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A Review of Gendered Consumption in  
Sport and Leisure

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## A Review of Gendered Consumption in Sport and Leisure

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this review, we examine literature from leisure sciences, sociology, marketing, and history to demonstrate how Firat's (1994) modern significations of gender categories can be used as an effective lens for showing the lingering effects of modernism. In the process, we provide evidence in a sport and leisure context of what is associated with men and masculinity is valued over what is associated with women and femininity.

In the postmodern era, which many Western cultures are now beginning to experience, the categories of sex and gender are beginning to collapse and multiple categories of gender are arising. This transformation, according to Firat, will enable people to experience consumption with fewer constraints and boundaries. Firat notes, as do we, that postmodern freedom is still affected by modern categories, which aid in establishing norms of conduct. We use these categories as well as several of Firat's other modern significations of gender dichotomies (including home versus workplace, passive versus active, emotional versus rational, submissive versus assertive, worthless versus valuable, and product versus person) to demonstrate that the many forms of masculinity and femininity have not blurred enough to prevent most people from valuing masculinity more than femininity.

Our review shows evidence that while gender significations are less limiting in some ways than they were in the past, for the most part gender still matters. In the final section we report evidence of postmodern freedom from strict distinctions between masculinity and femininity in sports and leisure. Some blurring of the meanings of masculinity and femininity are transforming the activities of men and women; however, we show that this new kind of freedom appears to occur ambivalently or in a confused manner. While appearing to liberate, the new freedom still uses, in some ways, principles from the modern era that reestablishes or reinforces modernism. For example, while the successful Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) tries to empower and invigorate women, it takes a step back in postmodern freedom by reinforcing images of heterosexuality, portraying players as wives and mothers (McDonald 2000).

We end the review with additional areas for further inquiry into this topic. One area we address is the use of language in establishing more freedom. We suggest that one way to blur gender categories is to use gendered adjectives in non-conventional ways. For example, if media figures describe men playing golf as graceful and women playing soccer as aggressive their words can disrupt taken for granted gender meanings. Work from West and Zimmerman (1987) suggests that if the athletes themselves try to change gender meanings they risk being labeled deviant. An alternate strategy involves ignoring gender altogether, and focusing on individuals regardless of gender. We suggest casually showing people involved in sports and leisure activities without regard to conventional gender categories, thus letting men and women decide on their own whether they should engage in any activity without the need to worry about gender appropriateness. Other areas for future study are explored as well.

Keywords: Gender, Postmodernism, Modernism, Infantilization, Objectification, Gendered Consumption, Feminism, Sports, Leisure, Gender Perspective, Post-Gender, Feminism in Consumer Research

## A REVIEW OF GENDERED CONSUMPTION IN SPORT AND LEISURE

How are women's leisure and sport activities valued compared to men's? To answer this question, we review research from leisure sciences, sociology, history, and marketing. We use Firat's (1994) modern significations of gender framework to analyze how activities in contemporary Western cultures are separated into men's and women's and differentially valued. Even though the possibilities, freedom, and promise of a postmodern society hold out the likelihood of a post-gender society, gender as a system signifying differential value still exists (Firat 1994). Focusing on sports and leisure, we show that what is associated with women and femininity is devalued compared to what is associated with men and masculinity.

The hegemonic ideology of two genders is powerful in contemporary society. Examining insights from bodies that do not neatly fit into either category illuminates how "believing is seeing" when it comes to gender (Lorber 1994). Fausto-Sterling (2002) describes the changes in medical approaches to bodies that are not neatly feminine or masculine from helping individuals to live with their situation to medically altering infants to fit society's categories. She argues that at least five sexes would be more accurate than two, and that ideally we should think of sex as a continuum – "I would further argue that sex is a vast, infinitely malleable continuum that defies the constraints of even five categories" (Fausto-Sterling 2002, p. 469). She uses Foucault's notion of biopower to describe the "multiple contradictions" of the power to surgically control the "very sex of human body." While she accepts that the intent was to bring greater happiness, she does not agree that this is the only way. She says:

...if one accepts the assumption that in a sex-divided culture people can realize their greatest potential for happiness and productivity only if they are sure that they belong to one of only two acknowledged sexes, modern medicine has been extremely successful. On the other hand, the same medical accomplishments can be read not as progress but as a mode of discipline. Hermaphrodites have unruly bodies. They do not fall naturally into a binary classification; only a surgical shoehorn can put them there... Society mandates the control of intersexual bodies because they blur and bridge the great divide... In my ideal world medical intervention for intersexuals would take place only rarely before the age of reason; subsequent treatment would be a cooperative venture between physician, patient, and other advisers trained in issues of gender multiplicity. I do not pretend that the transition to my utopia would be smooth. Sex, even supposedly "normal," heterosexual kind, continues to cause untold anxieties in Western society...(Fausto-Sterling 2002, p. 471-472).

In this analysis, we explore changes in the world of sports and leisure to see how close we are to the simpler utopian world of participation without regard for gender. We first focus on the significations of gender categories developed from Firat's (1994) modern framework to a sports and leisure context. In the process, we add further explanation as to why these categories exist and offer some examples as to how they served as a divide between men and women in the modern era (assuming we are moving away from the modern era). With this categorization system, we are not attempting to prove or disprove any postmodernism arguments that have emerged in consumer research; we only use these categories as a convenient and efficient way to systematically assess the relevance of gender for contemporary sports and leisure.

Next we explore whether the different notions of masculinity and femininity constrain sports and leisure experiences. In other words, have the blurring of gender categories allowed people to be less constrained by notions of masculinity and femininity when making sports and leisure choices? Have these categories become so blurred that it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify engagement in a particular activity as masculine or feminine? Work from Firat (1994) and Firat and Venkatesh (1995) suggests that consumption experiences of men and women might become less constrained in postmodern societies due to such "blurring."

This review has several parts. First, we briefly examine modernism and postmodernism. Second, we introduce the modern categories or significations of gender categorized by Firat (1994) and show how they can be applied

to a sports and leisure context. Third, we look at these categories in more detail to explain how gender gaps and dichotomies still exist in sports and leisure activities and, in the process, provide examples of how modernity is still evident in our presumable “postmodern” society. In many cases, we use analysis from the gender literature and gender perspective to determine what is needed for further gender liberation (Connell 1987; Ferree, Hess, and Lorber 2000; Lorber 1994; Risman 1998; West and Zimmerman 1987). The gender perspective essentially conceptualizes gender as a social structure that organizes society into different and unequal categories based on sex (Risman 1998). Fourth, we discuss evidence of a fissure between gender and sex and examine how postmodern liberation is being experienced, even if in a confused or ambivalent way. We end with an examination of future directions for gender research in sports and leisure.

## POSTMODERNISM

In a postmodern society, Firat (1994) contends that what is considered masculine or feminine will break down as the boundaries between masculinity and femininity continue to blur and the different forms of gender multiply. This is likely because a signifier can mean a vast array of things, and, in some cases, simultaneously connote facets of seemingly opposite categories such as femininity and masculinity. The performance of gender, or “doing” femininity (West and Zimmerman 1987) or masculinity will no longer be exclusively tied to one’s sex category, nor will they be easily interpretable. Activities that conventionally convey clear meanings, such as combat conveying masculinity and gracefulness conveying femininity, will no longer be obvious. Risman (1998) suggests that in addition to blurred categories there will be exploding categories. She sees multiple masculinities and femininities undermining gender as a modern social structure; in a “post-gender” society, gender will no longer place more value on what is masculine and less value on what is feminine. Moghadam (1999) conceptualizes gender as an ideology that promotes inequities between the socially constructed categories of women and men that result in a stratified social system. A postmodern vision of these categories blurring into one should be liberating because it lessens the likelihood of gender being used as a way to categorize. In the realm of sports and leisure, this suggests that gender is less likely to influence participation or consumption of sports previously “marked” as masculine or feminine. Gender blurring should also change the meaning of women’s participation in “girls’ sports.” The meaning of women’s participation in figure skating, for example, should express both masculine and feminine aspects of identity.

In a postmodern world, consumption will not be constrained by modern dichotomies. Blurred categories remove the need to conform to culturally created conceptions of masculinity and femininity (Firat 1994; Firat and Venkatesh 1995). In a liberatory postmodern society, gender as a discourse would no longer be relevant. In essence, postmodern theorists suggest that all knowledge is a construction of language and discourse (Firat and Venkatesh 1995); there is no such thing as an ultimate or universal truth. Similar to Lorber’s (1994) notion that “believing is seeing,” postmodernism takes the apparent biological basis of gender and shows how it is created by ideology. The now recognizably socially constructed notion of gender can therefore be deconstructed.

In contemporary Western culture, lingering aspects of modernism are still evident, as what is considered female is still largely associated with the profane and what is considered male is still largely associated with the sacred (categories that are also socially constructed). We provide evidence that suggests that greater value is normally attached to the latter. Firat (1994) lists additional dichotomies connected with male and female that emerged from the modern era including home versus workplace, passive versus active, emotional versus rational, submissive versus assertive, worthless versus valuable, and product versus person. We use some of Firat’s (1994) modern significations of gender as a framework to demonstrate lingering modernism in sports and leisure activities. We use accounts of gender in sports over the last century to evaluate the current degree of gender blurring. We also look for evidence that such blurring is having an impact on reducing the gender dichotomies in sports and leisure participation that characterizes most of the twentieth century. This review shows the need for a historical trend analysis of sports and leisure participation by gender.

Hirschman (1993) considers the study of gender dichotomies to be a masculine activity in and of itself. We acknowledge this, but also believe, as mentioned, that shedding light on these categories will only bring us closer to liberatory postmodernism. We also acknowledge that these categories are more dynamic than how they are usually presented in contemporary society. Our review reflects research over several years, not necessarily the state of things at the moment of publication. Once again, we only use the results and findings of these studies to demonstrate lingering modernism and how Firat's categories can be used in sports and leisure. The studies we review include several perspectives with varying assumptions about sex and gender, the human experience, and strategies for social change (for reviews of the different feminist perspectives, see Bristor and Fischer 1993 and Lorber 1998). In addition, there are different units of analysis for comparison and incommensurate definitions of phenomena. We do our best to be specific in this review so that our analysis and interpretation reflect the diversity of our sources. Our goal is to review the literature and report the findings as they exist, knowing in advance that theoretical filters influence findings.

### HOME VERSUS WORKPLACE

Firat (1994) contends that many of the activities that were historically conducted at home in the modern era, such as gardening, sewing, and cooking, have now been replaced by the ready availability of their end products, making efforts in these areas largely unnecessary. Such activities in the modern society were associated with women because women stayed at home and performed these skills. In the home, people performed tasks considered unskilled and profane such as cleaning, eating, cooking, sleeping, leisure, and child rearing. Men, again, were connected with activities in the workplace and less connected with ones in the home. For men, the home was essentially a "pit stop" to re-energize them in their producer role. We see a similar separation in sports and leisure today.

Henderson's (1990) review, while somewhat outdated, indicates that women tend to have leisure that consists of activities near or at the home because it can be infused with household chores and because few opportunities for leisure exist outside the home. Kane (1990) argued that many women consume within the family and home context based upon the assumption that women tend to define themselves in terms of human relationships (Gilligan 1982). Many researchers (Allison and Duncan 1987; Chambers 1986; and Shank 1986) have found that the leisure of the dual career women is largely associated with family environments, particularly children. In an integrative review of the meanings of women's leisure, Henderson (1996) notes that women tend to use the home as the primary place and means for leisure. Shaw (1994) cites evidence to suggest that women fear violence outside as well as inside the home, which may also restrict leisure choices. In cases where nontraditionally female leisure opportunities do exist outside the home, they have often been offered in such a way as to not interfere with household responsibilities. In this case, leisure itself can be seen as problematic or constraining, as it reinforces gender appropriateness (Shaw 1994).

Henderson (1996) suggests that the desire for leisure among working men is more of a motivator than it is for working women because working women must contend with housework first. Firestone and Shelton's (1994) work on the "double day" shows that paid work affects women's non-domestic leisure more than it does men's, but the opposite was true for the impact of paid labor on domestic leisure. Women, in this case, had more domestic leisure time because they combined it with household chores.

While it appears that leisure opportunities certainly exist for women outside the home, the literature suggests that leisure for women is still largely perceived as a secondary concern. Opportunities for leisure exist, but only when other duties and other concerns have been addressed first. Expectations of a woman and her role in society appear to transcend the opportunities outside the home. Men face the same constraint, but can define what is expected of them more so than women. Even in cases when the opportunities for women are equal as those for men, women still perform "emphasized femininity" (Connell 1987). For example, mothers on golf courses are more likely to

be labeled deviant and asked to account for the care of their families than fathers on golf courses (West and Zimmerman 1987).

## CONSUMPTION VERSUS PRODUCTION

The consumption versus production dichotomy refers to the worth associated with the skills involved in either consuming or producing products. Women in the modern era were mostly associated with consumption aspects because their lives were frequently conducted in the home, where, according to Firat's (1994) analysis, the socially considered worthless and profane activities of consumption were conducted. Men, on the other hand, were associated largely with the public sector where worthwhile activities took place.

From a sports and leisure context, it is difficult to distinguish between consumption and behavior (Fischer and Gainer 1994); nevertheless, in this section we provide examples applying consumption versus production to the gendered nature of sports and leisure. At the risk of oversimplifying Firat's (1994) work, we stress that we use his categories of consumption versus production as a lens for observing sport and leisure consumption practices.

### Consumption

*Spectatorship* – In this section, we concentrate primarily on the consumption of televised sports, providing examples and support as to how men who consume televised sports prevent their own “feminization” even while engaging in a potentially feminine activity. We begin with an analysis of sports viewership. Historically, it is a common contention that men and women both enjoy watching sports on television, but their preferences differ. Sargent, Zillman, and Weaver (1998) found that boys and men show greater interests in football, ice hockey, basketball, soccer, and baseball, which are typically characterized as aggressive and competitive, whereas girls and women have greater preference for gymnastics, skiing, diving, and figure skating. There are examples of media reinforcement of these gendered consumption patterns, as indicated by NBC's efforts to position the Olympics with storylines resembling soap operas (Daddario 1997).

Men have historically dominated the consumption of organized sports. The “spectator gender gap” is narrowing. This is true of both live events and sports media. The greater popularity of both indoor soccer (Hofacre 1994) and golf (Nowell 1995) among women has contributed to the increasingly similar numbers of men and women spectators. Sports marketers and advertisers also view women differently. Branch (1995) provides evidence that sport organizations no longer view women as merely appendages to their spouses or friends at sporting events.

Dietz-Uhler et al. (2000) report that among a sample of college students, an equal number of men and women consider themselves to be sports fans, but men identify more strongly with being sports fans than do women. Kinkema and Harris (1998) note research that suggests women enjoy a wide range of televised sports conventionally dominated by men. Among all NASCAR television viewers, women comprise nearly 40 percent of the viewers, a number that has grown five percent since 1995 (Weissman 1999). Women comprise approximately the same percentage for National Football League television audiences; here, too, female viewership has increased substantially in recent years. This increased participation suggests that watching sports is “for women too,” suggesting diminished masculinity of these sports (or increased combination with femininity).

Such gains bring opposition. Research suggests that when women attempt to further their sports consumption on television or in other media areas, they are often met with resistance by men who feel mediated sports consumption is their domain. The use of sports talk, “lends itself to establishing male virtues such as competitiveness, achievement, aggressiveness, and fearlessness” (Kahle, Elton, and Kambara 1997, p. 37). Women attempting to participate are often ignored (Fischer and Gainer 1994) because sports are viewed as a masculine domain where men are allowed to bond with one another (Messner 1992). Women entering this

domain, whether knowledgeable sports consumers or not, can upset the process of male bonding (Fischer and Gainer 1994).

The evidence provided here suggests that lingering hints of modernism exist but are diminishing. Perhaps what allows men to maintain a sense of masculinity in such a consumptive practice is how they consume sports. Rather than consuming passively, an act usually considered feminine, men, as suggested above, often consume sports in an active, aggressive manner. They analyze, advise or inform fellow spectators about the actions of the athletes or teams. Women, on the other hand, stand to suffer sanctions if they produce a running critique of the action. The gender of the actor, the gender of the perceiver, and the social context shape the meanings and interpretations. This idea is similar to computer work historically being considered “women’s work” because it required dexterity and was low status work. When it started to become high status work the same activity was redefined as highly skilled and technical (Reskin and Roos 1990). Therefore, while the gaps in viewership appear to be closing, the trajectory may plateau if men want to maintain control over the domain as a masculine act.

*Participatory Activities* – Men have dominated leisure and participatory sport activities in North America (Wiley, Shaw, and Havitz 2000). The historic lopsidedness of male participation in sports is often explained by gendered socialization. Participation in sports is considered an important way to construct a masculine self-identity. Boys who have difficulty with sports are vulnerable to attack as “not real men” (Messner 1992). Boys’ participation in sports is considered the norm and girls’ participation exceptional (Messner, Duncan, and Jensen 1993; Wiley et al. 2000). Connell (1987) uses the notions of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity to explain gendered social patterns of sports participation.

Nonetheless, more women are participating in sports than ever before. Approximately one in three women participates in organized sports (Sabo and Jansen 1998). In addition, girls age nine to 18, who are familiar with the Internet and other multi-media, are showing more interest in sports than women over 18. Among those ages nine to 14, girls show more interest than boys in playing sports such as basketball (Gardyn 2001). This indicates that at the grassroots level, participation in sports among young girls is increasing. Bradish, Lathrop and Sedgwich (2001) compared female consumers in generations X and Y. They found that the younger generation Y consumers possess a heightened commitment to sport and that their consumer expertise and preferences were similar to boys.

Several factors have contributed to the increase in girls’ participation in sports, including Title IX (Messner 1988). Before Title IX, one in 27 women participated in sports. According to Dworkin and Messner (1999), in 1971 there were only 294,015 U.S. women who participated in interscholastic high school sports compared to 3,666,917 men, or roughly 7.5 percent compared to 92.5 percent. By 1996 the number of women participating grew to 2,240,000 compared to 3,554,429 men, or 39 percent compared to 61 percent. Changes at the institutional level of analysis have allowed women and girls to close the gap in participatory activities. While there is some evidence of postmodern liberation in such activities (as discussed in the final sections), we argue that further liberation will occur when men and women and girls and boys are allowed freer access to move in between the different activities without regard to gender.

One thing that continues to prevent self-expression in participatory activities, especially organized activities, is the separation between men and women and boys and girls into different spheres (Thorne 1993). This physical separation allows “differentness” to be maintained, whether real or artificial, which exaggerates differences and allows men to maintain control (Reskin 1998). According to Reskin, physical segregation fosters unequal treatment because it locates people in different spheres where disparity in treatment from the dominant group can be hidden or kept away from the subordinate group.

*Leisure Activities* – Leisure is another area of consumption where gender gaps exist. The gender gap in free time, or pure leisure, during the week in the United States and several other OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries is close to three hours in favor of men (Bittman and Wajcman 2000).

Women in these countries experience a higher proportion of their leisure time that is contaminated with other unpaid activities, such as housework and taking care of the children. Men's leisure is less likely to be interrupted. Men can experience larger blocks of free time or pure leisure without having to worry about other obligations. Bittman and Wajcman (2000) also found that among married couples with children under two, men have approximately three times as much "adult leisure" time during the week (without the presence of children). In addition, men see time with children as play, while women see such time as the occasion for unpaid work. This concept of pure leisure or uncontaminated leisure coincides with Deem's (1988) idea of leisure quality, whereby the quality of leisure for women is less than it is for men.

A vast literature indicates that men have fewer constraints than women. Examples of constraints on women's participation include: more difficulty finding people to participate with, being too busy with family, a lack of physical ability, not knowing where to participate, not knowing where to learn the activity, not being at ease in social situations, and being physically unable to participate (Jackson and Henderson 1995).

Are the notions of masculinity and femininity as clear-cut for leisure as they are for sports? We think not. Many fewer activities are clearly gender marked if they are considered leisure. For example, bike riding, playing tennis, jogging, ice-skating, playing on the beach, skiing are all activities for "people" and can easily be coed. There are some leisure activities that are considered more masculine (skateboarding, surfing) and some that are considered more feminine (shopping, "chick flicks", spas). The risk of gender transgression is low if someone of the "wrong" gender participates. Examining leisure compared to professional sports shows the flexibility of signs and what they signify. Leisure bike riding has no apparent "gender," but competitive bike riding (the Tour de France) is masculine, despite the ostensible "sameness" of the activities.

### **Production**

In this section, production is viewed in terms of who manages and controls organized sports, specifically in the NCAA, and who receives the majority of the funding and attention. The word "coach" still connotes masculinity (as does "priest," "judge," "senator," "pilot," "dentist," etc). Positions of power are still assumed to be masculine. The focus here begins with the management structure of women's athletics and leisure.

According to Dworkin and Messner (1999), at the onset of Title IX, the vast majority of all coaches for women's college teams were women. In 1972, 90 percent of women's college teams had women coaches, but in 1996 that percentage decreased to below 50 percent. A more dramatic shift occurred with athletic director positions of women's college athletics. In 1972, women held 90 percent of these positions compared to 18.5 percent in 1996 (Dworkin and Messner 1999). Dworkin and Messner credit this rapid shift to changes in economic conditions underlying collegiate athletics. As the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) gained economic power through such sources as television, the nature of women's collegiate athletics went from the diverse values of health and cooperation to values of cutthroat competition. Men were therefore hired in these positions to mold women in a militaristic tradition in order to take advantage of the newfound marketing and profit potential that was evident in men's sports (Dworkin and Messner 1999). Lovett and Lowry (1994) attribute the decline of female coaches to the effectiveness of the "good old boy" network and the ineffectiveness of the "good old girl" network.

Despite men moving into positions once held by women, evidence suggests that the gap in wages is actually higher in some cases for women. Within women's basketball, for example, Humphreys (2000) found that women Division I NCAA head basketball coaches have base salaries that are nine percent higher than men's. However, the base salaries for coaches of women's basketball is 50 percent the base for coaches of men's basketball. The higher amount given to men's basketball is attributed to occupation and not the coach's gender (Humphreys 2000).

Similar findings from another study (Suggs 2000a) indicate that women at the collegiate level, overall, have less control over resources and production. Even though Title IX does not offer any guideline on specific percentages

or dollar amounts for coaches' salaries, the women's proportion of total salary budget of NCAA Division I was under 35 percent in 1998-1999. Even though the percentage of women college students is 53 percent, the percentage of women college athletes is only 41.8. This percentage is up, though, from the year prior when women occupied 53.2 percent of the undergraduates but only constituted 39.6 percent of all student athlete positions (Suggs 2000a).

According to Suggs (2000a), the reason for the spending discrepancy between men's and women's sports lies in the fact that sports programs at Division I-A schools have more interests in the revenue-producing sports such as football and men's basketball. This spending discrepancy, however, creates more opportunities for women's sports programs because the moneymaking programs help subsidize the nonrevenue-generating sports, which largely include women's sports. The discrepancy among Division I-A women participating in sports is even larger at those schools not belonging to the equity leagues, or those conferences associated with lucrative television contracts, which include the Atlantic Coast, Big East, Big Ten, Big 12, Pacific-10, and Southeastern (Suggs 2000a).

The NCAA at Division II and III levels provide a somewhat different story than Division I. The percentage of female athletes in Division II and III is 38 and 41 percent, respectively, compared to 42 percent in Division I (Suggs 2000a, 2000b). The total percentage of female undergraduates at the lower division schools is 56 percent in Division II, 55 percent at Division III, and 53 percent at Division I. Funding for coaches of women's teams is approximately 32 percent and 40 percent of the total coaching budgets in Division II and III, respectively. The data show a very interesting aspect of university sports. As schools get bigger in terms of division, universities are likely to spend more money on the popular, revenue-generating sports—usually football and men's basketball. Gender equity or "substantial proportionality" may never be accomplished at smaller colleges due to the fact that women, overall, are less interested in sports, and those women who are interested in sports usually prefer to go to the larger programs (Suggs 2000b).

Another institution that is heavily produced and dominated by men is golf. The Professional Golfer's Association of America (PGA), which is the world's largest working sports organization, is comprised of over 27,000 people (PGA.com 2003). Of these people, fewer than four percent are women, but this number does not include the 1,100 women who belong to the Ladies Professional Golf Association's (LPGA) teaching and club professional division (Kinney 2003).

The male domination of sports production is evident in media coverage as well. Comparison of the sports programming on ESPN and CNN and sports reporting in *The New York Times* and *USA Today* reveal the very high degree of embedded favoritism toward men's sports and men athletes, even at times when major women's sporting events were peaking in newsworthiness (Eastman and Billings 2000). Donna Lopiano (2002), executive director of the Women's Sports Foundation, notes, however, that some women's sports, such as tennis, garner high if not higher television ratings than comparable men's activities, but funding in terms of prize money and television rights still lag behind what men receive. Research on gender equity in the leisure services field shows that women indeed sense this discrimination, as they report greater feelings of discrimination and perceived inequality (Shinew and Arnold 1998).

As the evidence above suggests, funding for women's athletics and women's coaches is narrowing, even though in many cases the substantial proportion standard established in Title IX has not been met. Gaps in the production of conventionally men's sports, however, still largely exist, as most attention in the major media outlets is still given to men's sports rather than women's, even though current newsworthiness of women's sports is on the rise. Men appear to govern the production of most organized sports, despite the fact that many of these sports are for women. We contend that those who control production are likely to maintain power, which obviously prevents postmodern liberation from occurring, as men will maintain the privileged status. Although closing the gap completely would perhaps get us closer to liberation from gender constraints, we argue that constraints at the interactional level will still persevere. In married couples where the wife is the chief wage earner, acts toward

gender normalcy still prevail (Commuri 2001). The husband still picks up the dinner check, for example. We argue that gender as a structure is so deeply entrenched that the production of sports and leisure will still be viewed as a “man’s job” irrespective of women’s participation.

### ACTIVE VERSUS PASSIVE

In the modern era, men were associated with activity and women were associated with passivity (activity implies masculinity, passivity implies femininity). This is similar to the notions of production and consumption. Consumption is considered feminine (and therefore mostly the domain of women) (Firat 1994). In this next section, we apply the modern passive/active dichotomy to a sports and leisure context starting with media framing of passive women and active men.

In an early study of female versus male poses in magazine advertisements from 1928, 1956, and 1972, Poe (1976) found that when women appeared in sports motif, they usually appeared in a coed recreational activity rather than a same-sex competitive sport. She also found that the representations of women did not increase but decreased. In fact, the quality and quantity of the images differed significantly from 1928 compared to 1956 and 1972. This, according to Poe, came as quite a surprise, given the nature of the increased opportunities for women in competitive sports in later years. These findings suggest that increased opportunity for gender “blending” produced a reaction towards greater separation.

In later media studies, Duncan and Messner (1998) found that sportswomen were photographed in such a way as to suggest deference to men, while sportsmen were more likely to be portrayed in poses showing dominance to women. For example, men relative to women were shown in positions of higher elevation, larger relative sizes, and positions of protectiveness. Women were portrayed in lower physical positions, smaller sizes, and with their heads and bodies canting. Women, as a whole, were shown in passive poses while men were shown in active athletic poses. Duncan (1993), in a similar study, noted how similar the passivity of the female athletes presented in *Sports Illustrated* is to that of the swimsuit models used in *Sports Illustrated*.

Leath and Lumpkin (1992) found similar results in their study on active versus passive poses. In their study on the female publication *Women’s Sports and Fitness*, they found that women who were models rather than athletes were portrayed on nearly 45 percent of the covers. In addition, the majority of all women, whether athletes or non-athletes, were depicted in passive poses. Such poses indicate that women are more valued for their appearance rather than for their athleticism (Duncan and Messner 1998).

Another issue in the media coverage of athletes that lends itself to modern passive versus active analysis is the concept of agency. Men are typically portrayed in the media coverage of sports as having agency or control over themselves, their opponents, and their own successes. Women, on the other hand, are portrayed as lacking agency, being framed as having external forces such as luck and family support dictate their success. In essence, men are portrayed as active agents and women as reactive agents (Duncan and Messner 1998). Duncan and Messner also note that in describing basketball shots, locution is quite evident in women’s games and not so much in men’s games. In their study they found that when a woman missed a shot, the announcers would use first person active voice to describe the miss. If men missed, the first person active voice was rarely used, which is a concept Duncan and Messner call “agentless” framing or secret agent. In essence, a poor performance by a man was repositioned into a positive; errors were due too unbridled strength or other unavoidable circumstances. Women’s errors were due to “their own unmitigated incompetence” (Duncan and Messner 1998, p. 179). These subtle distinctions suggest that creating and maintaining masculinity as active and femininity as passive persist in sports.

These are just a few of the many ways that we can examine passive versus active in a sports and leisure context. Certainly many women are now being photographed and viewed as active, aggressive sports participants. The

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portrayal of the U.S women's soccer team victory in the latest World Cup provides evidence of how women are now doing things once aligned with masculinity. This suggests that women are less constrained by notions of conventional emphasized femininity, even though Lopiano (2002) argues that the "ponytail" look of the players maintains such femininity. Changes in this category are perhaps the closest in blurring between gender and sex, as women display actions conventionally considered masculine. If actions are allowed to speak louder than words, then depictions of women doing conventional masculinity may transform the meaning of those actions in the blurred way suggested by Firat. West and Zimmerman (1987) imply that individuals are morally accountable for gender transgressions, but collectives or those in power can challenge gender regimes and produce system wide change. When players such as Brandi Chastain and other female athletes can engage in aggressive sports without being classified as deviant, this will be evidence that simple gender dichotomies no longer persist. Further blurring of gender categories will follow when aggressive behavior and descriptors can be used without regard to the sex category of the actors.

## **EMOTIONAL VERSUS RATIONAL**

The modern era tended to create bipolar dichotomous categories, with one category superior and sacred and the other inferior and profane (Firat 1994). The emotional/rational is one such modern category with women largely possessing the emotional (less valued trait) and men the rational (more valued trait). We examine how these categories can pertain to sport and leisure, beginning with a focus on spectatorship and ending with media coverage.

### **Spectatorship**

In regard to emotions during and after sports productions, Wenner and Gantz (1998) review a number of different results by gender. Regardless of the level of interest men and women have in sports, women are more likely than men to continue watching television after a game. Men, however, are more likely than women to stay in a bad mood after watching a loss. Men are also more likely than women to show greater nervousness during sports broadcasts.

Overall, from the spectator perspective, these results indicate that men can be even more emotional than women can be. This is contrary to conventional dominant notions of emotionality as indicating femininity. As Hochschild (1983) observed, a double standard for anger exists. For men, the expression of anger is deemed rational, but for women anger is interpreted as a sign of emotional instability (Pierce 1995). In a sports context, the conventional link between emotion and masculinity is loosened. Anger and irrationality here signify masculinity.

### **Media Coverage**

Media portrayals of athletes perpetuate the notion of emotional women and rational men. Trivializing, stereotyping, devaluing, or ambivalent media messages are important because viewers and readers often uncritically internalize and easily accept them as truth. Duncan and Brummet (1993) argue that media coverage is sexist. Sexist ideology in media coverage serves to take away women's potential power in sports. Duncan and Messner (1998), for example, found that women were more likely than men to be depicted in the media as sobbing or being consoled by their coaches or other players after a defeat. Duncan and Messner use support from the sport pain and injury literature to suggest that such findings are consistent with the "culture of risk." Male athletes are encouraged to ignore and deny injuries because admitting injury is equivalent to admitting weakness, which is considered feminine. In the hypermasculine world of sports this would be a highly stigmatizing thing to do.

Duncan and Messner (1998), as discussed under passive versus active, note how media attribute women's successes to external forces, while men's are attributed to internal ability. Such attributions include emotions. When women athletes lose, Duncan and Messner report that commentators often attribute the losses to

incompetence, emotions, and lack of aggressiveness. Hilliard (1994) found similar results in women's tennis where emotional vulnerability was the primary explanation for failure. Messner, Duncan, and Jensen (1993) argue that two formulas of success exist, one for men and one for women. The one for men alludes to notions of rationality in which success is based upon talent, instinct, intelligence, size, strength, quickness, hard work, and risk taking. For women, many of these elements exist as well, but also include emotion, luck, togetherness, and family.

The evidence provided here does suggest to some extent that a modern gendered emotional/rational dichotomy persists in sports, with women portrayed as emotional and men as rational. "Doing gender" is pronounced in sports; however, anecdotal evidence suggests some blurring, with men allowed more leeway to show their feelings (a feminine act in the modern gender system). There are ample portrayals of men crying, hugging one another, or slapping each other on the behind in a sports context. Men, in fact, express love not only physically but also verbally. The potential of these portrayals to blend masculinity and femininity is great although presently unrealized. While the full range of emotions, interactions, rationality, intelligence and control exist among women and men, blurring reflects that these traits have similar value regardless of gender categories in the sports context.

### SUBMISSIVE VERSUS ASSERTIVE

The notion of submissive versus assertive concerns the relationship that existed, and was expected, between men and women in the modern era. Women, as mentioned, were once considered the private property of men. The feminine was signified as being consumed, objectified, and commodified by men, which essentially meant that men owned their wives. Women could do little on their own without their husband's permission (Firat 1994). We examine how this translates to a sports and leisure context beginning with the concept of empowerment. We also explore how this dichotomy exists in television spectatorship and how women and men are portrayed in the media.

#### **Empowerment**

While examples of submissiveness exist for women in participatory leisure activities and sports, leisure involvement overall is said to give women confidence to challenge society's gendered role restrictions and stereotypes. By doing so, leisure and sports are means by which women can become empowered (Gilroy 1989; Henderson 1990; Henderson and Bialeschki 1991; Shaw 1994). Organized sports empower women through better health, muscular bodies and fun (Hall 1996; Real 1999). Several scholars indicate that the increased physicality from exercise enhances women's ability to challenge traditional notions of femininity (Hall 1996; McDermott 1996, 2000). Despite the obvious benefits of leisure and sport, Gilroy (1989) suggests that a woman's body is rarely seen as an agent or source of power. Instead, the female body is treated as an object controlled by someone else. In the context of aerobics, women's consumption is viewed as the direct result of consumer culture in which socially desired body images are produced, and women are motivated to acquire and sustain them (Cole 1993; Hargreaves 1994; Maguire and Mansfield 1998). Cole (1993) seeks the origins of women's bodies as cultural politics in the Reagan era, which produced "gender-perfect" and "hard-body."

In many cases, the empowerment women can gain from sport and leisure can be a double-edged sword leading to their own oppression. The physical strength needed to perform in an activity may lead to empowerment; however, the resultant muscle mass may also leave women feeling ostracized for being socially deviant (Gilroy 1989). Women can even be oppressed in cases where the muscle mass is seen as more feminine. Dworkin and Messner (1999) argue that the muscle mass resulting from sport and fitness activities may appear to be empowering and agentic, but such bodily agency may reinforce patriarchy in the sense that women might be sculpting their bodies in order to conform to commercialized notions of heterosexual femininity. Dworkin and Messner (1999) also suggest, as does Gilroy (1989), that even if women are empowered by muscular fit bodies, such bodies are still socially constrained by a "glass ceiling." In the case of fitness, Dworkin and Messner (1999)

suggest that for women to be accepted, they must be consistent with expectations of emphasized femininity (see Connell 1987).

### **Spectatorship**

Submissiveness in the context of sports spectatorship figures here in terms of whether men or women dominate the viewership or spectatorship of televised sports. Wenner and Gantz (1998) report findings that suggest married women overall will comply with the needs of their husbands when a discrepancy exists in sports spectatorship. They report that women are almost two times more likely than their husbands to watch what sports their husband wants to watch, and men are also more likely than women to believe that their spouses would give up watching their sports viewing in order to accommodate the other's plans. When a conflict in viewing does arise and one partner wants to watch sports and the other partner wants to watch his or her favorite show, women are more likely than men to acquiesce to the second television set. Men usually have dominant power on TV channel choices and influence women's viewing by limiting their choice (Lull 1990; Seiter et al 1989). This situation makes it more difficult for women to concentrate on their viewing for a long time.

Wenner and Gantz (1998) report evidence that the stereotypical notions of armchair quarterbacks and football widows have less at their foundation than commonly believed. In essence, they write that the differences that do exist between men and women in sports viewing are more likely to be culturally based than sports based. When interest in sports is controlled, men and women overall appear to have similar reactions. This suggests that the need for blurring and the meaning level for change at the behavior level are unfounded. Despite the masculinity of sports viewing, interested women participate.

On the one hand, the limited evidence here suggests that women are relegated to the submissive role in sports viewership. On the other hand, the latter finding suggests that the desire exists for women to take sports viewership seriously. The stereotypical outlook of women becoming sports widows, as suggested above, is a comfortable way for many men and women to exist because it is consistent with doing gender. In cases where women are "interested" in sports viewership, they are considered the exception so that the norm remains unchallenged. Once again, movement toward postmodern freedom will be accelerated once gender is not used to determine what is appropriate.

### **Media Coverage**

The notion of submissiveness versus assertiveness has also emerged through media coverage. In this sense, what has been at issue is femininity, and whether displays of competitiveness among women can actually appeal to an audience that presumably prefers to view women who act like stereotypical women. Creedon (1998) argues that when sport intersects with gender, women's physicality simply does not sell to advertisers, but neither does men's femininity.

The Ladies' Professional Golf Association (LPGA) tour is consistently used as an example to demonstrate the difficulty of appealing to advertisers (Chambers 1995; Crosset 1995). When *womenSports* was introduced as the apparent women's version of *Sports Illustrated*, advertisers failed to embrace it (Creedon 1995, 1998). In the 1980s, however, *womenSports* changed to *Women's Sports and Fitness* to position itself to cover fashion and beauty, a need that was intensified by the aerobics and jazzercise craze. Advertisers of shoes, cosmetics, and other beauty aids came on board once the image and focus changed to reflect traditional gender norms. Whether this is what most women actually wanted or desired, however, is not clear.

Duncan and Messner (1998) explain that the sport media have been slow to register the narrowing of the muscle gap aided by such programs as Title IX because athletic women and girls symbolically threaten male hegemony. The media, whether consciously or unconsciously, paint pictures of women that perpetuate notions of submissiveness. Duncan and Messner (1998) even contend that when athletes are women, the magazine's poses could be considered soft-core pornography. They argue that the athletes are photographed in poses that indicate a

“come-on” with angled glances and parted lips. In a study on golf magazine representations, Maas and Hasbrook (2001) found that golf magazines do little to challenge hegemonic masculinity.

The same is not true when the athletes are men. Instead, when athletes are men they are portrayed in dominant positions. Trujillo (1991), in a study of representations of Major League Baseball pitcher Nolan Ryan, suggested that Ryan was a perfect representation of hegemonic masculinity. Trujillo argues that the media portrayals of Ryan reinforce hegemonic masculinity by portraying him as the embodiment of masculine athletic power, the ideal image of the capitalist worker, the family patriarch, white rural cowboy, and phallic symbol. The media, Trujillo argues, found somebody who exemplifies masculinity, and so were therefore comfortable in giving Ryan excess coverage.

Evidence of women appearing less submissively in advertisements, especially in athletic company advertisements, is beginning to appear. When MacCurdy (1994) analyzed women in athletic advertisements, she found that women appear less concerned with how men see them than they do in other types of advertising. Instead, women appear as they see themselves irrespective of men. Whether women are taking on more of a masculine model of dealing with the world, or are “actually moving into a locus of personal power that allows their femininity to remain intact” remains unanswered (MacCurdy 1994, p. 46).

## **WORTHLESS VERSUS VALUABLE**

Corresponding with the notions of consumption versus production and home versus the workplace is the associated value of these domains in what Firat (1994) categorizes as worthless versus valuable. In the modern era, consumption was for women and considered worthless. “Consuming, after all, was valueless, a profane and banal act... They were criticized, made fun of, devalued for being consumers, yet if they were not good consumers, they hurt national economic growth” (Firat 1994, p. 213). Even though value has been the underlying premise throughout this review, we evaluate it more directly in this section in terms of participatory activities, media coverage, and leisure entitlement.

### **Participatory Activities**

At the collegiate level, gender equalizers such as Title IX have created great inroads for women and women’s sports. Women now have opportunities to compete at levels that were unavailable and unthinkable ten years ago (Cole 2000). Cole compares Title IX with affirmative action programs and contends that at best Title IX is unevenly instituted and enforced. She finds that many universities just make minor and symbolic compromises to avoid penalties, which are often not enforced despite blatant discrepancies. Cole also contends that the influx of multinational corporation (MNC) support of women’s sports and Title IX should not necessarily be viewed as pure and without ulterior motive. By making consumption of women’s sports appear to be a “progressive practice and a political experience,” Cole (2000, p. 6) argues that MNCs actually profit. In other words, while corporations appear to be helping a cause they are not acting altruistically. Dworkin and Messner (1999) argue that corporations such as Nike have found peace and profit by co-opting feminism in such a way as to make women feel that Nike supports individual empowerment and agency. However, they argue that such efforts produce the following:

In contrast, individual women’s agency expressed as identification with corporate consumerism is a reproductive agency that firmly situates women’s actions and bodies within the structural gender order that oppresses them (Dworkin and Messner 1999, p. 349).

### **Media Coverage**

In terms of media coverage, Kinkema and Harris (1998) suggest that the media devalue and trivialize women athletes by devoting disproportionately less time to women’s sports. The media also devalue women by highlighting such aspects as physical attractiveness or roles as mothers, daughters, girlfriends, and sisters rather

than focusing on women's athletic skill and competence. This is explored further in the final section. The media are also criticized for placing blame on individual women athletes and reducing them to adolescents. Kinkema and Harris (1998) found that both men and women respondents perceive women sports reporters as less competent than men counterparts.

Duncan and Messner (1998) found, in a study using Amateur Athletic Foundation (AAF) data, that the production of men's NCAA basketball coverage compared to women's coverage contained far more technical features such as detailed graphics, slow-motion replay, and different camera angles, all of which add value to the consumption experience. Also, men's productions contained far more hype before the event, framing the event and players as heroic and newsworthy. They also found that when athletes were men they were portrayed as larger than life, stronger, and more agentic.

On the other hand, research also suggests that media coverage of women's sports is increasing and for reasons that are based more upon a competitive product and traditional notions of team play rather than sexism. Creedon (1998) reports several incidents of women's sports gaining ground in television revenues and ratings, making such sports as women's NCAA basketball and the fledgling Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) enticing to advertisers. Despite such inroads, Creedon contends that coverage is still lopsided and will likely be so for decades. This is partly because most media workers and executives are men. This is true despite exceedingly high female enrollment in journalism and mass communication programs. In addition norms for entry-level personnel are widely considered masculine. Deadlines and space limitations favor male-dominated sports leaving women's sports under reported. Increasing the number of women journalists is unlikely to fix the problem. Women entering sports journalism do not want to cover women's sports because they know women's sports are devalued and will not lead to success in journalism (Creedon 1998). This situation perpetuates male dominance in media coverage despite women's inroads.

The media also devalue women's athletics through gender marking. When referring to women's athletics, the media often implicitly term men's sports as the standard, referencing such things as the NCAA basketball tournament as "the" tournament (Duncan and Messner 1998), whereas the women's version is prefixed with the term "women's." The same holds true for other activities, events, and leagues. The Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) versus the men's Professional Golfers Association (PGA) serves as a good example. Messner, Duncan, and Jensen (1993) argue convincingly that gender marking contributes to the perpetuation of male dominance in the sports and activities where it is used. Bruce (1998) found that many women he interviewed regarded the production of men's basketball as the standard against which women's basketball should be measured. He argued that this undermines women's attempts to experience strong identification to sports.

Infantilization is another example of how the media devalues women's sports. In this case, men athletes are often referred to as "men," "young men," or "fellas," but not "boys" while women athletes are frequently called "girls" and "young ladies" (Duncan and Messner 1998). Infantilization also occurs when women athletes are referred to by their first names and men athletes by their last names. Research suggests that "dominants" are often referred to by their surnames and subordinates by their first names (Messner et al. 1993). Dworkin and Messner (1999) describe media framing of Olympic men gymnasts and women athletes as vulnerable, powerless, and in the hands of their men coaches or superiors, also suggesting infantilization.

### **Leisure Entitlement**

In terms of leisure, the notion of value has emerged through the concept of entitlement. Entitlement in leisure has been widely discussed in terms of whether it is a right or privilege. Research often suggests that men see it as a right, whereas women do not and are actively discouraged not to (see the review by Henderson and Bileschki 1991). Even though women may often say that they need leisure, they may not place a higher priority on it or feel they deserve it (Henderson 1996), despite the positive outcomes associated with leisure and physical fitness. Such outcomes include empowerment and improved mental and physical health (Fischer and Gainer 1994; Goodwin and Hill 1998; Henderson 1996; Henderson and Bialeschki 1991; Shaw 1994).

The notion of women not feeling entitled to leisure can be explained by marginality theory (see Henderson 1990). According to this theory, those who feel marginalized in society feel a lack of control over their own lives because their lives are at the disposal of others. Leisure, then, often ends up being the lowest priority for women. Henderson and Bialeschki (1991) cite research that suggests women may not feel entitled to leisure until the children have grown and left home or until the women turn 65.

Notions of leisure entitlement appear to vary among different groups of women. Henderson (1990) cites work from Deem (1986) to provide evidence that women who work outside the home or who were employed had more leisure interests than non-employed women. Employed women more easily compartmentalize their lives to make time for leisure. In addition, employed women generally have more money and more household help, which provide more leisure options (Henderson and Bialeschki 1991).

More leisure entitlement and empowerment should lead to greater leisure involvement and enjoyment (Henderson and Bialeschki 1991; Shaw 1994). Leisure is a potential location for women to establish resistance against oppression. Henderson and Bialeschki (1991) indicate that such resistance can spread to other oppressive social structures (Henderson and Bialeschki 1991). The leisure as resistance argument is based upon the idea of agency and self-determination. In other words, in order for women to achieve resistance, they must be able to perceive and interpret social settings in a way that they want (Shaw 1994). Women's participation in conventionally men-dominated domains is associated with an increased sense of self and autonomy (Shaw 1994); however, as we have seen in other domains, activities can have multiple meanings. Having to participate in men's sports on men's terms is not empowering for all women. As Lukes (1977) argues, the third face of power, or the power to define situations, is greater than face-to-face domination. If women must fight sexism to participate in activities, then, as Henderson (1996) finds, leisure is less likely to be a positive experience. Consistent with Firat's notion of the multiple possibilities of signifiers, leisure activities leave room for a variety of interpretations. If women participate in kickboxing to conform their bodies to media-dictated notions of beauty, they are likely to be oppressed. If they participate to feel strong and self-reliant, they are likely to be empowered. The activity has no inherent meaning, gender or otherwise.

## PRODUCT VERSUS PERSON

Firat (1994) alludes to the commonly held notion that women in a modern sense were objectified while men were held in the subjective or treated as individuals. In this sense, women were viewed as property while men were viewed as the property owners. "The feminine that was signified as the consumer became the consumed, commodified, and objectified to be used by men" (Firat 1994, p. 212). As with the other categories, the product versus person dichotomy is related to notions of production and consumption, valuable versus worthless, and so on. In this section, we demonstrate how the product versus person dichotomy can be applied to a sports and leisure context with the primary focus on the objectification of women's bodies in the sports media.

### Objectification

The activities that receive considerable attention for objectification include gymnastics (Dworkin and Messner 1999), swimmers, divers, and figure skaters (Sabo and Jansen 1998) as well as beach volleyball players (Creedon 1998). Sabo and Jansen (1998) remark that the camera angles used in telecasting such activities reproduce soft-core pornography that are aided by voice-overs extolling childlike innocence and vulnerability. Davis (1997), in his book about the swimsuit issue of *Sports Illustrated*, argued that most of bikini-clad supermodels draped over driftwood on Caribbean beaches have nothing to do with sport. Therefore, she concludes, "*Sport Illustrated* is magazine about hegemonic masculinity rather than a magazine about sport" (p.55). Duncan (1993) investigated objectification found in *Sports Illustrated* to reveal how mechanisms of patriarchy, which includes objectification, are embedded in photographs and captions. Duncan argues that engendered textual analyses are useful, but in

order to understand the underlying systems or structures that give rise to objectification, as well as commodification and voyeurism, we must analyze the medium as well.

The objectification of individual women athletes usually transfers to larger audiences than when the focus is on team competition. In the case of the former, critics argue that the media frames usually highlight traditional notions of femininity, including supple and shapely bodies and pretty faces. This objectification of women, in accounts made by both men and women (Kane and Lenskyj 1998), usually frames men as more powerful (Dworkin and Messner 1999), which undermines the considerable athletic achievements women have made over the last few decades (Sabo and Jansen 1998). Nonetheless, researchers in the area contend that the media constantly emphasize traditional notions of femininity or use erasure tactics (associate aggressive sports with lesbianism) to downplay, trivialize, or marginalize female athleticism (Cahn 1993, Kane and Lenskyj 1998). This is why they contend such activities as women's softball, involving over eight million women, rarely receives media coverage in the local press. Lopiano (2002) notes a similar phenomenon in the coverage of the media-safe All-American women's soccer team compared to the successful women's undefeated gold medallist softball and basketball players. The former received top billing, while the latter were relegated to background news due to their less feminine builds and perceptions.

Many marketers in this area realize the large underutilized sports market created by women, and are now more than ever sensitive to objectification. Global corporations and marketers are now beginning to seize the opportunity to grow women's markets (Branch 1995; Furst 1994; Lough 1996) and ways to appeal to the women segment is on the rise (Gauthier and Hansen 1993; Hansen and Gauthier 1993). Marketing to women has created ambivalent feelings among some feminists who have railed against such corporations in the past (Sabo and Jansen 1998). Some argue, however, that as women continue to make strides towards self-definition, control over their own bodies, and equality in sports, defenders of the status quo intensify their fight (Kane and Lenskyj 1998; Messner 1988).

## **FREEDOM FROM MODERN EXPECTATIONS**

To illustrate how, from a modern perspective, the role of gender in this domain has changed, we provided examples of how Firat's (1994) modern significations of gender framework can be used to analyze sports and leisure. Our goal was to show how these significations could be used as a lens to study dichotomies in sports and leisure. In the process, we shed additional light as to why some of these dichotomies persist in, presumably, a postmodern society. Now we want to provide some insight as to how notions of liberatory postmodernity appear to be making their way in some sports and leisure activities, but, for the most part, in somewhat confused, ambivalent, or less than liberalizing ways.

Even though Connell (1994) claims that sports is a leading definer of masculinity in Western culture, Whitson (1994) asserts that such a notion is only evident in sports of "force," or those sports that celebrate physical dominance and use institutionalized rules. In other sports, however, Whitson claims that femininity and masculinity are allowed to occur in a variety of shapes and forms without adhering to conventional notions of domination or gender. Such activities give people, generally men, places to develop personal skill, strength, and pleasure in physical activities for those who do not excel in traditional team-based competitive sports (see Wheaton 2000). In essence, it appears that these "new" sports, or individualized sports (i.e., mountain biking, snowboarding, and skateboarding) that are less institutionalized and less formal, break down masculine domination. They allow feminine and masculine representations to occur simultaneously (Wheaton 2000). Midol and Broyer (1995) claim that the new sports allow men to access something that has been conventionally defined as feminine and women to engage in something that has been conventionally defined as masculine.

In sports such as windsurfing, there is evidence of multiple gender categories becoming more apparent. According to Wheaton (2000), even though windsurfing remains a force in maintaining the gender order in

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society, the recognized categories of sporting masculinities have broadened. As with other sports that have evolved in opposition to dominant sporting cultures, windsurfing allows for several forms of masculinity. In her study of windsurfers in England, Wheaton (2000) asserts that windsurfing is less differentiated along gender lines than most other male-dominated leisure activities (e.g., golf, rugby, and sailing). For the most part, the male windsurfers in Wheaton's study respect active sportswomen and do not regard women as being passive, sexualized objects. Gender, in many regards, is ignored or not considered a vital component for establishing expertise.

A form of masculinity that emerged from the windsurfer culture that Wheaton (2000) examined was called "ambivalent masculinity." In this form, men actively disavowed forms of macho identity in forming a more anticompetitive and supportive group of participants who are less tolerant of sexism. While not necessarily embodying the "new man" concept, which essentially engenders complete gender liberation, the windsurfing culture described by Wheaton is a sign that postmodern freedom, albeit ambivalent, is possible.

While "degendering" should be on the horizon, there is evidence that conventional gender structures are often deeply embedded. In a study of Canadian adolescent boys from working class families, Laberge and Albert (1999) found that many believe that participation in women's sports (e.g., synchronized swimming, rhythmic gymnastics) threatens masculinity. The same was not true for boys from middle and upper class families who were split on the topic, indicating more openness of transgressive acts. But as Laberge and Albert note (1999), the acceptance of transgressive behavior may simply represent "ideological recycling" in which the moral strength obtained through facing stigmatization and discrediting by peers are used as proof of masculinity. "This reinforces rather than contests the hierarchical and dualistic gender configuration of sport, as men are still considered both different and superior even when they are involved in a traditionally women's arena" (Laberge and Albert 1999, p. 258).

Evidence of a confused postmodern freedom also emerges in the forum of women's professional sports, specifically in the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA). While several professional women's basketball leagues have been tried in the past, the WNBA appears to be making substantial progress, both in terms of finances and gender equality. According to McDonald (2000), the WNBA positions itself as somewhat of a "throwback league," where team play is emphasized over individual achievement. The WNBA positions itself as a league that empowers women, freeing women to be who they want to be (McDonald 2000). According to McDonald (2000), while WNBA players are portrayed as socially responsible, upstanding citizens who serve as good and humble role models for young children, they are also shown as being nurturing, cooperative, altruistic, and supportive of social causes. This, according to McDonald, "serves to remake traditional ideologies of femininity by positioning WNBA women as sport's new moral uplifters" (2000, p. 43). While trying to empower and invigorate women, the WNBA takes a step back in postmodern freedom by trying to create an image of heterosexuality, portraying players as wives and mothers (McDonald 2000).

Discourse without masculinity as preferable, superior and more valued than femininity and an absence of gender equity comparisons will signal postmodern liberation. These changes are happening in golf. Dichotomous gender categories were prevalent in golf during the modern era. Changes such as renaming the "ladies' tees" with such terms as the "forward tees" and "men's tees" with the term "middle tees" exemplify a new discourse. Changing the language may not be enough, though. McGinnis (2002) found that many golfers still consider the front tees "women's" and the back tees "men's, irrespective of how golf course managers designate the different teeing grounds. McGinnis (2002) found that the name change is nevertheless important. The more women feel they are limited in terms of where they can tee, the more they feel that men have the privileged status in golf. Changing gender meanings may be slow and uneven, but the promise of postmodern freedom persists.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Our review shows the usefulness of Firat's (1994) dichotomous significations of gender framework, which represent categories from the past or modern era, for identifying change and continuity in the relevance of gender for sports and leisure activities. Firat talks about the promise of postmodern deconstruction for freeing individuals from socially constructed notions of gender. He suggests that gender blurring may become so extreme that the usefulness of gendered social categories will disappear. Risman (1998) argues a similar point. She describes a post-gender society in which the categories of masculinities and femininity are exploded into multiple masculinities and femininities. She, too, envisions a world in which masculinity and femininity are no longer strongly tied to the sex categories male and female. Loosening these ties and allowing for masculinities and femininities opens a path towards eliminating gender as a system of power relations that privileges what is male. Our review shows evidence that gender significations are less limiting in some ways than they were in the past, but that for the most part gender still matters and the dichotomies realized in the modern still persist today.

How can additional change happen? Postmodern analysis emphasizes the importance of language. Therefore, one way to continue to blur gender categories is to use gendered adjectives in non-conventional ways. For example, we could describe men playing golf as graceful and women playing soccer as aggressive. If the athletes themselves try to change gender meanings they risk being labeled deviant (West and Zimmerman 1987); those in positions of power (commentators or media framers) have the power to legitimately change language usage.

Similar to studies of the changing gender of household tasks (Twiggs, McQuillan and Ferree 1998) or occupations (Reskin and Roos 1990), future studies need to monitor the gender of sports and leisure activities. Such research should examine gender marking, participation by sex, the value placed on various activities (e.g. media coverage of the NBA and WNBA), and the presumption that men's sports are the standard. In addition to monitoring change, future studies should explore marketing attempts to target women's participation. Because sports have historically been "men's," marketers need to make a special effort to include women; however when they do, they further differentiate women from men. If blurring categories will promote liberation, marketers face a conundrum. How can they increase women's participation without also increasing gender distinctions? In other words, one might ask whether gender marking prevents blurring from occurring due to creating separate categories for women. Does the benign intent of marketing golf clubs specifically for women in fact send a message to women as well as men that women need special clubs in order to compete, thus singling women out as inferior participants? Risman's (1998) analysis suggests that if we cannot eliminate "difference," we can work towards minimizing "unequal." Marketers can look towards not using gender to signify differential value or power and still use gender distinctions in their campaigns.

An alternate strategy involves ignoring gender altogether and focusing on individuals irrespective of category, thus accelerating the promise of liberatory postmodernism. How can they do this? We are not sure. One way might be to casually show people involved in sports and leisure activities without regard to conventional gender categories (e.g. have mixed groups playing football and doing synchronized swimming without having it be a main focus of the ad). This approach should let men and women decide on their own whether they should engage in any activity without worrying about gender appropriateness. This is a huge task to offer. Gender is such a fundamental organizing principle in society that most individuals prefer to alter their bodies to fit the social categories than to try and change the social order (see Fausto-Sterling 2002). Yet, as this review reveals, there has been change; as the postmodern framework suggests, marketers are well poised to provide even more.

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