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In A Man's World  
Gender Equality in Sports  
Visual Studies and Ethics

## **ABSTRACT**

Gender roles are proven to be very evident in the history of American culture. In the history of fashion, women have been portrayed as very feminine, and were not introduced to pants until the 20th century. There has been an accepted and distinct separation between male and female in labor, characteristics and fashion. Sports have taken on these separations by creating uniforms that are segregating the female and male sex. Athletic females are still portrayed as “sexy women,” instead of portraying them as athletic, strong or talented women. The public is in constant reminder from the media that at the end of the day, athletic and professional women are mothers, wives, ‘sexy’ and existing in the women role. There is an evident shift in uniforms from elementary school, middle school, to high school and sports beyond the educational system that start this gateway into “sexier” uniforms for women. The more athletic the sport, the more masculine it becomes, making a threat to males and the definition of masculinity. Instead of embracing this skillset held by many women, the media and society take it upon themselves to objectify these women in newspapers, magazines, and many other vehicle mediums to show these skilled women as nothing but sexual objects that should be looked at, instead of appreciated for their talents. This societal built idea has changed the tone for women and men in the category of sport and has created a fetish element in the sport itself. This entire idea is deeply rooted in the theory of sport, the theory of fashion, and is much more involved in the upbringing of children than one would assume.

## **INTRODUCTION: Sex appeal and Gender Roles**

“The dissatisfaction that some women experience in regard to their body image and identity is held to be so powerful that it causes women to change their behavior and their eating habits in order to conform to an ideal image (1).” Body image problems are a popular discussion, as clothes get thinner, shorter and more revealing. Women are expected to be smaller, and

thinner (ideal). Identity is laden in our fashion, on or off of the court. Even in our sports it seems we are playing the gender role to the highest capacity. “An extension of this theoretical framework—critical feminist theory—is anchored to the fundamental assumption that society is structured around a series of inequitable relationships of power whereby females are routinely and systematically marginalized and devalued (2).” Women time and time again have been portrayed as the ‘sex object,’ and it is seen in athletic promotion and marketing as well. “The eroticized imagery of a woman has been a popular device for enticing consumers to purchase products for decades. Indeed, sexual images of women in advertising are said to be so pervasive that they are ‘scattered like parks or resorts, little retreats for the male imagination, strokes to the ego and hooks for commerce (3).’ This idea is a marketing strategy that is referred to “sex appeal approach,” and is used by many advertising and marketing companies. “The sex appeal approach is commonly and frequently seen in both male and female sports (4).”

Sports uniforms have quite a differentiator when it comes to male vs. female competition. It should be noted that in gender-neutral competitions or relays, the uniforms directly display that equal attribute. Sports like track, cross-country, soccer, baseball or even basketball do in fact, have equivalent uniforms, used across the boards for their athletes. However, in a sports setting the athletes are positioned quite differently to the public.

## THE SWITCH FROM GENDER NEUTRAL: Middle School



Figure 1: Lancerettes k-5 cheer program and High School Lancerettes during a basketball game.

From ages 12-18 we experience a massive amount of growing, changing, and developing, and our gender identities begin to show themselves. In elementary school, there is a much different mindset to “gender” and the idea that “sex sells” isn’t as prevalent as it is in our teen years.

In elementary school it is common that cheerleading uniforms include t-shirts, sweatpants, or some sort of jogging suit. Once in a while (figure 1) the young girls will still be assigned a skirt, however their shirts are still loose (even though at this point they have less to hide than a girl in her teens), and remain slightly gender neutral. Lori Kuntz, principal at Stewart Lakeshore Elementary explained, “we don’t really have a cheerleading team for elementary students, however, Lakeshore has an extra-curricular group for kindergarten through fifth grade called the Lancerettes, and they have to

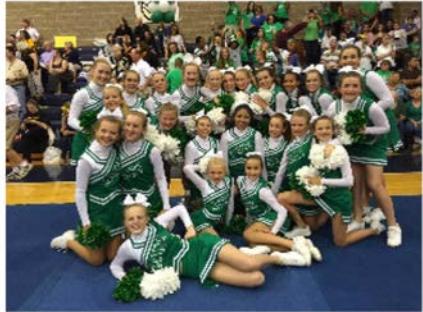


Figure 3: Middle School cheer team at cheer competition.

wear pants and a white matching cheer t-shirt for their uniforms (5).” This is very common among many elementary schools (figure 2). During middle school, this outfit begins to switch to a more feminine look (see figure 3).

Middle school attire begins to rid longer skirts or any required pants, leggings or articles of clothing underneath the skirts. This is a big change in any pre-teen and teenagers’ life when discussing hormones, and bodily changes, for both male and female sexes. However, when looking at other sports in general; basketball, track, cross-country, soccer, or softball and baseball, the uniforms remain pretty similar and unisex. However, at the end of elementary school and the beginning years of middle school, depending on the athletic program, volleyball is introduced.



Figure 2: Elementary school team squad.

From my own volleyball and athletic experience,

Figure 4 reflects our uniforms, which consisted of a baggy, loose t-shirt that was far too big on most of us, and mid-thigh length spandex. The spandex were required for us to buy through the school so we couldn't purchase athletic attire from "Dicks sporting goods", or "Nike", or any other brand that could potentially have tighter and shorter spandex. Our school was a very small, and conservative school, but I found this to be true with the majority of our competitors.



Figure 4: River Valley Middle School Volleyball team

From the studying of imagery, it can be concluded that the majority of uniforms for elementary are loose to the body, non-fitting, and decently modest for those going through the athletic departments at an academic level. It can also be noted that although there is a change at the middle school level, there is still a remaining modesty level within the female sporting teams.

## High School

High school sports get a bit more differentiated in uniforms. From a vast view at high school sports and competition, the average bystander can tell you that shirts get a little more



Figure 5: Left: River Valley High School Volleyball  
Right: Coloma High School Volleyball

tight, shorts get a bit shorter, and more skin is shown at a high school level; for men and women. In regards to volleyball (figure 5), instead of tucking in shirts, they just get shorter and fit for the body. The spandex worn does get shorter and tighter, and the guidelines for how long they have to be, and the material restrictions fade

out. Most teams will stick to a unified brand, however, if you buy extra pairs outside of a school uniform order, it isn't frowned upon. There is a functionality feature of having a tighter shirt that doesn't lift up as easy when a player jumps, or doesn't lift up as a player slides on the floor. In

recent years, most volleyball teams have even switched to tighter, but long sleeve shirts to protect the player's elbows against floor burn.

In cheerleading, we see the same thing. In figure 6 there is a direct comparison on a younger youth cheerleader, and a high school cheerleader. The skirt on the high school student

seems to be much shorter and hugging her hips much tighter than the little girl. There is also much more skin being displayed on her upper body. Yet, this could also be argued with the fact that the high school girl has gone through a chemical and hormonal change, therefore, her outfit is a little tighter around the areas that are loose on the little girl.



Figure 6

On a much different note, there are some high school uniforms that have been banned due to the fact they do show too

much skin, but in fact, they show less skin than a professional level of cheer like the Dallas Cowboys, and many others in fact (figure 7). These uniforms were banned because the use of mid-drift in a setting that educates ages under 18, as well as the length of the skirts, particularly that involve doing stunts and leg kicks.

Cheer can be very competitive, especially in a dance-like competition that occurs for many squads on the weekends; however, these girls have very little protection. Their arms and legs are typically vulnerable to injury, since the uniforms do not require any padding, or protection.



Figure 7: High school cheerleading uniform banned.

## Dress Code Violations

An ironic aspect of these uniforms is the dress code that is apart of the educational system that is put into place to create a controlled environment. Most of the dress code regulations seem

like they lean towards preventing controversial outfits for girls. Most schools forbid tank tops, spaghetti straps, skirts that do not pass fingertip length (or it must not be above 3 inches past the knee), and no midriff can be shown. Below, in Figure 8, there is an example of a High School and their dress code. Independence High School, from San Jose, California, is one of many that have these exact rules.

1. Students are expected to dress in a manner that is neat and appropriate for school or work.
2. Students may not wear clothing that disrupts the educational process.
3. No sagging clothes (baggy pants); pants should be size appropriate and worn at the waist.
4. No torn jeans
5. No hats/head covers, scarves, head rags (i.e. stocking caps, satin-type hairdo covers, "do-rags", etc. (hats brought on campus must be inside a student's backpack throughout the school day)
6. Clothing, jewelry and personal items (backpacks, fanny packs, gym bags, water bottles, etc.) shall be free of writing or pictures. Other items or insignia that are crude, gang-related, vulgar, profane or sexually suggestive, that bear drug, alcohol or tobacco company advertising/promotions or that advocate racial, ethnic or religious prejudice are strictly prohibited.
7. Clothing that bear logos, insignia, letters or colors signify a gang, a crew, violent actions or weapons will not be tolerated.
8. All tops (shirts and blouses) must cover the top of the shoulder and completely cover the stomach, chest and bare back. No bare midriffs.
9. Shorts and skirts must be size appropriate (arm extended at side, short or skirt bottom reaches finger tips); tight fitting shorts, short shorts and cutoffs are prohibited.
10. Only the student's name, written in plain block letters, is permitted on backpacks or other personal items.
11. No see-through shirts, blouses; no halter tops, tank tops/tube tops, "wife beaters", undershirts, muscle shirts or other tops that expose the midriff.
12. Shoes must always be worn; no inappropriate footwear or roller blades.
13. No under clothing worn as outer wear.
14. Red or blue shoes, shoes with red or blue accents or shoes with red or blue laces are not allowed.
15. No sunglasses may be worn inside school buildings or classrooms.
16. Any jewelry, body art, piercing or extreme hairstyle/color deemed by the school to be dangerous or a distraction to the learning environment is not acceptable (jewelry with spikes, chokers, wristbands or extra large rings.)
17. Students may not wear clothing that reveals the back, midriff, that make undergarments visible, or when arms are raised becomes visible. These include but are not limited to: boxers, sheer tops, spaghetti straps, halter tops, swim tops, tube tops or clothing that exposes the midriff.

Figure 8: Independence High School; San Jose, California

Although some of these pertain to the male sex, it seems that at least 4 of these refer to the midriff, and another that vaguely says to "not disrupt the educational process." These regulations have been in the educational system for quite some time, however, in the early 21st century they are beginning to be questioned by the parents of students. With a society that shows less and less clothing daily, there has been an increase of insecurity and body image issues. There have been many instances where wearing the uniform, particularly cheerleading, has been banned to school. This seems to be sending odd messages to parents and the students wearing these outfits.

In Tampa bay, a school voted to ban these uniforms from a school setting unless they wore pants and long sleeve shirts underneath their uniforms. *The academic leaders stated that the “skirts were just too short,” which created an uproar from the parents.* “Letting the girls wear their uniforms creates a double standard, he said. The district’s dress code requires that shirts have sleeves and skirts fall to at least mid-thigh. A parent looks at their son or daughter getting ‘dress coded’ for wearing something short, then they look at the cheerleading uniform and they say, ‘What about that?’ Schlereth said (6).” If these young girls can wear their uniforms to games and not school, what message is it actually sending? From a societal perspective it seems that if women wore a Dallas Cheerleader uniform daily, they may be judged for being provocative, yet in a cheering setting, it is almost glorified. The parents responses to this ruling

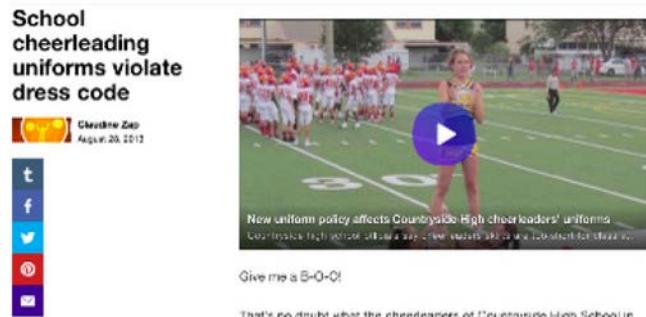


Figure 9

were, “If it’s an approved school uniform — which it was approved, by the administration, years ago — why is it out of dress code?” asked Christine Johnson, whose daughter is a junior on

Countryside’s varsity squad. “And why can they wear it in front of thousands of people at a football field if they can’t wear it on game day at school?” Unfortunately, this occurred to several schools across the nation, and was later integrated into most school systems around the United States.

## PRO SPORTS: WNBA

There are many sports created for men that are not deemed acceptable for women to play, and if women play them, generally they are feminized. “For example, playing tackle football or engaging in Greco-Roman wrestling are generally not accepted as appropriate sport behaviors for

girls or women, but are considered appropriate activities for boys and men (7)." There have been many studies looking at the masculinity of sports, but not male vs. female sports, until recently. "Multifactorial gender identity theory provides the theoretical foundation for the current study. Spence's gender identity theory proposes that gender phenomena are multifactorial and deeply embedded in social contexts (8)." Basketball is a sport that men and women share, yet in different leagues. Due to consumer demand, the NBA currently makes more revenue than the WNBA. This being said, the NBA league in 2014 made 4.7 billion dollars, while the WNBA made about 10 million (9). It was reported

Diana Taurasi made the All-Women's National Basketball Association First Team in 2014 and helped the Phoenix Mercury win the league's championship. That season, she was paid the WNBA maximum salary of \$107,500. In 2013-14, the Phoenix Suns employed Dionte Christmas for 198 minutes. For those minutes—the only minutes Christmas has ever played in the National Basketball Association—he was paid the league minimum of \$490,180 (10).

The profit created and disbursed by the leagues are another discussion of inequality, however, the social reminders that are followed up in the leagues are the discussion of interest. A lot of the time, you will see WNBA athletes being positioned as mothers, wives, or placed into a more feminine role than their athletic profession. However, in looking at the NBA, most of them are not advertised as fathers, loyal companions, or the ones who take care of the household. According to a study conducted by Mary Jo Kane, Nicole M. LaVoi, and Janet S. Fink, "Perhaps more disturbing is how females are portrayed when they are covered. Numerous investigations have demonstrated that sportswomen are routinely portrayed in written and visual texts that emphasize their femininity and heterosexuality far more than their athletic competence (11)."

Most women working as professional athletes feel the need to sell their body to promote sports for women. "The common sense notion that sexually provocative images promote women's sports explains (in part) why female athletes are systematically portrayed as

traditionally feminine rather than as physically big and powerful. It also sheds light on why some sports women embrace the opportunity to sexualize themselves (12).” Most of the time women are placed as a sexualized image in a magazine or in pop culture, but hardly will you find that of men.

Dan Fleser covers the women’s team in Tennessee, and has been a reporter at Knox News for over 27 years. When asked about the differences he has seen in male vs. female sports he stated, “the biggest difference in coverage is amount of manpower and resources devoted. It’s been more for men than women at most papers I’ve seen over the years because at most places there’s more readership interest in men. It’s evenly divided in our newspaper because the interest in both sports is relatively equal among our readership.”

Something that spectators will see during NBA and WNBA games are cheerleaders. Dan stated, “The atmosphere in terms of cheerleaders, support system, whatever, is comparable for men and women as far as I can tell, although typically male basketball has a dance team as well as a cheerleading team. The biggest variable is the crowd size.” The WNBA wears the same types of uniforms as the NBA, however, since they are seen just as masculine, their positioning outside of the sport is much different. These players will either be seen as sex objects in a magazine spread, or a motherly, ‘feminine role’ individual in a different magazine spread.

### **Beach Volleyball and Cheerleaders**

“Benjamin Rader pronounced the Dallas Cowboys NFL team as the world leader at exploiting sex appeal via the Cowboy Cheerleaders (13).” Although, not all high school students, college students, or even other pro football cheerleaders (or basketball for that matter) dress as provocatively as the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders, it is still a sexualized uniform that “flaunts heaving, [has] skimpily covered breasts, and short shorts, which [expose] some of the curvature of their posteriors (14).” However, if younger generations are encouraged to pursue their skill set

to the next level, and the next level is a sexualized, cheering for men, version of gymnastics, what are they really achieving?

While researching the Dallas Cowboys in particular, there is a list on their homepage that describe other duties they have besides cheering during their football games. It reads: “Perform at AT&T Stadium, Travel to exotic locations for Annual Calendar Shoot, Entertain U.S. military troops throughout the world on USO Tours, Perform for National Television audiences...(15).” Although these sound normal, looking into them seems to be targeting mostly one sex: male. Traveling to exotic locations for a calendar shoot, means modeling in even less clothing attire to create a calendar for consumerism; again this is objectifying women, as if their uniforms don’t do that accurately. Next, the team gets to travel to military troop locations around the world for touring, where they entertain and dance, for men (mostly). Although their websites do not say you have to be a certain weight or height, it is boldly noted, “You should look well proportioned in dancewear. We DO NOT have specific height and weight requirements, however, a lean figure is demanded by our uniform (16).”

When the International Beach Volleyball Federation released their new uniforms for the Elite Volleyball team, the majority of people were outraged (17). A widely known athlete, Gabrielle Reece Hamilton, was quoted, “The Federation was/is offering “this fantasy for people who say, ‘I love the beach, I love summer, and I love sandy people,’ and they are trying to play off of that, the bottom line is: sex sells (18).” Even to obtain their own personal marketing status, these elite players have gotten breast implants, or have over trained their abdominal muscles to acquire this new “sexy” look for women which seems to be spoken loudly by the fitness industry: strong is the new sexy (19).

The look and use of all of these leagues (uniforms and actions) are attempts (successful ones) at using sexual impulsiveness to sell to men, and with the added addition of sensual

women wrestling on the media, it is also an example of this tactic (20). This isn't just seen in sports however, this is also very prevalent in our movies, superheroes and many other popular culture images and stories. Even within the same realm of superhero, the male will be seen as dominant, the hero, and the strong one, while the woman is there for some decorative manner (21). This same scenario is seen in our university environments in the United States, "or at the decorative wrappings for the football and basketball team (22)." "We see this occurring in sports quite frequently, the way the media focuses on the feminine side of the female athlete (23)" especially when they are not dressed for the male gaze.

## **COLLEGE VOLLEYBALL**

"Female student athletes often desire a muscular body to be successful in a sport, but this body type does not conform to traditional cultural norms of femininity (24)." Our history of the ideal body has taken shifts and turns throughout time of what is deemed ideal or beautiful. In the United States particularly, the ideal body has gone back and forth from "full and curvy," to "thin and unhealthy," to "strong and built." However, the fashion and its femininity rules have not altered as much as the actual ideal standard. Viewing art history and it's images, most women are represented in skirts, dresses, or feminine clothing, and even if the woman is not wearing a dress or something open at the bottom, it most likely will be a suit or piece of clothing that is tightly formed to the body.

Volleyball is an athletic sport, often only played by girls and women in high school and college, and is introduced to men as more of a club sport in college and after those years. Needless to say, women mostly dominate the sport. In men's leagues, typically they wear normal clothing, "boy shorts," that are loose to the body, unless the sport is played in a beach volleyball setting, then depending on the country it varies. In high school, college, and pro volleyball for women however, the uniform typically consists of short spandex, high socks, and a tightly fit

uniform jersey. “Results indicated that body image among female student athletes is a multidimensional construct... Participants reported conflicting messages about their bodies in regard to how they look on the court and how they are supposed to look outside the court (25).” A study by Jesse Steinfeld, Rebecca Zakrajsek, Kimberly Body, Katharine Middendorf, and Scott Martin was conducted among college volleyball players to examine the experiences of female volleyball players to understand their beliefs about their bodies, both as women outside and inside the sport of volleyball to see if there was a comparison about their revealing sports uniforms and if they were related to body image.

“Athletics provide a unique environment that places the physical body on center stage... in which their bodies are evaluated not only based on performance, but on appearance (26).” For women, finding the ideal body is difficult, because society sends conflicting messages and ideals. “The societal ideal has been described as “firm but shapely”, “fit but sexy,” “strong but thin” (27).” This leads the female athletes to be proud of their bodies, but definitely quick to point out all of their flaws (28).

In relation to athletic uniforms in general, past research has demonstrated that female athletes in refereed sports, like basketball, volleyball and others, compared to females that participated in judged sports, like gymnastics, or cheer, there is a greater risk for negative body image and disordered eating when the uniform is tighter (29). When it comes down to the results, former competitive athletes have reported that their uniforms made them more aware of their shape and physique, which influenced feelings of dissatisfaction about their bodies (30), and current athletes reported that appearance in the uniforms raised awareness of body concerns and the potential for others to evaluate their bodies against the societal idea (31). “The prevalence of skin tight sport uniforms has contributed to perceptions of female athletes feeling sexualized and objectified in their uniforms ... female collegiate student athletes who wore revealing uniforms

reported feeling exposed and expressed concerned with how they looked, in addition to feelings of discomfort associated with their uniforms (32)."

## LINGERIE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

In 2009, the Lingerie Football League made an appearance on national television. Later in 2013 its name was changed to the "Legends Football league (33). Before it was its own league it originated from the Super Bowl Halftime show on Pay per view from 2004-2006. The Lingerie Football teams (figure 10) wear a garter, underwear, bra, a little padding, and a helmet. There have been many controversial news stories and discussions about the pay of the sport, including one by ABC called, "So Sexy or Just Sexist?" published and recorded in 2013 (34). Most of the players simply just state that they love the game and completely forget about the outfits, however, they do have to have other jobs due to the lack of pay.



Figure 10

When discussing "femininity" in the sport, their coach quoted, "Most football players don't include tanning and manicures in their training routines, but these female footballers see it as just part of prepping for the next big game. While it may seem like somewhat of a spectacle, the teams take the sport very seriously, spending at least six hours a week practicing on the field, rehearsing and studying complicated plays (35)." Although no one is forcing players to "prep" themselves, male football players do not do anything of the sort, and do not prep to be more "attractive," or sexy.

There is a much different pay in regards to salary when discussing the LFL and the NFL. The LFL wears half the amount of clothes, could be seen as just a sex objectification "sport," or

“fetish,” and receives a very small wage. “Two lingerie football players are suing their former league in California court, saying that it wrongly classified its scantily clad athletes as independent contractors in order to pay them skimpy wages.” “...Ms. Margulies and Ms. Johnson named Legends Football League and its founder, Mitchell Mortaza, in their complaint, which was filed in late June, the law firm said, accusing the league of failing to pay minimum wage and not paying for injuries suffered while playing football (36).” Most of these LFL leagues are comparable to hobby leagues or other types of clubs outside of the academic or professional level.

Mitch Mortaza, chairman of the LFL, stated, “The marriage of sex appeal and sport has been used to sell athletes for years—we’re just a little more obvious about it and, more importantly, honest (37).” The chairman realizes that it would be hard to get the LFL as big as the WNBA or other professional sports for women, so he quotes that “this is it,” for females who want to play football in North America (38). “Currently, however, there’s no market for women in North America to play football in regular sports gear, he admits—but denies creating such a climate. Women, he says, simply don’t appeal to the mass demographic that advertisers care about. The reality for young women is: this is it (39).” Advertising and selling sex, which is a repetitive aspect to selling a product, helps sports to acquire viewers and profit.

Other critics are even more critical of this remotely new sport. When starting the sport, it was about “helping” women play in a stadium packed with fans. “LFL UK plan to bring about a football revolution by playing in lingerie,” the league’s website explains. “[It] will increase public interest in women’s football so that women’s teams can play to packed stadiums (40).” What they didn’t see, due to blinders of not actually being in the “hot spot,” was that the feminist movement would not take kindly to this new “sport.” “Women footballers have worked hard to have the right to play football away from the prejudices endured by their predecessors ...

Lingerie Football is all about sexual titillation and could expose players, especially young girls, to people who view them as a sex objects rather than sportswomen. (41)."

The league was created to start selling tickets, in hopes that one day women can just play football without all of the ornament decoration that labels them "sex objects." "It seems unlikely that Gemma Hughes, founder of the LFL, will be swayed [to change the uniforms after the petition went on for a year to end the sexism]. "We know this is scandalous, but that media attention is what's going to sell tickets," she said. "All money made is going to be put back into women's football. Look at tennis—the women dress like women and they get the same equal pay and similar amount of sponsorship as men (42)."

## **THEORIES OF SPORT**

Sports are not only used for entertainment and occupation, but play a role in the economy as well. "The focus in these approaches on paid about provides a very partial view of the specific relationship between gender and the mode of production and, more specifically, ignore the significance of unpaid domestic labor (43)". The economy pays each player based on the amount of money or popularity of the sport. This is the reason that NBA players are often paid at a much higher rate than WNBA players. There are often more fans, more merchandise, and more Cost of Goods sold for male sports, than female. Three theorists, Brohm, Hoch and Vinnai, were the first to look at the relationship of this economy difference, and most importantly, the relationship between sexuality and sports. "They argue that sexuality is mediated in sports; that sexual representation is necessary for the survival of capitalism; and that the machismo ethos of sports, by bonding men together, is a fundamental expression of male power, and domination over women (44)". These theorists back up their ideas using psychological explanations derived from Freudian theory and notions of sexual sublimation (45). Their conclusion of sport sexualizing was that sports are presented as a substitute—a way of regulating male sexuality and diverting

young men from sexual problems (46). However, “it ceases to be surprising that college football and basketball players gang-rape women in numbers equaled only by fraternity brothers... or that male basketball and football players are reported to police for sexual assault 38 percent more than their male college peers. Or that football and basketball players are more likely to engage in sexually aggressive behaviors, than their peers, including those who play other sports (47).”

In this use of sport, there is also a separation of female and male. “Both on a personal/existential level for athletes ... sports have become one of the ‘last bastions’ of male power and superiority over—and separation from—the feminization of society (48).” Does this determine the difference in fashion or sexuality in the sport? Do men often become intimidated by women playing aggressive sports, because it takes away their “masculinity?” Or what about the labeling that happens to women because they play a sport, “girls who play sports are tomboys or lesbians (49).” These labels tend to create an unfeminine label that separates the most ‘feminine’ girls from the ‘masculine’ girls.

“Masculinity is not inherent in the male body; it is a definition given socially to certain characteristics (50).” But if women present these characteristics, it is intimidating and “non feminine,” or ‘not sexy’. When discussing the training and preparation for the “Ironman” marathon (which is an extensive race that typically lasts from four to six hours involving multiple different obstacles and challenges) R.W. Connell asked Steve Donoghue what it is that defines a man, or masculinity. Donoghue responded, “be strong,” and “not to be gay (51).” Not all respondents answered this brief and blunt to this question but Connell backs Steve’s short answer up with the fact that he has always gone to an all-boys school, so he needed that to be his differentiator, as well as his sport has the exclusion of women or possible girl friends that could actually participate.

“Women have always been strong. We have carried water, harvested crops, birthed and raised children... women do two-thirds of the world’s work, according to New Zealand economist Marilyn Waring, but women in the late twentieth century gain increasing economic, political, and athletic strength, many men cling to manly sports as a symbol of “natural” male dominance (52).” Sports are a way for men to escape the ‘daily life scenarios,’ that include marriage, responsibilities, and care taking of their children. “By creating a world where masculinity is equated with violence, where male bonding is based on the illusion of male supremacy, and where all of the visible women are cheerleaders, manly sports set the stage for violence against women (53).”

Sport has become a women’s issue for many reasons: because they are playing on the fields, men begin to look at women’s bodies with contempt, male athletes have disproportionately high rates of sexual assaults on women; including those involved in female athletes, and because the media itself cheers for men’s sports and rarely covers women’s sports, giving the common viewer the knowledge that men are more athletic and more important (54). This issue begins at a very young age, including the female education for younger girls. Within the last century there has been an increase in education for girls and sports, however, “the fixed degree of energy and constitutional overstrain theory was not in any way incompatible with the encouragement of girls’ physical education. Allowing girls to ‘run wild’ was a healthy preparation for the time when women needed their strength for bearing children (55).” Throughout these debates, it deemed important to educate and allow sports for females, however the end result is still children, and retaining femininity because of those produced children.

Today, there are plenty of magazines that focus on the ‘beauty’ of women, and urge them to maintain credible fashion, hygiene and physical attributes. *Seventeen Magazine* encourages

images of clean, sleep, young, and gleaming bodies by representations of bodies in sportswear, however the images of actual sweaty girls competing are not of the norm that you would actually see in the magazine (56). The girls in the images are typically wearing ski-suits; sweat suits, high-cut leotards, skintight shorts and tights, and the models are typically in casual poses displaying the fashion for fashion rather than practical use (57).

“Body presentation which makes more visible the form and sexuality of the female body has become increasingly noticeable in particular female sports (58).” There are certain sports that are deemed feminine and provide tight clothing like ice-skating, gymnastics, and even in the Olympics, and although male athletes compete, it is still seen as a feminine gesture. However, today there are sports that contain routines that are “ultra-feminine”, or put women in postures and gestures that show sexually suggestive moments and even sometimes are borderline erotic (59).

Sportswear today is even manufactured to support a “sexy image (60).” This links the commercialization of the ‘sexy’ and the ‘athlete’. This encourages women around the world to sometimes obsess with being thin or fit, and “ever since the end of the 1970’s the ‘worked on’ body has become not only permissible, but presented as desirable says Horne and Bentley (61). Susan Bordo argues that the preoccupation with fad, diet, and slenderness, is one of the most powerful “normalizing” strategies of our century, ensuring the production of self-monitoring, self-disciplining “docile bodies.” Because women, more than men, are the objects of these controls, it follows that they function in the reproduction of gender. “The idealized contemporary female body is slender and has to some extent become homogenized, across all races, classes, and ethnicities (62).”

Magazines have worked female athletes within their spreads to show the glamour within each one of the females. The photographs of these athletes show glamorous poses that

completely ignore the performance they do daily, but highlight the sexuality and transform them into objects of desire and envy (63). However, Annette Kuhn states that these images are not just in magazines, but even newspapers as well, as a reminder that at the end of the day, they are women, and nothing more (64). “Photographs are accompanied by blatantly sexist comments which confirm the message of the image- for example, in the *Wimbledon Television Viewer’s Guide* 1987, Gabriela Sabatini is referred to as a ‘pin-up’ and ‘an eye catcher both on and off the court … As graceful as a jungle cat, with flashing Latin eyes (65),’” and etc.

Within the media every part of women’s sports becomes about their sexuality and their image. From their uniforms down to what is presented to the public, how they compete is never showcased as much as it would be in the male sporting category. “Men tend to be portrayed as physical and aggressive, and their actions and accomplishments are highlighted, whereas women’s femininity is symbolized as we have seen through glamorous and sexualized shots, or through implied masculinization, by the use of informal and intimate names, and by references to athletes’ roles as girls, wives, and mothers (66).”

### **FASHION THEORY: Post Modern/ Modern/ And Fashion Theory**

“Both Fetish and Fashion share a Latin root - facticum. Facticum means “artificial,” and derives in its turn from another Latin word, facere, which means ‘to make’ or ‘to do.’ Do not be misled by the presence of the ‘fact’ in facticum: it has nothing to do with being true, and it is the same ‘fact’ in ‘manufacture’ which means to ‘make by hand (67).’ Fashion and fetish are both things that are made, then, and this gives them entry into the academic disciplines of economics, anthropology and psychoanalysis, where they are taken up, provided with various senses and used to explain human behavior (68).

For instance, “the fashion industry’s preference for, and dependence on, very thin models is well known and well documented. Karl Lagerfeld, is famous for having said in an interview

that ‘no one wants to see round women,’ and deriding the ‘fat mummies,’ who sit on their sofas eating potato crisps while saying how ugly the thin models are (69).”

“Eugene Lunn identifies modernism as a set of five ideas which concern aesthetic form and social function. The first concern of aesthetic self-consciousness or self-reflexive is it indicates the ways in which artists and designers draw attention to the media and materials with which they work. The idea is found in modernist works from Kant’s first *Critique* to Foucault’s account of the age of representation in *The Order of Things* and Greenberg’s essay ‘Modernist Painting’ (70).” “The fourth idea concerns identity of the individual as a structured and stable produce of social interaction. Modern art shows the dehumanization and fragmentation of the individual (71).”

“Dress and fashion are routinely described and dismissed as trivial, as deceptive and as frivolous, for example. What is important is the person, or the ‘real person’ beneath or behind the ‘mask’ of fashion... The authentic or real person is the content or matter here and fashion, what they wear, is the style or the form in which the person appears (72).” Every ‘fashion’ statement, or advertisement is to enter an idea or unconscious thought into the sublime. There are particular poses, gestures or words that will make people think of a certain social class. “Seeing the word ‘sportswear’ will make every reader think of some version of social class (73).”

“A theory, an understanding or a picture - of a social class and a theory of how social class relates to sportswear is operating without conscious encouragement or prompting and it is producing an idea or picture of these things in people’s minds (74).” However, each of these social classes, have their own ideals, and the ideals do have consequences. In 2011, British fashion designer Giles Deacon said that the fashion industry presented an ‘unrealistic; image of women.’ This thought was again, because of the overuse of skinny models. “Models Luisel, Eliana Ramos, and Ana Carolina Reston all died from heart failure following a ‘starvation diet,’

and anorexia (75)." "The dissatisfaction that some women experience in regard to their body image and their identity is held to be so powerful that it causes women to change their behavior and their eating habits in order to conform to an ideal image (76)." Female athletes have these very same pressures and expectations within the sport category as well, and since they are positioned in the media as "sexy," instead of "talented" or "strong," they are just as at risk of overworking their bodies or starving their bodies as models are. This is an issue deeply rooted within culture and most importantly, is deeply rooted in the gender identity of a female.

### **Fetish, Fashion and the Erotic**

There are many uniforms today that have barely any coverage of the human body. When looking at the pro-sports leagues, including lingerie football, there is a level of fetish within the uniforms for the spectators. In the late 20th century, there is also an introduction to women's wrestling, and within guys wrestling comes the "ring girls," that are in lingerie or very tight, short shorts that walk around with signs to apparently let people know what round it is. These are different levels of objectification that allow the spectators to view something more than the sport.

In relation to sports, pop culture also has this same element. "Significantly the commodities, the items of lingerie, are claimed to have magical powers, and they are made to stand for a certain social and economic status (jeweled bras are very expensive)." It could be also argued that Rihanna, Lady Gaga and Cheryl Cole are themselves fetishized by the *Mail Online* and its website, as they would be represented as powerfully erotic objects in very similar photographs. Of Course *Mail Online* is not the only source of this confusion between the fetish, the fashion and the erotic (77).

Freud says, " that fetishism is a deviation in which an 'unsuitable substitute' for the sexual object is made. These inappropriate substitutes also take two forms, they may be metonymy... or synecdoche, in which an inanimate object (such as clothing or underwear)

bearing some relation the person replaces the sexual object (78)." If these articles of clothing are left alone with nobody within them, is the element of fetish and sexual still existing? For some, it may be, but since these articles are attached to a body during spectatorship, this heightens the level of fetishism.

### **ROLES OF FASHION: Function**

In many sports, or even marathons, like the Triathlons, there are benefits to wearing tighter clothing. In swimming, a body suit can create speedier movement in water, or spandex can often help speed and the aerodynamics for riding a bike. The more lightweight the clothing, the easier it is to compete in athletic competitions. The athletes are still being covered for the most part, and the clothing still functions as a way to give them personal coverage, while helping them achieve their goal of competing for placement.

There are some cases, previously covered, that do not seem to benefit the athletes at all. Lingerie football, cheerleading, and some dancing groups who do numerous stunts are left with small amounts or no padding at all, and are put in relatively vulnerable situations with their unprotected bodies. However, it isn't necessarily the garment itself that alters the views of the fans or viewers, but the media and how it is presented to the viewers.

### **Sex Objectification**

"Knight and Giuliano examined U.S. female and male college students' perceptions of male and female athletes portrayed in print media, which emphasized either the physical attractiveness or athleticism of the athlete. Athletes (both female and male) whose attractiveness received more attention than their athleticism were perceived as less talented, less aggressive, and less heroic than athletes whose athleticism received more attention (79)." Many women and men have been asked to stand in for magazines, or pose for a photographer in provocative poses,

and to a degree, if the study is true on a large scale, then most of these people will be seen more as models than athletes. “Readers liked the articles that focused on the athlete’s attractiveness less than the articles that focused on athleticism. Further, participants who read the story emphasizing the female athlete’s beauty rated her attractiveness higher than did participants who read the article focusing on her athleticism. A similar pattern was not found regarding the attractiveness of the male athlete. This study demonstrates that the type of coverage (attractiveness versus athleticism focus) as well as the gender of the athlete influenced people’s perceptions of the athlete. Importantly, coverage of athletes that focuses on their athleticism was perceived more positively by the audience (80).”

During this study men were shown sexualized images of athletes compared to models. “The boys respond to sexualized athletes and models in similar ways is consistent with objectification theory’s premise that female bodies are routinely objectified in Western societies … Similar to sexualized models, sexualized athlete images prompt the viewer to focus on the appearance and attractiveness of the woman in the photograph rather than on what she does (sport) (81).” At the end of the study, they were sexualized women, and it didn’t necessarily matter what they did, because they were categorized relatively the same.

“Interestingly, boys were more likely to label sexualized athletes, rather than sexualized models, as the ideal standard for female beauty or comment that men would be especially attracted to these women. Boys did not comment at different rates on the appearance, body shape/size, weight, and sexiness of the models and athletes, and the majority of these statements were positive in both conditions (82).”

In regarding to female sport uniforms, they do “function as a code of discipline and some attributes of ideal femininity, the role of the uniform in relation to acquiring codes of sexuality is radically aberrant (83).” However, there are multiple oppositional attributes within uniforms, and

that is those of military, sport, or school which include: discipline versus spontaneity; a group identity/conformity versus individuality/expressiveness; formality versus informality; compulsion or choice; sexuality versus sexiness; and sexual innocence versus sexual perversion (84). These uniforms and the ideas of uniforms were effective tools to arouse sexual interest (85). Even some women said they would rather go to a baseball game than see a “porno,” because the male sex wears tighter pants than most other sports and most of the time they embrace each other or touch each other’s bottoms during the game (86).

## **CONCLUSION**

Despite the society that we live in constantly trying to separate and identify individuals and groups, it seems that uniforms made particularly for one sex often separates sexes intentionally or unintentionally. Those uniforms made for only women are much tighter and sexualized than those made strictly for men (87). As generations’ progress and age, articles of clothing for women seem to get shorter and tighter, whereas the male uniform seems to be consistent throughout the course of their athletic career. Baseball uniforms continually stay stagnant, but cheerleading uniforms begin to show more skin as the athletic career continues. The way athletes are positioned within the media and in front of their fans is also a huge contributing factor to the way females are sexualized instead of treated as professional athletes. Sport theory, fashion theory, and the roles of society all put in contributing factors to the roles of gender. The discussion of uniform cannot be glanced at only an adult level since society places us in gender roles from the time we can walk. Humans are socialized from the moment they are born until the day they decease. There are a variety of factors that play into the beauty myth as well as the gender role, and it seems that these objectified means encourage the cycle to continue.

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# In a Man's World

Female Athletes, Gender Roles, and Sexualized Uniforms

# Barnard - Fashion Theory

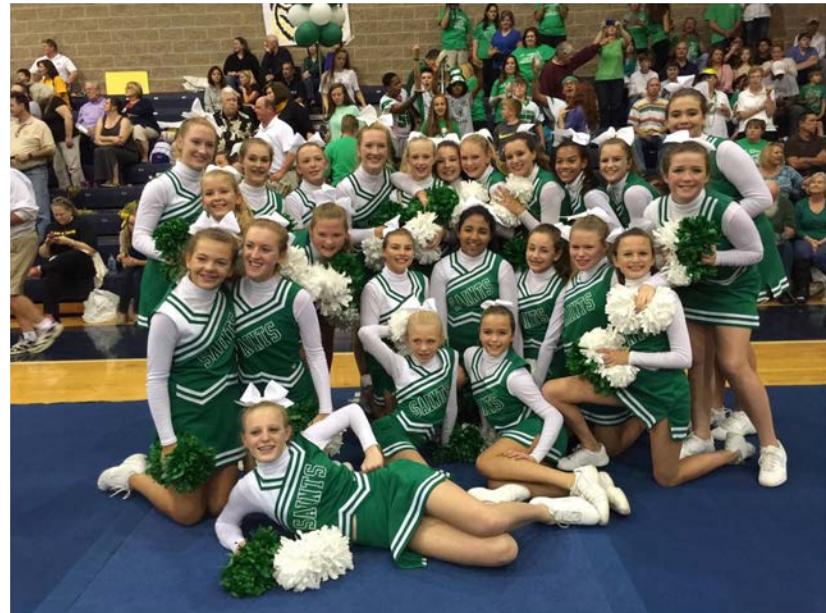
“The dissatisfaction that some women experience in regard to their body image and their identity is held to be so powerful that it causes women to change their behavior and their eating habits in order to conform to an ideal image”

# **Theoretical Framework - Critical Feminist Theory**

This framework is anchored to the fundamental assumption that society is structured around a series of inequitable relationships of power whereby females are routinely and systematically marginalized and devalued

# The Switch from ‘Gender Neutral’

From Elementary to Middle School



# Middle School Volleyball



# High School Volleyball



# High School Cheerleading



# Dress Code Violations

1. Students are expected to dress in a manner that is neat and appropriate for school or work.
2. Students may not wear clothing that disrupts the educational process.
3. No sagging clothes (baggy pants); pants should be size appropriate and worn at the waist.
4. No torn jeans
5. No hats/head covers, scarves, head rags (i.e. stocking caps, satin-type hairdo covers, "do-rags", etc. (hats brought on campus must be inside a students backpack throughout the school day)
6. Clothing, jewelry and personal items (backpacks, fanny packs, gym bags, water bottles, etc.) shall be free of writing or pictures. Other items or insignia that are crude, gang-related, vulgar, profane or sexually suggestive, that bear drug, alcohol or tobacco company advertising/promotions or that advocate racial, ethnic or religious prejudice are strictly prohibited.
7. Clothing that bear logos, insignia, letters or colors signify a gang, a crew, violent actions or weapons will not be tolerated.
8. All tops (shirts and blouses) must cover the top of the shoulder and completely cover the stomach, chest and bare back. **No bare midriffs.**
9. Shorts and skirts must be size appropriate (arm extended at side, short or skirt bottom reaches finger tips); tight fitting shorts, short shorts and cutoffs are prohibited.
10. Only the student's name, written in plain block letters, is permitted on backpacks or other personal items.
11. No see-through shirts, blouses; no halter tops, tank tops/tube tops, "wife beaters", undershirts, muscle shirts or other tops that expose the midriff.
12. Shoes must always be worn; no inappropriate footwear or roller blades.
13. No under clothing worn as outer wear.
14. Red or blue shoes, shoes with red or blue accents or shoes with red or blue laces are not allowed.
15. No sunglasses may be worn inside school buildings or classrooms.
16. Any jewelry, body art, piercing or extreme hairstyle/color deemed by the school to be dangerous or a distraction to the learning environment is not acceptable (jewelry with spikes, chokers, wristbands or extra large rings.)
17. Students may not wear clothing that reveals the back, midriff, that make undergarments visible, or when arms are raised becomes visible. These include but are not limited to: boxers, sheer tops, spaghetti straps, halter tops, swim tops, tube tops or clothing that exposes the midriff.

# Restricted Uniforms?

Albuquerque school restricts cheer uniform from campus dress code



By Marissa Lucero

Published: September 4, 2015, 5:31 pm | Updated: February 23, 2016, 8:42 am



The screenshot shows a news article from a website. At the top, there is a dark banner with white text that reads "Guide to Prohibited Dress" and "Albuquerque school restricts cheer uniform from campus dress code". Below this, there is a photograph of cheerleaders in uniforms. Overlaid on the image are several text boxes containing specific rules. One box on the left lists prohibited clothing items such as gang-related attire, excessively tight clothing, short shorts, skirts and dresses, bare midriff, low-cut and/or off the shoulder blouses, and sagging or bagging. Another box in the center states "Principals shall develop and implement written individual school dress codes". A small white arrow points to the right side of the page, likely indicating a continuation of the article.

Guide to Prohibited Dress

Albuquerque school restricts cheer uniform from campus dress code

Prohibited clothing

- gang-related attire
- excessively tight
- short shorts, skirts and dresses
- bare midriff
- low-cut and/or off the shoulder blouses
- sagging or bagging

"Principals shall develop and implement written individual school dress codes"

Sagging" or the wearing of pants below the waist and/or in a manner that allows underwear or bare skin to show, and "bagging" or the wearing of excessively baggy pants with low hanging crotches.

BY JULIE

# These High School Cheerleaders Were Sent to Detention for Wearing Their Uniforms to Class

Even though school admin. approved them for pep rallies and games.



Julie Pennell

SEP 10, 2015 12:13PM EDT



They've got spirit for their team, but they're not cheering for their school's dress code policy, that's for sure. The cheerleaders at



## Pinellas schools say cheerleading uniforms are dress code violations



Lisa Gartner, Times Staff Writer ▾

Monday, August 26, 2013 6:29pm

[Facebook](#) 1K [Twitter](#) Tweet [Email](#) [+1](#) 1K

[Print](#) [Comment](#) 273



# School cheerleading uniforms violate dress code



Claudine Zap  
August 28, 2013



Give me a B-O-O!

That's no doubt what the cheerleaders of Countryside High School in Clearwater, Fla., are saying to the news that their uniforms violate the school dress code and they can't wear them to class on game days, according to a story from [WFTS-Tampa](#).

# In My Own Experience...



# WNBA



# Obvious Wage Difference

WNBA player who plays all season - \$107,500

NBA player that plays 198 Minutes- \$490,180

# Interview with Dan Fleser

Reporter for the Tennessee Women's Basketball team for Knox News

"the biggest difference in coverage is amount of manpower and resources devoted. It's been more for men than women at most papers I've seen over the years because at most places there's more readership interest in men. It's evenly divided in our newspaper because the interest in both sports is relatively equal among our readership."

# Cheerleaders



# Beach Volleyball



# College Volleyball



# Lingerie Football League





# Theory of Sport

Sport Is Used for:

Economy

Entertainment

Occupation

Theorists:

Brohm

Hoch

Vinnai

Look at the relationship between economy  
difference, and relationship between sexuality and  
sports

# Sexuality and Sport



# Masculine Sport Vs Feminine Sport



# Why is this a Women's Issue?

Gabriela Sabatini, 1987



# Theory of Fashion

FACTICUM: TO MAKE



# Models and Fashion

Karl Lagerfield - Designer



# Dreamcatcher

By Nicole De Carle London



# In Search for “Female Athletes”

female athletes

Google

Ashley

All Images News Videos Shopping More ▾ Search tools

Professional Athletes / Female

Serena Williams

Maria Sharapova

Ronda Rousey

Danica Patrick

Lindsey Vonn

Alex Morgan

Caroline Wozniacki

Michelle Jenneke

Lolo Jones

Anastasia

# Fetish, Fashion and the Erotic



# Function



# Sexual Objectification

Michelle Jenneke

Australian hurdler and model, who won a silver medal for the 100 m hurdles at the 2010 Summer Youth Olympics.



# This is the last slide I promise



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