

# **Competing Against Stereotypes**

## *The Female Athlete Experience*

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the experiences of female varsity athletes related to gender stereotypes in the realm of sports. Dominant literature within the discipline of sports sociology recognizes the early distinction between masculine, feminine and gender-neutral sports. Studies conducted over the last three decades demonstrate an overall awareness of gender stereotypes and sport typing, yet how this gendered division of sport affects the athletes remains unclear. Drawing on data collected over the last three decades, I examine the existence and acknowledgement of gender stereotypes and sport typing in relation to female athletes and their participation in varsity athletics through semi-structured interviews. The data analysis shows that female athletes are aware of gender stereotyping in sport, although they do not explicitly acknowledge them as influencing their athletic experience. Rather, indirect expression of experience with gender stereotyping and subsequent coping strategies demonstrates that navigating gender stereotypes may be a subconscious effort, rather than exclusively visible coping strategies.

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## **Introduction**

“stereotypes for male athletes give them power, whereas the stereotypes for female athletes [are] weakening”

### Female Varsity Volleyball Athlete

The use of stereotypes is a major way we simplify our social world. While stereotypes enable us to respond rapidly to certain social situations, they also lead us to make generalizations that may not be true for everyone. The realm of sports has traditionally been characterized as a male domain (Coakley, 2001; Engel, 1994). Female athletes are “trespassers” on this male space and, as such, many stereotypes challenging their feminine identity or their right to play sports are perpetuated. In contemporary society, the dominant view remains that sport is a male domain (McClung & Blinde, 2002). From an early age children show signs of recognizing gender ‘appropriate’ behaviour, including within sports (Boyle, Marshall & Robeson, 2003; Riemer & Visio, 2003; Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). Dominant literature within the subdiscipline of sport sociology recognizes the early distinction between masculine, feminine and gender-neutral sports, suggesting that from a young age athletes navigate gender stereotypes when they participate in sports.

In recent decades there has been a shift in sport sociology from studying male athletes only to studying female athletes as well, and consequently, to research into gender stereotypes and sport typing (Boyle et al., 2003; McClung & Blinde, 2002; Riemer & Visio, 2003; Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). Primarily through quantitative methods, researchers have collected data in order to investigate the perceptions of gender and sport in contemporary society (Riemer & Visio, 2003; Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). Results suggest that sport still remains

intrinsically gendered, and athletes who do not conform to gender appropriate sports often find their status in society is not as high as those athletes who do conform to gender norms in sport (Riemer & Visio, 2003; Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006; Wiley, Shaw & Havitz, 2000). Studies conducted over the last three decades demonstrate overall that there is an awareness of gender stereotypes and sport typing, yet how the athletes themselves manage these stereotypes, both inside and outside the realm of sports, remains unclear. How do female athletes navigate gender stereotypes when they participate in sports? I seek to investigate the degree to which female athletes experience gender stereotypes and the ways in which gender stereotypes influence their athletic experiences. Uncovering the experiences of female athletes in contemporary society may help us understand how sport helps to define gender, how masculinity and femininity are defined and enacted in society through sports and how we as a society can move towards gender equality among athletes.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Sport Classification: Situating the Female Athlete*

Much of the literature in the discipline of sport sociology draws on Eleanor Metheny's sport classification system. According to Metheny (1965), sport is a significant form of human behavior, thus shaping the way we are perceived in society. The system distinguishes certain sports as either female appropriate, or inappropriate based on four postulates (Riemer & Visio, 2003). First, some forms of competition are seen as unacceptable for females due to their aggressive nature; these are characterized by either bodily contact with an opponent, direct application of bodily force to a heavy object, projecting the body through space over long distances, or face-to-face opposition, where some contact may occur with an opponent, such as hockey and boxing (Metheny, 1965). Second, some forms of competition are generally acceptable for women to participate in; these sports are characterized by resistance or force of an object that is light, projecting the body into space in an aesthetically pleasing pattern, such as swimming or figure skating (Metheny, 1965). Third, some forms of competition are seen as not acceptable for college women but may be acceptable for minority women within the college population; these are characterized by projecting the body through space over a moderate distance, application of force to a moderately heavy object, and a display of strength in controlling bodily movements (Metheny, 1965). Some examples of these sports are javelin, long jump, and gymnastics (Riemer & Visio, 2003). Lastly, Metheny (1965) proposed there are some forms of face-to-face activities acceptable for women. These sports are characterized by a barrier between opponents, the application of force using a light implement and overcoming the resistance of a weightless object, for example, volleyball and badminton. Although this classification system may seem dated in contemporary society, recent studies of sport typing still

acknowledge Metheny's classification of sports, despite the increase in gender inclusivity in sport (Boyle et al., 2003; Riemer & Visio, 2003; Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). Results from these studies mirror Metheny's views on gender and sport, suggesting that societal views on gender in the realm of sports may not have evolved as far as popular belief would suggest.

### *Gender at Play*

Sport is a common leisure pursuit among children and plays an important role in developing their future leisure behaviors and understandings (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). From an early age, children are aware of gender stigma in sports and physical activities (Boyle et al., 2003; Riemer & Visio, 2003; Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). The everyday interactions of children on the school playground demonstrate this stigma awareness and reflect the societal views of gender appropriate roles and behaviours (Boyle et al., 2003). Sociologists Boyle, Marshall and Robeson (2003) view gender as a process in which parents, school, society and the child all contribute. They focus their research on observing the interactions between fourth grade boys and girls over several recess periods from a social constructionist perspective. Recess offers an unstructured space for children to interact with their peers in a variety of settings. Despite the lack of explicit instruction, gender roles are reinforced through play (Boyle et al., 2003). The physicality of a 'typical' boy recess and the aesthetic activities of a 'typical' girl recess reflect and reinforce gender stereotypes and demonstrate an early recognition of gender appropriate behaviour. The early recognition of gendered behaviours on the playground is reflected in children's perceptions of other activities, such as organized sports.

Results from researchers Reimer and Visio (2003) and Schmalz and Kerstetter (2006) reveal that children are aware of the gendered nature of sports. One study recruited children 8 to

10 years of age to participate in a survey. In order to assess their awareness of gender stereotypes in sports, the children were asked to rate a series of sports as masculine, feminine or gender neutral (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). Another study following a similar model included a variety of age groups ranging in age from 5 to 18 years old (Riemer & Visio, 2003). Results from both studies led to similar conclusions: children are aware of gender stereotypes in sports and their influence on the sports they choose to participate in. Sports in the feminine category included cheerleading, ballet, and dance. Sports in the masculine sport category included football and wrestling (Riemer & Visio, 2003; Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). The classification of sport given by the participants reflects Metheny's. Cheerleading, ballet and dance are seen as aesthetically pleasing sports that do not involve bodily contact and are therefore considered appropriate for females. Football and wrestling, characterized by their bodily contact and aggression, would not be seen as appropriate for female athletes (Metheny, 1965). Despite the changes in attitudes toward gender over the last fifty years, these studies show that Metheny's construction of appropriate and inappropriate sports is still relevant. Children are being socialized to view gender as a determining factor in their decision to participate in activities. If they do not conform to the status quo and gender stereotypes, they may find themselves facing gender discrimination.

### *Competing Against Stereotypes*

Female athletes are often disadvantaged in a sport system that is overwhelmingly organized, administered and dominated by men (Blinde, 1989; Bryson, 1994; Daniels, 2009; Theberge, 2000). Gender segregation in contemporary sport implies a male need for a masculine preserve, a space in which boys could become men without the distraction of women. Underlying this need for segregation is an assumption of male athlete superiority. Creating a law,

such as Title IX in the United States that prohibits exclusion based on sex implies that female athletes need special permission to play and female athletes entering the realm of sport are diminishing the game (Daniels, 2009; Theberge, 2000, United States Department of Labour). Many sport organisations felt they had to adapt rules in order to accommodate the perceived 'weaker' female athlete (Daniels, 2009). As a result, constructions of femininity and masculinity are conceived and maintained by a male dominated social realm, thus favouring male participants and excluding women as legitimate members.

Western culture proposes socially defined gender systems that dictate appropriate behaviours for men and women. Influenced by these socially defined gender systems, men and women behave differently because of frequent opportunities to 'do gender,' or act out gendered scripts (West & Zimmerman, 1987). The realm of sport, which emphasizes physicality and power, provides an opportunity for male athletes to 'do gender'. Female athletes, however, are subjected to gender inequalities due to the patriarchal structure of sports and the cultural emphasis on physical appearance (Theberge, 2000). Social conventions dictate how the body is seen and valued. Historically, the female body has been valued for its aesthetic appearance and reproductive capabilities. Therefore, any activities women participated in had to aesthetically emphasize their appearance (Daniels, 2009; Metheny, 1965). The physical appearance of women's bodies then, is one of the most visible and recognizable factors of compliance with the rules of femininity. Female athletes must balance the social conventions of feminine appearance with their sport's performance in order to avoid being negatively stereotyped (Daniels, 2009). As a result, women in sports that emphasize muscularity and size find themselves labeled as lesbians (with the assumption that this would be a negative label) because their sport participation places them in a middle ground between idealized masculinity and stereotypical femininity, regardless

of their sexuality or how lesbians might wish to define their own femininity or athleticism (Dufor & Linford, 2010; Theberge, 2000).

Nancy Theberge's study of a local Ontario women's hockey team reflects the cultural ideals of male superiority in sport, reinforcing women as the 'other' in the realm of sport. Female hockey players find themselves caught between the idealized masculine hockey hero and stereotypical femininity (Dufor & Linford, 2010; Theberge, 2000). As a result, female hockey players often find their status in society is not as high as those athletes that do conform to gender norms in sport, male hockey players in particular (Riemer & Visio, 2003; Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006; Wiley, Shaw & Havitz, 2000). As mentioned previously, the physical appearance of the female body is one of the most visible and recognizable factors of compliance with the rules of femininity (Daniels, 2009). This becomes difficult for female athletes that participate in sports that emphasize muscularity and size (Dufor & Linford, 2010). Female hockey players may find themselves labeled as lesbians. Sports and lesbianism are inherently connected by the stereotypes perpetuated in female sports (Daniels, 2009). Covered in hockey gear, an athlete's feminine identity becomes blurred by equipment that has traditionally been associated with masculinity. Consequently, female hockey players struggle to claim a space in sport and affirm their identities as athletes and as women in a cultural context that places athleticism and femininity in opposition (Theberge, 2000, p. 90). To manage this stereotype of the relationship between aggressive sports and female sexuality, female hockey players must adopt certain strategies in order to present a socially acceptable image of the female body.

In order to manage the social stigma surrounding female hockey, the players use visible markers, such as clothing, to negate gender stereotypes. Nancy Theberge investigates how a local competitive women's hockey team, the Blades, copes with the socially constructed image

problem of women's hockey. Athletes on the Blades women's hockey team must adhere to a dress code that prohibits jeans, tracksuits and running shoes (Theberge, 2000). The organisation justifies the dress code as an appropriate way to manage public perception of the women's hockey team, specifically the view that they are mannish, and by extension lesbian (Theberge, 2000). As a result, the players enact a kind of self-presentation through their clothing, in relation to others, specifically the organisation, the media and their supporters (Goffman, 1963; Theberge, 2000). The intentional self-surveillance of the outer appearance in order to maintain visual femininity and avoid gender stereotyping based on sport choice is constraining for female athletes, particularly those who do not conform to gender appropriate sports (Daniels, 2009).

This visible coping strategy is juxtaposed with the actual sexual identities of the female athletes, often rendered invisible and ignored in an attempt to distance the team from the stereotype. For example, social events with the Blades were distinctly heterosexual; lesbians on the team did not bring their partners to the events, unlike their heterosexual teammates who often brought their boyfriends and husbands (Theberge, 2000). By not bringing a female date and adhering to the team dress code, the team conforms to cultural codes of gender appropriate behaviour. Society, in turn, further reinforces gender differences in sport by adapting different rules for female athletes. The belief that women are more emotional than men implies that coaches, who are predominately male, need to speak to them differently (Theberge, 2000). Altering the rules of the game for women constructs the female athlete as the 'other', distancing them from the realm of sport and thus perpetuating their lower status in this domain. The gender difference in sport extends beyond team culture and game rules, and the female athlete is consistently presented to society as the 'other' through the media.

Out of the sports arena, the media reinforces public perceptions and stereotypes of the female athlete. The stories circulating in the media, in the form of photos, commentary, and print media, confirm the relationship between female athletes and society by emphasizing their physical appearance or by dismissing them as objects of humour. For example, women are often sidelined at professional men's sports. They are portrayed only as the cheerleaders on the side of the court in revealing outfits adorned with glitter. The attention on them is emphasized at halftime, with the aesthetic nature of their performance and physical appearance criticized by the media. This sharply contrasts with the portrayal of male athletes, who are often romanticized, idolized and applauded for their strength (Duncan, Messner, Williams & Jensen, 1990; Jones, Murrell & Jackson, 1999). Print media describe female athletes differently depending on what 'gender' of sport they participate in (Jones et al., 1999). Females participating in 'male' sports, such as hockey, are often compared to a male equivalent and print media often avoid commenting on the female's performance. For example, a female hockey player may be named the female Sydney Crosby but her performance as a female athlete is never commented on, only her performance in relation to a superior male athlete. Comparing female athletes to their male equivalent reinforces the masculine dominance of that sport, marginalizing the female athlete. In addition, when females are the focus of sport media they are often on the sidelines cheering the male athletes while they conform to their masculine identities. The presence of male cheerleaders celebrating the achievements of female athletes during broadcast games is notably absent, suggesting that female athletes should not be celebrated the same way as male athletes (Duncan et al., 1990).

Further, statistics and replays are utilized more in men's games than in women's games (Duncan et al., 1990). The descriptions of sports announcers validate the efforts of male athletes

as significant, while the lack of statistics and replays during women's games diminishes their efforts to a pastime rather than a significant contribution to sport, satisfying and reinforcing public perception of female athlete inferiority (Duncan et al., 1990, Jones et al., 1999). The media thus create obstacles for female athletes and their recognition as 'real' athletes, by presenting them as second-tier athletes in relation to male athletes. As female athletes continue to gain media attention, or their absence in the media becomes increasingly noticed, some researchers have shifted their focus on how female athletes' own experiences are shaped by societal perceptions.

One particular study, using in-depth interviews, investigated the degree to which female intercollegiate athletes are aware of gender issues and their sensitivity to feminism (McClung & Blinde, 2002). The study revealed that the female participants displayed a certain awareness of gender issues but the great majority did not publicly identify as feminist and cited negative perceptions related to the term (McClung & Blinde, 2002). The study concluded that sport did not appear to be an effective context through which female athletes were exposed to situations that encouraged identification with gender issues (McClung & Blinde, 2002). However, this study is not a fully effective measure of gender issue awareness among varsity female athletes. Participants of the study were women participating in gender appropriate or gender-neutral sports such as tennis, swimming, volleyball and softball. There was no representation of female athletes participating in male-dominated sports such as hockey or rugby. It is possible that experiences of inequality and stigma would be more prominent among female athletes participating in such sports. Inclusion of these female athletes in the study would have affected the researchers' perception of sport as a medium to investigate gender issues.

*Research Proposition*

If we examine the print media coverage of female athletes and the early recognition of the gendered nature of sport, it becomes apparent that sport is an effective context through which to examine issues of gender, sport typing and stigma. From this study I plan to adopt the researchers' method of in-depth interviews, but add female athletes who participate in cross gender sports, as well as gender appropriate sports, to investigate the influence of gender stereotypes in their participation of sports, both on and off the field. I hypothesize that female varsity athletes participating in sports characterized as masculine will experience greater gender stereotyping than female varsity athletes who participate in sports that adhere to social standards of femininity. I predict that varsity female athletes consciously adapt certain 'coping mechanisms' both on and off the 'field' in order to assert their femininity in the male dominated realm of sport, such as wearing pink or keeping their hair long, behaviours that dispel myths and symbolize hegemonic cultural beliefs of femininity.

## Methods

### *Face-to-Face: Understanding the Female Athlete Experience*

I conducted nine in-depth semi-structured interviews with four female varsity hockey players and five female varsity volleyball players. Qualitative interviews may appear to be similar to ordinary conversations, probing the interviewee to share their personal experiences, but interviews differ from a regular conversation in terms of how intensely and how much the interviewer listens in order to pick up on key words, ideas and non-verbal cues (Berg & Lune, 2012). Semi-structured interviews draw from a set of interview questions yet they are not closed, so with this method, the interviewer is able to probe beyond the answers of the predetermined questions (Berg & Lune, 2012). This allows the interviewer to gather a rich description of the personal experiences of the interviewee unique to their everyday social life. Gaining first-hand knowledge from female athletes who are currently navigating gender stereotypes enriches the data, as participants were able to draw on recent experiences. Finally, interviews allow the researcher to understand how participants attribute meaning to their environment (Bryman & Teevman, 2005).

As mentioned above, it is possible that the experiences of inequality and stigma would be more prominent in female athletes participating in male-dominated sports. For this reason I chose female varsity hockey players as one of my target groups. Previous research in the discipline of sport sociology recognizes hockey as a masculine sport and as such, female varsity hockey players may find their status not as high as athletes who conform to gender appropriate sports. In addition, I interviewed female varsity players of volleyball, which is recognized as a feminine or gender-neutral sport (Boyle et al., 2003; McClung & Blinde, 2002; Riemer & Visio, 2003; Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006).

### *Recruitment Strategy*

In order to qualify for the study, participants had to be current female varsity athletes playing for their university varsity hockey team or varsity volleyball team. Recruitment was initially conducted through email contact to club directors and university athletic directors. To recruit volleyball players I contacted the president of my former competitive volleyball club, The Ottawa Mavericks Volleyball Club, to advertise the study to alumni who are currently playing varsity volleyball, through the club website and Facebook group. To recruit hockey players I contacted athletic departments at the University of Ottawa and local universities, such as Dalhousie University and Saint Mary's University in Halifax. The emails outlined the goals of the research as well as the consent process, requesting that the recipients pass along the information to varsity athletes who comply with the participant criteria. The information posted to social media, specifically Facebook, asked participants to pass along the information to other female varsity athletes who may be interested in participating (refer to appendices B-D for recruitment information).

By contacting the club director of my former volleyball club and the athletic department of various universities, I was able to reach a larger population of potential participants that I otherwise would not have been able to obtain. The advertising through the volleyball club director and the athletic directors proved not to generate enough participants. As a result, I also recruited participants through personal social networks and snowball sampling, which allowed me to access volleyball and hockey groups outside of my personal connections. Finally, I posted on social media outlining the study, which reached a sizeable population and provided potential participants with a brief overview of my research objectives.

### *Analysis: Coping with Gender Stereotypes*

During the interview process I sought to understand the informant's personal experiences with gender stereotypes and sports. The early stages of the interview focused on why the informant chose to participate in either hockey or volleyball and to discuss when their interest in the sport began. The main objective of this interview stage was to establish a rapport between the participant and myself. The interview then transitioned into the topic of gender stereotypes, specifically, the perception of female athletes in society at large, the media and everyday social life. Participants were then asked to discuss general assumptions about female athletes as well as their own personal experiences with gender stereotypes in sport, as outlined in appendix A. The data gathered from the interviews was analyzed for common themes and experiences, as well as any significant differences. Themes, experiences and ideas were grouped into codes for further analysis, as outlined in appendix E. My analysis focuses on gender stereotypes as experienced by different groups (hockey players and volleyball players) as well as individual experiences with gender stereotypes in athletics. Specifically, I situated my analysis around four major themes: defining gender stereotypes, presentation of the female athlete, navigating gender stereotypes and the advantaged athlete. While the qualitative nature of the study generated rich, descriptive data, semi-structured interviews are limiting in terms of representation. Nine participants is not a significant number that reflects the attitudes, values and beliefs of the entire female athletic population. However, rich description derived from the semi-structured interviews does allow the researcher insight into the *why* and the *how* of a participant's choices, providing insight for future research.

### *Negating Ethical Concerns*

The semi-structured interview is designed to minimize risk and discomfort. The consent form explicitly states that a participant can choose to ignore a question or withdraw from the interview at any time. I reassured participants before, and if necessary during the interview of their right to ignore a question and their right to withdraw from the interview. In addition, there were potential conflicts of interest associated with this study. In order to avoid any potential pressure to participate I recruited participants who are not former teammates. Further, participants may have felt pressured to participate in the study if the athletic director of their university condoned the project. The athletic directors simply assisted with recruitment by passing information along, and did not know who participated. The athletic directors were notified of their role in the recruitment email, as outlined in appendix C.

## Analysis

Topics assessed include: defining gender stereotypes, representation in the media, personal experiences with gender stereotyping in sport and the gendered nature of sport. The analysis evaluates the degree to which gender stereotypes influence the athletic experiences of the participants.

### *Defining Gender Stereotypes*

All of the participants expressed similar ideas of gender stereotypes in relation to female athletes, but drawing on different discourses. The two dominant, and at times overlapping, discourses were that of self-reflection and expression of the other. While all of the participants identified as female athletes, not all of them acknowledged that the stereotypes they expressed applied to them. Rather, the volleyball participants cited stereotypes in relation to other athletes, where as the hockey participants cited stereotypes that applied to them as female hockey players. The most prominent stereotype of female athletes, expressed by every participant, was the link between sport and lesbianism. The discourse surrounding this stereotype and its place in the realm of sport was expressed differently between the volleyball participants and the hockey participants.

All five of the volleyball participants identified stereotypes that question female sexual orientation. Common terms to express this stereotype include “butch” and “muscular”. One participant noted that female athletes are a “more butch version of a girl” and “obviously lesbians”. When the volleyball participants spoke of these stereotypes they were specific about which female athletes these stereotypes applied to. Female athletes that participate in hockey, rugby, or are “dressed in basketball shorts” are the lesbians. Their expression of stereotypes that

question sexual orientation were in relation to other female athletes but they did not see themselves the same way. This may be due to the fact that volleyball is a socially acceptable sport for females (Metheny, 1965) and as a result, the volleyball participants do not experience the same social stigma that they identify as associated with female rugby, hockey or basketball players. When asked to discuss specific stereotypes of female volleyball players, many of the participants identified stereotypes that emphasize the female body rather than sexual orientation.

The majority of the volleyball participants acknowledged their uniform as the source of gender stereotypes associated with female volleyball players. One participant discussed how the spandex shorts worn in women's volleyball have led to many assumptions about female volleyball players and their sexuality. Common stereotypes of female volleyball players are "slut" and "easy", who wear the uniform "for the guys", perpetuating the presumption of heterosexuality, which contrast the presumption of homosexuality linked to female hockey players. The terms "slut" and "easy" are charged with negative connotations, evident in the tone of voice of the majority of participants. In this case, the female athlete's uniform becomes a symbol of female sexuality and deviance from socially acceptable norms of female sexual behaviour. Another participant noted that these stereotypes surrounding the female body is a way to undermine female athletes and "it's mostly other girls who do this". This suggests that by wearing their team uniform, female volleyball players are not adhering to the social norms of acceptable conduct outlined by their female peers. Their bodies become stigmatized based on what they wear and not how they act, a phenomenon that transcends many other realms of society.

Similarly, all of the hockey participants expressed "lesbian" and "butch" as common stereotypes of female athletes. Unlike the volleyball participants, the hockey participants were

self-reflecting when they talked about being labelled butch or lesbian. For example, one hockey player said that “*we* are seen as pretty butch” (emphasis added), acknowledging that the stereotype applied to herself as a female hockey player. The contrast between discussing stereotypes of female athletes in relation to the self or in relation to the other suggests that while female volleyball players and female hockey players are seen as female athletes, they view themselves differently based on the sport that they play. This view is shaped by gender expectations in Western society and whether their sport adheres to those expectations. Hockey, characterized by aggression, violence and strength, is viewed as a masculine sport (Metheny, 1965; Riemer & Visio, 2003; Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). As a result, female hockey players become “marked” because they deviate from gender norms. Gender markers pick up extra meaning that reflects common associations with the female gender, for example, being not quite serious (Tannen, 1993). The lack of seriousness associated with women is evident in hockey.

Another common stereotype disclosed by the hockey participants was that women’s hockey is viewed as inferior to men’s hockey. One participant revealed that “there’s a bad stereotype that men’s hockey is better than women’s hockey”. The other hockey participants shared this sentiment, noting that female hockey players are “less”, “not as good”, and that they “don’t have the [same] high ability [as men]”. As mentioned above, hockey is characterized as a masculine sport, and as such females that participate in hockey are deviating from gender norms and are thus subject of public scrutiny. They are not valued the same way as male hockey players because outside the realm of sport women are not valued the same way as men.

The stereotypes expressed by all of the participants were negative, attacking sexual orientation and the female body. The most common stereotypes expressed by both groups,

“lesbian” and “butch” and the stereotype “slut” expressed by the volleyball participants reveal behaviours and identities that vary from social gender norms, thus ostracizing female athletes. During this portion of the interview it seemed as though the participants resisted these stereotypes, acknowledging their existence but not associating them with personal experiences. When I asked the participants to reveal their own experiences with gender stereotyping in sports, the majority admitted to never experiencing stereotypes as an athlete. This contradiction between the self as an individual and the self as part of a collective suggests that perhaps the stereotypes of female athletes have become so engrained in our social scripts that female athletes do not acknowledge their significance in their personal athletic experiences.

The majority of the participants noticed that the media plays a significant role in shaping public perception of female athletes. When asked how female athletes are presented in the media, the majority of participants expressed that they did not notice female athletes in the media at all. Instead, all they saw were men’s sports being broadcast, specifically the NHL, the NBA and the NFL—sports that embody hegemonic masculinity. This suggests that sport remains intrinsically gendered, celebrating hegemonic masculinity and ignoring female athletes, thus rendering their athletic experiences invisible.

### *Presenting the Female Athlete*

Although the participants did not emphasize positive stereotypes of female athletes, overall they stated positive characteristics when describing themselves as athletes. Again, the discourse highlights differences between the two different groups of female athletes, suggesting that the societal perception of female athletes and their respective sports shapes their self-perception, thus confirming the gender hierarchy in Western society. The hockey players

described themselves as “dedicated” and “focused”, attributes necessary to be a successful athlete. However, none of the hockey players used any adjectives that described their skill level or things that they do well in a game. Conversely, the female volleyball players were hesitant to describe themselves as athletes, but once probed for how others view them they were open to describing themselves through the eyes of others. The most common description among the female volleyball players was that they saw themselves as a “leader” on the court. The volleyball players were hesitant to speak about themselves; only when they were asked to describe themselves in relation to others did they offer any insight. Being a “leader” in volleyball is always in relation to others because it is a team sport, with multiple people on the court at once. Like the hockey players, the volleyball players did not discuss any of their personal accomplishments. None of the participants described themselves as being good at sports, despite the fact that they play at a varsity level, which demands an elevated skill level. This may be due to the general socialization of women to underestimate their own skills and accomplishments. The portrayal of female athletes in the media offers insight as to why these female athletes were hesitant to boast about their talents.

Overall, the participants were discouraged by the lack of media coverage for women’s sports. Eight of the participants acknowledged that on the rare occasion a women’s sport was in the media, it was often presented in a negative light. All of the volleyball players noted that the uniform for women’s volleyball was often the focal point, with beach volleyball being the most sexualized. One participant said “it’s definitely a lot more sexual...I mean we do wear spandex shorts so I guess that’s part of the association”. The same participant also commented on the sexualization of female volleyball players and the media, stating, “it’s a running joke, people just roll with it”. Similarly, another athlete explained, “female athletes in advertisements are trying to

appeal to guys, which in most cases often...her sexuality and objectifying her sexuality”. This objectification of women in the media is present in many other realms of society, most notably in celebrity culture. This presentation of female volleyball players and celebrities in the media reflects the hegemonic gender roles of Western society (Duncan et al., 1990; Jones et al., 1999). While men are not exempt from media critique, their portrayal often places them in a position of authority where as women are often dismissed as sexual objects not to be taken seriously.

The hockey players presented similar views on female athletes in the media, although their views were specifically in relation to male hockey players. In Western culture, specifically in Canada and the United States, the media glorify men’s hockey and idolize the players for their aggression, skill and tenacity (Theberge, 2000). On the ice, male hockey players exemplify hegemonic masculinity and the media rewards this behaviour with ample broadcast time and coverage of NHL games, as well as lower level provincial and junior teams (Theberge, 2000). The hockey participants expressed that this was not the case for women’s hockey. The consensus among them is that “you just don’t really see a lot of female hockey players”. Notably, one hockey participant said, “I think right now it’s a pretty positive vision” when referring to female athletes in the media. She is the only participant to express this sentiment, although she did note that they were absent from the media. None of the other participants equated absence from the media as a positive vision of female athletes, instead acknowledging that this lack of airtime was hindering women’s sports. One participant suggests that the lack of media coverage is due to the fact that “historically [hockey] has been a male dominated sport”. Another participant shared a similar sentiment, stating “women’s hockey is definitely portrayed as less...we are not seen as having the same strength as men’s [hockey]”. These sentiments, shared by the majority of the hockey participants, support findings presented in other contemporary studies (Boyle et al.,

2003; Riemer & Visio, 2003; Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006). Sport typing and gender classification of sport remain prevalent in contemporary society, despite efforts to move towards gender equality. The media coverage of female hockey players is a visible reflection of gender classification of sport, celebrating the triumphs of men's hockey and rendering women's hockey insignificant.

When they are made visible, the presentation of the female athlete in the media can have a significant impact on the athletes. Female body image is emphasized, with a focus on how the uniform of a sport presents athletes differently. The uniform of beach volleyball, usually a bikini, is often the subject of commentary or scrutiny in the media, taking attention away from the performance of the female volleyball players. In addition, the spandex shorts worn in indoor women's volleyball also become a fixation in the media and among the public. Comments on the women's volleyball uniform (or lack thereof) were raised between both the hockey and volleyball participants. One hockey player noted that "volleyball...the females are wearing nothing pretty much and the males can be in that sport but they're wearing full clothes". A volleyball participant shared similar thoughts, stating "I always hear comments about how boys 'love' watching women's volleyball". The notion that women's volleyball is being watched for the uniform and not the athletic performance reflects cultural emphasis on the female physique and supports the findings put forth by in previous media content studies, suggesting that media perception of women in sport has not improved over the last 25 years (Duncan et al., 1990; Jones et al., 1999).

### *Navigating Gender Stereotypes*

All of the participants were able to identify gender stereotypes that apply to female athletes, grouping the stereotypes based on the sport that female athletes play. For example, hockey and rugby players are labelled “butch” and “lesbian”. When it came to discussing how female athletes navigate these gender stereotypes, the participants were not as concise in their answers, suggesting that coping strategies may not be an active pursuit, but rather an indirect, subconscious effort. When participants were asked to describe common stereotypes of female athletes, each participant attributed certain stereotypes to specific sports, including their own. However, when asked to share their personal experiences with gender stereotypes, the majority of the participants claimed that they had never personally experienced stereotyping in sport. Yet, when the question changed to include the stereotyping experiences of their teammates, participants had more to say. Perhaps the initial question was too personal for some, but sharing the experiences of their teammates suggests that they are aware of stereotyping unfolding around them.

Responses to how the athletes themselves navigated these gender stereotypes were mixed. I asked participants how they would *act* in order to *avoid* being stereotyped. Initially the participants were reluctant to acknowledge that female athletes would need to act a certain way in order to avoid the stereotypes. One hockey player captured the consensus among all of the participants when she stated “there is no special way of acting, they really shouldn’t have to act a certain way”. However, when I asked specifically about how a female athlete would *cope* with gender stereotypes, participants offered different examples of behaviours associated with the physical appearance of women. This juxtaposition between similar questions suggests that the view of the authentic self does not comply with external actions. As mentioned above, the

participants did not acknowledge their own experiences with gender stereotypes in sports; instead they spoke of experiences in relation to other people. Similarly, when describing the actions undertaken by female athletes to avoid being stereotyped, it was always in relation to others. For example, one hockey participant, when speaking about female hockey players, said, “she would probably wear make-up while playing”. Although the participant herself is a varsity hockey player, she does not associate with the coping strategy that she associates with *other* female hockey players. Furthermore, when addressing the stereotype that female volleyball players are “sluts” because of their uniform, one volleyball participant explained, “she might show up to a practice wearing baggy sweatpants”. Again, the participant did not refer to the self when explaining this strategy, even though the stereotype was attributed to her sport.

Associating coping strategies with other female athletes, whether or not they play the same sport as the participants, and not with themselves suggests a tension between the authentic view of the self as an athlete and the way society views female athletes. Participants may not feel as though they must adopt coping strategies because they do not identify with the stereotypes. When participants say, “there is no special way of acting” it is because they themselves do not consciously alter their actions in the face of gender stereotypes. As Daniels (2009) explains in her work, sports and lesbianism are inherently connected through stereotypes. Many of the stereotypes expressed by the participants were ones that questioned the sexual orientation of female athletes, implying that being “butch” or “lesbian” were seen as negative labels. Therefore, society may connect female athletes with homosexuality and consequently being unfeminine but the athletes may view themselves differently, as being both athletic and feminine or as both homosexual and feminine (Dufor & Linford, 2010; Theberge, 2000). However, the acknowledgement of coping strategies in relation to other athletes cannot be ignored.

As discussed above, participants suggested various behaviours associated with femininity that *other* athletes might adopt to cope with stereotypes, such as wearing make-up or dressing in feminine clothing outside of sports. Despite acknowledging these actions, none of the participants admitted to altering their own actions in order to avoid being stereotyped. This is not to say that these participants do not navigate gender stereotypes when participating in sports, but that it is a subconscious effort. By distancing themselves from the gender stereotypes and the subsequent actions to navigate them, the participants are resisting the stereotypes. However, at various points during the interviews, the participants revealed instances of navigating stereotypes, suggesting that not all coping strategies are as visible as wearing make-up. For example, one hockey participant explained, “I don’t let the stereotypes bother me...I use the stereotype that girls’ hockey is less than men’s as motivation to be a better player”. Although it may not be visible, this participant’s internalizing of the stereotype of female inferiority acts as driving force, shaping her athletic experience.

The majority of the participants cited that the best way to present their sport in the face of the stereotype of female athlete inferiority in sport was to invite people from their social network to come and watch their games. Again, the individual athlete is not visibly presenting herself in a different way, but rather her efforts to dispel myths surrounding female athletes are indirect. It is up to the viewers to attend the game; the athlete continues to play her sport, implying that her behaviour as a varsity athlete does not change in the face of that stereotype. The navigation of gender stereotypes in sports then is one of both a direct and indirect effort on behalf of the athletes. Although none of the participants acknowledged personal direct coping strategies, they did cite this indirect one, implying that female athletes do take action to combat stereotypes. Further, the indirect strategies they explained throughout the interviews suggest there exists

tension between their view of the authentic self and society's view of female athletes. This creates an environment where indirect efforts to dispel myths perhaps go unnoticed in their day-to-day athletic experiences because the stereotypes have become so engrained in a realm of society that remains inherently gendered.

### *The Advantaged Athlete*

Female athletes are often disadvantaged in a sport system that is overwhelmingly organized, administered and dominated by men (Blinde, 1989; Bryson, 1994; Daniels, 2009; Theberge, 2000). When the participants were asked to compare the number of male coaches they have had in their athletic careers to the number to female coaches the results were significant. All of the participants had had more male coaches than female coaches. Notably, less than half of the participants had had any female coaches at all, and those that did had female coaches that were only in an assistant role. These numbers support the idea that sport remains dominated by men. When asked to comment on their male to female coach ratio, one participant noted, "You see more males coaching female sports teams than female coaches working with men's teams". Another participant commented on the impact of these numbers stating, "I think that in University it would have been nice to have a female coach...they understand more a girl's mindset". The majority of the participants expressed this sentiment, although none of them could provide justification as to why they had had so many male coaches and so few female coaches. None of the participants expressed negative feelings about their male coaches but they all felt that having more female coaches would have had a positive impact on their athletic experience.

The uncertainty that emerged on this topic suggests that, to the participants, there is no valid reason as to why they encountered so few female coaches in their athletic careers. This

uncertainty is similar to the doubt expressed by the participants when they spoke about acting differently in order to avoid gender stereotypes. Just as female athletes should *not* have to act differently to avoid being stereotyped, there should be more female coaches in sport. Yet, female athletes *do* present certain coping strategies and there *is* a lack of female coaches in comparison to male coaches. Thus, sport remains inherently gendered, perpetuating a culture that celebrates hegemonic masculinity (Blinde, 1989; Bryson, 1994; Daniels, 2009; Theberge, 2000). As a result, men will continue to remain in authoritative coaching positions, largely shaping the athletic experiences of female athletes.

The comparison between female athletes and male athletes emerged as one of the most prominent themes of the interviews. What became evident from this comparison was that the participants felt that their male counterparts often overshadowed their athletic experiences. The participants cited terms such as “jock”, “muscular”, “popular” and “player” when describing stereotypes of male athletes. Each of these terms can be attributed to hegemonic masculinity and are seen as culturally valued or acceptable when associated with men. For example, when the participants described male athletes as being a “player”, also known as a womanizer, they expressed that this was a negative stereotype. Yet, as a society we often tolerate men being a “player”, whether it be a player of sport or a player of women, it is a term often encouraged amongst male peers, where as if a female was comparatively labelled she would be rejected by her peers and by society. The other stereotypes are expressed with positive connotations, attributes that athletes and non-athletes alike should strive for. In comparison, the stereotypes that the participants associated with female athletes were expressed negatively. One participant captured this sentiment when she said, “stereotypes for male athletes give them power, whereas the stereotypes for female athletes [are] weakening”. Many of the stereotypes attributed to male

athletes build them up, as they are stereotypes that conform to gender norms. Conversely, the stereotypes attributed to female athletes challenge social norms, just as the female athletes themselves challenge traditional gender roles.

Sport is a realm of society that an individual can be a part of their entire life, beginning in childhood. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that these gender differences expressed by the participants are not limited to their athletic experiences but implicate all athletes. The differences between male and female athletes and between male and female coaches reflect cultural beliefs. Those who do not conform to social norms often find their status as high as those who do conform. Further, sport is not the only realm of society that continues to be administered and dominated by men. The views expressed by the participants reflect larger social structures and the ways masculinity and femininity are defined and enacted in society, they provide an opportunity to reflect on the status of gender equality in contemporary Western society.

### **Conclusion**

The participants relied on two different discourses when describing gender stereotypes in sport; self-reflection and expression of the other. The most prominent stereotype of female athletes was the link between sport and lesbianism. The volleyball players expressed terms such as “butch” and “muscular” in relation to other female athletes who participate in sports such as rugby and hockey. Conversely the hockey players were self-reflective when describing gender stereotypes, acknowledging that their sport is associated with lesbianism. Further, the volleyball players discussed how the uniform in women’s volleyball has led to many assumptions about female volleyball players and their sexuality, specifically that she is a “slut” or “easy”. During their description of gender stereotypes in sport it was evident that the participants were resistant

to the negative stereotypes surrounding female athletes. However, when asked to reveal their own experiences with gender stereotyping in sports, the majority of participants claimed they never experienced stereotypes as an athlete. This contradiction between the self as an individual and the self as part of a collective suggests that perhaps the stereotypes of female athletes have become so engrained in our social scripts that female athletes do not acknowledge their significance in their personal athletic experiences. Similarly, the presentation of female athletes in the media confirms the tension between the authentic view of the self and the societal view of female athletes.

The media is a factor in shaping the athletic experience of female athletes. Participants were discouraged by the lack of female athletes in the media and they felt that male athletes were viewed as the superior athlete and celebrated in the media and in our culture. Consequently, this vast difference in the value of male and female athletes may contribute to their self-perception. The participants were hesitant to discuss how female athletes should act in order to avoid being stereotyped because they felt that female athletes should not have to act differently in order to conform to social expectations. However, the participants did offer certain behaviours that female athletes could do in order cope with stereotypes, such as wearing make-up or dressing feminine. The participants did not associate these coping strategies with themselves. Conversely, the participants stated indirect coping strategies in relation to the self, suggesting that the navigation of gender stereotypes includes direct strategies that are visible and indirect strategies that do not change the appearance or behaviour of the athlete.

The overwhelming presence of men in sport shapes the athletic experiences of female athletes. The ratio of male to female coaches of the participants confirms that sport remains a domain dominated by men. The participants felt that having more female coaches present would

have a positive impact on their athletic experiences. Further, the participants felt that their male counterparts often overshadowed their athletic experiences. Many of the stereotypes attributed to male athletes build them up, as they are stereotypes that conform to gender norms. It is evident that gender stereotypes have impacted the athletic experiences of these female athletes. The stereotypes of female athletes expressed by the participants challenge gender norms. Whether they attribute these stereotypes to their own athletic experiences or not, the acknowledgement of their existence reflects cultural gender expectations and the consequences for those who do not conform to gender norms, thus shaping their athletic experiences.

The continued domination of the realm of sport by men impacts the experiences of female athletes. Men's presence in the realm of sport does not necessarily have a negative impact on the experiences of female athletes, but the presence of more female coaches would enhance these experiences. This reflects the gendered structure of sport and highlights the consequences of maintaining a gender binary that benefits one but excludes the other. It is evident that gender stereotypes have impacted the athletic experiences of these female athletes. Whether they attribute these stereotypes to their own athletic experiences or not, the acknowledgement of their existence reflects cultural gender expectations and the consequences for those who do not conform to gender norms, thus shaping their athletic experiences. Their attitudes towards the presentation of female athletes in the media supports previous studies that examine the portrayal of female athletes in print media (Duncan et al., 1990; Jones et al., 1999).

A comparative approach of studying female athletes who conform to gender appropriate sports and female athletes who do not conform enabled me to understand how social constructions of gender norms in sport shape the athletic experience of female athletes. Further, previous qualitative investigation has focused on female athletes that only participate in gender

appropriate sports. My research has extended to include female athletes who do not conform to gender norms in sport and thus may find their status not as high as those that do conform (McClung & Blinde, 2002; Wiley, Shaw & Havitz, 2000). Future research should avoid relying on Metheny's classification of sports. While recent studies have shown that participants' distinction of sport based on gender appropriateness does reflect Metheny's theory of gender appropriate sports, society is becoming increasingly aware of gender and the importance of removing gender stigma. Therefore, researchers should look towards emerging theories of gender and sport when investigating sport typing in the future. Issues surrounding the rights of transgender people are becoming increasingly prevalent in contemporary society, specifically around issues of health, rights and social acceptance. The realm of sport and transgender athletes presents an opportunity for research in the discipline of sport sociology. Finally, with the recent emphasis on studying female athletes, it is important for future researchers to remember that male athletes face stereotypes and experience gender discrimination in the realm of sports. Future research should include male athletes as a subject in the issues of sport typing and gender stereotypes in sport.

## **Appendix A: Interview Questions**

### Introduction

1. Tell me about which sports you participate in.

### Choosing to Participate in Sports

2. In one word how would you describe (hockey/volleyball)?
3. Why did you choose to pursue varsity (hockey/volleyball)?
4. Please tell me about when your interest in (hockey/volleyball) began?

### Gender Stereotypes

5. How do you describe yourself as an athlete?
6. How are female (hockey/volleyball) players portrayed in the media?
7. How does this portrayal of female (hockey/volleyball) athletes in the media compare to the portrayal of male (hockey/volleyball) athletes in the media?
8. How do you think society perceives female athletes?
9. How do you think society perceives male athletes?
10. Do you feel that sports perpetuate stereotypes?
11. (if yes) What are some of the stereotypes of female athletes?
10. How do female athletes cope with these gender stereotypes?
11. How would a female athlete act in order to avoid gender stereotypes?
12. Tell me about your experiences with gender stereotypes as an athlete. Have you seen any evidence of gender stereotyping? Have you experienced it directly yourself?

(if yes) how did you cope with these gender stereotypes?

13. Do you think male athletes experience gender stereotypes? If so, tell me what those might be
14. How is this similar/different to your experiences with gender stereotypes?

### Conclusion/Background Info

15. How many years have you been a varsity athlete?

16. What is the most important thing you would like me to remember?
17. What have we not talked about that you think might be important for me to know?
18. What other insights would you like to share about sport typing/gender stereotypes?

**Appendix B: Volleyball Recruitment (email to Club director)**

Dear [insert name]

My name is Courtney Oattes and I am currently in my fourth year as an undergraduate student doing my honours thesis in Sociology at Dalhousie University. As a part of my degree I am interested in researching gender stereotypes in the realm of sports. The purpose of this study is to interview female varsity athletes to explore their experiences with gender stereotypes and how this has shaped their involvement in athletics.

In order to investigate my research topic I am looking for individual participants to take part in an interview of 45-60 minutes in length. Participation is entirely voluntary and no compensation will be provided. No real names or any other identifying factors (such as the University they play for) will be used in the written data or the analysis. Further information about the nature of the research, the expectations of the participants and the consent process can be provided at your request. Attached is a copy of the consent form that participants are required to sign prior to the interview.

I am seeking your assistance in recruiting female varsity hockey players. With your permission, I would like to advertise my study on your website and Facebook group. I know Maverick alumni are often still active within the Maverick community and I expect a fair number of current female varsity volleyball players will be in the Ottawa area over the semester break. Those interested in participating should contact me at the following email address [cr870699@dal.ca](mailto:cr870699@dal.ca) or by telephone (613) 324-3939 in order to set up an interview at a time and location that is convenient for them.

If you have any further questions about the study please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Warm regards,

Courtney Oattes

**Appendix C: Hockey Recruitment (email for the Athletic Director)**

Dear [insert name]

My name is Courtney Oattes and I am currently in my fourth year as an undergraduate honours student in Sociology at Dalhousie University. As a part of my degree I am interested in researching gender stereotypes in the realm of sports. The purpose of this study is to interview female varsity athletes to explore their experiences with gender stereotypes and how this has shaped their involvement in athletics.

In order to investigate my research topic I am looking for individual participants to take part in an interview of approximately 45-60 minutes in length. Participation is entirely voluntary and no compensation will be provided. No real names or any other identifying factors (such as the University they play for) will be used in the written data or the analysis. Further information about the nature of the research, the expectations of the participants and the consent process can be provided at your request. Attached is a copy of the consent form that participants are required to sign prior to the interview.

I am seeking your assistance in recruiting female varsity hockey players. With your permission, I would like this information to be passed along to the head coach as well as the female varsity hockey team. Those interested in participating should contact me at the following email address [cr870699@dal.ca](mailto:cr870699@dal.ca) or by telephone (613) 324-3939 in order to set up an interview at a time and location that is convenient for them.

If you have any further questions about the study please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Warm regards,

Courtney Oattes

## **Appendix D: Post for Social Networks**

### Competing Against Stereotypes: The Female Athlete Experience

I am a fourth year undergraduate student in Sociology at Dalhousie University conducting my honours research project on the experiences of gender stereotypes in sports. This study looks at how female varsity athletes experience gender stereotypes in their everyday lives. My main objective is to allow participants the opportunity to share these experiences from their point of view. I suspect that female varsity athletes have experienced gender stereotyping; no matter what sport they play. As such, my goal is to bring attention to this experience, in order to contribute to sport Sociology and develop a better understanding of gender stereotypes from the personal experiences of athletes.

You are eligible to participate if you are a current female varsity athlete playing varsity hockey or varsity volleyball for a Canadian university, and are willing to discuss this topic for my research thesis. Participants will take part in a face to face 45-60 minute interview in Halifax or Ottawa.

If you are interested in learning more about my thesis project, or have any concerns, please contact me by email.

If you believe anyone else might be interested in participating in this study, and who meet the requirements, please pass this information along to them.

Thank you,

Courtney Oattes

cr870699@dal.ca

### Appendix E: Coding Breakdown

VIS-COP: visible coping mechanisms performed by female athletes to cope with gender stereotypes, for example: wearing make-up during a game

BEH-COP: behaviours/actions of female athletes to cope with gender stereotypes, for example: inviting friends to a varsity game

INT-COP: coping with gender stereotypes internally, for example: motivation, denial

MED-F: the influence of the media in the portrayal of the female athlete, for example: airtime on broadcast television, body scrutiny

MED-M: the influence of the media in the portrayal of the male athlete, for example: airtime on broadcast television, idolization on television shows

FEM-ST: stereotypes of female athletes

MAL-ST: stereotypes of male athletes

PE-ST: personal experiences with gender stereotypes

SELF: perception of the self as an athlete

SB: sports background, previous/other sports played

ESI: early sport interest

PSD: personal sport description (link to SELF)

SPA: societal perception of athletes

    PFA: perceptions of female athletes

    SFA: sexualizing the female athlete

    EFBI: emphasis on female body image

    PMA: perceptions of male athletes

    SMA: sexualizing the male athlete

    EMBI: emphasis on male body image

GC: gender comparison

MFCR: male to female coach ratio

    GI: impact of the gender of the coach on team dynamic/personal experiences

GOS: gender opportunity in sports, for example head coach positions

VS: Why the athlete chose to pursue varsity athletics

**APPENDIX F: Consent form**



*Faculty of Arts and  
Social Sciences*

**CONSENT FORM**

**Competing Against Stereotypes: The Female Athlete Experience**

You are invited to take part in research being conducted by me, Courtney Oattes, an undergraduate student in Sociology, as part of my honours degree at Dalhousie University. The purpose of this research is to interview female varsity athletes to explore how they have experienced of gender stereotypes in sports, and how this has shaped their involvement in athletics. I will write up the results of this research in a paper for my class, called the honours thesis.

As a participant in the research you will be asked to answer a number of interview questions about your personal experiences in athletics. The interview is expected to take approximately 45-60 minutes in a quiet location of your choice. The interview will be audio-recorded. If I quote any part of the interview in my honours thesis, I will use pseudonyms, not your real name, and I will remove any other details that could identify you, such as the University you represent, from the quote. The athletic director of your university and your coach will not be notified of your participation in this study. Your decision to participate will not affect your standing on the varsity team.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to answer questions that you do not want to answer, and you are welcome to stop the interview at any time if you no longer want to participate. If you decide to stop participating after the interview is over, you can do so until March 1, 2015. I will not be able to remove the information you provided after that date, because I will have completed my analysis, but the information will not be used in any other research.

Information that you provide to me will be kept private and will be anonymized, which means any identifying details such as your name will be removed from it. Only the honours class supervisor and I will have access to the unprocessed information you offer. I will describe and share general findings in a presentation to the Sociology and Social Anthropology Department

and in my honours thesis. Nothing that could identify you will be included in the presentation or the thesis. I will keep anonymized information so that I can learn more from it as I continue my studies.

The risks associated with this study are no greater than those you would encounter when talking about athletic involvement in your everyday life.

There will be no direct benefit to you in participating in this research and you will not receive compensation. The research, however, will contribute to new knowledge on the personal experiences of varsity female athletes, specifically their experiences with gender inequality, gender stereotypes and societal misconceptions of female athletes. If you would like to see how your information is used, please feel free to contact me and I will send you a copy of my honours thesis after April 30.

If you have questions or concerns about the research please feel free to contact me or the honours class supervisor. My contact information is (email) cr870699@dal.ca. You can contact the honours class supervisor, Dr Martha Radice, at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University on (902) 494-6747, or email martha.radice@dal.ca.

If you have any ethical concerns about your participation in this research, you may contact Catherine Connors, Director, Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-1462, or email ethics@dal.ca.

**Participant's consent:**

I have read the above information and I agree to participate in this study.

Name:

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Signature:

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Date:

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Researcher's signature:

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Date:

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