to engage in compensation type gender strategies and recognized the use of such

strategies by their teammates. Most did not, however, feel the need or desire to utilize these types of strategies themselves. Even in moments where these women spoke explicitly of feeling embroiled with the cultural contradiction of female athleticism and of facing lesbian stereotyping, they resisted engaging in heterofeminizing practices like wearing makeup or altering workouts.

Some of the athletes who utilized resistance strategies did so by being expressly critical of others- "resistance through criticism"- like their teammates, who engaged in compensation strategies, despite recognizing the pressure female athletes are under to perform heterofemininity. Other resisters spoke of feeling so committed to their "jobs"- "resistance through commitment"- as basketball players that, even when conflicted, chose not to "interfere" with what was required of them as elite-level athletes. And some athletes engaged in what I call "ideological resistance," rejecting heterofemininity primarily because they do agree with the ideological basis for valuing heterofemininity above all other forms of gender expression.

Importantly, some of the athletes who engaged in resistance strategies *also* utilized compensation strategies. Engaging in multiple gender strategies simultaneously or switching between strategies is not uncommon (Hochschild 1989; Chen 1999). The use of more than one gender strategy illuminates female athletes' attempts at managing the dynamic and multiple "problems" they are faced with: a sporting context that values the performance of masculinity and a societal context that values the performance of heterofemininity. Utilizing different gender strategies serves as a way for female athletes to "succeed" as competent women and competent athletes.

"What's the Point In It?" / Resistance Through Criticism

A number of the athletes in my study spoke critically of the ways in which other athletes engaged in compensation strategies. While they often acknowledged feeling conflicted, for instance, by what their bodies *actually* looked like versus what their bodies were *supposed* to look like these women expressed various reasons for why resisted utilizing body modification strategies. Former athlete and current coach Dee Dee, for example, laughs as she tells me:

> *Like you know how- Michelle, you a girl, you know how girls are. They want to, especially some that call themselves, you know, being real girly and real feminine, you know they want to keep that…*
>
> Figure?
>
> *Yeah. I mean, because I ain't gonna lie. Damn, my arms are huge.*
>
> You're very fit though. You don't like that?
>
> *I don't mind them, but like for instance, I was out this weekend and ugh, and I hate when, I ain't gonna lie, I hate when people be making comments about my arms. But I was out, you know, doing something with my brother, I think we maybe went to the movies, but like three people stopped me like, "Damn, what you be doing? Lifting weights?" I was like, "Why? Stop looking at my arms!" [Laughs]*
>
> Really?
>
> *I get it all the time. It's…it's not nothing. I mean I don't want to say I'm ashamed or anything, but I do, I get it all the time. It's constantly.*
>
> So you get people, on the street, random strangers coming up to you saying, "Damn, your arms are big!"?
>
> *Yeah, I do, all the time. And maybe they might not say damn, but they be like, "You lift weights?" or like I holler back, like I ain't gonna lie, and yes, I played basketball so I guess it's okay, but I can't go anywhere without somebody asking me, "You play sports or a sport?" Like, it don't matter, nowhere.*

> Right. Did you ever go, like when you were playing, "Let me go try and make sure people know that I can still be feminine"?
>
> *Nope.*
>
> Nobody did that?
>
> *Like, I'm not gonna lie, me and my teammates, we didn't care. So, no…and like there would be times like, obviously the majority of the time we were in our sweats or whatever but there would be times where we would go out and we would, you know, get cute or whatever, but we wasn't doing it for that reason. We were just doing it because we about to go out. But there were times where we was like, "Whatever." Because I'm sorry, nobody's got time for that. I mean I could see if I was a regular student, like it's different, like cause I ain't gonna lie, we would be in class and you might be sitting next to a regular student that ain't got nothing else to do besides go to class and they don't have to do half the stuff we do and they might be in there, looking cute, trying to go to class, their little 10:00 class. We wasn't doing that. [Laughing] Oh no! We was like "whatever." We just had like, we would have practice at 6:00am sometime. Nobody trying to put on no clothes. So, nah, that was never…to be honest, there was never a time where…which is weird because you know, you might see some people that try to conform so they'll be like, "I don't want people to stereotype me," but no, we never did that.*

Our exchange highlights several important issues. Dee Dee begins by discussing how she feels about embodying the cultural contradiction of female athleticism or, more specifically, embodying masculinity with her "huge arms." She also underscores how, like Kameron or Rowan, she is consistently policing by others through commentary on her physique. When asked, however, if she has ever felt the need to do anything to (over)emphasize her femininity, she tells me "Nope." In fact, Dee Dee explains that apart from "getting cute" when her and her teammates would go out, most of the time they felt apathetic about expressing femininity by appearing "cute." Comparing herself and her teammates to "regular students" who were not constrained by early morning practice times and packed schedules with little room in between obligations, Dee Dee admits, "Nobody trying to put on no clothes." The decision not to engage in gender strategies for

Dee Dee was not because she did not feel conflicted or bothered by others' perceptions and policing of her gender performance- she clearly did. Rather, her schedule demands left little time and energy for worrying about "looking cute," presumably even if she wanted to.

Other athletes I interviewed were more explicitly critical of athletes who wore make-up for games or attempted to alter training regimens to modify their bodies. Former athlete, Tiffanie, tells me:

> *Um, I mean yeah, there were definitely girls on the team that would put make-up on and all that stuff like before games and everything. And I was just like, "What are you doing? Like, you're gonna sweat, it's gonna come off. What's the point in it?" I never understood that. But that's just, that was them. That's what made them feel good and whatever. I mean, they just didn't see a problem with it, and I'm like "Okay, that's fine." I don't understand it.*
>
> But, why do you think they did that?
>
> *I don't know. I mean, probably because – I mean I'm just thinking of them and their personality and what not – probably because they feel the need, for whatever reason, to look good or want to look good. Um, I don't know, it makes them feel better.*
>
> Better about what? Just better in general?
>
> *Just better about themselves. Like still, I don't totally know, but I would say just better about themselves is what I would think is the reason why they do it.*
>
> Do you think it's because on the one hand you're playing sports and you're kind of, you know, you're being aggressive and masculine, so you're trying to balance it out?
>
> *Yeah, I guess so. I mean even, you know, even the professional women that play. I mean, like when you see a close up of them, you know, and the camera zooms in on them, they have make-up on and stuff, too. I don't know if like for them it's different because they have this image that maybe the league wants them to like uphold or whatever but you know. Like I said I don't see the need to do that when you're about to be sweating and running around. Basketball's not a dainty sport, so.*

> But you never felt compelled to put on some lipstick before you played or anything like that?
>
> *Uh no. Not at all. [Laughing]*

As Tiffanie's response highlights, how the "problem" of female athleticism gets defined shapes the imagined solutions. Like Dee Dee, Tiffanie does not deny that many athletes feel conflicted about looking masculine through sport participation and, as a result, feel the *need* to put on make-up to appear feminine. She does not, however, personally feel the need to do such things because she doesn't see a problem with being sweaty or not looking "dainty" For Tiffanie then, it seems that she resists gender strategies because she doesn't frame the problem of female athleticism in the same way as her teammates; she understands that the sport of basketball is not feminine and does not see anything wrong with appearing masculine.

Former athlete and Sophie, tells me that she resists compensation strategies like makeup because she is not attempting to "look straight" and because they are fundamentally impractical in a sporting context where athletes sweat:

> *I don't know. It's the same thing like people putting on make-up before the game. I'm like, why? You're going to sweat it out. Like, I don't know why people try to be so pretty when they do this. Just because they wanna make it more feminine, you know? I don't understand...*
>
> Did you ever do that?
>
> *No! No! I would never do that.*
>
> Why not?
>
> *Because when I play basketball, I don't think about what I look like. I'm not tryin' to look as straight as possible, you know?*
>
> Did your teammates do that?

Yeah. All the time.

Really? Like full make-up?

You know, not like full make-up. Some mascara, I mean, a little glitter here and a little, like, you know. And then they'd sweat it all out, running down.

Here Sophie articulates why she believes female athletes' engage in compensation strategies- to "look pretty" or heterofeminine. As an out lesbian, however, Sophie does not feel the need to try to "look as straight as possible" by compensating while she's playing basketball. Rowan expresses a similar distaste for wearing makeup during competition for issues of practicality and because she thinks it's "stupid":

Yeah, I don't see how people can do that- wear makeup in games. You sweat too much.

Right, but why do you think they do?

I really don't know, I think they just want to look pretty on the court. I don't know. I wouldn't say I care about my appearance but I'm not gonna go out there looking tacky as hell.

You think that's tacky to wear makeup?

No, it's just stupid.

[Laughs] Why?

Because it's like "What are you doing?" You go out there to get rough, like you don't go out there to "Oh, I broke a nail. Like oh, my mascara's smearin." Like come on, "Move!" [Furrows brow and waves hand back and forth].

Rowan resists trying to appear heterofeminine- "looking pretty"- on the court because she believes that serious athletes should be focused on their athletic performance, not whether their mascara is smearing or their nail breaks. Rowan's hand waive at the end of her comment as she says "Like come on, 'move!" represents her feelings even more clearly

than her words. She waves her hand back and forth as if to brush those out of the way whom she believes entertain behaviors that are "tacky" or "stupid."

Rowan's case is interesting because she engages in all three forms of gender strategies, despite being specifically critical of others' use of makeup. For example, Rowan is very strategic about the size and placement of her many tattoos- an appearance based compensation strategy- because she wants to appear "ladylike." Moreover, she engages in significant body modification compensation strategies like altering her weight lifting workouts in order to decrease her muscle mass- the embodiment of masculinity- and align more closely to the heterofeminine ideal. Despite partaking in these strategies, Rowan simultaneously criticizes appearance based compensation strategies like wearing makeup. Rowan's example is meaningful because it illustrates the ways in which female athletes can not only engage in multiple, even conflicting, gender strategies at the same time (e.g. resistance *and* compensation) but how they can adopt partial strategies, selecting out the elements they feel are necessary or desirable and discarding the ones they do not.

"Drinking the Kool-Aid"/ Resistance Through Commitment

Another way in which female athletes engaged in resistance was though idealized notions of commitment. These athletes recognized the pressure placed upon them to perform heterofemininity and resisted, opting out of attempts to align with hegemonic notions of heterofemininity. They did so by focusing their attention not on being heterofeminine but on doing what was necessary to achieve their athletic potential. In some cases, athletes engaged in partial and reluctant resistance; these athletes resisted in action (e.g. they did not engage in compensation strategies) but not in ideology (e.g. they

wanted to or whished they could). For these women, if their sport required them to gain muscle mass through intense weight training, they accepted the "consequence" of embodying masculinity because they saw themselves as fully committed to being successful at their sport.

These athletes were not unaffected by pressures to perform heterofemininity; rather, they pushed back, albeit at times reluctantly, against such pressures by placing more importance on being successful athletes than on being successfully heterofeminine women. Former athlete, Danielle, for instance tells me:

> *I had teammates like that [who used compensation strategies]. I mean it wasn't me. I actually got our teams Iron Woman Award for dedication in the weight room. And my strength coach was like one of my best friends in college. He was awesome. He had me on Creatine one summer, and I got my max up, like highest girl max he's ever had and all that kind of stuff. I was not afraid. I loved the weight room. I loved it. I was not afraid of it. But I did have teammates that would – you know, here I am like, shrugging 45 pound dumbbells and I'm not the biggest girl on the team- there are the biggest on the team that are grabbing like 25s and 30s. And I'm like, "I know you guys can do more than that." "Well I don't wanna get football player shoulders." And I definitely saw a lot of that. It was annoying. [Laughs]*

Even though Danielle wasn't "afraid" of lifting heavy weights, she does understand that lifting weights leads to the development of muscle mass and, as such, can be "scary" for women. Embodying masculinity though having "football player shoulders" is not a desirable trait for women who want to appear heterofeminine. Despite understanding that the female athlete paradox is complicated, Danielle was firmly committed to her training- she took muscle mass building supplements and worked to have the highest "max" (maximum amount of weight lifted) of any female athlete her strength coach had ever seen. Danielle engaged in resistance by placing her desire to be strong over her desire to

be heterofeminine. That she "loved the weight room" probably impacted her ability to comfortably engage in resistance as well.

Former athlete Tiffanie, who mentioned earlier not wanting to get "too huge," resisted strategies designed to place her close to the heterofeminine ideal such as opting out weight training because she wanted to get stronger in order to be more successful at her sport. As she says: *"I always wanted to get stronger just because, you know, I'm small, and in order for me to hold my own, I needed to be strong."* "Holding her own" while competing in her sport thus becomes more important for Tiffanie than trying to appear heterofeminine. Thus, even though she thought about how weight lifting would make her look, she did it anyway. Importantly, as Tiffanie also mentioned earlier, she never felt that her "genes" would allow her to get "too big," which could by why she, like Danielle, seemed to easily engage in resistance.

Unlike Danielle and Tiffanie, former athlete and coach, Jackie, articulates a more reluctant form of resistance. As she claims, she "drank the Kool-Aid," buying into notions of commitment that she needed to do "whatever it took" to be better, even if she didn't like the way she looked as a result:

> *Yeah! Yeah, I mean I think I definitely drank the Kool-Aid in terms of like, I was willing to do whatever, you know, put on weight, muscle. You know, I drank protein shakes four times a day and then I was gonna be better and get on the court, I think. But, no I mean, I definitely, I know I didn't look in the mirror and necessarily liked the way I looked going all throughout college. But I can remember just consciously being like "this is almost a sacrifice that I'm doing for basketball." And, you know, I wish that wasn't the case. I wish, you know, I was strong but also, I don't think it'd be true if I said I loved the way I looked…I definitely was more concerned about, just kind of the incongruency between what was best for me for basketball versus what I wanted to look like outside of basketball… In college, number one, I wanted to do well in basketball. I also wanted to look good for, you know, guys. And for myself as well, but obviously it's also that attraction… You know, over the summer and stuff, getting in the*

> *gym and lifting and putting on weight and, you know, sprint work and stuff. That was more what was gonna get me ready for basketball, which is, you know, obviously what I did. But I didn't feel like that was what was gonna make me look my best.*

As she outlines in detail, sacrifice for her sport meant doing things that made Jackie feel conflicted about her body because putting on weight and muscle to be strong did not translate into heterofeminine attractiveness to men. Despite this, she consciously decided to absolve herself of the task of achieving heterofemininity (at least while in college) so she could do well at basketball. She drank protein shakes four times a day, suffered through grueling sprint workouts, and lifted weights to put on muscle mass because she felt deeply committed to her sport. And while she did so reluctantly, she did so nonetheless.

Current athlete, Naomi, echoes similar sentiments as Jackie. She actively considers how her physique changes with her weight training but admits, "that never stops her":

> Do you ever feel like that like you don't want to lift the weights because you don't want to get big?
>
> *No. Not really. But I mean I build muscle pretty easily, so sometimes when I lift I'm like "Oh my gosh, my shoulders." Like I've been shaped up basically since I got here. I was very—and I've never been skinny. I've been pretty big, but I've never had like muscle definition really, and I can see it and I'm like "Oh my gosh, I'm getting big." But that never stops me though.*
>
> Like what are you feeling at that moment?
>
> *I don't know. It's just like you look in the mirror and if you put on a tank top, you're like "Oh my gosh, I look like an athlete. Like I look strong." But then again, I'm proud of it at the same time. Of course you want to put on a dress and feel like you're not like—people don't look at you and be like "Oh, you're big." But like it doesn't stop me though, and I know people say that too like coming to college, like you're probably going to gain at least 10 pounds in pure muscle weight. And this is the four years, you're just going to have to deal with it. I mean it's a part of it and that*

> *goes back to like this is a job, and like you can't hold back because—I don't know. I mean I don't feel like that should even be in your mindset that you don't want to do certain things because of the way you look. I mean of course you may get insecure and stuff or you may not like it, but you better deal with it. [Laughing]*

Naomi is not immune to feeling the pressures of conforming to a heterofeminine ideal. She feels proud of her accomplishments yet is ultimately ambivalent about her embodiment of masculinity- her "oh my gosh" moments. While giving her pause, those moments are fleeting when she remembers that basketball is her "job." Naomi, like many others, is concerned about looking "big" in a dress or a tank top. She does not engage in resistance in the same way as other athletes. Rather, Naomi's resistance mirrors Jackie's- a reluctant, sometimes wavering choice to "deal with it," at least for the four years she has committed to playing basketball.

Former athlete, Elise, talks similarly about her job and "doing what they told her to do":

> *I mean, now looking back on it, I'm like "God, I was huge in college." My strength coach was huge and into Olympic lifting. And we did, you know, a ton of Olympic lifting. I don't know how I fit into clothes. I was big. But I never really worried about it. I was working hard, you know, I was on scholarship, I was doing what they told me to do. You know, nobody ever, as far as people outside of the athletic community, nobody ever said anything to me about, you know like "Man, you're too big," you know? Anything about me being a girl and having muscles or, you know, that kind of thing. Nobody on my team was really like that either. We were always having competitions between one another to see who could squat the most, you know, or whose thighs were bigger. We never really had any of that.*

Retrospectively, Elise believes she was "huge" and wonders how she fit into clothes. But during her time as an athlete, she admits that she (nor her teammates) did not worry about being "too big" and, unlike many of the athletes in my study, did not receive explicit criticism from anyone outside of the athletic community. Elise's focus was on working

hard and doing what was expected of her as a scholarship athlete. Like Tiffanie and Danielle, it is possible that Elise felt comfortable engaging in resistance by being fully committed to her sport because she never received any explicit commentary and policing from others.

Kyle, current athlete at MWSU, similarly discusses wanting to put on muscle mass in order to be strong and successful at her sport:

> *I do. I mean I think because of the profession that I'm in basically, basketball, that's a requirement. I mean you don't want to be too small, and then nobody ever know you're strong. You'd get pushed around.*
>
> So you're trying to get big? You want to put on?
>
> *Yeah. I want to get bigger. I mean I want to get more weight on me. And I know people who want to get more weight. I think it's just some people who are kind of self conscious about getting too big, like they'll want to get a little bit bigger, but they don't want to get too big.*
>
> Because then people will think what, like --
>
> *Maybe like probably going back to the gay thing or it will just be like it doesn't look right when you throw on a dress. But if you love what you do, it shouldn't matter.*

Kyle wants to get big so that she will not get "pushed around" by opponents and because she sees putting on muscle mass as a requirement of her profession. When asked, she can imagine why others would not want to possess muscle mass (e.g. "it doesn't look right when you throw on a dress") but concludes simply, "if you love what you do, it shouldn't matter."

"I Don't Agree With That At All"/ Ideological Resistance

Contrary to the athletes who engaged in resistance strategies because they thought wearing makeup was impractical or because they chose to do "whatever it takes" to achieve athletically, a few of the athletes in my study resisted aligning themselves with

heterofemininity because they just simply did not subscribe to the ideology that places heterofemininity above all other forms of female gender expression. Prince, for instance, highlights how she doesn't believe in "all that extra shit" women are expected to do to perform heterofemininity:

> *...a lot of people think they look better with makeup on. Shit, why not put it on for the game and sweat pounds of it off? You know, I don't...I never really understood it, but I would never put on makeup whether I was a girlie girl or not, you know. It's just not something I believe in. I believe in natural beauty, you know? All that extra shit, you can save that shit for the birds.*

Prince critiques appearance based compensation strategies like wearing makeup for practical reasons (e.g. "sweat pounds of it off") but also illustrates that her ideological beliefs differ from the hegemonic- she "believes in natural beauty" not performances of overemphasized heterofemininity.

Former athletes Rogue and Beckett, expresses similar sentiments as Prince. They both invoke "commitment" as reasons why they do not personally engage in compensation strategies but also express resistance by challenging the devaluing of female expression of masculinity. As Rogue tells me:

> Did you ever find yourself doing anything [not lifting weights] like that?
>
> *Hell no. [Laughs] That just wasn't me, you know what I mean? Like, no way. No. I was completely like, "This is what do I gotta to do to get better basketball-wise." Even before that – I made fun of the girls who did that. [Laughs] We had a few. We had a few, you know. Not very many. We had a couple.*

Here, Rogue is both criticizing the use of body modification compensation strategies and emphasizing how her commitment to basketball was the most important thing. She also, however, resists pressures to conform to a heterofeminine ideal because, as she says, "That just wasn't me." Beckett, a former athlete who played on three different collegiate

teams, explicitly denounces the relative valorization of heterofemininity over "having muscles":

> *No, I never personally felt like that. I mean, I wanted to do whatever I had to do to be the best that I could be. But I do specifically remember teammates saying that, you know, "I can't do that, my arms are gonna get big and then I'll look like a guy and get all bulky." But I do remember teammates saying that but I never personally felt that way.*
>
> Why didn't they want their arms to get big?
>
> *I think it goes back to that stereotype about what females are supposed to look like and what's beautiful and being bulky is not beautiful in some people's eyes. Not even bulky, I think just having muscles. Some females, and males, think that muscles make you not seem feminine which I think is totally wrong. I don't agree with that at all.*

Like Rogue, Beckett's commitment to her sport and developing her athletic potential- be the best that she could be- played a part in her resistance strategies. More importantly, however, Beckett explicitly challenges the heteronormative belief system that equates what's "beautiful" with what's "feminine," rather than bulky or "just having muscles." This type of resistance, more so than any of the other forms, has the potential to influence structural change because it fundamentally questions the foundations that inequalities around gender and sexuality are built upon.

All of the athletes who engaged in ideological resistance strategies were self-identified, out lesbians. Like the way sexuality mattered in whether female athletes felt the cultural contradiction of female athleticism, it seems that it also matters in regards to the type of gender strategies female athletes engage in. Lesbians and bi-sexual women did engage in both forms of compensation type strategies; however, no heterosexual women engaged in resistance from an ideological standpoint. Thus, it seems possible that openly gay female athletes resist differently than heterosexual athletes because they feel

already situated outside of the boundaries of normative heterofemininity and/or because their lived experience is one in which non-normative gender expressions are commonplace. Unfortunately, there is a lack of ethnographic research on lesbian athletes[53] that could corroborate these findings.

It is important to point out that athletes who engage in compensation strategies such as limiting weight training are not any less devoted to their sport than those who resist. All athletes competing at this level are committed to their sport. Rather, the fact that all elite-level, female athletes cannot or do not engage in resistance strategies (of any form but especially "ideological resistance") for the love of their sport merely highlights how structures of race, gender, and sexuality as organizing principles of social life, generate the "problem" of female athleticism that compensation type gender strategies are needed to solve. And all athletes, no matter their individual "choices," are working within a structure that valorizes heterosexuality and normative gender performance and an institutional context in which lesbian stereotyping thrives and female athletes are perpetually surveilled and policed for their gender transgressions.

Institutionalized Gender Strategies

My ethnographic data revealed that in addition to being individual endeavors, gender strategies are also institutional. That is, gender strategies are not just products of individual conscious or subconscious "choice." Often times, and especially within contexts such as women's elite level collegiate basketball, choices are made for the players. At MWSU, the athletes rarely choose their own classes or what to major in (and at the very least, are dissuaded from majoring in anything too challenging or time

[53] For an exception see Krane & Barber (2003).

consuming). For example, Kameron tells me: *"I honestly couldn't tell you how to do half the stuff they do for us or help us do, as far as scheduling goes, as far as setting up tutors or going to this advisor and knowing this person"* The athletes are told when to wake up and go to sleep (with regular "lights out" checks) and they have little control over what they eat and who they socialize with. Such rigorously controlled schedules are commonplace and mostly necessary in elite-level athletics, to be sure. Players must take classes at certain times so as not to conflict with training and practice schedules.

Beyond the logistics of the day to day for these athletes, however, I also witnessed various ways in which the athletes had decisions about their physical appearance- how they "presented themselves"- made for them. The MWSU athletes' decisions about whether or not to engage in appearance based compensation strategies were made within the parameters of expectations or pressures from other players and, most importantly, the coaching staff. Such policing and enforcement of individual players' performances of gender- how to dress or wear their hair- thus serves to institutionalize gender strategies, making "choice" irrelevant. Thus, MWSU athletes' use of gender strategies are not just happening with a broader cultural context but within a local, institutionalized context.

"That Does Not Look Right"/ Player Policing

Several of the MWSU players spoke of the ways in which their teammates' policing of their gender performance impacted their decisions about whether to engage in appearance based compensation strategies such as wearing make-up for games or styling their hair a certain way. Kyle, for example, explains:

> *They'll [her teammates] just fix up their hair real quick, throw on some makeup. Because there's something- look a hot mess or somebody think anybody- they be the first one and tell them to take it out right there.*

Really?

> *Our team has to be the most, in a way, honest team. Sometimes it's out of control honest, but in an honest way, they'll say, "That does not look right. Don't wear that. Don't do that." And they don't care, especially the upperclassmen, they will not care what they say out their mouth. They will tell you the honest- the worst honest truth you want to hear.*

Here Kyle explains the repercussions players face if anyone "looks a hot mess" by not having their hair done properly- their fellow teammates will tell them, in a brutally honest way, "that does not look right." This player-to-player policing of physical appearance serves to institutionalize gender strategies, making engaging in such tactics less about individual choice and more about group-level expectations.

While they may have agency over how much make-up they wear or how to specifically style their hair, they do not have the option of opting out. Prince spoke similarly at length about how she did not utilize appearance based compensation strategies when she first arrived at MWSU but eventually bought into expectations set by her older teammates:

> *Like we first get here, my hair nappy before the game, everybody like, "You not gonna do shit with your hair?" and I'm like, "Well? Like I don't too much care." And they're like, "People gonna be taking pictures of you," you know what I'm saying, "you want to look presentable." And you know like, "You don't want nobody just to come to the game and be like, 'Oh my god, look at that kid'" kinda thing. But to me, I didn't really care. I'm just like "Shit, I'm here to play," you know what I'm saying, like, "let's go to work" kinda thing. But you know, eventually, you kinda buy into the whole like, I guess, expectation kinda thing, you know. I feel like with picture day, everybody get like fucking dressed up all crazy and everybody's amazing, got their- people who ain't get their hair done all year, done got their hair done for picture day. You know what I'm saying? But I think that just come with, like, what team you're on. Like my freshman year, all the seniors, all the juniors, like in the mirror, putting on makeup, putting on eyeliner, blush, foundation, mascara, all this stuff for the game and we lookin' around, we all freshman and we like, "What the f…" you know? But then as the years go on, you know, sophomore year, everybody who was in my class, kinda…[gesturing putting on makeup and*

> *doing hair in a mirror]. Then junior year, we telling everybody, "Girl, you better put you some makeup on." You know, it's just how it worked over time so I mean I really don't know why it's done. It's kinda just, I guess, tradition for us.*

As a freshman, Prince was resistant to fixing her hair or putting on make-up for the games. She highlights how her and her fellow freshman teammates were surprised by older players' expectations that they would focus on their appearance in such a way. As she says, she didn't care what others thought of her and was focused primarily on "getting to work," despite her teammates objections and encouragements. And while initially resistant of engaging in compensation strategies (e.g. "What the f…?"), she discusses how, over time, she was persuaded to utilize them herself (e.g. doing hair in the mirror) and eventually began policing her younger teammates' appearances in the same way she was policed as a freshman (e.g. "Girl, you better put you some makeup on"). While Prince calls such a transformation "tradition," she illustrates the ways in which the use of compensation strategies at MWSU became institutionalized over time and how the policing of gender is perpetuated with each incoming cohort of players.

"Just Brush Your Hair"/ Coaching Police

Coaches and coaching staff represent the most important players in the institutionalization of gender strategies. Current athlete, Eve, for instance tells me how the coaching staff encouraged the team to "look good all the time":

> *Well, you know sometimes we play on TV, and I guess they don't want to look busted 'cause you know we talk about a lot of people and they don't want anybody talkin about them. But like I guess though it's just like from when Joelle was there. Joelle Tate, she was our senior last year. Like you know she always put on makeup, her and Mackenzie. They always put on a face full of makeup, and like make sure their hair was done, because they just didn't want to look bad. And like a couple of years ago our coaches was always like, you know, "Make sure you look good all the time."*

> Look good, meaning have makeup on?
>
> *No, just like if you don't, she was just like "Make sure your hair is always done. Make sure you look all right in the face," like "We don't want you looking all beat up."*

Here Eve initially tells me that her teammates choose to put on make-up or do their hair in order to look good on TV. Later, however, she highlights the influential role of two of her older teammates, Joelle and Mackenzie, who would "put on a full face of makeup" before games. Importantly, she goes on further to discuss how the coaching staff would explicitly tell the players to "look good all the time" by having their hair done and looking "all right in the face." Such findings are consistent with previous research that has outlined how coaches attempt to promote feminine and heterosexual "images" on their teams by encouraging their players to wear make-up or enforcing dress codes (Krane 1997). While some players may successfully resist teammates' pressures to engage in compensation type strategies, it is clear to see how pressures from the coaching staff would be less easily resisted. Indeed, the MWSU coaching staff went to great lengths to police their players' expressions of gender during all sport-related activities, especially games.

During my time spent with the MWSU women's basketball team, I witnessed first hand the ways in which the coaching staff was instrumental in the institutionalization of gender strategies through the policing of their players' appearances. One of the most explicit examples occurred early in the season before a game. One hour before the start of the game, the players began to make their way to the floor to begin warm-up exercises and the coaching staff gathered near the team's bench to discuss last minute strategy and line-up changes. Star player, Rowan, tiptoes her way quickly down the steep stadium

steps, a focused but relaxed look on her face, eyes turned downward. Her straightened hair pulled loosely back in a low ponytail with the few short pieces that had gone astray flying forward in her face as she hurried to the gym floor, ready for competition. Noticing Rowan's descent, Coach King looks up from her clipboard and, after a moment of watching, exclaims rhetorically to the other coaches:

> *Just brush your hair. I'm not asking her to do anything fancy. Just brush your hair. Why would she think it's okay to come down like that? We're playing another team. She wants to be All-League. Why does she think that's appropriate?*

For Coach King, Rowan's hair was not "appropriate" because it was messy but more importantly because it appeared unfeminine. Following Coach King's outburst, one of the assistant coaches said something to Rowan and shortly after, she left the floor and came back with her hair slicked back tightly into her ponytail, not a single strand out of place.

This moment is significant, and I choose to highlight it here, because it points to one of the consequences of embodying a cultural contradiction for female athletes, especially when an institution or institutional actors such as Coach King at MWSU externally mediate that contradiction. Here is Rowan, undoubtedly the team's most talented player and all-around athlete, entering the stadium for competition. She should be focused, arguably, on only one thing in this moment: the game. Instead, her pre-game warm-up is interrupted by her coach's request for her to go back upstairs to the locker room and re-do her hair so that she "looks appropriate." If Rowan was not thinking of her gender performance before, she certainly is now. Of course, there is no way to know whether this distraction affected Rowan's concentration before or during the game. Regardless, the larger point is that *how her hair looks* is not something she should have

had to think about during an athletic competition at all. Yet she had to in this moment because she was not performing heterofemininity well enough.

The MWSU coaching staff diligently surveils and polices their athletes' expressions of gender and sexuality, forcing players to concern themselves as much with being successfully heterofeminine (e.g. not a "hot mess") as with being athletically successful. Not only were MWSU players' policed into engaging in compensation type gender strategies but were variously rewarded for doing so. For example, during a trip to Hawaii for a large tournament, the team went to a fancy dinner at a local hotel restaurant reserved solely for them. Many of the players got dressed up for the event sporting short, flowy dresses with sandals or high heels, make-up, and expertly styled hair. As the team entered the hotel lobby, assistant coach Erin, with a big smile on her face, excitedly stated: "*See, you don't have to look like a basketball team. Ya'll look cute!*" The players thus receive positive reinforcement from their coach, Erin, for performing ideal heterofemininity- "being cute"- compared to "looking like a basketball team."

"Slam Dunk Design"/ League Policing

Gender strategies are not just institutionalized at the local, program level. Female athletes are often pressured to partake in compensation type gender strategies to heterofeminize themselves at the league-level and beyond. For instance, during MWSU's conference tournament at the end of the season, the league distributed a short magazine called "League Extras" along with the large conference booklets that highlight the statistics for each participating school. On the cover of "League Extras" is an athlete from Prairieview State, wearing an evening gown, covered in dark eye-shadow and lip gloss, and casually holding a basketball. The first page of the magazine boasts the title "Slam

Dunk Design- Our Girls Have Style!" and pictures seven athletes from various schools dressed in a variety of feminine fashions, some wearing tailored suits and high heels and others wearing short, cocktail dresses and diamond necklaces, all with their hair styled and make-up on. Further in the magazine is a page highlighting individual players' favorite family recipes for pies or homemade shampoo.

Publication materials like "League Extras," while disconcerting, are not a new occurrence for women's athletics. Scholars have thoroughly documented how media portrayals of female athletes favor presenting them as feminine women- posing in feminine clothing with their husbands and children- than as athletes (Kane & Creedon 1994). Many collegiate programs have been known to pose female athletes in prom-style dresses or other formal wear for team posters. Moreover, popular magazines like ESPN and Sports Illustrated have promoted issues featuring professional female athletes in swimsuits, lingerie, or nude, with sensitive body parts covered with sports paraphernalia such as tennis rackets or soccer balls. And professional organizations such as the WNBA have long held orientations for first-year players that include classes on how to set up a 401k or apply make-up.

Ultimately, magazines such as "League Extras" or the WNBAs makeup classes further highlight the various ways appearance based compensation strategies have become institutionalized. This is not to say, however, that female athletes do not have agency to resist, as many often do. For instance, like the ways Prince, Rogue, and Beckett engaged in strategies of resistance, when asked why she declined to participate in the WNBAs orientation on makeup and dress, out, lesbian Britney Griner said, plainly, "I

don't need that shit."[54] Unfortunately, individual acts of resistance only go so far in dismantling the larger structures at play. Even if an individual athlete engages resistance strategies so as not to attempt to conform to hegemonic ideals of heterofemininity, as long as one coach's comment can send her back into the locker room to fix her hair, there is much more work to be done. Importantly, this work needs to happen at the institutional and structural levels. While the institution of sports has come a long way, it is still a place behind the times.

[54] From an interview with Elle magazine (http://www.elle.com/life-love/society-career/brittney-griner-profile).

CHAPTER 7

A Place Behind the Times: Women's Collegiate Basketball & The Institutional Reproduction of Inequality

The Importance of Intersectionality

This study offers an ethnographic exploration of the ways in which race, gender, and sexuality get constructed, performed, contested, and policed within the institution of sports. I began this study seeking to find out whether female athletes in the contemporary, post Title IX moment (in which "fit" bodies are more accepted than ever) feel a "cultural contradiction" between their athletic and gender identities. Moreover, I wanted to examine the types of strategies they employed to negotiate with this contradiction. What I found, however, was a much more complicated picture that involved more than just issues of competing identities. Because of the pervasiveness of lesbian stereotyping within the institution of sports- particularly women's collegiate basketball- female athletes' expressions of gender and sexuality are under constant surveillance and subject to routine intervention. It is within this context that players feel variously conflicted between being successful athletes versus successful heterosexual women and engage diverse types of gender strategies to reach equilibrium.

The importance of understanding these findings within an intersectional framework cannot be overstated. The theory of intersectionality or the "matrix of domination" developed by feminist scholars, particularly non-white scholars, has had a profound impact within the field of sociology over the last twenty years[55]. Rather than viewing race, gender, sexuality, and class inequality as distinct phenomena, the theory of

[55] This impact, however, has largely been limited to the specific field of gender studies rather than the field as whole.

intersectionality sheds light on the ways in which these forms of difference and oppression operate together, as interlocking systems of inequality that differentially influence individuals' lives. Intersectionality is based on the understanding that race, sexuality, and gender (and others) are socially constructed categories that intersect with one another to shape the everyday experiences of individuals. While one of those categories may become more salient than the others in a given context, they are at all times intertwined with one another and cumulative in their impact (Andersen & Collins 2008). Perhaps the most significant contribution of the matrix of domination framework has been its ability to demonstrate how intersecting forms of oppression have material consequences. That is, acknowledging that race is "gendered" and gender is "racialized" is relevant not only because we can more thoroughly understand controlling images such as the hypersexualized, black male rapist (Davis 1983; Collins 2000) or the "black bitch" (Collins 2005) but also because we can see how such images impact, for example, the experiences of black men with the criminal justice system or black women within the institution of sports.

The everyday experiences of the MWSU female athletes as well as the other athletes I interviewed were impacted by larger, intersecting structures of race, gender, and sexuality. These structures worked in conjunction with one another to variously impact these athletes' daily lives. As I outlined in the previous chapters, the intricate relationship between gender and sexuality played an important part in how female athletes' experienced the cultural contradiction of female athleticism, how they engaged in gender strategies, and most importantly, how they were monitored and policed by others. For instance, female athletes are already considered to be "masculinizing"

themselves through sport participation, both as a result of partaking in masculine behaviors such as aggressive but also by embodying masculinity through muscle mass. That masculinization, however, is not read the same way on white, non-white, queer, or straight bodies. Female masculinity, in this way, is associated with lesbianism. Lesbian stereotyping- perpetuated largely through the "dyke" discourse- is used to police female athletes' gender. Those experiences are racialized, however, and as a result, play out differently for white and non-white athletes. Notions of what constitutes "appropriate" expressions of femininity are racialized, as non-white women have historically been situated outside of normative, white, hegemonic standards of heterofemininity. As such, black female athletes experienced the cultural contradiction of female athleticism somewhat differently than their white counterparts. Similarly, queer women, also defined outside of normative constructions of femininity, experience pressures between their identities as feminine women and athletes differently than their straight counterparts. This is in part because many of them are fundamentally not trying to look feminine or at least feminine as traditionally defined.

Examining female athletes' use of gender strategies also highlights the importance of understanding these athletes' experiences from an intersectional framework. My data highlights several forms of gender strategies female athletes used to navigate within a sporting context that promotes ideal heterofemininity and regulates their gender performance accordingly. Many athletes engaged in appearance based and body modification compensation strategies designed to place them as closely as possible to the heterofeminine ideal. Wearing makeup and paying special attention to their hair seemed to be the most common types of appearance based forms of compensation. Importantly,

most of these athletes thought of such practices as "natural" or mere attempts at "looking good." That these strategies were mostly subconscious highlights the way in which gender becomes normalized, especially in a context in which appearing heterofeminine is valued and rewarded. Body modification through the altering of training regimens in order to decrease muscle mass (and the embodiment of masculinity) was another highly utilized compensation strategy by many of the athletes in my study. These strategies were not subconscious, however, as the athletes engaged in these practices purposefully.

It is possible, however, that black female athletes' use of what could commonly be called appearance based compensation strategies actually represent forms of resistance since they are using the resources available to them to operate within a structure that already always situates them as outsiders. Similarly, it is perhaps not surprising that the out, lesbians in my study were the ones most likely to express ideological forms of resistance, critiquing the ways in which normative expressions of gender are valued over other, non-normative gender expressions. In this way, understanding how gender strategies play out in the everyday lives of female athletes requires a serious examination into the processes by which race, gender, and sexuality intersect to shape the experiences of female athletes. One-dimensional explorations- focusing, for instance, solely on gender- cannot account for the differences in experience faced by athletes based on race and sexuality. Only an intersectional approach, as has been attempted in this writing, can provide the kind of nuance necessary in understanding these athletes' lives as women working within larger structures of race, gender, and sexuality, among other forms of difference and oppression.

The Importance of Structure & Agency

The findings in this study also offer insight into the complex relationship between structure and agency. As defined by William Sewell (1992), structures are "sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by that action" (19). To enact agency within larger structures that empower and constrain social action then is "to be capable of exerting some degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree" (Sewell 1992: 20). Female athletes are working within larger structures (sport, race, gender, sexuality) that work to constrain their actions as athletes and also as women. Female athletes are fundamentally devalued compared to their male counterparts, as they are not only seen as playing adapted versions of male games but are perceived as being less biologically capable of being competent athletes. They are also, however, perceived to be less capable than non-athletes at being competent women because of the ways in which they must enact and embody masculinity during sport participation. All of these competing and contradictory structures impact the everyday lived experience of female athletes as they attempt to be both/and and walk a very thin tightrope between conflicting societal demands.

Even within these structures, however, female athletes can and do enact various forms of agency. The very practice of engaging in gender strategies is a form of agency. Within a context where they have limited resources, female athletes' use of gender strategies- whether by seemingly superficial efforts such wearing makeup or by engaging in resistance strategies- represents their attempts at exerting some control over the social relations in which they find themselves. Knowing they are perceived as masculine

through sport participation, female athletes can use the resources available to them to counter such perceptions either by overemphasizing their femininity (in various ways) in order to counter the perception of masculinization or by resisting (in various ways) the valuing of normative expressions of gender over others.

Over time, and as such efforts take the shape of collective as well as individual action, this type of resistance can fundamentally alter the structures in place. For instance, as more athletes and coaches come out of the closet and participate in sports as openly gay, it is possible that structures constraining female athletes' expressions of gender and sexuality will slowly erode or perhaps more accurately, change shape. Indeed, the institution of sports seems to be a place well behind the times and trends of society at large. As the larger sociopolitical context around lesbian and gay rights shifts towards more acceptance, a backlash seems to be occurring within the institution of sports. Over time, these structures will also shift, although it is uncertain what form they will take.

The More Things Change…

Over the last several years, a number of landmark decisions have been made regarding gay and lesbian[56] rights in this country. In 2010, the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy banning gays and lesbians from serving openly in the military was repealed by the Senate, fulfilling a promise Barack Obama made during his presidential campaign in 2008. In 2013 the Supreme Court of the United States ruled the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which defines marriage as a union between one man and one woman, unconstitutional. Thus, same-sex couples married in the 17 states and Washington DC in which gay marriage is legal, are now entitled to the same federal benefits as heterosexual

[56] I use "gay and lesbian" rather than the more common LGBTQ abbreviation because I am referring specifically to marriage equality in this example instead of, for instance, anti-discrimination policies in the workplace and other pressing concerns facing the queer community more generally.

married couples. Public opinion on marriage equality has shifted significantly in recent years as well. Over half (54%) of Americans support same-sex marriage today compared to just 27% in 1996. Importantly, almost the same number (52%) would vote in favor of a law legalizing same-sex marriage in all 50 states if given the opportunity to cast a vote[57]. Moreover, popular television shows such as Modern Family and Glee have brought gay and lesbian (most gay) individuals and issues into the spotlight. It is clear that gay and lesbian issues have come to the forefront of the political and national stage and more Americans than ever are accepting of the idea of gay and lesbian inclusion into previously heteroexclusive institutions. How, then, in a context in which the sociopolitical landscape around sexuality is shifting in such a positive direction, can we understand the findings of this study?

I argue that the hyper-vigilance with which female athletes' expressions of gender and sexuality are policed in the contemporary moment, particularly in the context of recruiting, is an ironic result of the cultural shift in this country towards greater acceptance of gay and lesbian individuals and their rights. The use of anti-gay recruiting tactics, for instance, has not received widespread attention outside of immediate team contexts because sexuality has not been as visible an issue as it is today. Only one of the former athletes in my study[58] mentioned having any experience with negative recruiting while they were playing collegiate basketball.

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[57] http://www.gallup.com/poll/163730/back-law-legalize-gay-marriage-states.aspx

[58] Former athlete, Sofia, said the following about negative recruiting: "Okay so I remember this one recruiting trip that we had, like a recruit came in and um, somehow- and I don't- like we're all sitting in our locker room- and our locker room had these great leather coaches and like a big screen TV right? So we're lounging in the locker room- and this recruit comes in and um, and I remember one of my teammates um, explicitly telling this recruit that came in 'It's important you know that we don't have any gay people on our team.' Um, as in like this is something that we can offer you, right?" [Laughing]

Indeed, most of the former athletes in my study talked about how anti-gay recruiting tactics did not used to be as big of an issue in women's sports, partly because being in the closet was the status quo. As more athletes came out and issues around sexuality began appearing in the media, the need for containment increased. As former athlete Beckett tells me:

> Did you ever experience that [anti-gay recruiting] getting recruited or when you were at any of your places, was that ever an issue?
>
> *When I was getting recruited, I never heard anything of the sort honestly. I think things have changed a lot since then. You know, that was ten years ago. I think it's a lot different now especially with a lot of things being in the media. Like I know, Penn State was in the media for that. Universities like that. But I think, when I was getting recruited ten, twelve years ago, I didn't think it was an issue. It's just become more, I think people have become more comfortable, more open, and stuff like that. And I think a lot more people are out now so now it's become more of an issue.*
>
> So you think as people get more comfortable to be out, it's causing more of an issue in sports?
>
> *Because I think it's causing more of an issue for people who aren't okay with it so they're making it a bigger issue than it ever has been.*

Beckett does not believe that anti-gay recruiting was as big of an issue when she was being recruited in the early 2000s because not as many athletes, coaches, and other personnel were out. As issues around sexuality in sports became more visible- she uses the specific example of Renee Portland and Penn State mentioned earlier to note how such issues are being picked up in the media- the greater the possibility for retaliation from those who "aren't okay with it."

Former athlete and current coach, Dee Dee, tells me similarly that concern over individuals' sexuality is more recent phenomenon:

> Did you experience that [anti-gay recruiting tactics] with recruiting?

Uh-uh [shakes head].

Do you think that's a more recent thing?

Yeah…I really didn't care so I don't know. That was never nothing I was worried about.

But now it's like people care or…

I think so. I think people do care. But I also think that people want to make sure that their child is going to be accepted wherever they go. Because you know, I think parents are beginning to see more and more, you know, you might see that more and more where, "Oh yeah, my daughter might be gay" or whatever or "My daughter isn't gay," either way. If she comes here and let's say you've got a handful of gay people, I mean is that going to be a problem? Like you know, I think people may feel, "Hey, I don't want my daughter thinking that she's going to be forced into anything" but then if my daughter is gay, "Well I don't want my daughter rejected." So you know, I think people just want to make sure that their daughter is going to be accepted into the group and not be shunned away because then, you know, nobody want to go through that.

For Dee Dee, anti-gay recruiting tactics are recent and directly related to parents' desires for their daughters, gay or straight, to be accepted by their teams. According to this understanding, anti-gay recruiting tactics- questions about the sexuality of coaches or athletes- are a direct result of parents' concern for their daughter(s). More likely, however, such concerns are coming from homophobic parents who, for perhaps the first time, are having to deal with issues of sexuality as it relates to their children. The fact that the former athletes in my study did not perceive anti-gay recruiting to be a significant issue when they were being recruited (regardless of whether such tactics were actually going on over ten years ago) while current athletes speak fluently about such tactics as commonplace highlights how the increase of visibility of gay and lesbian rights and issues in the larger, societal context can lead to backlash in the institutional context of sports. That diverse sexualities are more commonplace now than ever has allowed

coaches to utilize and capitalize on fears of the "lesbian bogeywoman." In this way, it appears, as many of the players I interviewed argued, that gay stereotypes will only become more prolific as time goes on and negative recruiting tactics will become entrenched as "just part of the game."

The rise of anti-gay recruiting tactics alongside changing tides of acceptance for societal inclusion of lesbians and gays, while ironic, is not altogether unexplainable. Race scholars, for example, have thoroughly documented how moments of racial progress have brought about increased racial violence. In the post-reconstruction, Jim Crow era, lynchings and other forms of racial violence were commonplace methods with which whites attempted to regain control of a changing racial context and "defeat perceived threats to the racial line they had drawn in the sand" (Hale 1998: 200).

In a landscape that was shifting and seemingly slipping out of white control, racial violence became the primary means for whites to re-assert white supremacy. In the twentieth century, lynchings, once a form of private, vigilante "justice" according to Hale (1998), became "a modern spectacle of enduring power" (201). White racial violence, particularly expressed through lynching, represented a last resort effort to hold on to traditions of racial superiority that were in flux and forward moving. As Hale (1998) argues in *Making Whiteness*:

> Spectacle lynchings were about making racial difference in the new South, about ensuring the separation of all southern life into whiteness and blackness even as the very material things that made up southern life were rapidly changing. Racial violence was modern (203).

Lynchings were thus a form of social control as well as a form of retaliation against racial progress. Whites "resorted to violence against minorities to prevent an erosion of the corresponding boundary and the privileges it entails" Wimmer (2013: 71).

Racial violence was one attempt to re-define and re-draw the "boundary blurring that the end of slavery and Reconstruction had stirred up" (Washington 2012, as quoted in Wimmer 2013: 71). Industrialization and the migration of blacks from the south to the north during the 1900s brought about intense racial violence as well as whites fought to keep "their neighborhoods" segregated. Massey and Denton (1994) claim, "foremost among the tools that whites used to construct the ghetto was violence" (33-4). As the ghetto became more and more crowded and middle-class black families moved into bordering white neighborhoods, racial violence escalated:

> The pattern typically began with threatening letters, personal harassment, and warnings of dire consequences to follow. Sometimes whites, through their churches, realtors, or neighborhood organizations, would take up a collection and offer to buy the black homeowner out, hinting of less civilized inducements to follow if the offer was refused. If these entreaties failed to dislodge the resident, spontaneous mobs would often grow out of neighborhood meetings or barroom discussions, and a pack of agitated, angry whites would surround the house, hurling rocks and insults and at times storming the home and ransacking it. Periodic outbursts of mob violence would be interspersed with sporadic incidents of rock-throwing, gunshots, cross burnings, and physical attack. If the escalating violence still failed to produce the desired result, the last step was dramatic and guaranteed to attract the attention, not only of the homeowner, but of the entire black community: bombing (Massey & Denton 1994: 34-5).

When individual acts of violence were no longer feasible (at least in consistent, patterned ways), institutional forms of violence took their place. In terms of housing, neighborhood improvement associations, restrictive covenants, and blockbusting were all employed to redraw racial boundaries and reinforce the colorline as more and more neighborhoods began to become integrated. Moreover, recent work on the prison industrial complex outlines how racial disparities in the criminal (in)justice system represent a modernized form of institutionalized racial violence that works to control black and brown bodies and uphold white supremacy (Alexander 2010; Richie 2013).

The heightened policing of female athletes' expressions of gender and sexuality, as seen especially within the context of recruiting, can be seen then as an example of an attempt at social control in response to challenges to boundaries and the shifting political landscape that favors broad, societal level acceptance of gay and lesbian rights. Certainly, there are instances in which individuals attempt to reassert social control such as Renee Portland and her "no drinking, no drugs, no lesbians" policy. The far-reaching impact of anti-gay recruiting, however, is more than just a composite of individual acts of anti-gay "violence." Such tactics represent an institutional arrangement that serves to contain and constrain not just individual athletes but to reinforce larger social boundaries as well.

Thus, at the very same moment that more gay and lesbian athletes are coming out- most notably Britney Griner, Jason Collins, Michael Sam- and the shifting socio-political landscape moves towards more acceptance of gay and lesbian individuals generally, there has been institutional pushback. The institutional context of sports has dug in its heels, leading to heightened awareness and stricter policing of female athletes' expressions of gender and sexuality. The current "moment of change" for the gay and lesbian movement is not without challenge. The institution of sports is just one example of the ways in which inequalities get reproduced, with a particularly negative impact on female athletes. Of course, like all structures do, change will occur. Even under full court pressure, individual female athletes are everyday enacting various forms of agency that are meaningful and will hopefully, over time, lead to real and lasting change.

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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Interviewees by Race and Sexual Identity[59]

		Straight	Lesbian	Bisexual	Total
Current Players					
	White	1	0	0	
	Black	5	4	1	
					12
	Biracial[60]	0	0	1	
Former Players					
	White	6	5	1	
	Black	2	1	0	
					17[61]
	Biracial[62]	0	2	0	
Key Personnel					
	White	1[63]	1	0	
	Black	1	0	0	
					3
	Biracial	0	0	0	
Total		16	13	3	32

[59] Both race and sexual orientation were self-identified by interviewees.
[60] The player in this category self-identified as biracial.
[61] The two former players who were on staff at MWSU during the time of the interview are counted in this category, rather than in key personnel.
[62] The players in this category self-identified as biracial and Pacific Islander, respectively.
[63] This interviewee, the strength and conditioning coach, is male whereas all other interviewees are female.