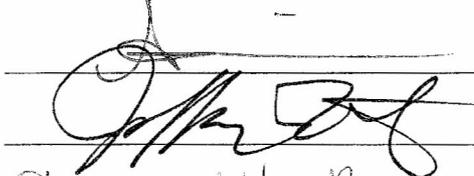


WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL SPORTS AND TITLE IX: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

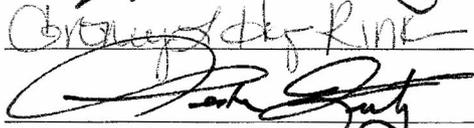
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Kathleen M. Sims
A Thesis
Submitted to the
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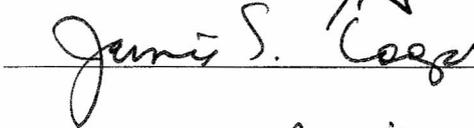
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Spring Semester 2014
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Women's Professional Sports and Title IX: An Anthropological Analysis

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University

by

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With great thanks to my parents, friends, and extended network of advocates. And, in particular, kudos to my boyfriend, Alex Ozenberger – the greatest supporter of them all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	v
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Research Objective	4
Methodology	6
Application of Soccer to Research Objective	7
Theoretical Significance	12
Chapter Two: Investigating the Enactment of Title IX	18
Chapter Three: Postfeminism, Fitness Frenzy, and Nike Sneakers	30
Emergence of the Postfeminist Era.....	32
The “Fitness Boom” and the Marketization of Women’s Recreational Athletics	38
Women’s Recreational Athletics, Feminine Beauty, and Fitness-Inspired Fictitious Empowerment.....	43
Chapter Four: The Emergence of Women’s Professional Sports	48
Development of Women’s Professional Soccer	55
Chapter Five: The Marketing of Women’s Professional Sports: Advancing the Postfeminist Narrative	60
Sexualized Sporting Agents.....	61
Virtuous Citizen-Athletes	66
The 1999 Women’s World Cup and the Production of Disparate Marketing Scripts ..	69
Chapter six: Discussion.....	76
References.....	86

ABSTRACT

WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL SPORTS AND TITLE IX: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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George Mason University, 2014

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This thesis investigates the extent to which the enactment of Title IX in 1972 directly permitted the emergence of women's professional sports organizations. I note the initial ambiguity as to Title IX's applicability to women's participation in organized athletics and the resistance leveled against Title IX's enactment. I then analyze the establishment of women's professional sports: women's professional athletic organizations resulted not from Title IX but from the expansion of the neoliberal market. Women's sports were positioned as advantageous to corporate investment via the confluence of the advent of the postfeminist era, the sociopolitical signification of hard bodies as representative of proper American citizenship, and the marketization of the women's fitness market. The convergence of such developments served to discursively articulate women's elite sports as financially profitable to corporate investors. I also reflect on the dominant scripts utilized to generate demand for women's professional sports.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I will never forget where I was on July 10th, 1999, the day that the United States Women's National Soccer Team, after 120 minutes of scoreless competition, defeated China via penalty shootout to clinch the Women's World Cup title. I watched the game with my family while on vacation at Bethany Beach. At the time, I played travel soccer, and I aspired to someday play for the United States National Team. As Brandi Chastain's penalty shot rippled the net of the goal, finally ending the game, I felt a surge of excitement. But my elation was quickly tempered by confusion as Chastain ripped off her shirt and sank to her knees, fists clenched and mouth agape in a silent scream, her voice drowned out by the roar of the crowd. I had never before witnessed a professional woman athlete behave in a similar manner, and as a result I was somewhat perplexed. Why, I contemplated, did she take off her shirt?

In the days and weeks that followed the World Cup, that image became inescapable: it graced magazines and newspapers, it was flashed on the news and made appearances on morning talk shows, it was relayed to diverse audiences via the internet. It has, furthermore, exhibited great cultural permanence: today, if one searches Google for images of Brandi Chastain, various iterations of the image depicting Chastain's shirtless, post-penalty kick celebration, comprise the vast majority of search results. Chastain's celebration has even been implicated in present-day academic scholarship – a

recent edition of the *Journal of Socio-Economics* included an article entitled “The Chastain Effect: Using Title IX to Measure the Causal Effect of Participating in High School Sports on Adult Women’s Social Lives” (Clarke and Ayres 2014).

I was a child when the United States Women’s National Team defeated China in the 1999 Women’s World Cup final. I graduated from elementary school just weeks before it occurred. Consequently, it is not surprising that I failed grasp the significance of that match, of those women, of that black, Nike sports bra. As I have aged, I have witnessed the increased proliferation of images of professional women athletes – including, but not limited to, soccer players – depicted in a highly sexual manner. Such images have caused me great frustration, as I interpret the sexualization of elite women athletes as detrimental to the advancement of women’s professional sports. I have experienced particular dissatisfaction via each instance that various high-profile women’s soccer players posed provocatively for publications such as *Sports Illustrated* and *ESPN the Magazine*. To me, Mia Hamm, the poster-child of the 1999 American World Cup squad, reigns supreme as the epitome not only of athletic genius, but also dignity and poise. Mia Hamm never posed nude; her awe-inspiring performances on the field spoke for themselves. Why, I have thought, must these present-day women’s soccer players tarnish the popular perception of women’s sports by selling themselves out as centerfold whores? Have they no appreciation for their predecessors – that is, the athletes of the 1999 American World Cup team – who fought so hard, both on and off the field, to garner greater public appreciation for women’s soccer?

Similarly, I have observed the deficient media coverage of various professional women's athletic events, particularly in comparison to the corresponding men's events, and the limited nature of women's professional sports organizations, the most visible of which consist of significantly fewer franchises than the correlative men's organizations. For example, the Women's National Basketball Association consists of 12 franchises, whereas the National Basketball Association consists of 30 franchises. Similarly, the National Women's Soccer League is comprised of nine franchises, whereas Major League Soccer is currently comprised of 19 franchises – two more franchises will be added upon the start of the 2015 season.

I have witnessed the public underestimation of women's athletic capability, followed by the mass censure of women athletes whose athletic prowess and physical strength demonstrate women's athletic capacity as fit to equal that of men. (Women's National Basketball Association sensation Brittney Griner is a prime example of a professional woman athlete frequently ridiculed for her athletic genius [Fagan 2013].) Yet, simultaneously, promotional discourse, prominent public figures, such as Michelle Obama, educators, and numerous professional women athletes celebrate the present-day as the glorious era of women's athletics. It is true that women have been permitted greater access to and increased visibility within the professional sports industry writ large. But considering the aforementioned observations does women's presence within professional sports merit the triumphant praise disseminated via various prominent public figures and women athletes?

Research Objective

My thesis emanates from my frustration with and perplexity by the contemporary status of women's professional sports. Through my research, I examine the emergence of women's professional athletics – more specifically, the organizations that were initiated throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st Century, as that period of time witnessed the most energetic proliferation of women's professional sports. (Two professional women's athletic organizations predate the recent proliferation of women's professional sports – the Ladies Professional Golf Association was established in 1950, and the Women's Tennis Association was established in 1973. However, the past two decades have witnessed the greatest proliferation of women's professional *team* sports, including soccer, basketball, and softball.) I attempt to identify the various social, political, and economic forces that factored in their materialization. In particular, I strive to position the enactment of Title IX as it pertains to the development of professional sports, and to elucidate its implication via the continued production of women's professional athletics.

It is indisputable that the prevalence of women's professional sports organizations within the United States has increased throughout the past two decades. However, in comparison to men's professional sports leagues, the most prominent of which boast deep-seated historical legacies, women's organizations evidence relative institutional and cultural novelty. Popular discourse most frequently accredits the Title IX legislation, enacted in 1972, as the heroic enabler of women's professional athletics. Contrarily, various scholars suggest that the enactment of Title IX exerted little direct influence on

women's professional sports. For example, it has been argued by Michael Giardina and Jennifer Metz (2005:62) that "women's professional sport in the 1990s/2000s has not been – as some in the popular press would have us believe – the simple progression and natural outcome of female athletic participation since the passage of Title IX in 1972." If Title IX did not directly facilitate the establishment of women's professional sporting organizations, to what can we attribute their recent development?

I argue that the emergence of American women's professional sports resulted not as a direct consequence of Title IX, but rather via the convergence of various cultural, political, and economic developments that stimulated heightened private sector interest and investment in the women's fitness market and women athletes, thus positioning the establishment and development of women's professional sports as potentially lucrative.

Due to the fact that Title IX legalese applies exclusively to public educational institutions and programs, its legislative influence does not extend to the private sector, and thus does not directly act upon women's professional athletics. However, I propose that the enactment of Title IX has influenced the realization of women's professional sports via intermediary processes. I assert that the legislation enabled the creation of a vast, under-utilized labor supply, from which newly established women's sports leagues might recruit their athletes. I also propose that the increased presence of athletically inclined women, prompted by the enactment of Title IX, represented a viable, pre-existing target audience, presumably favorable to the consumption of and investment in women's professional sports. Furthermore, I emphasize the corporate exploitation of Title

IX, as evidenced via its implication in the marketed courtship of public interest in, and thus popular consumption of, women's professional sports.

Methodology

My thesis was entirely informed by textual research and analysis. I greatly utilized peer-reviewed articles (accessed via the George Mason University Library full-text, electronic publications collection), edited volumes, and scholarly books. I also utilized a documentary film, *Branded*, directed by Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady and produced by ESPN Films as part of the series entitled "Nine for IX," which premiered in 2013 in celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Title IX legislation. My perception and analysis of women's athletics was greatly influenced by the work of C. L. Cole, professor of gender and women's studies, sociology, and communications research at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and David L. Andrews, professor of physical cultural studies, Department of Kinesiology, at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Due in great part to my personal affinity for the sport, I chose to center my analysis on American women's professional soccer. In researching the progression of women's involvement with soccer and the development of women's professional leagues, I greatly utilized *The Girls of Summer: The U.S. Women's Soccer Team and How it Changed the World*, written by Jere Longman (2000), sports reporter for the *New York Times*. Additionally, I acquired ample information from several articles, including "Women's Soccer in the United States: Yet Another American 'Exceptionalism,'" written by Andrei Markovits and Steven Hellerman and published in the 2003 edition of

the peer-reviewed journal entitled *Soccer and Society*. The other articles were published via various mainstream websites, such as espnW.com, espn.com, si.com, and NYTimes.com. Several of these articles were brought to my attention through my own personal involvement with Internet-based social media channels – that is, via Facebook and Twitter – and numerous others were discovered through Google searches. I relied on these articles most greatly for information regarding the National Women’s Soccer League, Women’s Professional Soccer, and the Women’s United Soccer Association, as I struggled to find vast scholarly literature that singularly highlighted women’s professional soccer.

Application of Soccer to Research Objective

Soccer is a physically demanding, contact sport, frequently associated with a particular notion of hypermasculinity (Archetti 1999; Caudwell 2011; Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994). The hypermasculine character attributed to the sport has, in various countries, principally those located in Europe and Latin America, been recurrently brandished as justification to women’s exclusion from participation, particularly at the professional level (Caudwell 2011). If not prohibited, the popular understanding of soccer as masculine domain has served to legitimate the “harassment, discrimination, and abuse...unfair and inequitable treatment” (Caudwell 2011:330) committed against women participants. However, in the United States, there exists little association between soccer and masculinity (Longman 2000; Swanson 2009), due in great part to the sport’s relative obscurity prior to the

establishment of the North American Soccer League in 1968 (Markovits and Hellerman 2003). (The North American Soccer League was a professional men's league that was established in 1968 and operated until 1985 – it featured national and international talent, most famously the Brazilian soccer legend Pelé [Markovits and Hellerman 2003; Veseth 2006].) Although in numerous countries soccer is regarded as the most perfect representation of national masculine character (Archetti 1999; Bellos 2002; Swanson 2009), football is the sport most frequently recognized by the American public as the athletic epitome of national masculine spirit (Cahn 1994; Swanson 2009). This association was consolidated within the American collective conscious before soccer had amassed significant following; consequently, the masculine character frequently associated with the sport extra-nationally proved less salient to the American public.

Women's soccer provides access par excellence to illuminate the progression of American women's sporting participation and the eventual emergence of women's professional sports organizations following the enactment of Title IX. Simultaneous to the legalization of Title IX was soccer's ascent within the public conscious as the sport *de rigueur* for participation by children of affluent, white, suburbanites (Foer 2010; Swanson 2009). As stated by Foer:

Soccer's appeal lay in its opposition to the other popular sports. For children of the sixties, there was something abhorrent about enrolling kids in American football, a game where violence wasn't just incidental but inherent. The didn't want to teach the acceptability of violence, let alone subject their precious children to the risk of physical maiming. Baseball, where each batter must stand center stage four or five times a game, entailed too many stressful, ego-deflating encounters. Basketball, before Larry Bird's prime, still had the taint of the ghetto. But soccer represented something very different. It was a tabula rasa, a sport onto which a generation of parents could project their values. Quickly, soccer came to represent the fundamental tenets of yuppie parenting. [2010:237]

Throughout numerous other countries where soccer is the most greatly revered and observed sporting practice, recreationally and professionally, the popularity of the sport historically was grown through grassroots involvement: children and adults alike gathered to play, and public spaces such as streets and parks served as playing surfaces. In the United States, however, soccer was popularized via top-down implementation, most significantly through national youth soccer organizations (Foer 2010; Markovits and Hellerman 2003; Swanson 2009). Considering that (1) the increasing popularity of youth soccer participation emanated from its cultural opposition to other sporting activities, such as football and baseball, both greatly associated with masculine character, and (2) that the American public does not attribute a hypermasculine identity to soccer, the concomitant enactment of Title IX in 1972 and the upper class appropriation of youth soccer positioned the sport as the prime repository for the daughters of white, suburban America to exercise their newly mandated access to organized athletics.

The rate by which girls' soccer participation increased after 1972 soon outpaced that of boys' participation. As per statistics enumerated via the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association (Markovits and Hellerman 2003), between 1987 and 2001, American soccer witnessed a decline of 4.4 percent in male involvement, whereas female involvement simultaneously increased by 24.1 percent. Furthermore, female involvement in organized varsity and junior varsity high school soccer increased exponentially (that is, by over 700 percent) between 1981 and 2001. Throughout the next 20 years, women's soccer was further advanced via the increased provision of collegiate women's varsity soccer programs: in 1982 there existed merely 103 women's soccer teams, but by 2001

that number had dramatically increased to 824 (Markovits and Hellerman 2003). Due to the heightened collegiate provision of women's soccer, the American public witnessed a substantial increase in the number of elite women soccer players (Markovits and Hellerman 2003; Longman 2000).

It is true that a great quantity of American men participate in soccer – recreationally, competitively, and professionally – but the sport is not nationally perceived as requiring the same rough and tumble, All-American, rugged, masculine character developed through and elevated by American football (Foer 2010; Swanson 2009). Arguably because the American public does not perceive soccer as a hypermasculine domain, women's soccer has witnessed, to a certain extent, heightened presence in the professional sports industry, greater attention from the media than that given to other women's sports, and elevated popular appreciation and spectatorship (Longman 2000; Markovits and Hellerman 2003). There exists at present a professional women's soccer league (fittingly designated the National Women's Soccer League), and the United States Women's National Soccer Team, which competes in international competitions, has demonstrated great competitive success – the National Team won Olympic gold medals at the 1996, 2004, 2008, and 2012 tournaments, and Women's World Cup championships in 1991 and 1999. Numerous professional women's soccer players (past and present), including Mia Hamm, Julie Foudy, Brandi Chastain, Hope Solo, and Alex Morgan, have achieved great fame and public recognition. Evidence further suggests that American women's soccer has “experienced ‘golden years’ when women's participation appear[ed] relatively trouble-free” (Caudwell 2011:333). Yet,

similar to numerous other women's professional sports, the golden years experienced by women's soccer number significantly fewer than the years characterized by popular and financial downturn. Plagued by financial mismanagement, exorbitant debt, and internal dysfunction (Foudy 2013; Voepel 2012), the development of women's professional soccer has generally proven unsuccessful, as exhibited via turbulent attempts to establish an economically viable professional league (Foudy 2013; Baxter and Rohlin 2014; Bell 2013; Voepel 2012). The current National Women's Soccer League represents the third endeavor to implement and sustain a women's professional league.

Women's soccer has also witnessed persistent social and corporate attempts to harness the progression of professional organizations and to reify a culturally salient appearance of sexualized femininity (Caudwell 2003, 2011; Longman 2000). Upon the conclusion of the 1999 Women's World Cup, Sepp Blatter, reigning president of FIFA, the international governing body of soccer, stated: "the future of football is feminine" (Caudwell 2011:335). Blatter's statement articulated femininity as the foremost characteristic desired of elite women soccer players. Herein lies the significance of Chastain's shirt-stripping celebration: as noted by Caudwell (2011:336), "Chastain and her Nike-crested chest were framed and produced as the epitome of the event...Chastain, and her breasts, subsequently, became an iconic – and obviously feminine – figure for [soccer] and for the future of [soccer]." In aggregate, American sport is still popularly perceived as masculine in character, and women's sporting bodies, which disrupt the popularly delineated masculine-feminine boundary, are exploited in the projection and reification of sexualized femininity (Cahn 1994; Caudwell 2003, Hardin et al. 2005).

Although women's professional soccer in the United States has, to a certain extent, witnessed success as a professional corporate enterprise, its professional proliferation is thwarted by popular ambivalence towards women's public embodiment of a physical culture historically perceived as property of men (Whitson 1994; Young 1980).

Thus, the popular disassociation of soccer and masculinity has resulted neither in the uninhibited flourishing of women's professional soccer nor the popular resignification of soccer as feminine domain. American women's soccer elucidates the tensions wrought via the progression of women's sports proceeding from the enactment of Title IX to their professional articulation. For female youth, engagement with athletics is socially permissible, and even encouraged: as stated by Donna Shalala, Secretary of Health and Human Services under Bill Clinton, "getting involved in sports such as basketball, tennis, and soccer builds self-confidence and self-esteem while also keeping young girls physically active. These are vital skills and attitudes that will help girls throughout their adult lives" (Giardina and Metz 2005:70). But for women, especially as the cultural performers of professional, spectator sports, engagement with athletics is permeated by tension between the masculine and the feminine (Butler 1998; Caudwell 2011). This is evidenced by the investment in the publicized sexualization of women's sporting bodies by corporate professional sporting organizations and the inability of Title IX, which prompted great increase in girls' athletic involvement, to similarly lead to the flourishing of women's professional sports.

Theoretical Significance

The academic articulation of the anthropology of sport as a distinct subject of enquiry was achieved, following the postmodern turn, through the synthesis of diverse theoretical threads into a “general approach to sport...grounded in a cultural theory of the body and performance” (Besnier and Brownwell 2012:449). The anthropological investigation of sport has proven greatly salient to the cultural analysis of the body and embodied identity, as “sport is a human activity in which the body is the object of most intense scrutiny: trained, disciplined, modified, displayed, evaluated, and commodified, the sporting body is the focus not only of the person who inhabits it, but also spectators, trainers, and ‘owners’” (Besnier and Brownwell 2012:444). Furthermore, given the present-day implication of professional sporting practices in processes of globalization and transnationalism (Bale and Maguire 1994; Klein 1991, 1997; Maguire 1999, 2005), including the transmission of political and economic thought, the movement of human labor, and the disruption or materialization of relationships between globalism, nationalism, and localism, sport is also salient to the analysis of macro institutional structures and social forces (Besnier and Brownwell 2012).

Title IX was enacted in the United States in 1972. As a result, women’s entrance into and engagement with athletics coincided, to a great extent, with the intellectual integration of the anthropological investigation of sports (Besnier and Brownwell 2012). The convergence of women’s increased athletic participation and the increased anthropological investigation devoted to sports prompted greater academic interest concerning women’s sporting bodies (Birrell 1988; Bolin and Granskog 2003). A great portion of the research directed at the analysis of women’s athletic participation has

utilized a feminist approach: “research in which women and gender have been made visible and centralized in inquiry into the organization of social life” (Bolin and Granskog 2003:248). In this vein, various scholars have endeavored to identify and bring to light the trajectory of women’s involvement with athletics – prior to and following the enactment of Title IX, as participants (Cahn 1994) and as spectators (Toffoletti and Mewett 2012) – as historically women were debarred from many sporting activities and organizations.

Although the observation of women’s sports in the post-Title IX era reveals significantly greater participation than that evidenced prior to 1972, it is also evident that women’s place in the sporting realm remains contested (Hall 1996; Messner 1994), and participation “has not come without struggle” (Bolin and Ganskog 2003:1). Much previous scholarship has explicated women’s participation in professional sports as implicated by masculine hegemonic authority, as various theorists ascertain the professional sporting industry as a masculine preserve (Bryson 1994; Messner 1994; Theberge 1994), or an “institution through which male hegemony is constructed and reconstructed” (Bryson 1994:47). Therefore, great attention has been devoted to examining women’s present-day engagement with sports, particularly pertaining to various guises of masculine-biased discrimination inflicted upon professional women athletes, including: executive control of women’s sports organizations and international sport policy, underrepresentation of women’s athletics via the media, and discursive trivialization of women’s athletic achievements (Bolin and Granskog 2003; Bryson 1994; Burstyn 1999; Messner 1994; Theberge 1994). To investigate women’s athletics via

centering analysis on masculine hegemonic authority provides an interesting perspective, and previous scholarship has proved critical in illuminating the “ways in which sport reproduces the ideology of natural differences – male dominance, and correspondingly, the ‘natural’ inferiority of females – and which thereby perpetuates the notion of sport as a male preserve” (Bolin and Granskog 2003:249; Burstyn 1999; Birrell and Cole 1994; Hall 1996; Hargreaves 1994; Theberge 1994).

Via this interpretation, theorists perceive sport as a privileged site implicated in the reproduction and perpetuation of the greater structural and institutional framework that foregrounds day-to-day experience. That is, sport – particularly professional sports, but also youth and recreational organizations as well – serves to sustain various structural social inequalities (Andrews and Silk 2012; Birrell and Cole 1994; Burstyn 1999; Hargreaves 1994): it acts as a “site for relations of domination and subordination” (Hall 1996:31). As noted above, several investigators have revealed sports organizations to be replicative of the prevailing masculine-centric, heteronormative sex-gender system (Bolin and Granskog 2003; Burstyn 1999; Cahn 1994; Birrell and Cole 1994; Connell 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994; Theberge 1994), within which women are positioned as socially inferior to men. Considering the extreme popular interest in athletics, and the ceaseless inundation of sports related media via the Internet and the proliferation of network television channels dedicated solely to the broadcast of sports (Zirin 2010), women’s inferiority within the sporting realm is communicated to the masses with alarming frequency. Although consumers may not consciously perceive such ideological programming, “sport as a gendered form bears

significant relation to gender segregation and inequality in other realms of social life” (Theberge 1994:181).

The progression of women’s professional athletics – as emanating from a particular moment in the recent history of the United States characterized by the confluence of diverse social, political, and economic developments that positioned women’s fitness and women’s professional sports as ripe for fruition via corporate investment – remains less examined than the analysis of sport as a bastion of masculine authority. Similarly, minimal analytical attention has been granted to the development of women’s professional organizations as understood in relation to Title IX. Although the vast majority of previous investigations refer to Title IX and its impact on youth athletic engagement (Birrell and Cole 1994; Bolin and Granskog 2003; Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994; Burstyn 1999), both recreationally and competitively, analytical depictions of the legislation as implicative in women’s professional sports are slight. It is this less explored territory that I address via my thesis.

I begin with an examination of Title IX, noting the initial ambiguity regarding the legislation’s applicability to women’s participation in organized athletics and the resistance leveled against the legislation, prolonging its ability to be effectively employed to combat sex discrimination in youth and collegiate athletics. I also discuss the contemporary lag in compliance, due to the increasingly corporate-like status assumed by American universities. I then explicate particular cultural influences that became manifest throughout the 1980s and 1990s, including the production and diffusion of postfeminist sentimentalities, the sociopolitical articulation of hard bodies as representative of proper

American citizenship, and the marketization of the women's fitness market. As I discuss in Chapter Four, the convergence of such developments served as cultural priming – the discursive articulation of women's elite sports as financially viable – for the corporate investment in and establishment of women's professional sports. Corporate entities perceived women's sports as lucrative sites for financial investment due to the heightened population of athletically inclined women, Nike's demonstrated financial growth via the production of the women's fitness market, women's evidenced interest in the consumption of professional sports, and the expansion of the sports marketing industry. Also in Chapter Four, I explore the establishment of the Women's United Soccer Association so as to illustrate the instability inherent to the management and operation of women's professional sports. Following the examination of the corporate-driven proliferation of women's professional athletics, I investigate two marketing strategies – the sexual script and the virtuous citizen script – utilized to promote women's professional sports, generate demand for the women's athletic product, and solicit mass viewership and fandom. In Chapter Six, I argue that the corporate-driven establishment and development of women's professional sports represents an allied corporate-political endeavor to suppress women's ascent within the socioeconomic sphere as motivated by men's desire to preserve their privileged status atop the American social hierarchy. Furthermore, I suggest that Title IX is implicated via the allied corporate-political denial of women's equality, as the legislation discursively articulated, and legally provided for, the federal government's consent to women's continued socio-physical subordination.

CHAPTER TWO: INVESTIGATING THE ENACTMENT OF TITLE IX

Critical to analyzing women's entrance into the sphere of recreational and, eventually, professional athletics is an examination of Title IX of the Educational Amendments to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, enacted in 1972 and heralded by many as the most important breakthrough in the history of women's athletic participation. The legislation emanated from the reemergence of feminist political activism in the 1960s: "recalling the successes and failures of their sisters at Seneca Falls, feminists in the second wave have taken on various forms and strategies to counteract the sexism of their time" (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994:98). To its proponents, Title IX proved greatly emotional, as it prompted national and political attention to the root of societal sex roles. The enactment of Title IX "marked the first time that the issue of women's and girls' access to sports achieved the status of a public agenda item" (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994:101). Although Title IX addressed women's societal subordination writ large, "it was the sport and athletic implications of this act that...produced the greatest controversy" (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994:101).

Contemporarily, both increased participation in athletics by female youth and the existence of women's professional sports leagues are prevailingly credited to the enactment of Title IX (Cole 2000; Giardina and Metz 2005). However, when Title IX was signed into law in 1972, athletic participation was not explicitly mentioned in the

language of the legislation; although not irrelevant to the language, achieving gender equality in sports was not the manifest intent of the legislation (Edwards 2010). To quote the language, the initial legislation states, in part: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance” (Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. §1681 et seq.). Thus, in regards to the intent of the legislation, as described via the website dedicated to the United States Department of Justice (www.justice.gov), “The principal objective of Title IX is to avoid the use of federal money to support sex discrimination in education programs and to provide individual citizens effective protection against those practices.” It is clear, therefore, that in 1972 neither the original language nor the manifest objective of the legislation precisely addressed the achievement of gender equality in sports. Yet, it was greatly consequential that athletics became the principle objective of Title IX, “because the shift in focus and the redefinition to athletics continued to frame the Title IX debate from that point forward” (Edwards 2010:301).

Second-wave feminist and athletic participant Hollis Elkins (1978:22) asserted, “there has been little concern in the women’s movement about women’s athletics. Because sex equality in athletics is relevant to millions of girls and women, it seems strange that this should be the case thus far.” Thus, if second-wave activists were indifferent as to women’s athletics, as accused by Elkins, via what processes did the objective of Title IX policy shift from education to sports? Although proponents of Title

IX were aware of the legislation's potential to facilitate "equalization of sport opportunity and rewards" (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994:101), Edwards suggested:

Athletics arose on the agenda as an unintended consequence of the interest-group conflict surrounding Title IX's passage through the regulatory institutional processes...Focus turned to athletics primarily because of those groups fighting against Title IX. Those opposed to Title IX, such as the NCAA and the American Football Coaches Association, drew attention to an issue that women's groups originally fighting for Title IX had ignored...Those who had fought so hard for Title IX as originally legislated would not have targeted athletics if their opponents had not deliberately drawn attention to the issue. [2010:307]

Thus, the legislation's shift in emphasis from education to athletics occurred "not because there was overwhelming pressure from the outside that demanded gender equity in sport, but because it emerged as the primary issue of contention within Title IX's policy community" (Edwards 2010:308). As a result, and despite the law's initial ambiguity as to its applicability to athletics (Edwards 2010; Anderson et al. 2006, Simpson 2012), the uncertainty was eventually clarified after a series of legislative revisions and court decisions, the outcomes of which reinforced the relevance of sports as pertaining to the principal objective of the Title IX legislation (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994; Edwards 2010).

However, the legal revision process was protracted, as the legal explication and implementation of Title IX encountered great resistance: "the provisions of Title IX...engendered extreme, organized, and concerted lobbying; generated impassioned pleas; and garnered extraordinary claims about the benefits or disasters that would befall society if the legislative mandates were implemented" (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994:101). Within Congress, the legal explication of Title IX's applicability to sport was greatly resisted by male representatives, the majority of whom remained very traditional

in their outlook towards societal sex roles (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994) and thus perceived women's competitive athletic participation as inappropriate, as per popular perception regarding femininity and the social activities appropriate to women's participation (Cahn 1994). Ronald Reagan's election as president further obstructed the legal clarification of Title IX's applicability to sports, as Reagan was staunchly conservative and anti-feminist (Cole and Hribar 1995; Harvey 2005); he espoused a limited, program-specific interpretation of the legislation that, in practice, resulted in negligible improvement (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994). Furthermore, numerous athletic department directors – the vast majority of whom were men, and the National Collegiate Athletic Association writ large, argued that compliance with Title IX put great fiscal strains on university athletic departments and, more specifically, jeopardized men's athletic programs (Thelin 2000; McDonald 2000; Edwards 2010).

Thus, the question of Title IX's applicability to sport remained ambiguous throughout much of the 1970s and 1980s as proponents engaged in legal battle with the executive and legislative branches, and with outside interest groups such as the National Collegiate Athletic Association. It was the result of proponents' persistence that Title IX's applicability to athletics was eventually clarified via the language of the legislation. As aptly stated by Boutilier and SanGiovanni (1994:103), "finally, 16 years after the passage of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, the law had a set of regulations and guidelines, tested in the courts, that would put into effect in 1988 something liberal feminists had expected in 1972." Therefore, it wasn't until after 1988 that Title IX was

convincingly employed with greater frequency to combat sex discrimination in youth and collegiate athletics.

Despite the language's initial non-attention to sports, the legislation ultimately prompted dramatic increase in the number of girls and young women participating in recreational and competitive sports (Harvard Law Review Association 1997; Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994), particularly as pertaining to soccer, as discussed in the previous chapter. However, it has been observed that the "equalization of sport opportunity and rewards" (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994:101) desired by Title IX's earliest proponents has yet to be realized; this pertains to both those athletic organizations impacted by Title IX and those that exist within the private sector. In certain aspects, it is arguable that the "uncritical application of Title IX to women's athletic programs" (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994:105) has contributed to women's sustained unequal position within the athletic sphere rather than facilitate their achievement of equal status and equal opportunity (Cahn 1994; Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994).

For example, Title IX compliance at the collegiate level has been very gradual; research suggests that numerous institutions still do not meet the standards of gender equality necessitated via Title IX (Anderson et al. 2006; Thelin 2000; Cole 2000). As described by Cole (2000:5), "most universities have made minor and symbolic compromises, whereas few have been penalized for persisting disparities." The institutional hesitancy to meet compliance regulations is attributable to the fact that American universities contemporarily operate as corporate entities: academic enterprises driven not by desire to produce inquisitive scholars prepared for their post-collegiate

forays into the real world but by the hedonistic pursuit of profit (Anderson et al. 2006; Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994; Thelin 2000). Therefore, university governance and policy development are greatly influenced by the present-day conditions of the market sphere (Anderson et al. 2006; Thelin 2000). The reluctance by university athletic departments to finance women's varsity sports programs can therefore be attributed to the university's disinclination to implement sports programs that are predicted to generate little revenue return. In comparison to the profit gained via highly popular men's varsity sports programs, such as football and basketball, the development of women's programs was – and remains – frequently perceived as financially wasteful, as popular fandom (and thus consumption) of women's competitive sports yet lags far behind that of men's competitive sports (Birrell and Cole 1994; Bolin and Granskog 2003; Burstyn 1999; Hargreaves 1994).

In an attempt to abide by Title IX yet still funnel as much money as possible into the men's football and basketball programs, many university athletic departments have cut other (less popular) men's athletic programs, such as cross country, gymnastics, and swimming (Fagan and Cyphers 2012; Pearlman 2014; Thomas 2011). The elimination of certain men's programs so as to accommodate women's athletic programs most frequently elicits public condemnation of Title IX as detrimental to men's athletic programs. The true culprit, however, is the mismanagement of funds by university athletic departments and the favoritism bestowed upon (men's) football and men's basketball (Pearlman 2014; Thelin 2000; Thomas 2011). Scholarly investigation has revealed that the development of women's varsity sports programs does not inevitably

inhibit the continued financial operation of men's athletic programs (Fagan and Cyphers 2012; Anderson et al. 2006).

Furthermore, the institutional accommodation for women's sports has demonstrated "failure to enhance the athletic opportunities of minority women" (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994). It has been argued that disproportionately, white women are the privileged beneficiaries of Title IX's legal mandate, as university enrollment reflects structurally perpetuated racial and class-based social inequalities (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994). Consequently, "the benefits of Title IX for minority females are far less extensive than for white females" (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994). Research also suggests that minority female scholar-athletes are subjected to greater surveillance and policing than white female scholar-athletes (Foster 2003). Through his ethnographic analysis, Foster (2003:301) observed that the athletic department staff at a prominent American university "operated with assumptions that were based in racialized expectations of behavior. These assumptions translated to greater surveillance of black female athletes than others, and diminished opportunities for black female athletes to exercise autonomy in decision making."

Most significantly, Title IX serves to sustain women's unequal position within the athletic sphere because "Title IX was never intended to transform the structures and processes of sport itself. It was merely going to 'force' educational institutions to make room for girls and women and to minimally reallocate scarce athletic resources and rewards" (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994:103). As a result, women were expected to conform to preexisting policies and practices engineered by sporting institutions to

define, regulate, and cater to men's athletic participation. Thus, "women are being asked to embrace the masculine model of sport" (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994:107), and the increased provision of women's sports has therefore prompted little destabilization of the masculine control exerted through athletic institutions. This has been evidenced by the continued disproportionate presence of men acting as coaches of women's sports teams and within the administrative and executive ranks of women's sports organizations (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994; Bryson 1994; Cahn 1994; Theberge 1994). As noted by Boutilier and SanGiovanni (1994:106), "the explosion of female collegiate sports has meant more careers and job opportunities for *white males*."

However, as noted in the previous chapter, collegiate women's soccer has, in fact, witnessed significant expansion. The substantial growth of women's soccer at the collegiate level can be attributed in part to the definition of compliance articulated via Title IX legalese (Markovits and Hellerman 2003). Gender equity compliance is satisfied "when participation opportunities for men and women are 'substantially proportionate' to their respective undergraduate enrollments" (Anderson et al. 2006:228). Although the Department of Education requires that institutions yearly report their male and female athletic participation numbers (Thomas 2011), evidence suggests that institutions frequently manipulate aggregate male and female participation data so as to avoid formal investigation (Thomas 2011). Furthermore, disclosure of aggregate male and female athletic participation data does not require detailed description as to the means by which a university chooses to achieve substantial gender proportionality (Anderson et al. 2006; Thomas 2011). Therefore, as the substantial proportionality test is a purely quantitative

measure, a university may be categorized as legally compliant even if its women's athletic programs are qualitatively inferior to men's athletic programs, or if the total number of women's programs is fewer than that of men's programs but the number of women athletes across all sports is proportional to women's undergraduate enrollment (Thomas 2011). Since the early 1990s, due to stricter policing of Title IX compliance, numerous universities have chosen to finance women's programs that require large numbers of athletes but minimal equipment; such practice allows for legal provision of women's athletics at a lesser cost to the university. Consequently, as noted by Markovits and Hellerman (2003:20), "women's soccer has been a particular beneficiary of Title IX, as the sport can provide a college with the opportunity to include at least 20 female student-athletes on a team with a minimal level of expenses for equipment."

That women's soccer is a particular beneficiary of the enactment of Title IX arguably contributes to the aforementioned favoritism bestowed upon white women athletes via the institutional application of the legislation. As described in the first chapter, beginning in the 1970s, youth soccer participation dramatically increased, particularly within affluent, white, suburban communities. Thus, youth soccer participation came to be popularly understood as exclusive to suburban, upper-middle class, white American families (Foer 2010, Swanson 2009). The popular association between youth soccer and white suburbia yet persists: as a result, the majority of children, male or female, that participate in competitive youth soccer leagues are white (Longman 2000; Swanson 2009). Consequently, the institutional proclivity to accomplish compliance to Title IX regulations via the establishment of varsity women's soccer

programs benefits white women athletes to a greater extent than non-white women athletes.

The favoritism afforded to white women soccer players via athletic department provision of varsity women's soccer programs was most manifestly expressed during the 1999 Women's World Cup. The United States Women's National Team was comprised of 20 players, all of whom either had attended or were then attending American universities (Longman 2000). In addition, all played varsity soccer at their respective schools (U.S. Soccer Federation 1999). The racial composition of the team was overwhelmingly white: of the 20 women, 18 were white: the only two minority women were black goalkeepers Briana Scurry and Saskia Webber (Longman 2000). As described by Longman (2000:42-43), "the racial make-up of the team – and the audience at the Rose Bowl – mirrored the racial demographic of the sport in the United States... The U.S. women reflected, like no other team, the values of mainstream, middle class, middle of the road America." Goalkeeper Briana Scurry reportedly referred to herself as "the fly in the milk," as she was "the only black starter on a lily-white side" (Longman 2000:254).

Although women's professional soccer in the United States benefitted from the expansion of women's collegiate soccer programs in that increased provision produced a substantial, highly talented labor pool, it is important to note that Title IX did not directly result in the materialization of women's professional soccer: Title IX was enacted in 1972, yet the first professional women's soccer league was not established until 2001. Furthermore, the establishment of women's professional soccer cannot be attributed solely to Title IX's legal mandate because the legislation applies exclusively to those

youth and collegiate athletic programs that are financed via the federal government. As the professional sporting industry – and thus women’s professional soccer – is situated within the private sector, it is not subject to Title IX compliance, and therefore is not regulated to ensure equal opportunity of the sexes.

Just as the establishment and development of women’s professional soccer cannot be uniquely attributed to the enactment of Title IX, the establishment of women’s professional sports writ large did not result directly via the legislation’s application. Although the professional sports industry is not legally subjected to compliance per Title IX’s regulations, the legislation is frequently credited with prompting the materialization of women’s professional sports (Cole 2000; Giardina and Metz 2005). Promotional discourse encourages the public to interpret Title IX as women’s benevolent athletic emancipator, freeing her from the discrimination previously orchestrated against her at the hands of men (Cole 2000; McDonald 2000).

In the fifth chapter, I will examine in greater detail the corporate exploitation of the Title IX narrative via the discursive rearticulation of women’s professional sports, and professional women athletes, as products of the legislation. The research presented in the following chapter, however, examines the various socioeconomic factors that converged prior to the establishment of women’s professional sports. To analyze the cultural developments that preceded the establishment of women’s professional sports proves constructive to the destabilization of the popular perception that regards Title IX as paramount to the production of women’s professional athletics: the analysis reveals that the legislation’s contribution to the recent proliferation of women’s professional

sports was periphery rather than paramount. Consequently, if women's professional sports did not proceed directly from the enactment of Title IX, to what can we attribute the recent development of women's professional athletics?

CHAPTER THREE: POSTFEMINISM, FITNESS FRENZY, AND NIKE SNEAKERS

Prior to analyzing the emergence of women's professional sports in the United States, it is necessary to foreground the cultural factors that preceded their establishment. It is of great consequence that Title IX was enacted in 1972 and subsequently clarified throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The legal explication process following the enactment of Title IX coincided with a particular moment in American history characterized by significant social, political, and economic restructuring, produced via the federal government's implementation of various policies informed by neoliberal doctrine (Harvey 2005). Neoliberal political economic strategy was characterized by extreme government non-intervention in the market sphere, unchecked market competition, and state protection of corporate activity (Harvey 2005). The neoliberalization of the American market sphere and the financial sector, and the eventual consolidation of the American neoliberal state catalyzed the amplification of corporate sovereignty, and prompted the establishment of "a national common sense that transposed structural and social problems into individual inadequacies" (Cole and Hribar 1995:354). Neoliberalism resulted in the saturation of the American corporate sphere; corporations thus sought to create – and profit from – new industries and new market segments.

The neoliberal movement also propagated a particular cultural climate, frequently referred to as the condition of postmodernity (Harvey 1989; Jameson 1984). The social

expression of postmodernity was driven by popular celebration of the free market via excessive commodity accumulation and the narcissistic exploration of the self (Goldman et al. 1991; Harvey 1989; Jameson 1984). The postmodern popular embrace of narcissistic commodity consumption accelerated the neoliberal-driven expansion of corporate America. Sexual politics, civil rights, religious doctrine, etc. were recast as economic liberties, available to the consumer through the purchasing of products and experiences (Cole and Hribar 1995; Harvey 2005). As described by Jameson (1984:57), “postmodern culture is the internal and super-structural expression of a whole new wave of American...economic domination throughout the world.”

The establishment of women’s professional sports was grounded in the confluence of the heightened presence of athletically skilled young women, resulting from the enactment of Title IX in 1972, and particular cultural developments that arose from the inextricable permeation of postmodern thought and neoliberal indoctrination. The women’s fitness market was one such market segment that was created and developed following the advent of the postmodern era. Women’s recreational fitness was discursively articulated as favorable to corporate development via the rise of the postfeminist era, characterized by the depoliticization of second-wave feminist rhetoric and women’s heightened consumer sovereignty, and the simultaneous increase in the national preoccupation with physical fitness and healthiness, frequently designated as the “fitness boom.” Corporate production of the women’s fitness market proved greatly salient to the subsequent corporate production of women’s professional sports. Thus, the

research presented in this chapter examines the emergence of the postfeminist era, the “fitness boom,” and the marketization of women’s recreational athletics.

Emergence of the Postfeminist Era

As noted in the previous chapter, the 1960s witnessed the (re)emergence of the feminist movement (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994), more popularly referred to as second-wave feminism or the Women’s Liberation Movement. Feminists sought reform objectives including equal employment opportunity, equal education opportunity, and reproductive freedom; their activism assumed various approaches, including “demonstrations, the establishment of domestic violence shelters and feminist health projects, and political identities” (Cole and Hribar 1995:356).

Throughout the 1970s, the Women’s Liberation Movement increased in strength and influence, as the majority of institutional gains realized via second-wave feminist advocacy – including Title IX, the successful approval of the Equal Rights Amendment by the House of Representatives and the Senate (in 1982, ratification of the amendment fell short by three states), and the decisions handed down by the Supreme Court via *Reed v. Reed* (1971), *Roe v. Wade* (1973), and *Craig v. Boren* (1976) – were achieved in that decade (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994; Williams 1997). As described by Cahn (1994:249), liberation activists “were increasingly using the courts, the legislature, and organized pressure tactics to address gender discrimination in work, education, and the law.” Second-wave reform efforts of the 1970s were most manifestly associated with the liberal feminist intellectual framework and political agenda, “espoused by women

including Gloria Steinem, by *Ms.* magazine, and by NOW (the National Organization for Women), [that saw] the root of women's oppression as the lack of equal civil rights and educational opportunities for women" (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994:98). Liberal feminists aspired to destabilize the deep-seated social doctrine that prescribed separate spheres to men and women, as it "preserved and promoted the dominance of male over female" (Williams 1997:72). The institutional deconstruction of separate spheres ideology, liberal feminists believed, would afford to women equal access to all opportunities and equality of reward for their achievements (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994).

Entering the 1980s, second-wave rationale coincided uneasily with the Reagan administration's pro-family agenda, which condemned the feminist movement "for subverting proper gender, breaking down the (mythic) family, and, by extension, threatening the American way of life" (Cole and Hribar 1995:354). Consequently, the effective diffusion of conservative rhetoric was subject to strategic appropriation of the aspirations of second-wave feminism. As per neoliberal political strategy, the Women's Liberation Movement represented a social force that required assimilation into the capitalist market sphere: *women's* problems had to be redefined as *individual* deficits improvable via personal investment and self-fetishization (Goldman et al. 1991; Gill 2007; Chen 2013). Feminist freedom, therefore, had to be translated into neoliberal freedom (Chen 2013). As eloquently worded by Chen, regarding the neoliberal assimilation of second-wave feminism:

The crucial point is not that the political is ignored, but that it is now subsumed under the all-absorbing domain of marketized self-governance. Social, structural

problems still exist, but the responsibility or blame now shifts from society to the individual. Any unsatisfactory or unequal situation in a woman's life is judged as nothing other than the effect of her own choices and investments, which is to be solved not through structural changes but through the individual continually seeking to improve her own competitiveness in a ceaseless project of the self, be it hairstyle, make-up, cooking skills or career capabilities. [2013:446]

The feminist movement was integrated into the market sphere via transferring “ideological grafts of feminist rationality onto the assumptions of consumerism” (Goldman et al. 1991:334), thus rearticulating feminist values “into desires and identities that are accomplished through consumption” (Cole and Hribar 1995:356). Corporate advertisements, promotional materials, and popular culture were greatly instrumental in executing the marketization of feminist ideology (Chen 2013; Goldman et al. 1991; Gill 2007). Such cultural artifacts served as sites for the translation of “key aspects of [feminist] discourse into semiotic markers that can be attached to commodity brand names” (Goldman et al. 1991:333) and lifestyle practices. As a result of the marketization of feminist ideology, the socially perceived importance attached to women's consumptive purchase greatly intensified. Thus, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed women's increased strength in the United States marketplace (Lough and Irwin 2001). Women's increased market strength was aided, perhaps ironically so, by the second-wave feminist reform movement of the 1960s and 1970s, as it was due to second-wave feminist efforts that women's presence in the United States workforce, and consequently women's spending power, increased.

The refraction of feminist collective politics into a marketed array of personal lifestyle choices and wearable fashions (also appropriately referred to as “lifestyling”) resulted in the depoliticization of feminist ideology (Chen 2013). Through the

dissemination of promotional discourse intimating that women had already achieved equal sociopolitical status with men, women were successfully solicited to abandon the feminist politics that advocated women's collective emancipation through political action (Chen 2013; Cole and Hribar 1995; Goldman et al. 1991). The aspirations and values associated with second-wave feminism were conveyed as antiquated and repressive, thus obscuring the persistence of structural inequalities that sustained women's subordinate status (Chen 2013; Cole and Hribar 1995). Women's freedom and empowerment were reinvented via the generation and legitimation of various (market-driven) popular feminisms, "instrumental in generating and circulating images of the 'new woman' who was defined through a series of signs and attitudes (now visual clichés) that converged around the characteristics of the liberal subject" (Cole and Hribar 1995:357). That is, the "new woman" was depicted as autonomous and liberated, enthusiastically embracing consumer sovereignty, and thus seeking pleasure and agency through self-fetishization (Chen 2013; Goldman et al. 1991). The marketization of feminist politics elicited the advent of the *postfeminist* era, characterized via women's alienation from feminist political activism, and, consequently, "the escalating number of women who began to take for granted the accomplishments and goals of second-wave feminism" (Cole and Hribar 1995:356).

Although postfeminist sensibilities posited women as liberated, autonomous, economic agents, its logic was also informed by the emergence of a "new traditionalism," emulative of the 1980s anti-feminist political climate, that "affirm[ed] and invoke[d] the normative category of 'the home' as [women's] fundamental site of safety, love, and

fulfillment” (Cole and Hribar 1995:358). The Reagan administration’s anti-feminist position was greatly guided by New Right rhetoric that advocated women’s return to her (allegedly) appropriate sphere: the domestic (Giardina and Metz 2005). New Right rationality also embraced a highly conservative interpretation of gender that delineated legitimate womanhood as characterized by normative heterosexuality, motherhood, and Christian morality (Harvey 2005; Cole and Hribar 1995). Although this particular understanding of womanhood appeared at first glance adverse to the postfeminist “new woman,” “new traditionalism” proved particularly appealing in response to the Reagan administration’s purported crisis of the traditional family (Cole and Hribar 1995; Harvey 2005; Giardina and Metz 2005).

The convergence of promotional narratives that positioned women as autonomous, pleasure-seeking, self-fetishizing agents and those that popularized women’s return to the home resulted in the production and legitimation of a collectively envisioned common sense via which the boundaries of proper womanhood were delineated (Cole and Hribar 1995). “Proper womanhood,” therefore, was characterized by women’s assumption of autonomy, but only to an extent that did not disrupt the societal sex roles traditionally prescribed to men and women (Giardina and Metz 2005). Thus, the permeation of postfeminist rhetoric resulted in the sociopolitical reinforcement of separate spheres ideology, arguably negating the progress towards gender equality previously achieved via second-wave feminist activism.

The diffusion of postfeminist sensibilities and the concomitant depoliticization of second-wave feminist discourse resulted in the disassociation of women’s advancement

in sport and feminist political activism. As previously discussed, proponents of Title IX as per the legislation's original intent – gender equality within *education* – adopted gender equality within *athletics* as the most salient objective of Title IX in response to the sports-centric resistance generated in response to the legislation's enactment in 1972. Thus, via the concerted efforts to clarify the applicability of Title IX to girls' athletic participation, women's advancement in sport was rearticulated as contributory to the destabilization of the doctrine of separate spheres. As voiced by Elkins:

We must realize that it has been the women's movement which has caused the sports world to open its doors to women – even if those doors are only slightly ajar. Title IX, state ERA's, and legal battles over female participation in Little Leagues and high school sports are result of the impact of the women's movement. While women's sports have not appeared to be an important issue in the movement, they have been affected by the struggle for equal rights for women. [1978:24]

However, following the market-driven depoliticization of second-wave feminist discourse throughout the 1980s, the significance attributed to Title IX by its proponents – as advancing equal sport opportunities for girls and women as part of the *greater political project* to destabilize the doctrine of separate spheres and to ensure women's social, political, and economic equality (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994) – was subverted.

Furthermore, prior to the 1980s, certain feminist circles perceived women's participation in sports as feminist political activism (Elkins 1978). This was most visibly embodied by tennis great Billie Jean King, who defeated Bobby Riggs in the 1973 “Battle of the Sexes,” established the Women's Tennis Association, and publically advocated for women's equal rights and women's equal pay – both within and without the sphere of athletics (Deford 1975; Elkins 1978; Spencer 2000). Yet, the political slant

attributed to women's athletic involvement was also destabilized via the postfeminist depoliticization of second-wave feminist activism. Within athletics, the waning of association between women's sports and feminist political activism was mirrored by the increasing hesitancy exhibited by women athletes throughout the 1980s and early 1990s to self-identify as feminists (Cahn 1994; Elkins 1978). As described by Elkins:

Most women involved in athletics have been unconcerned about the women's movement, and have often been hostile to the idea of women's liberation. They fear being labeled unfeminine or lesbian; they fear losing jobs for 'radical' activity; they fear being ostracized by men and other women in the sports world. [1978:22]

Just as other aspects of second-wave politics were subsumed via the neoliberal market sphere, so too was the political significance extended to women's athletic participation via Title IX. Although Title IX was only applicable to youth and collegiate educational institutions – and their associated sports programs – subsidized by the federal government, women's athletic engagement writ large was similarly divested of political significance. Following the advent of the postfeminist era, women perceived sporting participation as a consumptive lifestyle practice that enhanced their liberated, autonomous, postfeminist personae through physical self-fetishizing and self-maintenance (Cole and Hribar 1995), not as an activity that contributed to the advancement of women's sociopolitical equality.

The “Fitness Boom” and the Marketization of Women's Recreational Athletics

Cheryl L. Cole and Amy Hribar (1995:348) observed that the “contemporary mood in America cannot be understood apart from the exercise equipment, infomercials,

sneakers, spandex, diets, and fitness gurus and entrepreneurs” that permeate the nation’s popular culture. The advent of the neoliberal era witnessed an increase in the national preoccupation with physical fitness and healthiness (Cole and Hribar 1995; Ingham 1985). The “fitness boom” ensued, to a great extent, from the Reagan administration’s establishment of “a national common sense that transposed structural and social problems into individual inadequacies” (Cole and Hribar 1995:354), thereby advancing a division between the normal and the abnormal that located deviance and threat within the *physical* body. Thus, the fit body served as a visual display that spoke one’s commitment to self-improvement and self-reliance, character traits proclaimed by Ronald Reagan as emblematic of upstanding American citizenship (Cole and Hribar 1995; Harvey 2005; Ingham 1985). Physical fitness was rearticulated as symbolic of American patriotism. As stated by Giardina and Metz (2005:66), “the patriotic hard body was directly set against narratives of weakness, deviance, and subalterneity...one’s lifestyle choice was no longer considered as a private issue; it now had implications for public life and the collective well-being of the body politic.”

The establishment of “the body as the normalizing lens through which other bodies were judged and condemned” (Cole and Hribar 1995:354) and the concurrent redefinition of participatory democratic citizenship as self-realization via consumptive purchase and individual bodily work resulted in the intensification of “voluntaristic policies of autonomous bodily drill as privatized, preventative medicine or as means to self-fulfillment in a consumerist body culture” (Ingham 1985:50). Consequently, the physical body was discursively rearticulated as “*something* which must be selectively

developed...*it* needs cultivation toward an ideal which could not and cannot be attained without conscious and consistent effort” (Ingham 1985:47). The national preoccupation with fitness, health, and muscular bodies and the subsequent proliferation of health clubs, fitness regimens, athletic equipment, and dietary guidelines “became the trickle-down lived experience of this philosophy” (Cole and Hribar 1995:354).

Although Title IX was enacted in 1972, the proliferation of athletic participation by adult women – that is, women whose age in 1972 precluded their direct benefit via the enactment of Title IX – is most greatly attributable to the fitness boom and the corporate expansion of the athletic industry. Prior to the materialization of the national fixation with physical fitness, women’s participation in recreational athletics was not unprecedented; however, it also was not particularly mainstream (Cahn 1994; Birrell and Cole 1994). The rarity of women’s athletic participation resulted in part from prior exclusion from the great majority of organized athletic activities, and the persistent popular attitude that equated physical strength and athletic participation as masculine (Cahn 1994). At the start of the neoliberal era, therefore, the women’s fitness market, to a great extent, was nonexistent. However, women were equally commanded to enhance the well being of the nation through individual, bodily self-maintenance (Cole and Hribar 1995). Cognizant of the contradiction posed via the absence of women’s-specific athletic products and the demand placed upon women to achieve physical fitness (and thus enticed by the revenue potential contained within a previously unsolicited population), numerous corporate entities endeavored to construct and exploit the women’s fitness market (Cole and Hribar 1995).

To illustrate, Nike was a preliminary corporate force in the construction of the women's fitness market, and in the persuasion of women to invest in fitness-related apparel and products (Cole and Hribar 1995; Giardina and Metz 2005). (Incidentally, Nike is at present an official sponsor and the exclusive equipment provider to both the National Women's Soccer League and the United States Women's National Team.) In 1987, despite fear that soliciting the women's fitness market "would compromise Nike's authentic and serious sport image" (Cole and Hribar 1995:359), Nike produced its first women-centric advertisement. Although their preliminary attempt was greatly ineffective, Nike was persistent in its pursuit (and swiftly-ensuing capture) of the nascent women's fitness market (Cole and Hribar 1995). Nike's subsequent women-centric advertisements, designed by the now-famous Weiden+Kennedy advertising agency, proved strikingly successful, evidenced most blatantly by dramatic increases in Nike's sales of women's athletic shoes and fitness apparel (Cole and Hribar 1995).

But even more significant than the ever-increasing revenue return via women's fitness merchandise was Nike's escalating prominence within the realm of popular culture, particularly as a productive agent of postfeminist media content (Cole and Hribar 1995; Giardina and Metz 2005). Throughout the early and mid-1990s, Nike strengthened its affective purchase within the American postfeminist imagination; Nike is popularly credited for creating a "community imagined through a spiritual sense of womanhood...cultivated and...signified by Nike's now famous swoosh and directive" (Cole and Hribar 1995:348). By the mid-1990s, Nike's position in the postfeminist imagination had been elevated to that of "celebrity feminist;" Nike was "celebrated...for

its participation in changing American values related to gender, fitness, and advertising...[Nike] encouraged and motivated women to become physically active when it was not fashionable to do so” (Cole and Hribar 1995:358).

Although other corporate entities competed alongside Nike to curry favor with women consumers, it was most greatly due to Nike’s women-centric, pro-exercise advertising campaign that women’s fitness was brought forth from its social position within the subaltern and reinvented within the realm of the popular (Cole and Hribar 1995). Positioning itself as a “progressive and pro-women corporation” (Cole and Hribar 1995:352), Nike’s promotional rhetoric proved particularly persuasive. Nike communicated exercise as necessary to the realization of a “more authentic, internal self” (Cole and Hribar 2005:352). Through exercise, women were promised the emancipation and celebration of their essential ethos; Nike’s promotional rhetoric asserted that exercise was a “better version of a beauty practice” (Cole and Hribar 1995:352), and thus a more natural and just method to unification with the deep self.

Nike’s mandate that the authentic self be achieved via exercise evoked the popular rearticulation of women’s fitness as a necessary condition to the realization of feminine beauty. As the public display of a toned, fit body was thus popularly identified as representative of legitimate femininity, achievement of fitness became highly desired by American women. Fitness came to be popularly perceived as a means of self-fetishization necessary to the realization of the postfeminist “new woman” (Cole and Hribar 1995). As a result, women’s participation in recreational fitness activities greatly escalated. By the mid-1990s, the relentless proliferation of Nike’s women-centric

advertisements and women's increasingly avid purchase of and participation in fitness classes, exercise videos, and athletic merchandise signified the complete marketization of women's fitness, and the popular consent to women's pursuit of fitness as a means to achieve feminine beauty (Cole and Hribar 1995).

Women's Recreational Athletics, Feminine Beauty, and Fitness-Inspired Fictitious Empowerment

It is important to note that women's fitness was popularly interpreted not as athletic prowess, physical strength, or stamina, but rather as the maintenance and display of a socially idealized physique, characterized by a slender, muscularly toned (but not bulky) figure (Cahn 1994; Hardin et al. 2005). As previously noted, postfeminist rationale urged women's autonomy, financial agency, and self-investment, yet was also informed by conservative, anti-feminist rhetoric (Cole and Hribar 1995). Therefore, in practice, women's liberation was limited in scope. Women were discursively encouraged to exercise their newly assumed agency, but only to a degree that did not overstep the socially constructed and historically conditioned boundary that confined appropriate womanhood to particular social activities, lifestyle practices, and visibly embodied characteristics, including physical stature and modes of dress. In this vein, women's fitness participation so as to appear beautiful – toned and slender – was acceptable. Women's fitness participation so as to achieve muscular bulk and physical strength, however, too closely approximated the popularly perceived definition as to appropriate masculinity, and was thus popularly discouraged (Cahn 1994; Caudwell 2003).

This interpretation was discursively reinforced via the mediatized proliferation of images that depicted athletically inclined women as “sports cuties” (Hardin et al. 2005:105) rather than as heroic, formidably muscular sporting women. Corporate-produced images of attractive, “sports cuties” were utilized not only in the promotion of popular women’s fitness practices and products via the construction of the women’s fitness market, but also, proceeding into the 1990s, in the marketing of televised women’s sports events and, eventually, women’s professional sports. As noted by Cahn (1994:272), “when women’s [athletic] events [did] attract corporate sponsorship, investors concerned with selling their product often decide[d] that what sells the best is not women’s athletic ability but their ‘sex appeal.’” Thus, particularly throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (although to a certain extent the diffusion of such rhetoric continues to the present-day), women’s athletic participation as a means to the achievement of the socially idealized feminine physique was discursively expressed as more acceptable than women’s athletic participation for the sheer enjoyment of exercise and sports, or participation for the purpose of achieving muscular bulk and physical strength (Cahn 1994; Hardin et al. 2005).

Following the fitness boom, women’s increased athletic involvement and women’s fitness were simultaneously cast as representative of women’s social and political progress (Cole 2000; Giardina and Metz 2005). The 1990s witnessed the development of “a seemingly progressive but transparently conservative shift” (Giardina and McCarthy 2005:150) within the American cultural fabric. Thus, the signification of women’s athletics as women’s sociopolitical progress was in part due to women’s *visible*

heightened presence in a realm that was previously perceived exclusively as masculine territory (Cahn 1994), as “sport carries with it the most legible form of cultural shorthand for understanding the operation of power in a given context” (Giardina and McCarthy 2005:146). Women’s increased participation in recreational fitness, therefore, projected the 1990s “utopian vision” of social equality articulated via Clinton-era promotional discourse, yet “within nonthreatening, nonpoliticized formations ready for easy and profitable consumption by mainstream America” (Giardina and McCarthy 2005:153). Women’s sociopolitical equality was thus offered to the postfeminist consumer via investment in the fitness market and participation via the popular preoccupation with physical fitness and healthiness. Thus, as exhibited via the aforementioned popular consent to women’s pursuit of fitness primarily as a means to achieve feminine beauty, the purported empowerment discursively attributed to women’s fitness provided merely a progressive façade that concealed women’s continued social, political, and economic subordination.

Corporate marketers exploited the progressive mentality espoused by promoters of women’s recreational athletics so as to persuade the postfeminist audience to invest in the nascent women’s fitness market (Cole and Hribar 1995). Public portrayal of fitness as emblematic of women’s sociopolitical progress reaffirms to the postfeminist “new woman” her liberated, autonomous status. For example, Nike’s promotional campaigns contributed to the social signification of women’s athletic participation as symbolic of women’s empowerment (Cole and Hribar 1995; Giardina and Metz 2005). Nike’s advertisements “recall past moments and practices through and in which women have

been wronged,” but articulate the postfeminist assertion that “times have changed” (Cole and Hribar 1995:362) via the juxtaposition of the remembrance of women’s prior subjection with images of present-day, physically fit, hard-bodied, autonomous women. The particular images and language employed via Nike’s advertisements advanced an emancipatory narrative, via which “power [was] imagined as temporarily restrictive, and as something that can be overcome by working out and on the body” (Cole and Hribar 1995:362). Nike’s promotional rhetoric therefore contributed to the social articulation of the “image of the empowered female...[as] central to the construction of [American] national identity” (Giardina and Metz 2005:62).

Describing the corporate-driven sports industry in the early 1990s, Cahn (1994:272) stated: “More than ever before, decision making in sports revolves around the marketplace: which sports will sell tickets, which activities can attract advertisers, and which marketing strategies enhance a sport’s commercial viability.” Herein lies the answer to my research question: it was the perceived commercial viability of women’s athletics, rather than the enactment of Title IX, that facilitated the establishment of professional women’s athletic organizations. The private sector perceived the establishment of women’s professional sports leagues as commercially viable as result of the confluence of postfeminist sensibilities, the corporate construction and expansion of the women’s fitness market, women’s rapid seduction by and investment in fitness products and practices, and by the mid-1990s, the increased presence of the post-Title IX generation. Furthermore, the heightened pervasion of postfeminist rhetoric and the consequent social significance assigned to women’s commodity purchase positioned the

postfeminist audience as the prime target for viewership of women's professional sports.

Thus, corporate investors predicted that women's avid investment in women's

professional sports was greatly probable. As described by Lough and Irwin:

As increasing numbers of women [had] discretionary income to spend, and as the number of American women in decision-making roles...increased, corporate sponsors [became] more and more interested in this previously neglected market segment. The competitive nature of today's marketplace makes the sponsorship of women's sport a viable avenue for tapping into this desirable market segment. [2001:202]

CHAPTER FOUR: THE EMERGENCE OF WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL SPORTS

As previously explicated, the establishment of women's professional sports leagues resulted neither from feminist protests nor state interventions – that is, the enactment of Title IX. Furthermore, given women's historical exclusion from professional sports, women's professional athletics arguably did not arise from men's altruistic decision to permit women's entrance into the professional sports industry. However, the fusion of postfeminist sentimentalities and the marketization of women's fitness produced within the American social landscape fertile condition for the corporate-driven development of women's professional sports organizations throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Situated within the private sector of the neoliberal market, the progression (i.e., the perpetuation of both men's and women's professional sports) of the professional sports industry is driven by the acquisition of profit. Thus, lacking the historical legacy – or maturity, as phrased by Lough and Irwin (2001) – boasted by men's professional sports leagues (the most prominent of which trace their history to the first half of the 20th century), it was ultimately due to the revenue-driven evolution of the corporate market sphere that women's professional sports initially materialized and yet exist today (Giardina and Metz 2005).

Throughout the latter years of the 1990s, women's persistent embrace of popular fitness regimes, fad diet strategies, and investment in the burgeoning women's fitness

market indicated that the commercial establishment of women's professional sports leagues potentially promised substantial revenue returns for corporations willing to finance their development (Giardina and Metz 2005; Lough and Irwin 2001). Corporate investment in and development of women's professional sports represented a logical progression following the marketization of women's recreational fitness, as evidenced by several factors: (1) the increase in athletically inclined women and youth, (2) the prior market success (i.e. great wealth accumulation) realized via the commercialization of women's recreational fitness, particularly as demonstrated by Nike, (3) the extensive media attention and increased viewership devoted to women's athletics throughout the 1996 Olympics and the 1999 Women's World Cup, and (4) the intensification of activity within the burgeoning sports marketing industry.

Throughout the 1990s, the United States witnessed substantial increase in the number of athletically inclined women. Following the commercialization of women's recreational fitness, a great quantity of adult women participated in various athletic activities. Furthermore, throughout the 1990s, the post-Title IX generation – women that had benefitted from the enactment of Title IX as children – exhibited a significant increase in population. Women of the post-Title IX generation participated in organized, competitive athletics, including team sports such as soccer and basketball, to a greater extent than women of previous generations (Cahn 1994). The increased presence of athletically inclined women represented a viable, pre-existing target audience, presumably favorable to the consumption of and investment in women's professional sports, as “it is anticipated that increased participation will lead to increased consumer

interest...Female competitors are more likely to become consumers of women's sport" (Lough and Irwin 2001:203). Also, the post-Title IX generation included numerous women that had participated in collegiate varsity athletics; this particular population sector, possessing great athletic skill and extensive prior training, represented a highly suitable, largely under-utilized, labor supply (Longman 2000), from which newly established women's sports leagues might recruit their athletes.

The vast consumer investment in the thriving women's fitness industry resulted in great financial reward for those corporations that had succeeded in the solicitation of postfeminist consumers (Cole and Hribar 1995; Giardina and Metz 2005). Nike, for example, realized significant corporate expansion throughout the early 1990s via dramatically increased sales of women's athletic merchandise – particularly athletic shoes (Cole and Hribar 1995). To a great extent, women's professional sports represented unknown territory within the already crowded professional sports landscape. However, Nike's demonstrated success in the solicitation of postfeminist consumers, in addition to the substantial increase in women's athletic participation, substantial purchasing power (Lough and Irwin 2001), and demonstrated interest in the consumption of various men's professional sports (Lough and Irwin 2001; Toffoletti and Mewett 2012), evidenced women's professional sports as fertile ground for corporate investment and development. Furthermore, as suggested by Lough and Irwin (2001:205), "another aspect of women's sport that would appear to be attractive to sponsors is the fact that this market is...undersaturated, as opposed to the alternative options found in top-tier U.S. sports." Nike's strategic appropriation of the greatly under-developed, and thus undersaturated,

women's fitness market in the late 1980s revealed the potential advantage to be won via investment in a nascent market segment: "involvement with an undersaturated market [can] translate into an immediate impact by the...sponsor on the chosen market, due to greater exposure, recognition, and product/image awareness" (Lough and Irwin 2001:205).

As noted, American women have throughout history engaged with professional athletics – that is, men's professional athletics – primarily via spectatorship (Lough and Irwin 2001; Toffoletti and Mewett 2012), although "female voices and perspectives have been largely ignored in sports fan research and in the wider cultural imagination" (Toffoletti and Mewett 2012:1). Despite the historical symbolic annihilation as per women's consumption of men's professional sports, recent research suggests, "the numbers representing U.S. women who watch sport are impressive" (Lough and Irwin 2001:205). As mentioned by Lough and Irwin (2001:205), it is arguable that women's avid spectatorship of commercialized sports has been ignored within academia and the cultural imagination because "traditionally, sponsorship of sport was thought to be the best way to reach male consumers...Women were not considered as targets of sport sponsorship." Thus, the masculine-centric corporate sponsorship of professional athletics contributed to the symbolic annihilation of women spectators. (Recent evidence suggests that men's professional sports leagues now recognize women's substantial investment in and viewership of men's professional sports, as evidenced by the heightened provision of women's specific league-branded apparel and merchandise.)

Furthermore, two recent sports mega-events demonstrated women's equally enthusiastic spectatorship of *women's* elite sports. The first of such events was the 1996 Olympics, hosted in Atlanta and frequently referred to by media as the "Games of the Women" (Giardina and Metz 2005). The feminine identity bestowed upon the games was due to the heightened presence of female competitors (the 1996 Olympics were the first to include women's soccer, for example) and increased media coverage of women's events in comparison to the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, Spain (Higgs et al. 2003). Women's spectatorship of the 1996 Olympics similarly evidenced great increase in comparison to the 1992 Olympics: estimates suggested, "55-65% of Atlanta's 1996 Olympic audience was female" (Lough and Irwin 2001:205).

Women's spectatorship of the 1996 Olympics was impressive. However, it was the 1999 Women's World Cup that most evidently demonstrated the capacity of elite women's sports to attract mass viewership by female *and* male audiences. The 1999 Women's World Cup arguably "engendered a new-found popularity and respect for women's soccer far beyond the confines of recreational activity or a small number of spectator enthusiasts for the college game" (Markovits and Hellerman 2003:21). Despite the limited budget allocated for marketing the tournament and the skepticism expressed by various sports commentators and media outlets, ticket sales far exceeded initial projections (Longman 2000). Total attendance for the tournament was reported at 658,167 (Longman 2000). Ninety thousand spectators witnessed the United States defeat China in the championship match, hosted at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California; furthermore, over 40 million viewers watched the match on American television

(Longman 2000). To this day, the 1999 Women's World Cup championship remains the most-watched soccer match ever in the United States, men's or women's (Ewing and Grady 2013).

The success of the Women's National Team at the 1999 Women's World Cup prompted a popular following characterized by "bumper-to-bumper suburban anticipation" (Longman 2000:12), as caravans of minivans, packed with children and youth, set out to witness the Women's National Team in action. As described by Longman (2000:14), "Americans on a large scale felt – if only fleetingly, in a sanitized, hooligan-free, sample-sized container – the rosary-clutch, the chest ache, that makes this game the athletic heartbeat of nearly every other country of the world." Throughout the course of the tournament, successive American victories fueled an "old-fashioned nationalism of the unprecedented, of transatlantic flights and moon walks" (Longman 2000:13).

As demonstrated most evidently via the 1996 Olympics and the 1999 Women's World Cup, women's interest in the spectatorship of women's elite sports was as equally great as their interest in the spectatorship of men's professional sports (Lough and Irwin 2001). Thus, particularly considering the undersaturated character of the women's sport market, and that "women are responsible for more than 80% of all purchases" (Lough and Irwin 2001:205) in the United States, corporate investment in women's professional sports appeared greatly advantageous. As stated by Lough and Irwin:

Corporate sponsors who target seeking a return on their investments through product sales should focus their efforts towards gaining recognition and exposure among American women consumers. Utilizing affiliations with women's sport

appears to be an effective approach towards reaching women consumers.
[2001:206]

Corporate investment in and development of women's professional sports was furthermore articulated as substantially lucrative via the great intensification of activity (and revenue generation) within the burgeoning sports marketing industry throughout the 1990s (Lough and Irwin 2001; Ewing and Grady 2013). Due to the sports marketing industry's increased wealth, female athletes were employed as corporate endorsers with greater frequency (Ewing and Grady 2013). The greater visibility permitted to women athletes through their increased presence as corporate endorsers similarly generated increased awareness of women's elite sports (Ewing and Grady 2013). Furthermore, the 1990s were characterized by heightened technological innovation within the sphere of media production and communication. Occurring simultaneously, the increase in sports marketing activity and the heightened expediency of mediatized communication converged, allowing for the more efficient and more diffuse dissemination of advertisements (and other promotional materials) that featured professional athletes as corporate endorsers. Given the popular fascination with television, glossy-paged magazines, and celebrity, the recently permitted employment of elite women athletes as corporate endorsers and the concomitant technological acceleration of the dissemination of mediatized images articulated women's professional sports as greatly conducive to product "exposure, recognition...sales, and brand loyalty" (Lough and Irwin 2001).

The convergence of the aforementioned factors positioned the establishment and development of women's professional sports as highly enticing to potential corporate investors. As a result, beginning in the late 1990s women's professional athletics

witnessed increased corporate sponsorship and, as a result, significant expansion (Giardina and Metz 2005; Lough and Irwin 2001). To illustrate, the Women's National Basketball Association was established in 1996; the Women's Pro Softball League was established in 1997 and folded in 2001, it was revived in 2004 as National Pro Fastpitch, which still operates today; and the Women's United Soccer Association began play in 2001 and folded in 2003, Women's Professional Soccer was established in 2009 and ceased operations in 2012, and the current National Women's Soccer League began play in 2013.

However, as exemplified by women's professional soccer, corporate interest and investment in women's professional sports leagues has not resulted in the unproblematic operation and administration of women's professional sports organizations. Furthermore, women's professional soccer demonstrates that the aforementioned factors that contributed to the enticement of corporate sponsors – the heightened presence of athletically inclined, financially enabled women, women's previously expressed interest in the spectatorship of women's elite sports, the wave of national fervor and excitement produced via international competitive success, and the increased attention directed at women's sports via greater employment of women athletes as corporate endorsers – have not directly translated to mass consumption of women's professional sports.

Development of Women's Professional Soccer

Although women's professional soccer leagues have proven economically profitable in several other countries, most notably Germany, France, Sweden, and Japan,

previous attempts to establish women's professional soccer leagues in the United States have proven economically unstable, if not suicidal (Foudy 2013; McCann 2014; Voepel 2012). The first women's professional league, the Women's United Soccer Association, was founded in 2000 and began play in 2001 (Voepel 2012). Popular perception suggests the establishment of the Women's United Soccer Association emanated directly as result of the wave of public excitement produced via the victory of the U.S. Women's National Team over China in the 1999 Women's World Cup championship, and the media attention bestowed upon women's soccer throughout the 1999 Women's World Cup tournament (Giardina and Metz 2005; Longman 2000; Markovits and Hellerman 2003). Although emotionally salient, to attribute the establishment of women's professional soccer in 2001 exclusively to post-World Cup fervor presents an incomplete analysis, as indicated via the preceding paragraphs. Yet, post-World Cup fervor undoubtedly aided in generating public excitement towards the imminent establishment of the Women's United Soccer Association.

Although the United States Soccer Federation had proposed the establishment of a women's professional league in partnership with the pre-existing men's professional league – Major League Soccer – the athletes of the 1999 Women's World Cup squad chose not to pursue a partnership with Major League Soccer (Voepel 2012). Operating independently, “WUSA began on what appeared to be sound financial footing. AOL Time Warner, Cox Communications and Comcast were in the ownership consortium. Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Johnson & Johnson, Maytag, and Hyundai were among the sponsors” (Voepel 2012:paragraph 7). The league consisted of eight franchises, located in

Atlanta, Boston, Carolina, New York, Philadelphia, San Diego, San Jose, and Washington, D.C. (Markovits and Hellerman 2003). Franchise owners and coaches sought both national and international talent, and player salaries ranged from \$27,000 at minimum to \$85,000 at maximum (Markovits and Hellerman 2003).

Despite the league's proximity to the 1999 Women's World Cup, the presence of prominent athletes such as Mia Hamm and Brandi Chastain, and the reported success in attracting a female-dominant fan base – 66 percent female in 2001 and 70 percent female in 2002 (Markovits and Hellerman 2003) – the Women's United Soccer Association “suffered from disorganization, some very poor spending decisions, and a mistaken belief that its foundation was much firmer than it actually was” (Voepel 2012:paragraph 7). Ultimately due to exorbitant debt – estimated at \$100 million (Ewing and Grady 2013) – the league collapsed after merely three seasons (Foudy 2013; Voepel 2012).

The financial misfortune and subsequent collapse of the Women's United Soccer Association evidenced the instability inherent to the management and operation of women's professional sports. The aforementioned sociocultural conditioning that positioned women's professional sports as hotbeds for venture capitalism did not simultaneously alter the structure – a structure developed to benefit the operation of men's athletic organizations – of the professional sports industry writ large, nor deconstruct the extensive historical conditioning that rendered sporting participation as masculine behavior (Birrell and Cole 1994; Burstyn 1999; Cahn 1994; Hargreaves 1994). (As previously discussed in the second chapter, Title IX has similarly been criticized for its failure to produce structural change, and thus failure to destabilize the inherent

masculine character, within youth and collegiate athletics [Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1994].) Consequently, women's professional soccer, and women's professional sports organizations in general, are produced within a socioeconomic sphere characterized by the continued exertion of masculine hegemonic authority. Although the financial collapse of the Women's United Soccer Association was not inevitable (as previously discussed, the league executives had at their fingertips the ingredients necessary to realize financial success and sustainability), the league's potential success was disadvantaged due to its position within a masculine-dominated industry.

As stated by Voepel (2012:paragraph 16), "it's crucial that any endeavor involving women's [professional] sports be based on good business sense and a belief in the product's viability, but also a genuine appreciation for the product and desire to make it as accessible and appealing to its potential audience as possible." To make the product as accessible and as desirable as possible signifies the production of popular demand for the league product. In a recent blog entry, Bien-Aime (2013:paragraph 2) asserted, "women's sports should not appeal uniquely to females because women are playing. Women's sports should appeal to all sports fans because elite athletes are competing. Men do not feel mandated to watch LeBron James because he is a man...[but] because he is the best men's basketball player in the world." I absolutely agree with Bien-Aime; however, the production of demand for professional women's sports leagues is hindered by the historically conditioned popular preference for men's professional sports. Thus, via what processes do the promoters of women's professional sports attempt to subvert

the masculine authority exerted through the professional sports industry so as to produce demand for women's professional athletics?

In this vein, next I shall examine two promotional strategies frequently utilized to promote, or produce demand for, women's professional sports. Research suggests that elite women athletes prefer to promote consumption of their sport utilizing strategies that emphasize their athletic expertise (Kane et al. 2013). Yet, as depicted in the following chapter, women's athletic expertise is not frequently emphasized via the corporate promotion of women's professional sports. Conversely, it is most often the sexualized femininity of elite women athletes that is emphasized via the production of demand for women's professional sports, or the celebration of women's professional sports as emblematic of Title IX's alleged success in producing women's athletic equality. As suggested by Kane et al. (2013:270), the increased hypersexual presentation of professional women athletes is consequential because "how female athletes are portrayed has significant social and economic outcomes in that media narratives as both written and visual texts influence their acceptance – and thus marketability – in ways that reinforce traditional gender stereotypes."

CHAPTER FIVE: THE MARKETING OF WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL SPORTS ADVANCING THE POSTFEMINIST NARRATIVE

In analyzing the corporate-driven establishment of women's professional athletics, it is important to consider the marketing strategies utilized via the production of demand for women's professional sports. As described by Neale (Borland and MacDonald 2003:479), "the essence of demand for the game or sporting contest is fan interest." It is arguable that, to a greater extent than men's professional sports leagues, women's professional sports leagues confront greater social and institutional obstacles via the production of mass fan affiliation, as exhibited by the significantly smaller fan bases sustained by women's professional sports leagues than those sustained by men's professional sports leagues. However, it has been noted that "most objectives of sporting leagues can ultimately be reduced to the idea of maximizing fan interest" (Borland and MacDonald 2003:480), as the maximization of fan interest presumably translates into heightened consumer investment in the league product. Therefore, because women's professional sports leagues are positioned within a socioeconomic sphere that serves as a bastion of masculine authority, so as to maximize fan interest the promoters of women's professional athletics must embrace marketing strategies able to subvert the masculine bias exerted via the professional sports industry.

The production and manipulation of demand is of great importance to the sustained financial operation of women's professional leagues: women's professional

sports exhibit greater cultural and institutional novelty, and therefore less financial maturity, than men's professional sports. The techniques utilized by marketers to promote the popular consumption of professional women's sports most frequently emphasize two contrasting dominant scripts: the sexualized sporting agent and the virtuous citizen-athlete. As demonstrated via the documentary *Branded* (Ewing and Grady 2013), professional women athletes are certainly cognizant to the preferential portrayal of professional women athletes as either "sexed-up" or as socially responsible role models for the mythic American daughter (Giardina and Metz 2005). In the film, when questioned as to how a female athlete must navigate her career, retired Olympic gymnast Mary Lou Retton observed, "there are two categories: wholesome, all-American, squeaky clean, or sexy vixen" (Ewing and Grady 2013).

Sexualized Sporting Agents

The first script depicts the professional athlete as sexual agent. Promotional materials that utilize this script most frequently display the athlete in a provocative manner: scantily dressed, if clothed at all, and posed in such a way so as to appear sexually inviting (Cahn 1994; Hardin et al. 2005; Kane et al. 2013; Messner 1994). Such images frequently approximate soft porn, and emphasize the sexuality of the depicted athlete to a greater extent than her athleticism (Hardin et al. 2005). Upon publication (or broadcast), they are rapidly disseminated throughout the American public, most quickly via the Internet. Textual displays that exhibit sexualized images of women athletes

exploit a binary male–female system that “requires compliance with production of corporeality as it relates to sex-gender-desire ‘norms’ and ‘ideals’” (Caudwell 2003:376).

Particularly since the 1999 Women’s World Cup, professional women soccer players have frequently been implicated in the proliferation of promotional materials that utilize the script of the sexualized sporting agent. One need merely conduct a Google Images search for “Hope Solo,” starting keeper for the United States Women’s National Team and the Seattle Reign, to be inundated by evidence of the marketed sexualization of women athletes. In 2011, Solo posed nude for *ESPN The Magazine*’s “Body Issue.” Additionally, her bikini-clad image was featured on the cover of the July/August edition of *Fitness Magazine*, and she has appeared in numerous Nike advertisements, usually wearing little more than a sports bra and tight-fitting athletic shorts. Similarly, Alex Morgan, a striker who currently plays for the Portland Thorns and has also made frequent appearances with the National Team, twice posed for the *Sports Illustrated* “Swimsuit Edition,” first in 2012 and then again in 2014. (For the 2012 issue, rather than wear an actual bikini, Morgan’s swimwear was painted onto her naked body.) Lastly, Sydney Leroux, player for the Seattle Reign and frequent presence on the National Team roster, posed nude for *ESPN The Magazine*’s “Body Issue” in 2013.

As noted by Darren Rovell (Ewing and Grady 2013), sports business analyst for ESPN, “in order for women’s sports to survive, you need men to be into it.” That is, to exclusively solicit women’s spectatorship does not generate sufficient revenue returns. If the athletic skill exhibited by elite women athletes and the quality of women’s athletic competition does not prove sufficiently enticing to male audiences, via what means must

men's spectatorship be achieved? As asserted by sports and entertainment agent Ben Sturmer (Ewing and Grady 2013), "those athletes that wear less generate greater buzz and interest." The publicized sexualization of women athletes represents the corporate-driven attempt at the solicitation of the traditionally perceived, hypermasculine, heterosexual, male consumer of American professional sports. As observed by retired volleyball sensation Gabrielle Reece (Ewing and Grady 2013), "I don't think selling sex will ever be outdated...Breasts are never going to be out of style."

The sexualization of women athletes is also, however, used in the persuasion of female audiences, as it discursively communicates culturally salient postfeminist discourse: "a celebration of conspicuous consumption and solipsistic individual gratification, embodied above all in the image of the empowered, assertive, pleasure-seeking, 'have-it-all' woman of sexual and financial agency" (Chen 2013:441).

Particularly throughout the 1990s and continuing into the present day, postfeminist promotional discourse has greatly emphasized feminine sexuality and women's (alleged) sexual agency (Chen 2013). Marketers of women's professional sports are not singularly the perpetrators of the dissemination of images depicting sexualized female bodies: the postmodern present has witnessed pervasive sexualization of culture. *Sexualization* refers to the notion that, in the postmodern era, "sexuality appears to permeate every level of our experience" (Attwood 2006:89). Men's bodies are not exempt from the sexualization of culture; however, women's bodies are subjected to public display and evaluation with (markedly) greater frequency than are men's bodies. As articulated by Gill (2007:149), "surveillance of women's bodies constitutes perhaps

the largest type of media content across all genres and media forms.” The increased attention to (and, ultimately, scrutiny of) women’s bodies is made manifest via the proliferation of erotic presentations of women’s bodies in public media culture, including magazines, corporate promotional displays, and cinematic productions (Gill 2007). The popularization of such images obscures the boundary between the pornographic and the pedestrian, the public and the private.

The appeal of the sexualized sporting agent to women consumers is that the presentation of sexualized athletic bodies visually communicates to women audiences the postfeminist assertion that they are autonomous sexual agents, free from restriction within the sexual marketplace. Promotional discourse that depicts sexualized women athletes targets women as both sexual subjects and consumers, articulating sex (and *sexiness*) as “a source of physical pleasure, a means of creating identity, a form of bodily work, self-expression, [and] a quest for individual fulfillment” (Attwood 2006:86). Sexuality, therefore, is marketed and understood as both *style* and *stylish*. The stylization of female sexuality implies that sexiness is a commodified lifestyle choice, obtainable via self-surveillance, bodily work, and the purchase of various beauty products. Consequently, women are presented as participants in their sexualization, “as active, desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so” (Gill 2007:151).

Although some professional athletes are able to supplement their salaries with income generated by corporate endorsement contracts, competition for such contracts is intense, as the number of professional female athletes is significantly greater than the

number of available endorsement contracts at any given time. Additionally, those corporations that employ professional women athletes as endorsers nearly exclusively favor a particular type of woman; bluntly stated, marketers prefer attractive, sexy women who (physically and non-physically) conform to popular attitudes regarding womanhood and feminine beauty (Ewing and Grady 2013; Hardin et al. 2005). Consequently, an athlete's perceived market value is reduced to her physical attractiveness (Ewing and Grady 2013), and the availability of endorsement contracts is further restricted by the discriminatory parameters espoused by marketing executives in their selection of women endorsers.

There exists evidence that women's athletic skill and competitive success influence their market value (Ewing and Grady 2013). For example, tennis player Anna Kournikova and hurdler Lolo Jones initially attracted the attention of corporate sponsors and association executives via their physical attractiveness. However, neither woman exhibited great competitive success – Kournikova failed to win a single major tournament, and Jones failed to reach the podium at both the 2008 and 2012 Olympics. As a result, Kournikova and Jones attracted criticism that their sponsorship deals and public fame were ill gained (Ewing and Grady 2013). Yet, simultaneously, evidence indicates that corporate sponsors and industry executives do not grant exceptionally talented women athletes – such as Women's National Basketball Association player Brittney Griner, whom I mentioned in the opening vignette – proportionate attention *unless* they are also physically attractive. In fact, it appears that exceptionally talented women athletes who do not conform to popular standards of feminine beauty, like

Brittney Griner, soccer player Abby Wambach, and tennis player Marion Bartoli, attract greater public criticism for their athletic expertise and their physical appearances than they do praise (Fagan 2013; McManus and Spain 2013). Thus, it is arguable that for professional women athletes, physical attractiveness is ultimately more valuable to their net worth than athletic talent.

Virtuous Citizen-Athletes

The second script depicts the professional athlete as wholesome and virtuous, an upstanding role model for the mythic American daughter (Giardina and Metz 2005; McDonald 2000). Through this script, sport is understood as “the popularly conceived bastion of goodness, normalcy, and All-American values” (Giardina and Metz 2005:70). The professional woman athlete, consequently, is presented as the symbolic embodiment of the meritocratic American dream: through her hard work and dedication, she has achieved athletic excellence (Cole 2000; McDonald 2000). The wholesome woman athlete champions autonomous self-fulfillment and socially responsible femininity, as her athletic quest represents women’s crusade for social equality (Cole 2000). It is in this vein that Title IX is appropriated by marketers of women’s professional sports, thus resulting in the popular perception that Title IX itself facilitated, and consequently deserves praise for, the establishment and expansion of women’s professional athletics. Via marketing professional women athletes as virtuous citizens, emblematic of American meritocratic potential, it is Title IX – women’s benevolent emancipator – that is

discursively articulated as having played a significant part in permitting women's success via professional athleticism.

Women's athletics represent compelling sites via which the cultural signification of women's alleged empowerment is made socially intelligible (Giardina and Metz 2005; McDonald 2000). The marketization of women's elite sport unites displays of physical strength with promotional language lauding women who, through individual effort, dedication, and bodily self-work have "made it" in the professional workplace (McDonald 2000) – that is, as professional athletes. That the professional sports industry is considered by many to be a "man's world" merely strengthens the publicized narrative that positions professional female athletes as the physical, visual, and intellectual expression of women's empowerment: women's presence in the "boys' club" is advertised as evidence that women's inferiority is of the past (McDonald 2000). As illustrated by Cole (2000:5), consumers are invited to think of women's professional sports "as an expression of women's/girls' political progress and to recognize women's/girls' sporting accomplishments as concrete responses to everyday questions about gender equality."

Advertisers advance "a nostalgic commemoration of Title IX as righteous legislation" (McDonald 2000:39), thus positioning Title IX as a benevolent emancipator, granting women admission to the sphere of athletics. Sanitized narratives that uncritically celebrate Title IX "rely upon and remake the postfeminist contention that access is the main problem facing women: removing the barriers into male-dominated public spheres, including sport, will afford women the opportunity for autonomy and self fulfillment,

with ultimate success or failure determined by individual ability and/or choice” (McDonald 2000:40). The positioning of professional women athletes as symbolic of women’s meritocratic potential “makes it difficult to think about the everyday struggles related to health care, child care, and poverty facing ordinary women,” as “this ‘feel good’ sports consumption directs our attention to the limited number of women athletes who make it” (Cole 2000:5). Marketers of women’s sport publicize a particular “pull-yourself-up-by-your-bra straps” rationale that “ignores deep-seated gender, race and class oppressions” (McDonald 2000:40). Consequently, the publicized, progressive version of the Title IX narrative presents merely the “story that post-affirmative action America loves to tell itself about itself” (Cole 2000:4): that neoliberal governance has enabled the eradication of social and structural inequalities, and self-actualization is thus limited only by personal shortcoming.

Via the uncritical celebration of Title IX, promoters of women’s professional sports attempt to strategically leverage Title IX to “market an aura of social change as product image” (McDonald 2000:40); this technique is presumed to appeal to postfeminist viewers. As articulated by Cole:

From the perspective of multinationals such as Gatorade and Nike, endorsing the Title IX narrative makes sense. The ‘Title IX, Women’s Sports, U-S-A’ narrative, a variation on an already familiar and highly marketable theme, gives sport and its consumption meaning. It makes consuming women’s sport a progressive practice and a political experience. [2006:6]

Furthermore, the corporate-produced public celebration of women’s social and political progress, “coming together in a kaleidoscopic opiate of feel-good feminism and post-empowerment jubilation” (Giardina and Metz 2005:61), renders invisible the

association between women's sports and neoliberal market activity, and similarly encourages consumers to turn blind eyes to the various social injustices sustained by multitudes of women. In particular, numerous multinational sports merchandise corporations such as Nike and Adidas export production to foreign, economically peripheral countries and exploit local female populations via recruiting women to labor in dangerous factories in exchange for chump change (Cole 2000; Cole and Hribar 1995). (Within the United States, certain populations of women are disproportionately impacted via the structural violence wrought as a result of the expansion of neoliberal governance, including women of color, immigrants, the disabled, and women of low socioeconomic status [Harvey 2005].) Through the utilization of postfeminist and nationalist rhetoric, marketers assign social consequence to the consumption of women's professional sports. Consequently, the promotional rhetoric advanced via the marketers of women's professional athletics is integral to the preservation of popular consent to neoliberal governance and the hegemonic perpetuation of a (fictitious) gender-equal, national identity.

The 1999 Women's World Cup and the Production of Disparate Marketing Scripts

It is interesting to note that the two disparate marketing scripts appear to have materialized via the 1999 Women's World Cup, as it was during that tournament that the sexualization of professional women athletes was publically articulated to a greater extent than it ever had been previously. The tournament evidenced a growing number of followers whose fandom was motivated by decidedly more mature interests. Shortly

before the start of the tournament, National Team defender Brandi Chastain was featured in *Gear* magazine, “crouched and wearing nothing but her cleats, her rippling muscles and a strategically placed soccer ball” (Longman 2000:34). The image prompted the attention of late-night television host David Letterman, who referred to the National Team athletes as “soccer mamas” and “Babe City” (Longman 2000:34). Nightly, throughout the tournament, Letterman displayed “a picture of the team in which the players stood shoulder to shoulder like beauty contestants and appeared only to be wearing *Late Show* T-shirts” (Longman 2000:34). Letterman’s comedy of lechery aided in generating a popular following that appreciated the National Team athletes less for their athletic skill than for sexual fetishism of their bodies.

This is not to suggest that the athletes necessarily resisted or protested their sexualized representation. Rather, as observed by Longman (2000:36), “the American women had arrived at a cultural intersection where feminism and postfeminism converged and sometimes collided. On one hand, they were groundbreaking athletes in the pioneering spirit of Babe Didrikson. On the other hand, they were viewed as soccer babes and were willing participants in the sexualization of the team.” Although certain members of the National Team were less sympathetic to the sexual portrayal of female athletes, wary that sexualization by the media trivialized women’s athletic achievements, many reasoned that the attention directed at the attractiveness of the players was positive in that it enticed fans, and therefore generated revenue. When questioned as to whether or not the Women’s National Team would be as popular if the athletes were less attractive, Brandi Chastain (Longman 2000:38) replied, “There are those people who come purely

for the soccer. There are those people who come purely for the event. And there are those people who come because they like us, to look at us. Those are three great reasons to come.”

Yet, simultaneously, the discursive celebration of Title IX was tacitly articulated via the concerted solicitation of the youth soccer community, particularly soccer moms, soccer dads, and teenage girls, “who found in the American players trading-card idols, validation of their own interest in sports and the possibility of future achievement” (Longman 2000:32). The opposing articulations of women athletes as sexual objects and as virtuous role models were exhibited most blatantly through the emergence of the tournament’s most celebrated participants: Mia Hamm and Brandi Chastain.

Arguably the most recognized name not only in women’s soccer, but also women’s sports writ large, National Team striker Mia Hamm endured great media attention both prior to and throughout the World Cup. Although she preferred to eschew the spotlight, Hamm had previously achieved a high degree of public recognition and popular fandom as a result of her numerous prior appearances with the National Team and demonstrated penchant for scoring. (For many years, Mia Hamm held the coveted title of greatest goal scorer, have scored more goals – 158 – during her 275-game career than any other soccer player, male or female. Hamm’s record went unbroken until June of 2013, when National Team striker Abby Wambach netted her 159th career goal, ending Hamm’s storied reign.) Arguably, it was as a result of the media attention directed at the 1999 Women’s World Cup that Hamm secured celebrity status. As the most recognized, and perhaps most talented, woman on the squad, she was burdened with the brunt of

public expectation. It was her name that was most often chanted by the multitudes of spectators, it was her jersey that was most often donned by male and female fans alike. Commentators and analysts tasked her with carrying the team to victory; her reputation, therefore, was greatly tied to the fate of the United States National Team. Thus, although recognized by many prior to the World Cup, it was the extensive media coverage of the event, and the team's recurrent victories, that Mia Hamm became household name.

Like Mia Hamm, teammate Brandi Chastain was similarly elevated to celebrity status via the World Cup. In what arguably became the most memorable moment of the entire tournament, Chastain executed the penalty shot that finally ended the championship match between the United States and China, after 90 grueling minutes of regulation play, 30 minutes of overtime, and nine previously taken penalty kicks, one of which was heroically saved by American keeper Brianna Scurry. Within seconds of the ball leaving her foot, Chastain was on her knees in celebration, shirtless, fists held high and abdominal muscles rippling. Although the tournament was punctuated by innumerable displays of athletic genius, Chastain's celebration rendered those instances inconsequential. In the days and weeks that followed the World Cup, that image – Brandi Chastain, on her knees, muscles taut, and bra bared – became inescapable. Recently reminiscing about the extensive media attention devoted to Chastain's celebration, present-day professional soccer player Hope Solo (Ewing and Grady 2013) observed, “all they could talk about was the sports bra.” Throughout the history of soccer, it became quite common for male soccer players to remove their shirts in celebration after scoring goals. But Chastain's celebration represented cultural novelty: as illustrated by Longman

(2000:279), “she swung her jersey and she became a cultural Rorschach test. Some people saw the black sports bra, some saw the muscular definition and some saw the commercial conspiracy of Nike.” Given Nike’s explicit interest in the promotion of women’s athletic participation, skeptics argued that Chastain’s celebratory display was premeditated, orchestrated by Nike marketing executives desiring to make of Chastain a living advertisement. To this day, Chastain denies the allegations that there was any involvement on the part of Nike (Longman 2000).

Regardless of whether or not the act was premeditated, it remains today an iconic moment in the history of women’s sports, forever preserved in photographic representation. It is an image that radiates raw emotion, the ecstasy of victory and the unburdening of expectation. Recounting her celebration, Chastain (Longman 2000:282) remarked, “as soon as the ball hit the net, it all exploded. All the emotion, all the work that had gone into that moment, everyone’s anticipation of what the World Cup could be, our satisfaction, it all came together. It was like fireworks.” Promoters of women’s sports asserted that Chastain’s celebration exhibited the women’s progress, athletically and socially, since the enactment of Title IX: Chastain exemplified women’s post-Title IX conviction that “their exposed bodies would be as appreciated for strength and power as for sex appeal, certain that nothing would be denied them or taken away, neither their reputations, their careers nor their financial opportunities” (Longman 2000:37).

Washington Post columnist Ann Gerhart (Longman 2000:281) asserted that Chastain’s display resulted in the discursive rearticulation of “the sports bra [as] the cloth symbol of Title IX’s success.”

Simultaneously, however, if we are to strip away the emotionality, to resist the temptation to project onto the image the nationally sanctioned desire for gender equity, what remains is the image of a young woman, on her knees, clothed merely in athletic shorts and a sports bra. Immediately following the victory, newspaper editors debated whether or not it was appropriate to display photographs that captured Chastain's bra-baring celebration on the front pages of their publications. (Although many deemed such photographs acceptable, several others opted instead to spotlight photographs depicting Scurry's heroic penalty kick save.) Chastain's exuberant display seemingly muddled the imagined boundary that delineates that which is socially permissible from that which is socially prohibited.

Via examining the dominant scripts utilized to promote women's professional sports, it is revealed that Title IX's legal mandate is relevant to the development of women's professional sports in that it is exploited by promoters to solicit the viewership of postfeminist women. Thus, although popular discourse may suggest that Title IX directly enabled the establishment of women's professional sports, the legislation's most direct contribution to women's professional sports was to produce a vast population of athletically gifted young women from which women's professional sports leagues extract human labor. Due to the fact that promotional celebrations of Title IX obscure the persistence of structural inequalities that serve to sustain women's subordinate social position, both within the professional sports industry specifically and within American society writ large, the damaging script of the sexualized sporting agent is permitted to flourish. Consequently, the exploitation of women's sporting bodies via sexualization and

manipulation by corporate sponsors is wrought at the hand of popular exaltation of Title IX.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

Both the Women's United Soccer Association and the subsequent league, Women's Professional Soccer, ceased competition after three seasons on account of financial mismanagement and insurmountable debt. The current National Women's Soccer League began play in the spring of 2013. The league's second season started in April 2014. In 2013, the league consisted of eight teams, but prior to the start of the second season it expanded to include a ninth franchise, located in Houston. Broadcast information for the current season has yet to be announced; last season, the league partnered with FOX Soccer, which televised six regular season matches, the two semifinal matches, and the championship match. So as to encourage viewership despite minimal television coverage, the league mandated that franchises live-stream their matches via the Internet. Whether or not viewers were required to pay to access the live-stream was decided at the discretion of each individual franchise. It was recently announced that throughout the second season, matches will again be made available – free of charge – via the National Women's Soccer League channel on YouTube. As FOX Soccer was recently dissolved, it is unclear as to which television network the league will partner with to broadcast its matches for the current season.

So as to avoid a “three-peat” of financial collapse, league executives have adopted a financially cautious approach to the implementation and accomplishment of league-

wide activity (Bell 2013; Foudy 2013). Unlike the previous professional leagues, which operated independently without assistance from national governing organizations, the National Women's Soccer League was established with financial assistance from the U.S. Soccer Federation, Canadian Soccer Association, and Mexican Football Federation. The American, Canadian, and Mexican federations agreed to subsidize the salaries of approximately seven players per franchise; thus, individual franchises were relieved of a great portion of salary expenditure. Furthermore, the maximum expenditure for the remaining non-subsidized salaries was set at \$200,000; the limit translates to an average salary of \$15,000 per athlete, significantly less than the average salaries disbursed by the Women's United Soccer Association and Women's Professional Soccer (Bell 2013; Foudy 2013; Voepel 2012). (Furthermore, in comparison to the average salaries disbursed by the men's professional league, Major League Soccer, the average salary per athlete permitted via the National Women's Soccer League is negligible: the current maximum salary expenditure for Major League Soccer franchises is \$3.1 million.)

Expenses have been further limited by the utilization of smaller, less-expensive stadiums (Foudy 2013; McCann 2013). Several franchises host matches at stadiums belonging to local universities, including Sky Blue FC (Yurcak Field on the campus of Rutgers University), the Boston Breakers (Harvard Stadium), Chicago Red Stars (Benedictine University Sports Complex), and FC Kansas City (Stanley H. Durwood Stadium, University of Missouri-Kansas City). To market the league, athletes, coaches, and administrators alike have heavily utilized internet-based social media venues such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube (Foudy 2013), as marketing via social media platforms

is significantly less expensive than via television broadcast or magazines. Furthermore, Internet-based marketing allows the league to reach a greater audience base due to the heightened accessibility afforded via the Internet, and the viral nature exhibited by contemporary social media-driven information exchange.

As demonstrated via the repeated attempts to establish a profitable women's league, and via the limited, cautious business plan advocated by those managing the current National Women's Soccer League, women's professional soccer commands minimal national attention. Thus, the great international competitive success via the United States Women's National Team, the presence of highly visible, commercially endorsed athletes, and a dash of sex appeal have proven incapable to advance the popularity – and thus consumptive appeal – of women's professional soccer. The current National Women's Soccer League evidences the limited scope of women's professional athletics writ large. Although the continued evolution of women's professional sports has resulted in an expansion of organizations and leagues since the initial emergence of commercialized women's sports, their existence within the American neoliberal market sphere is indisputably precarious.

The women's professional sports leagues that persist today are markedly smaller operations than their equivalent men's leagues, as their sustainability is limited by smaller budgets. As a result, there exist today fewer opportunities for women to pursue careers as professional athletes than exist for men: there are fewer women's professional sports leagues, and those leagues that do persist have fewer teams than administered via the equivalent men's leagues. Furthermore, given the recent proliferation of athletically

talented young women and the concomitant shortage of available career opportunities per professional athleticism, the scouting and hiring process is intensely competitive (Noll 1998). It is inherently risky – for both men and women – to pursue careers as professional athletes, as the professional sports industry is highly exclusive (Noll 1998). Due to the financial precarity exhibited by professional women’s leagues and franchises, women are subjected to even greater risk via pursuing professional athleticism than are men. Women’s financial payoff, furthermore, is often insufficient: the average salaries disbursed to professional women athletes pale in comparison to the average salaries pocketed by professional male athletes. Consequently, for numerous women, professional athleticism is not viable as a sole source of financial income. To illustrate, several athletes from the Washington Spirit, a franchise of the National Women’s Soccer League, live with host families, with roommates, or in group-houses so as to reduce their expenses and thus maximize their modest salaries – two players even live, free of charge, at a Maryland retirement community (Gutnick 2013).

Boasting rich historical legacies, vast consumer bases, and impassioned fan allegiances, men’s professional sports yet reign supreme within the professional sports industry. Women’s professional sports continue to occupy a subordinate position to men’s professional sports within the professional sports landscape, and within the American collective conscious. As briefly described in the introductory chapter, women’s subordinate status within the professional sports industry is sustained, in great part, through men’s hegemonic authority, most acutely exerted via their position as the gatekeepers of the professional sports-media nexus (Hardin 2005). Thus, considering that

corporate investment contributes to the financial perpetuation of men *and* women's professional sports organization, what insight can be acquired via the examination of the corporate-driven establishment and development of women's professional sports?

The cultural superiority exclusive to men's professional sports does not threaten the masculine authority vested in the corporate executive class. The prevailing socioeconomic structure in the United States sustains men's advantageous position as per access to financial, natural, and intellectual resources. Men's attempt to suppress women's ascent within the socioeconomic sphere is motivated by the desire to preserve their privileged hierarchical status. Given that the American neoliberal state apparatus guarantees "the freedom of businesses and corporations (legally regarded as individuals) to operate within [the] institutional framework of free markets and free trade" (Harvey 2005:64), and that corporate America remains, to a great extent, a socioeconomic sphere controlled by men (Harvey 2005), the corporate-driven appropriation of women's professional sports represents a coordinated corporate-political institutional effort to deny women's advancement within the sports-media sector, and within the socioeconomic sphere writ large. Via the financial appropriation of women's professional athletics, corporate investors exert great authority over the management and operation of women's professional sports organizations, therefore regulating the growth and financial success of women's sports.

Corporate authority over women's professional athletics also enables masculine oversight as per the construction – or deconstruction – of popular interest in women's professional sports, most frequently accomplished via the creation and dissemination of

discursive texts. Thus, it is significant that the two dominant scripts most frequently utilized to promote women's sports and generate popular demand for the women's sporting product portray women as "sexed up" or as virtuous American citizens. The sexualization of professional women athletes contributes to the commodification of particular anatomical features, discursively articulated as representative of feminine sexuality. Thus, the sexualization of professional women athletes contributes to the discursive deconstruction, fragmentation, and exploitation of women's bodies, and reduces professional women athletes' socioeconomic capacity to the market provision of commodified anatomical feminine sexuality. The sexualization of professional women athletes via men's authority over the professional sports-media nexus represents men's authority to "depoliticize [women's] body and to deny its sociality" (Sharp 2000:290). The depiction of professional women athletes as emblematic of Title IX's success in administering women's athletic – and therefore sociopolitical – equality visually articulates and discursively perpetuates the corporate-political façade that communicates the postmodern woman's sociopolitical autonomy and equality. It is a façade that persuades women of their (fictitious) empowerment so as to dissuade feminist political activism and preserve the American masculine status quo.

It is greatly significant that the legal clarification of Title IX occurred simultaneously as the consolidation of the American neoliberal state apparatus, as the neoliberal movement was simultaneously characterized by the diffusion of conservative, anti-feminist rhetoric that advocated women's return to the domestic sphere. Consequently, the feminist demand that athletics be explicitly addressed via Title IX's

legalese did not prompt mass popular demonstration in support of women's athletic equality. Following the legal battle to clarify the applicability of Title IX to women's athletic participation, the revised language of the legislation discursively articulated, and legally provided for, the federal government's consent to women's continued socio-physical subordination, as evidenced both by the legislation's failure to destabilize the popular association between sports participation and masculine character and its failure to deconstruct men's authoritative control over athletics writ large. The perpetuation of women's socio-physical subordination has permitted the continuance of men's patriarchal control over women's bodies.

Historically, women were educated as to the embodiment of particular "modalities of feminine bodily comportment, motility, and spatiality" (Young 1980:141), greatly influenced by the patriarchal character intrinsic to American society. The socially prescribed performance of feminine bodily comportment, motility, and spatiality resulted in timidity, hesitation, and restriction as per women's physical movements (Young 1980). As described by Young (1980:142), the restricted character of women's physicality was evidenced by the "failure to make full use of the [female] body's spatial and lateral potentialities," and the failure "to summon the full possibilities of [women's] muscular coordination, position, poise, and bearing." Athletic involvement, from which women were often excluded prior to the mid-1970s, afforded to men the performance of the entire spectrum of human movement and physical subjectivity, and the cultivation of muscular coordination and strength; consequently, men's physical enculturation was less inhibited than women's physical enculturation. Men's physical enculturation did not

similarly produce timidity, hesitation, or restriction as per men's physical activities. The different modalities of bodily comportment socially prescribed to women and to men originated in the ideology of separate spheres, via which certain activities were designated as feminine or masculine appropriate: as per the doctrine of separate spheres, athletics were articulated as masculine appropriate.

For both men and women, physical enculturation begins during childhood. Therefore, the societal achievement of socio-physical gender equality must be realized through the equalization of boys' and girls' modalities of bodily comportment. It is in this vein that Title IX, while affording girls' increased access to athletic opportunities, has simultaneously sustained girls' – and women's – socio-physical subordination. As previously noted, the enactment of Title IX did not produce any change to the masculine-biased structure and masculine character attributable to American sports organizations. Girls' participation in athletics is therefore *a priori* disadvantaged due to the failure of Title IX to discursively rearticulate athletics as gender-neutral social territory. The persistence of the association between masculinity and athleticism discourages girls' appropriation of the full range of human movement and physical subjectivity, resulting in the condition – and corresponding gender slur – of “throwing like a girl.” Furthermore, the physicality necessitated via *masculinized* sport often demands of girls (and women) particular movements and the coordinated recruitment of certain muscles that are unachievable as result of the female body structure. Although girls and women have made great strides towards equalizing men's musculoskeletal athletic potential, much

physiological research suggests that most women will be able to closely approximate, but not equal, men's athletic potential (Epstein 2013).

Furthermore, evidence suggests that Title IX compliance has not yet been wholly accomplished – particularly at the collegiate level, as discussed previously, but also at the youth level (Harvard Law Review 1997). Girls' continued denial from the athletic realm simultaneously denies her access to the full spectrum of human movement and human subjectivity: the continuation of Title IX's unequal application and enforcement therefore abets in women's socio-physical subordination. Men's manipulation of women's access to athletics, within the professional sports industry and per youth athletics via legal enforcement of Title IX compliance, signifies men's control over physical culture and the continuance of men's patriarchal control over women's bodies. It has been argued that women's present-day limited physical mobility results from the social conditioning rendered via women's historical exclusion from many organized athletic activities (Whitson 1994; Young 1980).

Acting as a microcosm of American society writ large, and furthermore serving as an enduring bastion of masculine influence, to allow the destabilization of the masculine character vested in the professional sports industry communicates the potential to destabilize men's privileged position within the prevailing socioeconomic structural hierarchy. To permit women equal access to professional athletics does not permit their equal access to the corporate executive class per se, but given the proximity of the corporate sphere writ large to the professional sports industry, to permit greater professional opportunities to elite women athletes symbolically suggests a corporate-

permitted slackening to the previously upheld masculine ethos characteristic of professional sports.

Thus, as previously examined, corporate interest in the establishment and development of women's professional sports was indicative of corporate desire to profit from a nascent, undersaturated, potentially lucrative market sector. Corporate investment in women's professional sports also signified the corporate-political desire to guarantee the maintenance of masculine hegemonic authority exerted via the professional sports industry, and via the American sociopolitical sphere as well. As men overwhelmingly controlled the corporate executive class, corporate appropriation of women's professional sports therefore enabled masculine-centric corporate entities to police women's athletic organizations, while simultaneously promoting a pro-women façade via marketing women's professional sports through the production and dissemination of greatly salient postfeminist scripts. Women have been granted access to the professional sports industry, but equality of opportunities, equality of rewards, and equality of public esteem have yet to be achieved. Title IX's failure rearticulate athletics as gender-neutral social territory, and the half-hearted legal enforcement of Title IX's gender equality mandate, provides federal consent to men's continued patriarchal control of women's bodies.

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Kathleen M. Sims grew up in Arlington, Virginia. She attended the College of William and Mary, where she received her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology in 2010. She went on to receive her Master of Arts in Anthropology from George Mason University in 2014. Her research was inspired by her love of sports and all things fitness related. She enjoys running, weight lifting, and playing soccer and racquetball.