

APPROPRIATING FEMINISM: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE FEMALE  
ATHLETE IN THE WOMEN'S NATIONAL BASKETBALL  
ASSOCIATION'S ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS

THESIS

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By

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To Mom and Dad,

For their unwavering support of each of my endeavors

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## CHAPTER I

### SPORTS, THE MEDIA, AND THE WNBA'S CULTURAL IMPACT

The summer of 1996 was heralded as the arrival of the female athlete because women's teams were the highlight of the Atlanta summer Olympics (Huebner, 1996). The torchbearers of the 1996 Olympics were the U.S.A. women's basketball team, who generated a large following from their exhibition games against college teams in 1995 and their arrival as the new "dream team." Thus, women took the place of past men's Olympic basketball teams that were filled with professional players and were expected to bring home the gold medal because of their superior talent (Corbett, 1997). Women's basketball had finally arrived and with the success of the Olympics came the announcement of a professional league for women, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), sponsored by the National Basketball Association (NBA). The Olympics were only the starting point and the WNBA was heralded as the model for women's professional sports (Huebner, 1996). With the focus of the world on the WNBA, the league was characterized as the organization that would decide whether women's athletics challenged the dominant patriarchy of sports or continued to be seen as second fiddle and inferior to men (Bruce, 1998; Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988; McDonald, 2000; Messner, 1988). The advertisements produced by the WNBA are the best indication of the league's ability to challenge or reinforce the hierarchy of sports because the commercials were the most dominant marketing tool used by the league in establishing its values. The league invested an

estimated \$15 million in the advertising campaign for the launch of the league and continues to focus large amounts of money on advertisements for marketing (Evans, 2002; McDonald, 2000; Weiner, 2001; Whiteside, 1998).

This thesis examines the four television advertisement campaigns the WNBA has created in an attempt to generate support for its image through its eight-year existence. During the league's inauguration in 1997, a campaign called "We Got Next" was created in an attempt to display the schedule and its premier superstars. In 1998, the new campaign was named "Join In" in an attempt to highlight the league's fans and to encourage its growth. The "Join In" campaign features lots of action shots of players, fans in the stands, and even a soundtrack from three WNBA players. After the "Join In" campaign, the WNBA created the "We Got Game" campaign. The league used the "We Got Game" campaign from 1999 until 2001. The "We Got Game" campaign continued the inclusion of action shots of players and team interaction with fans outside of the basketball arena. The ads chosen from these three campaigns focus on basketball, the players, and the fans. In 2002, the WNBA changed this focus in an attempt to highlight the players' more sexy and personal side. This campaign is named "This Is Who I Am" and has continued with the 2003 season. These four campaigns will be analyzed with the first two campaigns being seen as the league's image-building period, the "We Got Game" campaign representing the reflection of that image up until the transition into the more feminine focused "This Is Who I Am" campaign. These advertisements communicate the league's values, a rhetorical act which fundamentally has the potential to change the culture of sports and the media through its depiction of female athletes.

This chapter explores previous research into the sports media and how the sports media influence society. The research from the sociological field, presented first, has found

that the media denigrates female athletes with less air time, creates paradoxes about whether the female athlete is feminine or masculine, belittles female basketball players through denial of team and game by sportscasters, and enacts gender values in the culture through the masculine domain of sports. The masculine hierarchy of sports is characterized by its privileging mostly team oriented male-labeled sports over female-labeled sports, which emphasize the individual and beauty, by ignoring female sports in media coverage or by casting them as inferior (Bryson, 1987). This framing by the hierarchy creates a hegemonic system of control of women's sports by enacting control over the dominant ideology of what sports are, how they should be played, and who should play them (Bryson, 1987). The framing by the sports media affects the way the culture sees the female athlete, but sociological studies fail to explain how this looks or occurs.

Within rhetorical analyses, the examination of verbal and visual discourse has found that these discourses devalue female athletes, allowing for their placement into traditional roles, thus continuing the male hegemony over sports and society. Rhetorical analysis also explains how even challenges to the hierarchy can be appropriated by the dominant structure undermining any possibility of deconstructing the masculine hegemony. The WNBA has positioned itself as the largest threat to the masculine hegemony by providing women an arena that garners media attention and consistently shows female athletes as powerful. The way the WNBA frames its advertisements is crucial to understanding the cultural impact of the league and whether it challenges the masculine hierarchy of sports.

### Sports, the Media, and Their Power in Society

Sports' reflection of the culture forces the female athlete to make a choice between being feminine or masculine, while the sports media create contradictory visual and verbal messages that become resolved and enacted within the culture. The media's portrayal of the female athlete is crucial to an understanding of how gender values are constructed within society and whether patriarchy continues within sports and society. A rhetorical analysis of advertisements' portrayal of the female athlete is necessary to understanding the broader social impact that sports have on culture.

Previous research within the sociological realm has established that sports are a reflection of the sociocultural system in which they are situated (Creedon, 1994; Messner, 1988; Messner, 1993). Historically, women's sports have been appropriated by the culture to devalue and undermine women, and reinforce male hegemony through the exclusion, dismissal, and ridicule of female athletes as weak and inferior to male competition (Bryson, 1987; Cahn, 1994; Smith, 1998). Pamela J. Creedon (1994) argues that sports serve as a metaphor for gender values because each sport is assigned a label of masculine or feminine, in turn teaching society how gender should be enacted. The labels that these sports gain act as a social sanction for which sex can play a particular sport and whether it is deemed worthy of societal attention. The masculine model is characterized by "aggressiveness, striving for dominance, competition, size, physical strength, and phallocentrism" while the "model of femininity, in contrast, stresses passivity, physical frailty, dependence (on men), nurturance, cooperation, and sexual submissiveness" (Sabo & Messner, 1993, p. 16). These cultural models, through the denial of participation, characterization of the sport as feminine, or labeling of a woman's abilities as inferior,

construct a patriarchy in sports that affects the society through the function of sports in reinforcing social norms.

Women's presence in sports, though, cannot be ignored because their existence in "masculine" sports, such as basketball and hockey, acts as a "fundamental challenge to male power and privilege" (Kane & Greendorfer, 1994, p. 33). While it has been argued that sports are a site where sexist attitudes can be contested through the female use of involvement as a form of empowerment, tension within society forces a choice between being feminine and being a strong athlete (Sabo & Messner, 1993; Messner, 1988). The paradox of differing values of competition means that a female athlete may be strong, but no longer feminine. Through her strength and loss of femininity, the female athlete loses her power as mother because her strength runs counter to the social construction of a mother as passive nurturer. If she is feminine then her participation in sports is devalued because the media portrays her as a sex object and inferior to male athletes. The way the media and its cultural members resolve this paradox is critical to the future of the sporting and social hierarchy.

Any gains made by powerful female athletes through their play, as symbolic formations of empowerment, are undermined by the sports media through their portrayal of female athletes as sex objects and mothers (Bryson, 1987; Creedon, 1994; Sabo & Messner, 1993). By creating women as sex objects the dominant paradigm is reinforced because the female athlete is seen as something that can be consumed, gazed at, and/or marginalized as inferior. Sexual objectification and creating a woman as a mother in the media's characterization of the female athlete is particularly dangerous in the way that it either reinforces violence against women due to their subjugation or hegemony over them outside of the athletic arena (Bryson, 1987; Messner, 1992; Messner, 2002; Sabo &

Messner, 1993). The legitimating of a masculine view of gender relations reinforces violence by creating a subordinate relationship for women with men (Bryson, 1987). The relationships communicated in the sporting arena serve as a basis for the social hierarchy because they teach the patriarchal culture at a young age to children. Television has been a critical arena for the construction of athletes because it “provides frameworks of meaning which, in effect, selectively interpret not only the athletic events themselves but also the controversies and problems surrounding the events” (Messner, 1988). The sports media construct and reaffirm the meanings of athletes, their power, and hegemonic meanings.

Research has shown that media representations of athletes devalue female performances in a variety of ways. For example, in their groundbreaking study Duncan and Hasbrook (1988) examined the collegiate Final Four coverage of men and women’s basketball. What they found was a denial of team by focusing on the individual personal background of a few female players that did not occur with the male players and denial of game by ignoring the physical skills possessed by the women (Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988). The denial of team tries to reinforce the individualistic scope that has historically been projected onto female athletes and denies their ability to break through in a team sport that the sporting culture characterizes as masculine. The denial of team acts to thwart female athletes' equality with males or deny a challenge to the hegemonic system by constructing a difference between the types of basketball that the two sexes play. The denial of game further entrenches the stereotype that female athletes are inferior, denying them power to break through the hierarchy that has been created around sports. Duncan and Hasbrook (1988) also found ambivalence within the narrative that the sportscasters used surrounding the event and thus created “contradictory network messages: that the women’s competition was an important intercollegiate basketball championship, but that

the women's competition was neither a real team sport nor a real game" (p. 11). Through the use of these narratives, sportscasters and television in general were able to deny women the ability to challenge the masculine definition of sports and competition through its use of "exclusionary and denigrating tactics" (Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988, p. 19).

Studies that came after the initial Duncan and Hasbrook study found less overt sexism, but did find use of gendered marking and naming to depict female athletes (Bishop, 2003; Messner, Duncan, & Cooky, 2003; Messner, Duncan, & Jensen, 1993; Messner, Duncan, & Wachs, 1996).

When Messner, Duncan, and Jensen (1993) revisited collegiate Final Four coverage as a follow up to the original Duncan and Hasbrook (1988) study, they found that "women were commonly referred to as 'girls,' as 'young ladies,' and as 'women'" along with the continued use of a female athlete's first name to create a more personal relationship, instead of professional one, with the athlete (p. 127). The authors argued that the use of gender marking and denigrating comments constituted the legitimization of men's "power and privilege over women" (Messner, Duncan, & Jensen, 1993, p. 132). The studies may have shown evidence of encouragement in the decrease of overt sexism, but it can be argued that these language choices on the part of the announcers constitute a change toward more covert denial of women's place in competitive basketball and that these language choices aim to undermine the challenges that the increasing support for women's basketball was raising to the traditional gender hierarchy of sports. The challenge to the hierarchy of sports was further undermined when Messner, Duncan, and Wachs' (1996) study found that even with increasing popularity of women's college basketball, men's games and players were given significantly more pre-game coverage, news coverage, and half-time attention. By giving the men's game more coverage and

attention the women's Final Four was framed as a non-event while the men's was a must see (Messner, Duncan, & Wachs, 1996). Even at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the sports highlight shows and the main sports magazine, *Sports Illustrated*, show little improvement in the coverage of women's sports, even though women's sports continue to grow in popularity (Bishop, 2003; Messner, Duncan, & Cooky, 2003). When women's sports were covered, athletes were depicted to encourage sexual voyeurism or make them seem motherly to reinforce femininity, furthering the demise and denigration of the female athlete as a legitimate athlete (Bishop, 2003; Messner, Duncan, & Cooky, 2003).

These oppressive images of female athletes can be resisted by the audience and athletes, but the construction of the images and programming still falls within the dominant structure of patriarchy which puts women into stereotypical feminine roles or negotiates women's roles to still allow power to be within the masculine hegemony (Bruce, 1998). By placing women into stereotypical roles, the masculine hegemony goes unchallenged, or if challenged then coopts the ability of female athletes to prevent their appropriation into denigrating roles. Toni Bruce (1998) found in an ethnographic study that female fans of women's basketball became angered when the announcers degraded the women's game, but still used the men's game as the standard when comparing men's and women's basketball. These actions on the part of female fans are indicative of the framing of sport as a hierarchal institution. The empowerment created by increased participation and viewing of female athletes rested "primarily with the fact that they could actually see women players being physically strong, skilled, tactical, and aggressive even though commentary tried to regulate the visual images more in line with traditional notions of femininity" (Bruce, 1998, p. 389-390).

The resolution of this paradox in which the hierarchy is challenged with strong athletes or affirmed through denigration of the female athlete as feminine by fans has yet to be explained by sociological theorists. This research has not taken into account whether the audience resolves contradictions in the visual images. How the sporting hierarchy resolves these challenges through cooptation and appropriation must be understood to see if the paradox for female athletes or the definitions of masculinity in sports is being undermined or reinforced in new ways. For example, female athletes who pose a challenge to the masculine hierarchy by being more skilled, dominant, or athletic than their male counterparts may be redefined as weak or ignored by the media, thereby delegitimizing the female athlete's challenge to the hierarchy of sports (Bryson, 1987). By redefining or degrading female athletes' performances the masculine hierarchy is able to control the definition of sport and the power to decide what sport is, continuing its masculine power in the society and putting male athletes at the forefront of public concern and admiration.

Through the use of content analysis and ethnographic methods, these sociological studies create a great understanding of the fact that the sports media has a large influence on society and exerts its influences by creating biases. These biases in coverage construct a female athlete as inferior or put her in a paradox that forces her into a stereotypical role within society. These studies, though, fail to explain how these biases affect the culture through reappropriation of the female athlete. The way the visual and audio messages are framed is key to understanding the underlying motivations of why the sports hierarchy denies women opportunities and reinforces a gender hierarchy within the society. The framing of sports messages has the potential to challenge patriarchy, but the sociological field has not recognized this communicative dimension. A critical way to examine these messages in their multiplicity of forms, visual and audio, is through a rhetorical analysis. A

rhetorical analysis gives the critic the ability to investigate the underlying meaning of the messages that go largely ignored by sociological critics and create an understanding of the cultural impact of sports.

While an integral part of society, the sporting culture also has not been fully examined by rhetorical critics. Some studies exist that raise important questions. For example, a 1989 study done by Gina Daddario (1992) showed that women were symbolically marginalized in the pages of *Sports Illustrated*. Daddario's (1992) findings were similar to Bishop's (2003) findings regarding limited coverage of women's athletics and how the privileging of particular sports creates a hegemonic view of what sports are appropriate for women and the role they should take as athletes. The coverage given in *Sports Illustrated* put "female athletes in a double bind. Not only are they restricted to a limited number of feminine sports, some of which are inaccessible to young teens and adults in high school and college, but they are held up to hegemonic ideals of beauty and attractiveness" (Daddario, 1992, p. 61). While Daddario's (1992) study is very similar to Bishop's (2003) research and that of other sociologists, the difference is that Daddario's study showed that sexual objectification occurred through visual and written descriptors. The analysis of how these descriptors interact in combination with one another has been a crucial area of investigation for rhetorical critics.

In a study of the 1999 U.S. women's world cup soccer team, Helene A. Shugart (2003) argues that in the coverage of the team a dynamic between visual and discursive descriptors was able to fetishise the athletes to create a dominant male gaze. Through her use of film criticism and rhetorical analysis, Shugart (2003) is able to integrate content analysis research and media criticism to form a crucial conclusion that "the mediated sexualisation of the team and its members manifest in ever subtler ways in order to

accommodate increased popular consciousness of overtly sexist media practices, overshadows their athleticism and undermines their achievements” (p. 7). An understanding of the gaze facilitates this conclusion. This understanding of the implications of the gaze upon the female athlete is essential because of how the spectacle within sport continues male hegemony (Brummett & Duncan, 1990).

Through rhetorical analysis, these researchers are able to go further than the sociological inquiry in explaining how the image and discourse function in relation to the audience, while also allowing for the discovery of underlying motivations of the text. An in-depth analysis of discourse is necessary to understand the broader impact that the text has on the culture as a whole and the way that the visual and verbal messages are resolved, as opposed to only highlighting the use of particular phrases used in broadcasts without discussing how the visual image may be the more dominant discourse. How these competing messages are resolved is critical to revealing the broader social impact. As Brummett and Duncan (1990) argue:

The narrative unifies glances into a gaze of desire by turning athletes into fetishes, or objects of desire and fascination...[O]bjects of desire become commodities with specific, measurable properties that define their value. Fans look at athletes in their motions appraisingly, longingly, as we would look at new cars on the showroom floor. (p. 233)

A rhetorical analysis is able to show how discourse, social practices, and technology of sports broadcasts are able to render sport into a spectacle that continues the objectification of female athletes, while also taking into account the role the viewer creates for himself/herself in enacting patriarchy within society (Brummett & Duncan, 1990; Shugart, 2003).

Using the 1999 women's soccer team as an example, studies have shown how corporate America appropriates the power of female sports to further male power and hegemony through an emphasis on the role of the male within the life of the successful female athlete, the creation of a social gaze, and the reinforcement of male control over the spectacle, thus undermining the power of women's sports to challenge the sports hegemony (Shugart, 2003). Only through a discursive and visual analysis can the contradictory messages of progress be unmasked by examining the interaction between the two and the audience. The World Cup team is a great example of how “packaged as progress, equality, and power, the mediated contemporary female athlete instead delivers highly traditional female sexuality” (Shugart, 2003, p. 27). An understanding of why the media packages messages is key because dominant athletes can be constructed as archetypal heroes/heroines that reinforce male hegemony (Trujillo, 1991). Through his analysis, Nick Trujillo (1991) establishes how an athlete's occupation reinforces male hegemony creating gender norms. By showing athletes in terms of power and force, hegemonic masculinity can increase and reinforce hegemony, thus undermining any progress that may be made by female athletes (Trujillo, 1991). The complexity of the mediated sports discourse provides breeding ground for patriarchy to occur, even though women's sports has been trying to break through the barriers. An analysis of the extent to which women's challenges to the hierarchy are occurring is necessary to further understand the power, motivations, and abilities of the media sport complex.

#### Creation of the League and Professional Sportswoman Discourse

The formation of the WNBA serves as a measure of how far women's sports has come. Historically, women's sports were denigrated and thought to be inferior, but the

league came into existence during a time of high public support and has used its images to challenge the masculine hierarchy. The league's discourse, though, is driven by the NBA, and has the possibility of furthering the sports hegemony. Therefore, the way the media frames the league's discourse is critical to understanding whether the masculine sports hegemony is challenged.

In 1891 when Dr. James Naismith introduced basketball to the American culture men and women played the game, but somehow women's basketball was never seen as equivalent to men's (Smith, 1998). The first women's collegiate game was held in 1896, but it took three-quarters of a century for a women's professional league to be started in the United States (Smith, 1998). Women's interest in athletics always has been a part of the American culture, but upper ranks of society used sports to reinforce their power by invoking Victorian standards and rendering female participation in sports as a social taboo (Cahn, 1994). Through social pressures the paradox for the female athlete was created: she wanted to be aggressive, but went to extreme lengths to make herself seem feminine so as to not break social norms (Cahn, 1994). This paradox can still be seen within sports today. If a female athlete is too athletic or strong she either is called "mannish" and labeled a lesbian via social backlash to create comfort with the female athlete or is feminized to undermine her challenge to the sports hierarchy (Cahn, 1994).

Highlighting femininity by using feminine themed team names and requiring modeling classes for players, the Women's Professional Basketball League started play in 1978 as the first professional league for women, although teams of women had been entertaining millions with their traveling road show games for years (Cahn, 1994; Festle, 1996; Staffo, 1998). The league experienced financial trouble and female athletes saw the first setback to gaining respect from the sporting culture when the league folded in 1981

(Staffo, 1998). The female athlete continued to gain ground through actions of Title IX, enacted in 1972, which required academic institutions to give equity to athletes. Women's basketball teams began to play to larger crowds with NBA Commissioner David Stern watching attentively from afar. Stern and the NBA were interested in starting a women's professional league in 1993, but the stumble of the 1992 women's Olympic basketball team only winning a bronze medal prevented the NBA from backing its start at that time due to fears that there was not enough exposure for women's basketball generated by the Olympics (Cahn, 1994; Corbett, 1997; Whiteside, 1998).

The ideal time to start a women's professional basketball league came in 1995-96 when support for and attention paid to women's collegiate basketball was growing. The NBA invested in and tested the American market for women's basketball through U.S.A. Basketball (Corbett, 1997; Whiteside, 1998). This women's team was assembled almost a year before the Olympic games to travel around the United States and the world and play in front of paying crowds. The NBA used this opportunity to track television ratings, marketability, and fan base to analyze the viability of starting a new professional women's league (Corbett, 1997). The NBA was bested in the race to form a professional league when the American Basketball League (ABL) was formed in 1996 with most of the 1996 gold medalist Olympic players giving their approval and backing (Corbett, 1997). This league was to be financed by private investors, but soon after was challenged by the NBA and its announcement that they would form the WNBA and would begin play in the summer of 1997 (Corbett, 1997; Whiteside, 1998). With NBA backing, the WNBA plays in NBA cities and in NBA arenas, except for one team that was sold and relocated before the 2003 season to a Native American tribe's lands and plays on casino grounds (Whiteside, 1998; Woolsey, 2003).

The league was formed around stars from around the globe, with three of the 1996 American Olympic stars at its center: Lisa Leslie, Sheryl Swoopes, and Rebecca Lobo (Whiteside, 1998). Coming off the Olympic success NBA Commissioner David Stern and the NBA thought that:

The time was right, but without a marketing plan that made sense, league officials knew it would be difficult to achieve success. The first decision was to play in the summer when the sports calendar was less crowded and the WNBA could be televised at consistent times – Saturday afternoons on NBC, Monday or Tuesday nights on ESPN, and Friday nights on Lifetime Television. (Whiteside, 1998, p. 56)

The different season and successful marketing plan led to greater exposure and growth for the league (Whiteside, 1998). By the end of the first season “many were hailing the WNBA as the most successful launch of a league in professional sports history” and savior of women's athletics (Whiteside, 1998, p. 63; Huebner, 1996). The WNBA lost its main rival for fans and athletes when the ABL folded midway through their third season in 1998 (Springer, 1999).

Although the WNBA forwards a new challenge to the sporting hierarchy and furthers the viewing paradox, it still exists within the male dominated, patriarchal system of the NBA. The NBA, as parent league, is shaping the discourse of the WNBA (Banet-Weiser, 2002; Creedon, 1998). Previous studies are correct that through “symbolic annihilation of the female athlete, the media tells us that sportswomen have little if any, value in society, particularly in relationship to male athletes” (Kane & Greendorfer, 1994, p. 34). While previous research has argued for equal coverage of women's athletics, the WNBA has not by any means gotten the same air time as the NBA. However, it is not the

amount of coverage alone that decides whether female athletes are able to break down the sports hierarchy. Instead the power lies in how they are portrayed to the viewing public (Creedon, 1998; Messner, Duncan, & Wachs, 1996). That the league was heralded from the start for its great launch and marketing plan is particularly important because the WNBA's marketing is a reflection of the culture (Cohen, 1993; Creedon, 1994). Greta L. Cohen (1993) argues, "In the field of entertainment, media power is no less apparent. Although the business of entertaining is far more subjective, the culture is reflected by the images the media portray. Content is constructed to conform with what a particular society finds entertaining" (p. 172). The way the WNBA constructs their advertising campaign is a crucial area to examine because the way the league approaches the public is key to showing the value of the female athlete.

Previous authors have found through discourse analysis that the WNBA has created a forceful, individualistic commercial worldview through its construction of the league and its advertisers (McDonald, 2000). McDonald's (2000) study failed to look at the visual cues within the advertisers' accounts, but in a study of visual imagery Sarah Banet-Weiser (2002) found the construction of the female athlete as a calming mechanism in comparison to the NBA's bad boy image. Banet-Weiser (2002) argues that the "action shots of strong, sweaty female bodies, simply by their sheer corporeality, challenge dominant masculine conventions involving sport" (p. 93). While this may be true, the verbal messages that accompany these images are equally important to the viewer in resolving the paradox of the female athlete. Through the use of emotional appeals and by showing the feminine side of multiple women players who are mothers in the league, a reinforcement of heterosexuality and an appeal to the "liberated female consumer" is created (McDonald, 2000, p. 39; Banet-Weiser, 2002). The dominant ideology has been

that “fans and sponsors are encouraged to see basketball as a sport where not only those women labeled as *deviant* by dominant ideology could play, but as a game played by those who followed normative conventions of femininity” (author's emphasis, Banet-Weiser, 2002, p. 94). Through two years of WNBA marketing, Banet-Weiser (2002) argues that, “the naturalized bodies of the female athletes of the WNBA have been reframed to represent values more often associated with masculinist team sports, allowing talent to reign over glamour,” thus showing the potential power the WNBA has in challenging conventions of femininity, masculinity, and sport (p. 100-101).

While raising interesting questions, these two studies and others like them fail to explain what implications these images of naturalized bodies and discourses have for the larger social culture. They also fail to understand how particular combinations of visual and verbal messages communicate the values of the WNBA and the sporting culture itself. These are particularly important questions to ask when dealing with a powerful medium such as advertising because as Jean Kilbourne (1994) notes:

Like a very potent drug, advertising is designed to do one particular job, but along the way it often has other, much broader results. Although some of this is intentional on the part of advertisers, much of it is not. Advertising sells more than products, but advertisers generally don't care about that. If the cumulative effect of some advertising, for example, is to degrade women or to sexualize children or to increase eating disorders, surely it is not the *intent* of the advertisers. It is simply an unfortunate side effect. (author's emphasis, p. 28)

An understanding of how the WNBA advertises itself to the public provides insight into the sporting culture as a whole, what possible challenges or reaffirmations the league is making to that hierarchy, and how it has the potential effect of reinforcing patriarchy

within the larger culture or achieving equality, not only for athletes, but the whole society. A rhetorical analysis that examines these underlying motivations is critical to understanding the message that the WNBA sends to the public and the potential impact it has on society.

### The WNBA's Significance to Culture

The WNBA is a particular area where hegemony, fetishes, sexualisation, and liberation are competing messages processed by the audience that watches the messages. The WNBA is a burgeoning organization that has been called the torchbearer for women's athletics and is a site where young athletes turn for their role models. The WNBA has the largest advertising base of any female athletics program and the backing of a male professional organization situated within the sports hegemony. The NBA's influence as parent organization and the breadth of coverage and attention the WNBA has created dictate the need for an analysis of their main marketing strategy, league-sponsored commercials. These commercials set the tone for the organization's image and values, which are communicated to and potentially adopted by the public. While analysis of these commercials has not yet been the subject of research, other analyses of WNBA coverage have shown competing visual and discursive messages of freedom, power, and femininity. How these contradictory messages are resolved is crucial to understanding whether the WNBA is able to challenge the masculine hegemony or just reinforces it through the veil of freedom and liberation as in the case of the women's soccer team (Shugart, 2003).

Rhetorical studies thus far have not analyzed how competing visual and discursive messages regarding female athletes interact and what impact these messages have on American culture. While the studies of the progress or lack thereof made by female

athletes within the sports hierarchy are plentiful, they fail to explain the positioning of the audience, how messages become resolved, and how particular choices by the sports media may affect the culture itself. Due to the growing complexity of the messages that the sports media has created, a deeper analysis than content analysis is needed to be aware of how these messages are interacting with the American culture and the sporting culture around the world. As Nick Trujillo (1991) argues at the end of his analysis of Nolan Ryan and masculinity:

[W]e have witnessed the demise of the homogeneous mass audience in recent decades and the rise of a fragmented audience composed of heterogeneous groups with diverse values and media consumption habits. To the extent that hegemonic masculinity in sport and in other arenas of society continues to be contested by various groups, and to the extent that these various groups continue to constitute fragmented audiences, media critics should study the attempts made in reporting, broadcasting, and advertising to maintain hegemony. (p. 303)

The explosion of female athletes and a professional women's basketball league threatens the male hegemony of sports; how the hegemonic system responds will dictate whether gains for female athletes are made and the culture of sports changes. The first step is understanding how the largest threat to traditional hierarchy, the WNBA, constructs its message and influences the culture. This thesis examines WNBA discourse critically in order to realize the impact of the league on the sports hegemony and society. The implications include, but are not limited to the possible challenges to the hegemony to break down binary gender relations or the hegemony's response of appropriating the female athlete in an attempt to further subvert challenges to the sports hegemony.

### Framework for Analysis

The emergence of the professional female athlete signals the possibility for a radical change in sports by undermining an inherently patriarchal institution which privileges competition and domination over an opponent as its highest values (Bennett, Whitaker, Smith, & Sablove, 1987). While increased participation and a new professional league may show change within the sports world, the question is how the institution portrays these women, what is framed as gains for women, and whether institutional values are projected onto the new league. With these questions in mind, this thesis uses a feminist framework for analysis. Feminist theory will be the overarching perspective for the visual and discursive methodologies that will be applied to the texts analyzed in this thesis. The way that the WNBA frames its athletes within its commercials is critical to the way that women's roles within the public and private sphere are communicated and enacted by the culture (Dow, 1996). The league's framing of female athletes has the possibility of being radical in changing notions of femininity and masculinity or of being complacent with society's fear of a female who does not fulfill traditional roles.

While there are many competing and contradictory notions of what feminism is or what a feminist is, this study will define a feminist perspective as one that strives toward the elimination of gender dualisms and comparisons in favor of a non-hierarchical system which acknowledges experiences across gender, racial, and class lines (Bennett, et al., 1987; Bordo, 1993). While there are arguments to be made that the feminist framework should be defined in line with liberal feminism and the encouragement of equality within the public sphere in accordance with the second wave of feminism during the 1970's and 1980's, this way of defining a feminist framework fails to acknowledge that these calls for equality within the sports hierarchy do not challenge the definition of sport, competition,

and what it means to be an athlete (Bennett, et al., 1987; Dow, 1992). The calls for equality and its frame for analysis assume that incorporation of women within the sports hierarchy will not delegitimize women's athletic qualities or reinforce masculine notions of what it means to be an athlete. Framing equality as a feminist perspective for analysis fails to question the hierarchal and patriarchal notion of sport as an institution within culture.

Within a feminist analysis that aims to scrutinize dichotomies, a visual analysis of how the commercials frame the female athletes can be understood. Construction of the female body historically has allowed for the male gaze to be dominant and emphasize male pleasure, thereby undermining female power or authority (Bordo, 1993; Cole & Hribar, 1995; Mulvey, 1975/1989). Within a feminist rhetorical analysis, use of the body can be a site of resistance or domination in the way the female is framed and the understanding of how social roles for females are created within the culture (Bordo, 1993; Mulvey, 1975/1989). Feminists argue that the body is constructed through the way that the image is created ideologically, who is doing the gazing, and how that gaze influences power within the culture. Through a feminist rhetorical analysis, an understanding within sports of how the body gets framed and communicated to members of the culture, especially in concert with the dominant ideology within the culture, is critical to knowing how female images are framed and whether domination occurs. Looking at the way that female athletes are framed within the commercials and the way athletes' bodies are portrayed is necessary to examine power and gender relations within the sports and society. Critical feminist analysis is an indispensable endeavor that allows for an understanding of how the sporting hierarchy is enacted or challenged by the WNBA and translates into enactment of gender relations within the "real world" (Dow, 1996). Otherwise, awareness of how the dominant gaze is enacted within culture is lost.

A Burkean approach to language will be used to analyze the discursive portions of the commercials. The competing messages created within the commercials necessitate a method to analyze how competition among terms is resolved and what type of values the resolution communicates to the viewers and to the culture as a whole. Burke (1950/1969) argues that dialectical terms can come into conflict within the visual and discursive realms by calling into question how particular actions and ideas are constructed. These oppositions create the antithesis of the action or idea that is created and must be resolved. The competition between terms of action or ideas encourage compromise by the ultimate portion of the vocabulary (Burke, 1950/1969). The ultimate creates a hierarchy of competing messages in sequence, which ends in a relationship between the terms that allows for the undergirding meaning to be found (Burke, 1950/1969). By using the emergent linguistic hierarchy to resolve competition and contradiction between the actions or ideas, an attitude toward the politics of the message and motivation for the message are created. An underlying understanding of the politics and motivation occurs because the organization of "one's attitude towards the struggle of politics...may suggest reasons why one kind of compromise is, in the long run, to be rated superior to another," thus proving the motivation behind the language used to enact the message (Burke, 1950/1969, p. 188). Through application of Burke's framework for positive, dialectical, and ultimate terms, the motivation and underlying ideology of the WNBA messages can be discovered.

### Summary and Preview of Chapters

This chapter introduced the sports media's influence on the construction of the sports hierarchy from which the WNBA has emerged. A review of pertinent sociological and communication literature established the framing that the sports hierarchy has created

to denigrate the female athlete as second fiddle to male athletes. The existence of the female athlete within patriarchy has allowed the male hegemony to exercise its power in sports and society. A brief contextual backdrop of the emergence of the WNBA was outlined, and further contextual background of the specific campaigns is explicated at the beginning of the separation of the four campaigns into two chapters for the purpose of the analysis. Finally, the components of the method were briefly outlined with the feminist perspective being the overarching perspective for application to the texts. The other two methods to be used in conjunction with the feminist perspective are the components of the gaze that are used to emphasize male pleasure and Burke's approach to language.

Chapter Two consists of an in-depth discussion of the feminist perspective, including the bodily gaze and Burke's linguistic theory, and how these theories will guide the analysis of the commercials. Chapter Three contextualizes and analyzes the three campaigns the WNBA created that have focused solely on basketball, "We Got Next," "Join In," and "We Got Game." Chapter Four contextualizes and analyzes the newest WNBA campaign, "This Is Who I Am." Chapter Five presents conclusions based on the previous analyses and discusses the impact of the WNBA advertisements on the sports world and culture.

## CHAPTER II

### FEMINISM, GAZING, AND LINGUISTIC HIERARCHIES AS RHETORICAL METHODS FOR ANALYSIS

Media coverage of the female athlete, when provided at all, has denigrated the female athlete and made her susceptible to extreme criticism because of her strength and athleticism. Historically, she has been given less television coverage and has served as a sexual object (Bishop, 2003; Creedon, 1994; MacKinnon, 1987; Messner, Duncan, & Cooky, 2003). When the female athlete is successful, she has to reinforce her femininity and traditional role within the home or risk being ostracized by society for fear that she is a lesbian (Bishop, 2003; Creedon, 1994; Messner, Duncan, & Cooky, 2003). These cultural conditions around the female athlete have placed cultural expectations upon how she should look and act. These expectations for the female athlete act as a larger backdrop for the WNBA's advertising campaigns and structure the choice for methods of analysis used in this thesis.

The WNBA presents a new challenge to the cultural backdrop of sports through its focus on women as professional athletes in what was once thought to be a purely masculine sport. While this challenge to the norm of sex-appropriate sports and the masculine hegemony could be defined as feminist, it also has the possibility of being framed by the media in the same ways that previous coverage of female athletes has been

framed. This framing emphasizes sexualization and returning women to their traditional roles within the home. The WNBA aims to challenge this framing of women in traditional roles through its presence in the sports landscape. Because the WNBA is located within the masculine hegemony of sports and a culture where patriarchy continues in the public and private sphere, a feminist framework for analysis will be employed in this study (Bennett, Whitaker, Smith, & Sablove, 1987; Dow, 1992; Dow, 1996; MacKinnon, 1987). This framework will act as an overarching perspective informing the application of the two other portions of the methodology. The perspective of the psychoanalytic gaze will be the method for analysis of the visual portions of the advertisements (deLauretis, 1985; Mulvey, 1975/1989; Silverman, 1983; Silverman, 1988). The method of psychoanalysis questions who is doing the gazing, who is being gazed at, and the way camera shots and angles of the body signify particular values for the audience. Burke's (1950/1969) notion of linguistic hierarchies will be used to analyze the verbal elements of the advertisements. The analysis of linguistic hierarchies focuses upon how contradictory or incompatible terms are resolved to allow for a hierarchal term or value to emerge that drives understanding of the text and reveals motivation. The WNBA advertisements under analysis are complex texts with multiple layers of meaning. In some of the advertisements the visual and discursive elements are contentious or incompatible with one another. This choice of incongruity communicates a particular message to the audience about how the league's values and position within or against the sports hegemony are represented.

In this chapter, the framework for a feminist rhetorical critic will be established along with its usefulness in understanding the advertisements. A discussion of the dominant gaze and its application will follow with an explanation of how a feminist critic would look at the visual elements of the advertisements. An explanation of camera angles

and shots will be discussed within the theory of the dominant gaze. An explanation of the Burkean linguistic hierarchy and its application will come at the end of the chapter.

### The WNBA and a Feminist Framework for Analysis

There are a multitude of interpretations and criticisms of feminism and what it means to be a feminist. For the purpose of this thesis the feminist framework will be rooted within the notion that there should be an elimination of gender dualisms and comparisons in favor of a non-hierarchal system that acknowledges experiences across lines of gender, race, and class (Bennett, et al., 1987; Bordo, 1993; MacKinnon, 1987). Within sports the construction of the female athlete has been very rigid with a continual emphasis upon female athletes retaining their femininity. In the sporting hierarchy being feminine means being weak and limited in abilities to play particular sports (Creedon, 1994; MacKinnon, 1987). A feminist perspective regarding sports would aim to reform the hierarchy of winning, domination, and the emphasis on the battle of the sport as ultimate values and terms. The values of sport would change to encourage an understanding and appreciation of each athlete's experiences within sport without creating hierarchal values that have to be achieved to be recognized as an athlete. Winning would still be included, but would not be central to the legitimacy of an athlete.

Instead, the emphasis on valuing all experiences of athletes would eliminate distinctions between male and female athletes. The learning of skills, teamwork, and playing of the game would be valued within this new framework (Bennett, et al., 1987; MacKinnon, 1987). A hierarchy of skills may still be present, but would not exist as a form of domination or exclusion of others as in the current masculine system. By challenging the masculine focused values of sport, the feminist perspective undermines the

power of patriarchy in sports. By changing the values of the sports hegemony through a non-hierarchical system, “athletics can give us [women] a sense of an actuality of our bodies as our own rather than primarily as an instrument to communicate sexual availability,” further challenging patriarchy within society (MacKinnon, 1987, p. 122). For a rhetorical critic, this feminist perspective would work to identify language and representations of athletes that focus on dualisms and that reinforce the hierarchical values of the sports hegemony. Rhetorical examination within this perspective aims to understand a framing which allows for transcendence from hierarchical values toward a gender-neutral view of sports by examining the ways athletes, their bodies, their skills, and their sports are presented within the media. Through the rhetorical critic's focus on uncovering hierarchical and gender neutral constructions, an understanding is created of how the sports hegemony and discourse around the female athlete portray her as empowering or appropriate her within the hegemony.

When examining the WNBA through a feminist perspective there are arguments that the analysis should be based on values of equality instead of on the elimination of dualisms, but this focus would fail to explain how a challenge to the dominant ideology of sport occurs because it assumes that the ideology of sport is fair and unbiased regarding the athlete (Bennett, et al., 1987; Dow, 1992; MacKinnon, 1987). Creating a feminist perspective based on equality is particularly problematic because there is an assumption that a change has already occurred within the sports hegemony's mindset toward female athletes to allow equality to be enacted (Bennett, et al., 1987). A framework of “reform toward 'equality' merely permits an impression of equality and serves to further the oppression of women” by not examining how the hierarchy enacts values, norms, and

expectations upon female athletes that are based within a masculine framework and aim to denigrate female athletes (Bennett, et al., 1987, p. 370).

Instead, framing inquiry around the elimination of dualisms challenges the appropriation of feminism within a culture of postfeminism and postfeminism's emphasis on how the feminist is punished for her lifestyle choice and ability to be competitive in the public sphere (Dow, 1992; Dow, 1996). Postfeminism assumes that females have succeeded within the public sphere and that this triumph is an indicator that patriarchal norms have been eliminated. Instead of being a challenge to patriarchy, postfeminism acts to discard sexual politics in an attempt to put women's lessons for liberation on display and further undermine the power of feminism through the reinforcement of domestic roles for women (Dow, 1996). These actions seek to reverse or at the very least nullify the success of second-wave feminism regarding women in the workplace and challenges to gender norms (Dow, 1996). Some have argued that a third-wave of feminism has emerged within culture that rejects second wave feminism and defines itself loosely (Shugart, Waggoner, & O'Brien Hallstein, 2001). Shugart, Waggoner, and O'Brien Hallstein (2001) argue, that "young feminists claim that third-wave feminism features a collaboration of difference in terms of identity construction, in which signifiers such as race and binary gender are rejected in favor of ambiguity and multiple personalities" (p. 195). The aim of third-wave feminists is to embrace sexual desire as liberating and powerful because it changes its position within a patriarchal and heterosexual culture (Shugart, Waggoner, & O'Brien Hallstein, 2001). Examples of third-wave feminism in the media have been Kate Moss and Ally McBeal. In her advertisements Kate Moss blurs the line between masculinity and femininity by assuming an androgenous images, but privileges male characteristics within her presentation of herself (Shugart, Waggoner, & O'Brien Hallstein,

2001). Ally McBeal represents third-wave feminism by being a strong figure in the public domain, but cannot exist without the companionship of a man. Her exercising of power, though, is enacted through her sexuality and ability to attract men (Shugart, Waggoner, & O'Brien Hallstein, 2001). Each form of feminism has been represented in particular ways by the media to depoliticize its power through appropriation (Dow, 1996; Shugart, Waggoner, & O'Brien Hallstein, 2001).

The media has appropriated elements of feminism in recognizable ways to induce identification or critique of feminism in accordance with reinforcing traditional gender norms (Dow, 1996; Shugart, Waggoner, & O'Brien Hallstein, 2001). While appropriation can be used by oppressed groups to claim dominant strategies of the dominant group's ideology in an attempt to criticize the dominant groups existence, appropriation is most often used by the dominant group as a way of reinforcing oppression to make their actions seem natural and justified (Shugart, 1997). The media appropriates oppositional strategies against domination through incorporation, thus undermining the power of the challenge.

Appropriation of feminist values into the patriarchal hegemony occurs through juxtaposition, deflection, and an emphasis on femininity (Dow, 1992; Dow, 1996; Shugart, Waggoner, & O'Brien Hallstein, 2001). Appropriation functions to neutralize public backlash against a strong female character or role model, but in the process creates paradoxes of how females should act or reinforces notions of traditional femininity. By emphasizing femininity, challenges to the patriarchal hierarchy are neutralized and patriarchy continues (Shugart, Waggoner, & O'Brien Hallstein, 2001). Through appropriation, feminism becomes commodified and functions hegemonically to further oppression (Shugart, Waggoner, & O'Brien Hallstein, 2001).

An example of appropriation through juxtaposition is offered by Dow (1992; 1996) in her analysis of the lead character Murphy from the television show *Murphy Brown*. Murphy is a brassy, driven, career newswoman who faces comedic criticism for her inability to enact traditional feminine qualities. Through her “enactment of patriarchal qualities” Murphy gains professional success, but the show's comedic effect and focus are on how her success “conflicts with her expectations for her as a woman” (Dow, 1992, p. 147). The juxtaposition of her success as a professional and perceived failure in her private life is created by “another female character who is successfully feminine” (Dow, 1992, p. 147). The feminine female character, Corky, is less successful within her public life than Murphy. Examples of the juxtaposition between the two characters are that Murphy is competitive, aggressive in tone and physicality, and successful because she has acceded to patriarchal demands in the workplace, while Corky is cooperative, looks feminine in dress, and is nicer than Murphy (Dow, 1992; Dow, 1996). Through her competitiveness against Corky and other female newswomen, Murphy faces hardships within her personal life which are articulated as a form of punishment for her public choices in the workplace in the text. The juxtaposition of Murphy and Corky exemplifies the challenges that women who take a more assertive role within the workplace and society face. The juxtaposition also implicitly argues “that, for women, the qualities the public world requires are radically different from those necessary for success in the private world of relationships” (Dow, 1996, p. 145). The embarrassment and humor associated with Murphy's character communicates difference between public and private strategies, making success in both spheres mutually exclusive.

Placing a forced choice upon women for success in one sphere, thus making a failure in the private sphere the fault of women, appropriates feminism's threat to the

patriarchy. Appropriation of feminism's narrative occurs through the enactment of masculine qualities, thereby displaying that barriers for women have been erased while putting the demand for incorporation of women into the public sphere squarely on women (Dow, 1992). Feminism's threat is quelled through a textual focus on women's existence within the public sphere, the hardships that women face in their private lives and the juxtaposition of feminism versus femininity. The focus establishes women's placement in the feminine sphere and the problems women face as their own therefore preventing a questioning of the public sphere as a patriarchal institution. The use of juxtaposition functions to undermine the challenge posed by the oppressed group. The result of juxtaposition is an appropriation which "of course, is hegemonic; what appears to be feminist...representations are, in fact, repackaged and commodified versions of third-wave sensibilities that ultimately serve to reinforce a dominant patriarchal discourse" (Shugart, Hallstein, & O'Brien Hallstein, 2001, p. 207). Through appropriation the media is able to undermine progressive ideals of feminism and continue a dominant ideology (Dow, 1990).

The feminist perspective constructed for this analysis aims to strip away popular culture's influence over gender norms and the female athlete's body. This exposure allows the values of feminism to guide an analysis which aims to understand how the media repackages feminist representations within culture so as to redefine feminism in a non-threatening way for society and undermine feminism's power to challenge the notions of gender and sport. Being a feminist rhetorical critic of the media entails using the values and ideals of feminism as a perspective for analyzing the meaning of words and visual representations in conjunction with their cultural impact on gender roles. This means discovering representative feminist discourse within the text or examining how feminist ideology is appropriated in particular ways to protect the dominant ideology. As Dow

(1992) argues, “feminist rhetorical criticism of television asks what view of symbolic reality about women is encouraged by a television text and what function that view of reality might serve” (p. 144). A feminist rhetorical perspective can create an understanding of how the patriarchy aims to appropriate feminism in an attempt to continue the dominant, patriarchal framework. Using feminism as a filter for analysis of the dominant gaze and linguistic hierarchies in a text produces an understanding of the way patriarchy functions hegemonically and challenges the representations of women and gender norms within society.

The media's encompassing power lies in its use of visual and discursive elements to create a view of reality for the viewer that is aligned with the producers of the message. As media messages become more complex an examination of the way the visual and discursive elements interact to create advertisers' view of reality is key to understanding gender relations within culture. Feminism's attention to gender relations is integral to preventing appropriation of feminist values by the sports hegemony. Feminist questions regarding how the female body is displayed, viewed, and appropriated within the mass media are important challenges to the dominant view of the female body as an object to view and subjugate. Feminism's keen eye and questioning about the representation of the female body is a necessary interrogation to break down a dominant view that continues patriarchy within culture. The visual analysis of advertising is not enough, necessitating an examination of the language forwarded by advertisers as requisite to an understanding of motivation and possible appropriation of feminist messages. For feminism, the language and possible juxtapositions that are characteristic of appropriation signify success or failure in challenging traditional gender norms. The WNBA's position of power in relation to defining the female body, gender relations, and the female athlete necessitates a feminist

perspective toward the way the advertisements visually and discursively influence future constructions of the female within culture.

### Gazing at the Female Body

The popular culture representation of the female body is an integral concern of feminism and of the sporting hierarchy. Media constructions of the female body have a profound impact on gender roles and norms for the appearance of women (Bordo, 1993). How the female is portrayed and displayed within commercial advertisements affects athletic and social gender roles. Viewing the female athlete as powerful or as a sexual object has great implications for her ability to challenge the sports hierarchy. The framing of the female athlete as powerful or sexual is constructed through how the desire of the viewer is represented in relation to the female athlete. The creation of desire constructs gender norms and creates what Goldman, Heath, and Smith (1991) call “commodity narratives” (p. 333). Through advertising “commodity narratives have addressed subjects about desire—most often about the desire for self-identity, whether it is the desire to be a good mom or the desire for flawless golden hair or the desire for respect” (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991, p. 334). These commodity narratives act to create desires for male and female viewers in an attempt to sell a product, but they also sell a social ideology. Advertisers create commodity narratives through the fetishizing of the female body for each woman's individual pleasure, thus offering an illusory form of empowerment (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991). Fetishizing functions to sexualize the female form and allow for the masculine view to retain power over the female as a form of criticism and expectation for her subordinate position within the relationship and culture (Silverman, 1988). The commodity narratives' use of fetishizing furthers the oppression of women by

creating beauty ideals for each woman to strive toward. This construction of ideals reframes the male gaze to allow the rhetoric of empowerment through beauty to reinforce traditional gender norms. The objective of this new standard of beauty is not to create empowerment for women, but to sell a product that has been historically linked to the subjugation of women to the male gaze (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991). The camera creates the male gaze's power of desire by communicating sexual availability to the viewer. The type of camera shots and the emphasis they put on the body creates the subject position for the viewer. The female body becomes indexed as sexual within advertisement and culture, which creates the power dynamic that allows for the appropriation and subjugation of women and their bodies.

The male gaze makes females into objects to be looked upon in a sexual manner, thus fulfilling male desires and undermining female power to challenge the masculine hegemony (Mulvey, 1975/1989). Laura Mulvey (1975/1989) argues that “Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent images of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning” (p. 15). The female stands as something to be leered at by the male viewer, thus undermining her threat to his position within society and allowing for the continuation of patriarchy. The ability to gaze reinforces male superiority and quells the threat that females present to the masculine hierarchy (Mulvey, 1975/1989). Mulvey (1975/1989) argues that this gaze is created to code the female erotically and encourage male power over the female:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy

onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (author's emphasis, p. 19)

Through the use of the male gaze the female is made to be passive and waiting for male approval, furthering male power over the female. This furtherance of male power acts to reinforce patriarchal norms and create gendered expectations for appearance and actions in communicating sexuality to the male viewer. The male view is not limited to only male audience members, however, is a point of view created for all viewers to enact.

In visual media, the camera creates the power dynamics related to the gaze. With a concentration on the body as a signifier of desire the dominant male subject position is constructed (de Lauretis, 1984; Mulvey, 1975/1989). The use of signifiers establishes a male point of view and subject position. The use of varying shots creates a desire and centers it on the woman. These shots establish that the woman is to be desired by men and admired by women. Teresa de Lauretis (1984) argues that the basis for the male subject position of viewership is historically created through all genres of the narrative:

Again and again narrative film has been exposed as the production of a drama of vision, a memory spectacle, an image of woman as beauty—desired and untouchable, desired *as* remembered. And the operations of the apparatus deployed in that production—economy of repetition, rhymes, relay of looks, sound-image matches—aim toward the achieved coherence of a “narrative space” which holds, binds, entertains the spectator at the apex of the representational triangle as the subject of vision. (author's emphasis, p. 27)

The “narrative space” does not only pertain to the film, but also the advertising world through its creation of a condensed narrative that aims to communicate a commercial and cultural message.

The male is central in culture and acts to define the way that the female body is seen by making the female a spectacle to be viewed as an object. Heywood and Dworkin's (2003) study of young children's reaction to female athletes' bodies in photos revealed that the male heterosexual position is a driving force in interpreting the female form, even for the female participants' reactions. In the instance of the female respondents within the study, there was evidence that the media creates heterosexual desires to frame how females respond to the attractiveness of the athletes. Heywood and Dworkin (2003) comment:

Boys of all ages seemed to “do heterosexuality” in the same way that researchers highlight the performative elements of “doing gender,” when yelling “She's hot!!” “I love you,” “Rarr!” or asking to “pleeeeeeease see the picture again.” Numerous girls stated that Lee [a female athlete within the study] was a “sexy mama!” or made comments that linked attractiveness to a perceived form of power...Girls, too, openly “did heterosexuality” and yet highlighted its constructedness through attempts to ensure their peers that they were not gazing at the pictures with desire. This was accomplished through reads such as “if I were a man, I would find her very attractive” or “I would want to go out with her if I was a guy.” Through claiming the subject position of a heterosexual man, girls and women safely uttered confirmations of a heterosexuality at the same time that such proclamations can be viewed as offering paradoxical moments of fissure. (p. 139-141).

The responses by the female participants in this study of reactions to photos of female athletes show that the male perspective of interpretation and desire is dominant when reading the female body, regardless of sex of the viewer. This finding is especially true in Heywood and Dworkin's study because the respondents were not asked about the athletes' sex appeal, but instead the children spontaneously made comments on sexuality and females commented with the caveat that placed their perspective within a male dominated viewpoint. The female athlete, as empowering as she may be to young girls, is still seen through a male gaze consequently affecting the message her image communicates within the narrative of advertising.

The female body has become an icon of sexuality and desire for the viewing public. The media has had a tremendous influence on the creation of women as an image and icon of sexuality. Sexuality as an appeal and mindset has become pervasive throughout culture and is an inherent characteristic of how the female body is viewed within culture. As de Lauretis (1984) argues, recognizing the function of the iconic female image is critical when examining gender differences:

The representation of woman as image (spectacle, object to be looked at, vision of beauty—and the concurrent representation of the female body as the *locus* of sexuality, site of visual pleasure, or lure of the gaze) is so pervasive in our culture, well before and beyond the institution of cinema, that it necessarily constitutes a starting point for any understanding of sexual difference and its ideological effects in the construction of social subjects, its presence in all forms of subjectivity.

(author's emphasis, p. 37-38)

Examining the gaze that is created through advertising is integral to an understanding of the role that the female athlete is allowed in the sports hierarchy, as well as a crucial area

of inquiry by feminist critics. The gaze created in the commercial media undermines feminist critics' fight against gender binaries and is a potential site for the appropriation of feminism's liberating messages into messages of sexuality. Appropriation of the female body through the masculine gaze is a direct blow to the feminist value of countering sexist oppression. The filming and editing of the female body creates the gaze and communicates particular messages for the viewer. The crucial inquiry is whether the shot selection, music, and editing furthers the heterosexual desire of the dominant male gaze.

The montage of an advertisement creates and controls the narrative of the commercial. Each shot, lighting technique, and edit creates a world that the viewer is enticed to follow and believe in. All of these ultimately act to create a subject to be gazed upon and have the effect of furthering patriarchy (Silverman, 1983; Silverman, 1988). The creation of a montage, which is the strategy of almost all advertisements, acts to break reality and construct an imaginary reality for the viewer to identify with (Silverman, 1988). Reality becomes severed further through the use of multiple cuts and editing that encourages fetishism.

The camera, lighting, and editing choices made by the production team and editor become further magnified within a thirty-second advertisement. These choices are magnified due to their rapidity and the short time-frame within which the message must be forwarded and which disallows reality to be present. Reality is even more absent because advertisements usually offer a spectacle or an ideal that seems extremely separated from the lives of the viewers watching the commercials. Due to the abbreviated nature of commercials the choices of shots, camera angles, and editing play a large part in conveying the narrative and are indicative of the role of the characters within the narrative.

The camera angles or shot selection act as the eyes of the viewer and create a signifier of the central icon the gaze centers upon (Silverman, 1983). The icon acts as a reflection or signifier of reality and becomes central in portraying the values or message of the narrative to the viewers (Silverman, 1983). This is because shot selection directs the audience's attention to particular things that are portrayed as important within the viewpoint and message of the narrative (Silverman, 1983). When the female looks directly into the camera the shot is not used to signify female control or power over the shot because it is usually preceded by a shot concentrating on a body part or the female has a pouty look which has been found to be indexed as sexual (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003). The view is also controlled by the use of lighting that accentuates and deemphasizes particular characteristics to create an intended impression of the image (Silverman, 1983). A softer focus created by lighting and lens choice may be used to accentuate the beauty and sexuality of the female by directing the viewer's attention toward erotic and sexual meanings, rather than harsh lighting of fluorescents that aims to make the image seem distorted, thus conveying a message of evil or thievery (Mulvey, 1975/1989; Rose, 2001).

The editing is crucial to the direction and message of the narrative. Kaja Silverman (1983) argues that the editing creates the eyes through which to view the narrative and is instrumental in giving the image or icon meaning:

Editing gives rise to signifiers which are again emphatically indexical—cross-cutting from one event to another directs and coerces the viewer's attention, as do the fade-in, fade-out, and dissolve. When the code of editing is keyed to the gaze of certain characters within the narrative of the film it becomes iconic as well, depicting what is seen by a particular set of eyes. (p. 23)

The point of view from which to receive the message is constructed through the shots, lighting, and editing, thus creating the gaze by which images are viewed. Through the gaze and shot selection, the female body becomes a key signifier of how the culture values women (Bordo, 1993).

The media constructs the female body to be viewed as a sexual object, making an examination of the media's framing integral to understanding the culture's perspective of the female's role in society and the power exercised over her (Bordo, 1993; Foucault, 1980). The dominant view of the female body as a sexual object delegitimizes women's roles within the culture and denigrates them to a secondary status in society. Within sports, this gaze historically has been used to construct women as more feminine and allow the dominant reading further power over the female body. The placement of the viewer reading the body becomes crucial because the body can be a site of resistance or control (Bordo, 1993; Foucault, 1980). While particular framings of the body as muscular, powerful, and controlled by the female may seem empowering, one must be cautious about reaching this conclusion because the body is an area where power dynamics exert control and create boundaries which create gender norms (Bordo, 1993; Foucault, 1980).

Through the shaping of the body there is also a shaping of power that is created through the gaze (Foucault, 1980). The control of the body symbolizes control over the self, but the fetishizing of the body prevents the liberation of the female (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991). Instead, a commodity narrative seizes control by creating expectations for how the female form should look and forms the male viewing pleasure through the editing process. Bordo (1993) argues that Foucault's notion of power explains how culture “produces and normalizes bodies to serve prevailing relations of dominance and subordination” (p. 26). Power is not a possession exercised by a group or individual, but the forces that exert

power are decided by historical constructions that create dominance (Bordo, 1993; Foucault, 1980).

Cultural practices surrounding the body are reinforced through the commodity narratives that fetishize and undermine feminist political power (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991). This fetishizing of feminism occurs by reducing feminism “to the status of a mere signifier or signified, so that it may be re-encoded by an advertiser as a sequence of visual cliches and reified signifiers” (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991). The signifiers of femininity emphasize “the line and curve of the female body along with a code of poses, gestures, body cants and gazes...To signify feminism, on the other hand, advertisers assemble signs which connote independence, participation in the work force, individual freedom, and self-control” (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991). Through commodity narratives feminism is articulated as a way to gain the right man, thus reinforcing feminine ideals and masculine superiority. The construction of the body within the social realm, and in advertisements in particular, has to be viewed as a part of the larger social discourse about the female body; the necessity to shape it within male definitions of what it should look like only acts to continue social control (Bordo, 1993). The display and view of the body becomes critical to an understanding of how the masculine gaze is constructed and complements or is juxtaposed against discourse about female athletes. Language gives meaning to the visual and therefore is a necessary component of understanding the narrative and motivation of the advertisement.

### Burkean Linguistic Hierarchies

The rhetoric surrounding and describing feminism has been decisive in its success and downfall within culture. Various rhetorical characterizations of feminism determine

whether there is a backlash against it or acceptance of it. Discourse addressing the feminist perspective influences whether this perspective is incorporated into society. How the female athlete has been depicted linguistically reveals her position and power within sporting hierarchy historically and in the current day. The reason that language is integral to the female athlete is because, as Kenneth Burke argues, rhetoric functions to name situations by representing a strategy of problem-solving within a situation (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1991). The female athlete and WNBA players, in particular, represent a challenge to the sports hierarchy that must be countered or forwarded through their depictions linguistically. The linguistic framing of the female athlete as powerful and revolutionary allows for the challenging of the sports hierarchy, while denigrating or neutral language acts to appropriate the female athlete into the patriarchal sports hegemony. These linguistic framings by the WNBA determine whether female athletes represent or prevent a feminist challenge to the sports hegemony. Linguistic framings are persuasive because the language used by the WNBA or any actor creates an orientation process for the audience. The orientation process works to create an understanding of and identification with a given situation on the part of the audience through the terms used to describe the situation (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1991). Within the patriarchal sports hegemony the framing of the female athlete dictates her ability to be revolutionary or appropriated within the system of sports. The framing of the WNBA's emergence and presence creates terms that are hierarchal and produce a particular worldview for the audience to adapt or rely upon. Understanding language surrounding the female athlete in today's sports world becomes critical in scrutinizing the power that she has in relation to the sporting hierarchy.

The linguistic choices made by a speaker or text reveal the rhetor's motivation (Burke, 1950/1969). Burke argues that the multiple images created through rhetorical

terms function to perform in similar ways and that the shifts in representation through language build the development of motive. While there may be multiple possibilities for representation through language, a dominant or culturally-determined ordering of the terms occurs to create a particular end for motivation (Burke, 1950/1969). This culturally-determined ordering creates a hierarchy of terms which creates a meaning and understanding for the audience (Burke, 1950/1969). The creation of a hierarchy of terms and language communicates values and ideals for the audience to act upon (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1991). The hierarchy of terms is based within the context surrounding the production of the text and reflects the values of the society (Burke, 1950/1969; Knox, 1957).

While there may be differences among audience members regarding the message, the use of terministic screens hides differences and furthers the terms of the hierarchy (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1991). For example, within the Dust Bowl era of the 1930's a debate raged within Congress and the farming community over conservation and land use, but the term that acted as the overarching framework for the debate was capitalism, which reflected the culture surrounding the reasons to farm and encompassed the goal of profits that farmers coveted (Peterson, 1986). Capitalism as a term was emblematic of the entire Depression era and its culture of wanting to make profits to end the hardship of a generation of people. Therefore, the hierarchy is representative of the culture and all the people that operate within it. Terministic screens employ a strategy of deflection, reflection, and selection to create a reality that is consistent with the hierarchy, its values, and the motivation behind its messages (Burke, 1950/1969). These concepts provide a rhetorical method for inquiry and application. Additionally, Kenneth Burke's discussion of positive, dialectical, and ultimate terms functions to analyze rhetoric and trace how a

hierarchy becomes created, how tensions are resolved within a text, and can reveal the rhetor's motivation.

To explain how a hierarchy of terms is created, Burke (1950/1969) identifies three types of terms: positive, dialectical, and ultimate. Positive terms act to name experiences and are identifiable to the audience insofar as they name “a visible and tangible thing which can be located in time and place” (Burke, 1950/1969, p. 183). Positive terms function to explain or identify such things as “size, shape, texture, [and] color” (Burke, 1950/1969, p. 183). Positive terms are reduced to motion and perception as a way to explain experiences, but do not initiate action (Burke, 1950/1969). Dialectical terms “refer to *ideas* rather than to *things*...[and] are more concerned with *action* and *attitude* than with perception” (author's emphasis, Burke, 1950/1969, p. 185). Dialectical terms construct and encourage oppositions to occur to show contradictions within a text (Appel, 1993; Burke, 1950/1969). Through the oppositions created by dialectical terms, a compromise may be reached but the values that the terms represent compete to gain the upper hand, while the ultimate terms create a hierarchy of the competitions that are arranged developmentally in an attempt to establish a unifying principle (Burke, 1950/1969). The transformative process of the hierarchy gives the terms new meaning and creates motivation for action on the part of the audience to adopt particular values and beliefs. The process is interconnected and creates transcendence of motivation:

In an ultimate dialectic, the terms so lead into one another that the completion of each other leads to the next. Thus, a body of positive terms must be brought to a head in a titular term which represents the principle or idea behind the positive terminology as a whole. This summarizing term is in a different order of vocabulary. And if such titles, having been brought into dialectical commerce with

one another, are given an order among themselves, there must be a principle of principles involved in such a design—and the step from principles to a principle of principles is likewise both the fulfillment of the previous order and the transcending of it. (Burke, 1950/1969, p. 189)

The narrative of the text creates the leading of one term into another; this narrative becomes a blueprint by which to examine the terms. The interconnectedness explains the establishment of the hierarchy and allows the critic to map it out.

The map or hierarchy created by the text drives the critic to find the development of the ultimate term(s). Burke (1950/1969) argues that “Once you have placed your terms in a developmental series, you have an arrangement whereby each can be said to participate, within the limitations of its nature, in the ultimate perfection ('finishedness') of the series. Each stage, at its appropriate 'moment,' represents the movement, the ultimate direction or principle, of the entire series” (p. 189-190). The interrelationship between the terms is created within narrative structure and is identified as the development of motivational clusters (Burke, 1950/1969). Within the hierarchal construction of investigating the ultimate terms, each side of oppositional values or ideals of the dialectic is represented and negotiated within the creation of the unifying principle of the ultimate terms (Burke, 1950/1969). The interrelationships between the positive and dialectical terms create a whole vocabulary that allows for the development of ultimate terms; this vocabulary in turn is based in the social atmosphere within which text is situated. This means that the social conditions and social hierarchies are represented and reflected within the linguistic hierarchy in some form, even if they are not dominant. This is attributed to the fact that “the hierarchic ordering of the subsocial realms could be considered as an 'ideological reflex' or extension of the persuasive principle experienced in the social realm”

(Burke, 1950/1969, p. 191). Thus, the unifying principle, which is the ultimate term(s), is based on societal values and is an overarching theme that is present within the rhetorical text. The societal values present within culture generates attitudes and structures that create hierarchies and solve its problems:

Critically on our toes, we look out for basic attitudes (sentiments or forms) which might reveal such hierarchic awareness as is implicit in silence, guilt, mystery, privacy, power. Such moods, and the imagery symbolizing such moods, indicate the consciousness of order, of superiority and inferiority, of invidious stratification and placement. Natural to such order are various tensions, and if we watch a literary structure closely we soon detect the strategies and policies (gestures, roles, stances, attitudes) which work out the hierarchic problems. (Knox, 1957, p. 21)

The hierarchy of terms functions to negate, compromise, and fulfill particular ideals of the social hierarchy and its conditions, while reforming itself to create a new ideal to be followed. The hierarchy allows redefining and renaming of experiences through the use of terministic screens which act to appeal to and direct attention to the reality that fits within the audience members' reality (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1991).

Through experiences and knowledge audience members create different perceptions of reality, thus dictating the types of observations and judgments that they make (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1991). Burke's dramatisitic view of language describes how humans create symbolic action in his definition of terministic screens: "even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality" (author's emphasis, Burke, 1966, p. 45). Terministic screens act to direct attention in a particular direction so that even the same terms can ultimately have different meanings

based upon the context and the way that they are presented (Burke, 1966). The terms used within the text define the worldview that is presented to the audience.

Terministic screens can enable competing visions or vantage points of the truth through the selection, reflection and deflection of reality. For example, in their comparison of *The Color Purple* between its enactment as a book and a movie, McMullen and Solomon (1994) argue that the film version acts to select and reflect portions of Alice Walker's novel, while also deflecting attention from some themes. Within the book the narrative is centered around the main character Celie's story of empowerment in the face of sexism and racism, while the film centers on Celie's overcoming of personal and economic hardship without questioning the social order of the time, which was critical to the novel. McMullen and Solomon (1994) argue that this is characteristic of a melodrama because it highlights the individual within the social order. The juxtaposition of the opening of the book and film are perfect examples of the deflection element of terministic screens. The book opens with a description of Celie's father raping her and created a picture of hopelessness, while the film has "a lighter, almost buoyant opening" of Celie in a field of flowers and her pregnancy showing; not until the following scenes are Celie's rape by her father hinted at (p. 164). The contrasting openings of the book and film allow the film to deflect attention away from Celie's hopelessness. Elements of the film are selected and others are deflected in an attempt to carry out a particular theme. The selection and deflection within the film means "[t]he viewer can avoid dealing with the difficult questions of oppression and subjugation because Celie 'wins' in the end" (McMullen & Solomon, 1994, p. 170). The employment of terministic screens changes the meaning of Celie's story and its cultural impact by appropriating her story within the hegemonic discourse. Through terministic screens there is a possibility that an adaptation occurs

which selects a reality that reinforces or challenges the social hierarchy. In the instance of the WNBA, terministic screens may deflect attention away from inequality, skill difference, or select a reality where the women's league functions comfortably within the sports hierarchy. The discourse and terms of the text become integral to creating a perception and motive for the audience that further reinforces the hierarchy of terms and makes it acceptable.

The application of hierarchy of terms and terministic screens highlights the competing and potentially incongruous messages in an attempt to create an understanding of the motivation and meaning behind the discursive messages of the text. The positive, dialectical, and ultimate terms create a hierarchy for language where terms become transformed and gain meaning within the context of their placement in the rhetorical text. The transformation functions as motive for the rhetor and as motivation for action on the part of the audience. Burke's concept of terministic screens explains how terms are transformed and assists in understanding how hierarchies are created.

### Summary of the Framework for Analysis

This chapter explains the framework that will be used to analyze the WNBA's four advertising campaigns. Feminism serves as the overarching perspective, with the aim of promoting a non-hierarchical representation of gender relations, especially within sport. The representation of the female athlete is highlighted and explored through the perspective of the feminist critic. Because the WNBA has a large social impact on gender relations, feminism is critical to understanding both how the masculine hegemony is able to further patriarchy and the potential for the female athlete to challenge the hegemony. Feminism will be the main perspective for analysis and the application of the concepts of the

dominant gaze and linguistic hierarchies to the visual and verbal elements of the advertisements.

The elements of these methods are not mutually exclusive and will be used in conjunction to analyze the WNBA's advertisements. The visual and discursive elements of the advertisements together function to create the values and perspective of the WNBA and its viewers. Through the use of the dominant gaze and power relations, how the female player, female viewer, and male viewers are situated can be analyzed, and these methods can explain how the viewing of the body is empowering or disempowering for females. The Burkean linguistic system examines the competing verbal messages within the advertisements and helps a critic resolve them through the discovery of a hierarchy of terms. These terms create motivation for the audience and explain the motivation of the rhetor. Both perspectives will be applied to each WNBA campaign. Chapter Three will analyze the "We Got Next," "Join In," and "We Got Game" campaigns individually with the application of each method.

For example, the visual gaze in the "We Got Next" campaign consists of looking at the shot selection, shot angles, lighting, and ordering of the montage in the advertisements to find the placement of the viewer in respect to the gaze and how this constructs the female athlete, while also placing the advertisements in a developmental series to find positive, dialectical, and ultimate terms. Within the analysis of shot selection, angles, and ordering of the montage, an explanation of them comes from the context of the entirety of the advertisement. If there is a straight-on shot of the athlete that shows her athleticism, skill, and sporting prowess that is then followed by a shot of that player or any other player on a beach in a seductive dress, then the portrayal of the athlete as credible and professional becomes minimized. The athlete's credibility and power to challenge gender

norms is undermined by the commercial's use of seductive desirability as a critical trait of the female athlete. The ordering of the montage alters the viewer's desire and viewpoint by representing the players as athletic, but sexy. The altering of the viewer from a position of respect to sexual emphasis portrays women in more traditional roles and reinforces patriarchy. In addition to the visual analysis of the ordering and selection of shots of the athletes, examination of the language used to portray the female athlete is necessary. The slogans, comments, and music used within each commercial function to complement or contradict the visual in order to construct the WNBA's view of women's basketball. The terms that are used to describe athletes' actions within the commercial, the narratives given about the players, and the presence of the slogan or other words on the screen construct the audience's reality through identification. The linguistic choices within the advertisements compete to create the hierarchy and an ultimate term that encompasses the WNBA worldview. The ultimate term could be "revolutionary," "strength," or "femininity."

In turn, the analysis of how the terministic screens frame the verbal discourse will be explained in relation to how the terms create a reality for with which the viewer can interact. The portrayal of the athlete through visual and verbal discourse enacts the WNBA's version of reality by deflecting, reflecting, and selecting how the athlete will be created in the advertisements and in society. The selection, reflection, and deflection on the part of WNBA commercials constitutes the rhetoric surrounding the female athlete and the overarching ultimate terms, which are critical to understanding the WNBA's motivation. The interactive conclusions of the advertisements are established through how the visual compliments or denigrates the female athlete and how the hierarchy of verbal discourse portrays her and her game to the audience. The interactions of the visual and

verbal discourse create the reality that the WNBA wants the audience to accept and adopt. The meaning and significance of the ultimate term in relation to the critic's ability to explain the motivation of the text will be addressed as well.

The same analysis of the advertisements' visual and verbal discourse will proceed with the other two campaigns and will lead to conclusions on how each campaign affects the portrayal of the female athlete. In Chapter Four, the same process of analysis and conclusions will be applied to the "This Is Who I Am" campaign. Chapter Five will present comparisons among the campaigns and conclusions about the evolution of terms, strategies, and terministic screens.

## CHAPTER III

### FEMINISM'S NEW FORM: THE WNBA TAKES SHAPE AND BEGINS PLAY

On June 21, 1997, months of planning culminated in the opening tip and playing of the four inaugural WNBA games (Stickney, 1997). In the matter of a year an entire league was formed and started play, making the April 24, 1996 announcement of the WNBA seem a distant memory (Berlet, 1996; Whitehead, 1998). The announcement created a challenge and whirlwind of activities for NBA personnel to design the league, gain sponsors and television contracts, and start play for the women's league. The league paid attention to every detail from the choice of sponsors to the color of the basketball. The attention and preparation by the league was critical in shaping the image of the league to its audience and to the sports hegemony. This chapter offers a brief background of the league's development along with information surrounding the league's first five seasons. This background sets up the analysis of the commercials and offers insights into the league's marketing choices within their advertisements. This chapter presents individual analyses of the WNBA's first three campaigns, "We Got Next," "Join In," and "We Got Game," and their incorporation of feminism as a motivating factor behind their message. A discussion of the the implications of each campaign will come at the end of the chapter. Chapter Four will contrast the first three campaigns' focus on the powerful female athlete against the latest WNBA campaign, "This Is Who I Am."

## Background

In an age where television reigns supreme, the WNBA was able to land a national television contract by having NBC, Lifetime, and ESPN each broadcast one game a week (McDaniel, 1996; Robbins, 1997; Swan, 1997; Thurow, 1997; "Women's basketball," 1996; "Women's league," 1996). The networks were chosen to allow for a balance of viewers from the general audience to hard-core sports fans to women (McDaniel, 1996; Thurow, 1997; "Women's league," 1996). An interesting twist with the networks in the contractual agreements was over the waiving of rights fees payments and allowing the WNBA to sell the commercial airtime (Robbins, 1997; Thurow, 1997). Usually a network will pay rights to air the sporting event and the network will in turn sell the commercial airtime during the program; instead, the WNBA was allowed to sell the commercials to their sponsors and in return the league shared advertising revenues with the networks. This increased WNBA control over what was promoted during the games and increased exposure for the league and its sponsors.

Sponsors of the league were chosen to fit the league's projected audiences and build credibility for the league by having some of the same NBA sponsors and types of NBA companies entice NBA fans to watch the women's league as well (Thurow, 1997). Initial sponsors of the league for the 1997 season were Spalding, Champion, Nike, Coca-Cola, Anheuser-Busch, McDonald's, General Motors, Sears, and American Express and were estimated to have spent 50 million dollars to help get the league off the ground (Elliot, 1996; "Spalding enters," 1996; Swan, 1997; Thurow, 1997). The main faces in all of the sponsors' commercials were Sheryl Swoopes, Lisa Leslie, and Rebecca Lobo who were the league's most prominent representatives and signees. With the support of sponsors the league was able to choose where to place teams. The WNBA chose

Charlotte, Cleveland, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Salt Lake City, Phoenix, and Sacramento as the inaugural eight franchises (Rubin, 1996; Whitehead, 1998). Each team chose and designed their own team name and logo, but the league encouraged the teams to model their choice in relation to their NBA counterpart (Whitehead, 1998).

The league may have labored on the large details of placement of teams, sponsors, television contracts, but even the smaller details of the ball, league logo, and uniforms were given attention to make sure that the right image was formed (Thurow, 1997; Whitehead, 1998). The league logo took six months to design due to problems with designing of the female players' hair and creating a mix of athleticism and femininity (Thurow, 1997; Whitehead, 1998). The choices for the ball colors included teal, bright orange, brick, and ultimately the league's official choice of alternating panels of orange and oatmeal (Thurow, 1997; Whitehead, 1998). Each ball was tracked by television cameras to find the right combination that would encourage the audience to watch (Thurow, 1997; Whitehead, 1998). The ball was even given its own press conference at Disney World and was at the center of the publicity for the league (Thurow, 1997). The choice of uniforms went through many nips and tucks as well, with the league trying to choose the right fabric and design (Thurow, 1997; Whitehead, 1998). All of these choices were made with three audiences in mind: "sports fans who will watch practically any televised game, active women ages 18-34, and families with children ages 7-17" (Burris, 1997, p. D1). The league's first attempt to gain the attention of these audiences was through their "We Got Next" campaign for the 1997 season.

The "We Got Next" campaign flooded the airwaves for the first time during the NBA All-Star game and was a continual presence on NBA broadcasts as well as at the games themselves (Knapp, 1997; Lister, 1997; Sherwin, 1997; Stickney, 1997; Young,

1997). The WNBA's increased presence on the airwaves created anticipation for the tip off of the league with their playground reference slogan and the attitude and intensity laden advertisements (Burris, 1997; Jensen, 1998b; Parker, 1997; Thurow, 1997). The WNBA's 15 million dollar marketing blitz was a success as many teams saw sell outs on opening day and attendance for the league rise from projections of 4,000 per game to 6,500 per game by mid-season (Allen, 1997; Fisher, 1998; Whitehead, 1998). Overall, the league drew 1.85 million fans to games and averaged 9,669 fans per game (Gay, 1998; Sherwin, 1997). Of those in attendance at the games, 67% of the fans were female and many were new basketball fans (Sherwin, 1997). Watching at home, approximately 2 million tuned in for NBC's weekly broadcast, 650,000 for ESPN's weekly broadcast, and 400,000 for Lifetime's weekly broadcast (Hanley, 1997).

After exceeding expectations in the inaugural season, the WNBA added two teams before the 1998 season and had their players singing gospel songs in their advertisements (Gay, 1998; Solomon, 1998; "WNBA looking," 1998). The WNBA's advertising slogan for the 1998 season was "Join In" and hit the airwaves on March 8, 1998 (Gay, 1998; Jensen, 1998a; "People-Montgomerie...", 1998). The advertisements ran through the NBA playoffs and into the WNBA season. The three gospel-esque singers in the commercials were league MVP Cynthia Cooper, Ruthie Bolton-Holyfield, and Nikki McCray (Gay, 1998; Jensen, 1998a; "People-Montgomerie," 1998; Solomon, 1998; "WNBA looking," 1998). The advertisements depicted the three players in street clothing along with fans and were aimed at drumming up support from male and female basketball fans (Jensen, 1998a; "WNBA looking," 1998).

The "Join In" campaign helped produce a 60% rise in season ticket sales in the ten cities with an average of 4,000 season-ticket holders per team ("WNBA looking," 1998).

The beginning of the second season not only saw increased ticket sales, but the league was also confronted with gay and lesbian groups protesting against some of the WNBA's advertising tactics of focusing only on heterosexuality (Fisher, 1998). The WNBA claimed that they did not know that there would be a large gay and lesbian audience and did not have plans to market to a gay and lesbian audience. The second season of the WNBA was the most successful to date and set record attendance levels of 10,869 per game (Cortez, 2001; Farhi, 2001; Parker, 2003).

The number of teams in the WNBA grew in 1999 and 2000 as the league came to a total of 16 teams. In 1999, the Minnesota Lynx and Orlando Miracle were added to the WNBA roster and in 2000, the Indiana Fever, Miami Sol, Portland Fire, and Seattle Storm came into existence (Starling, 1999; Stickney, 1999). The 2000 expansion was the last time the league has added teams. With the third season came a new advertising campaign that continued through the fifth season entitled "We Got Game." The advertisements continued to push a family and interactive environment between players and fans (Farhi, 2001; Starling, 1999). Even though the league had seen generous support from the public the WNBA continued to fail to turn a profit and attendance figures and television ratings began to fall in 1999 (Farhi, 2001; Weiner, 2001).

#### "We Got Next": Creating a Powerful Image of the Female Athlete

The "We Got Next" campaign is representative of the post-Olympic burgeoning excitement surrounding women's sports. The WNBA had used the popularity of the women's college game and of the women's Olympic team's heralded success when they traveled around the country as a foundation for forming the league. The excitement about and support for women's sports had a large influence on the "We Got Next" campaign.

The seven advertisements analyzed from the campaign created an image for the WNBA and an image of the female athlete by focusing on her physique, intensity, passion, and abilities to play the game of basketball. While the choice of these seven texts from the campaign and the texts analyzed from subsequent campaigns in this thesis are limited due to the advertisements the WNBA sent the author, they are representative in scope of the overall themes of the campaigns and of the ideology the WNBA. The choice of which advertisements to offer for this study represents the WNBA's values and their view of the female athlete. The “We Got Next” campaign is reflective of feminist ideology through its accentuation on creating the gaze upon the female athlete as inspiring and emphasizing that WNBA players have the skills necessary to be highly competitive.

The “We Got Next” campaign highlights the attitude and intensity of the competitive female athlete through the framing of the athletes' faces in close-ups, angles of shot selection, dominance of action shots, music choice, and lighting technique. The first campaign epitomizes a feminist challenge of the sports hegemony by erasing gender dichotomies between female and male athletes in the league's framing of the female athlete. In one of the most popular and talked about advertisements, the “We Got Next” campaign has Sheryl Swoopes, Lisa Leslie, and Rebecca Lobo walking down a gym corridor with blue lighting and smoke around them (“This Summer,” 1997). The *Reservoir Dogs*-inspired commercial seems to ooze attitude as the camera tracks their slow motion progress from one smoke filled entrance with a white light beaming from it to the other end of the hallway to a similar exit. The trio is clad in leather overcoats and jeans, and each has her blue WNBA monogrammed gym bag thrown over a shoulder. As the three walk down the hallway to what is assumed to be a court and George Baker's “Little Green Bag” plays as the soundtrack, the camera creates a close-up of each player's bag and then

her face to associate her last name with that player. In each close-up the player has a stern and intense look that is associated with competitive focus. As the camera follows the players down the corridor, the camera is either at eye level with the players or is below them a bit and angled upward. The upward shot makes the players seem larger than life and gives them a physical edge that is usually not associated with female athletes. This advertisement, along with every other “We Got Next” commercial, has some element of focus and competitive edge that the league uses to establish the viewer as in awe of the player regardless of gender. The commercials lack a sexual or seductive edge and instead creates respect for the players' abilities as professional athletes.

The gaze that is created by the camera for the viewer shows the players in action shots with control over their bodies as well as close-ups of the players' emotions during games and off the court, and places the focus on the players' athletic abilities. In one of the commercials within the campaign, Lisa Leslie, Rebecca Lobo, and Sheryl Swoopes are playing a game of 3-on-3 against other players (“Three-on-three,” 1997). The players' against whom they are playing remain faceless, an effect that highlights the abilities of Leslie, Lobo, and Swoopes. The camera opens with a focus on Lisa Leslie holding the ball at her waist posting up the individual guarding her right under the basket with her back to the basket. Leslie's elbows are extended to protect the ball, and Leslie seems to be about to make a spin move to face the basket and her opponent. The shot that follows Leslie's post position is of Lobo catching a pass and immediately turning toward the basket for a layup bank shot. Following Lobo's score, the camera cuts to Lobo, Leslie, and Swoopes in slow motion exchanging high fives among themselves (“Three-on-three,” 1997). The slow motion emphasizes the emotion and invested interest in the pick up game against the three faceless opponents, while also highlighting team camaraderie between the players. Within

this advertisement and all of the “We Got Next” advertisements, every basketball shot is made by the three players and the camera emphasizes their pinpoint accuracy. This precision does not end with the three marquee players' scrimmage, but also extends to the individually focused advertisements created for the campaign.

In the individual commercials highlighting Sheryl Swoopes and Rebecca Lobo the camera never leaves court action (“Rebecca Lobo,” 1997; “Sheryl Swoopes,” 1997). Each player is on display for the camera in a WNBA jersey and shorts with one other person passing them basketballs. The advertisements visually focus on the players' superior basketball skills and emotion even while practicing the game for the camera. The camera focuses on each player's shooting form and footwork; the camera either tracks the basketball from their fingers through the net or only the perfectly rotating basketball is shown in the visual frame as it flows right through the net and never touches the rim (“Rebecca Lobo,” 1997; “Sheryl Swoopes,” 1997). Shots which focus on the players' skills and technique give credibility to the athlete by representing her not as a sex symbol to watch, but as a highly talented basketball player. The camera's focus is placed on the activity of basketball, not on seductive poses by the player when not in game action, which is in alignment with feminism's preference for the female athlete to be framed by focusing on her abilities and passion for the game and teammates. Even in close-ups, the camera does not create a seductive desire for the player; these depictions deviate from the typical close-up wherein soft focus, lighting, and leering toward the female is created.

In close-up shots the players are staring at the basket with little to no emotion on their faces except a focused intensity on making their next shot. In one close-up of Rebecca Lobo her face and shoulders are the only portions of her body shown within the frame and sweat is filmed dripping off her chin as she seems to be trying to catch her

breath (“Rebecca Lobo,” 1997). Upward angled camera shots of the players are used to highlight their movements and suggest their large stature and presence on the floor. The camera's focus upon sweat dripping off the players, their eyes focused on the basket, or their facial expressions during play function to depict the players as intense, focused, and talented. This trend, though, is not upheld through all of the “We Got Next” advertisements.

Three of the advertisements analyzed have a more personal dimension to them, but even then the players are highlighted as athletic, powerful, and confident. In one of the commercials, Michele Timms' personal background is told for the viewer. The commercial opens with her walking down an alley between two buildings on a brick road dressed in blue jeans, a black shirt, and black leather jacket (“Michele Timms,” 1997). Timms walks directly toward a camera that seems to be on the ground and talks directly to it. Timms' direct look and addressing of the camera creates credibility and a position of power that is not normally given to the female character; instead usually only male characters are allowed to speak into the camera to allow for a desire narrative to be projected onto the female. Within her commercial as well as the others that have a personal dimension, game footage is interspersed with dialogue from the player or announcer (“Michele Timms,” 1997; “Ruthie Bolton-Holyfield,” 1997; “Zheng Haixia,” 1997). Timms and the other players in similar commercials are not put in sexually seductive poses, but instead the interspersed action shots reaffirm their athletic abilities as well as the narrative about their storied careers before the WNBA.

The reality created through the visual discourse of the advertisements denies a sexual gaze toward the athletes and instead fosters a gaze of reverence in relation to players. The players' control over their bodies, the use of various types of action shots, and

the camera's focus on their abilities prevents the female body from being sexually consumed by the viewer. Instead, the viewer consumes the players' abilities, in turn creating the viewer's respect for the players' athletic prowess while reinforcing the linguistic hierarchy created within the advertisements. The visual representations of the athletes coincides with the verbal discourse of the advertisements. While the visual representations show the aggressive and athletic female players, the verbal discourse reinforces the athlete's skills by highlighting their extraordinary basketball feats. The verbal and visual representations of the players complement one another to form the athletic, powerful, and intense female basketball player. The narratives within the advertisements create a dominant theme and emphasis on the players' competitiveness, which represents the linguistic hierarchy's ultimate term.

The evolution of the “We Got Next” narrative follows the athletes from their beginnings and influences on their play to their personal stories which ultimately fold into their professional stories of themselves as athletes. The narrative of the campaign incorporates parts of the players' personal history. For instance, a brief childhood history of Ruthie Bolton-Holyfield and Chantel Tremitiere (1997) creates commonality between the two teammates: “Ruthie Bolton-Holyfield learned how to play the game she loves on a dirt court in Mississippi against her eight brothers and eleven sisters. The defining moment in Chantel Tremitiere's life was when she was adopted into a family of fifteen.” After the female announcer gives background about each player a family portrait appears, but that personal history is folded back into the narrative of their passion for basketball and its competitiveness. Their personal histories function as a backdrop for the larger story of how the players are interlinked by the game of basketball and its glory.

Even when the narrative incorporates part of the social personality of the players, the focus returns to and is dominated by the players' love of competitive basketball. The focus on competitiveness and playing the game undermines the role that the personal background creates. Instead of feminizing the players, the personal background functions to simply familiarize the audience with the new players in the league who have been playing overseas for years and who lack news coverage in the United States. In the narrative of Michele Timms (1997) she opens the commercial as she is walking in street clothes with the statement, "I am what you have always called a free spirit." Continuing her narrative, Timm states, "I just love having a good time. I guess that is how I play basketball too" ("Michele Timms," 1997). The shots cut from her joking around in front of the camera in her street clothes to ones of her inside a gym in practice wear. Her narrative continues when she states, "I have played basketball all over the world and I would go anywhere for a good game. Now I am ready for my biggest challenge yet, the WNBA. See you in America" ("Michele Timms," 1997). The shots go from her starting the narrative leaning against a building in street clothes, to her passport, to her shooting a jump shot in an Olympic game, to her packing her clothes in a room, and finishes with her walking out of the room with a WNBA gym bag packed with her clothes and turning out the light on the audience. Even in this commercial, what begins as a personal story about herself becomes dominated not by her social personality but her athletic personality that is focused on being competitive. Timms' narrative fits within the linguistic hierarchy by showing the development and focus of the players' energy toward playing the game they love, but at the same time yearning for what Michele Timms states is a "good game" ("Michele Timms," 1997).

Within the narratives of the advertisements there is verbal discourse that reaffirms the personal side of the athletes, but ultimately the personal discourse surrounding players becomes silent within the hierarchy of language in the advertisements regarding sports. The WNBA advertisements place an emphasis on teamwork and individual skills through their portrayal of teammates in the instance of Ruthie Bolton-Holyfield, Chantel Tremitiere, Lisa Leslie, and Zheng Haixia. These commercials may give a personal background of the players, but the overall narrative relates to how they have commonalities regarding the game and how that creates a better team environment.

The linguistic hierarchy of the advertisements emphasizes the showcasing of athletes' individual accomplishments to create legitimacy for their abilities and the league's competitiveness. The announcer in Sheryl Swoopes' (1997) individual advertisement states, "Sheryl Swoopes has been college player of the year. She is an Olympic gold medalist. She owns the record for most points scored in an NCAA championship. She has a sneaker named after her." The same type of narrative continues when Rebecca Lobo (1997) tells the audience, "When I was twelve years old I told Red Auerbach that I would be the first woman to play for the Celtics. Sorry Red, I'm booked." The advertisements with teammates open with a female voice singing "Sisters are doing it, doing it all they can" and in the instance of the advertisement featuring Zheng Haixia and Lisa Leslie the female narrator states:

Zheng Haixia learned how to play in the Chinese province of Hanan. Lisa Leslie learned her skills on the court of Englewood, California. At six-foot eight Zheng Haixia has had a huge influence on Chinese basketball. At six-foot five Lisa Leslie has had a huge impact on U.S. basketball...Together they make up the formidable frontcourt for the L.A. Sparks. ("Zheng Haixia," 1997)

In each of these examples the emphasis is placed on the players' abilities, influence, and desire to play the game of basketball, which culminates in the ultimate term of competitiveness. By emphasizing players' achievements the advertisements locate the audience in a subject position that invites surprise, inspiration, or pride regarding the female basketball players who they are watching play women's basketball. By framing the female athlete as competitive within the realm of basketball and highly skilled, the female athlete gains credibility and societal myths about her are debunked. The representations of the ultimate term of competitiveness in the "We Got Next" advertisements function to deflect the reality that negative comparisons between the men's and women's game are being made in the media and society. The ultimate term selects to emphasize highly skilled players and not address the sloppy play or lack of talent on all of the teams' rosters.

The deflection created by the league did not address that there is a men's game with which to compare the women, or that there was another professional women's league in existence at the same time as the first season, although the American Basketball League (ABL) played in the Fall and Winter. The WNBA's representation of competitiveness as the ultimate value of the league and its players functions to emphasize league superiority through the "We Got Next" challenge mentality, adopted from the playground. When individuals called "next" on a playground it served as a challenge for the other player or players to be able to back up their game of being the best by taking on all-comers. In the instance of the WNBA, their slogan serves as a selection to emphasize a reality wherein the league challenges the ABL and the masculine sports hegemony. The advertisements reflect this reality through Lobo's comments about being booked now and not able to be the first woman in the NBA because she is doing something more important, or by emphasizing that Swoopes, the player who has had the most college success, has chosen

the WNBA over all other leagues. Within the advertisements the WNBA is portrayed as the superior league in comparison to all others. These advertisements for the WNBA deflect attention away from the notion that the league plays second-fiddle to the NBA by playing in the summer and with a short schedule that does not compete against the NBA and all other sports for their revenue time. This framing of the WNBA creates credibility for the league and its athletes through the portrayal of the athletes as competitive, hard-edged, and talented.

The idea that the WNBA is representative of a feminist challenge to the male hegemony because it asserts female athletes' abilities, competitiveness, and the notion that they are superior to men is tenuous at best and is reflective of the peak of high public support for women's sports after the Olympics. The commercials challenge the notion of the players' talents, but the inclusion of the players' outside interests has the possibility of becoming dominant in future advertisements and undermining the potential challenge the WNBA representations could make against the sports hegemony. The traditionally feminine portrayal of female athletes' outside interests also runs into the problem of how to frame the athletes when the public is more exposed to games while the memories of the Olympics fades and gaining fans for the league is still a priority.

#### “Join In”: Shifting the Placement of the Audience

Following in the footsteps of the WNBA's first season success, the “Join In” campaign was introduced to increase attendance and solidify the league's presence in the professional sports world. The “Join In” campaign was highly successful and incorporated the female athletes' skills, emotion, and fans into the advertising scheme. This analysis examines five commercials from the “Join In” campaign, including the flagship commercial

of Ruthie Bolton-Holyfield, Cynthia Cooper, and Nikki McCray singing the theme song for the entire campaign. This campaign by the WNBA is representative of a feminist challenge to the representations of the female athlete and her sport, but the feminist representations of the female athlete are partially undermined when feminization occurs through the gaze. The gaze upon the female athlete creates a new form of spiritual reverence for her that establishes the camaraderie between players and fans, but weakens the credibility gained through the athletic and competitive action shots within the advertisements. The verbal discourse has representations that appear aligned with feminism through their emphasis on participation through teamwork and athletic competition, but become destabilized by the construction of participation on the part of the fans as spiritual in nature. The spiritual connotations that become a part of the ultimate term function to feminize the female athlete and deemphasize her abilities, thus allowing for the appropriation of the feminist messages into the masculine hierarchy of sports.

At first glance, visual representations of the “Join In” campaign seem to be dominated by action shots of the players and their fans in an attempt to create a gaze that allows the female athlete to be viewed as powerful and socially influential. This perception of the female athlete is established through action shots framing the athletes' abilities as inspiring, skilled, and at times unbelievable. The camera follows the game action intently and in game time speed, allowing the audience to see the ability of a player running down the court to stop instantly and hit a long range jump shot or players' abilities to deceive their opponents allowing for the female athlete to be seen as athletic by the viewers (“Join in,” 1998). This gaze that creates respect and a powerful position for the female athlete ultimately is undercut and reframed as a spiritual reverence for the female athlete through the campaign's foundational advertisement of a trio of gospel singing WNBA players.

The players' control over the game is created, within multiple different action shots, through the fakes made by the players. In a particular selection of game footage within the advertisements a Sacramento Monarchs player is driving toward the basket on a fast break with a defender in front of her. The Monarchs player fakes as if she is going to pass to a teammate on her right side and instead lays a finger roll up into the basket ("Hallelujah," 1998). The camera is at the floor level on the sideline behind the basket and the players seem to be coming directly into the living room of the viewer. This shot allows the viewer to see the skilled nature of the players. The strategy and camera shot of the Monarchs player is a thing of beauty and is to be admired by male and female fans alike. The players are shown making incredible plays with relative ease, which increases their credibility and gains respect from a viewer.

Admiration for the players from the viewing audience is created through the players' ability to not only perform a textbook head fake, but also their ability to execute a tough play with precision. With the camera in an aerial view of the game action, Teresa Weatherspoon is leading a fast break to the basket and seems well defended with no option to score, but one of Weatherspoon's teammates is trailing behind her up the floor. Weatherspoon sees her teammate and leads a perfect behind the back bounce pass to the teammate ("Join in," 1998). The camera follows Weatherspoon's teammate up for the score and then immediately pans to Weatherspoon pumping her arms out in front of herself triumphantly. The play allows the audience to just say "Wow!" and be in awe of her abilities as a point guard. Through the display of extraordinary plays in the advertisements, the gaze functions to enact respect for the athletes' abilities. The choice of shots in the "Join In" campaign also focuses on the competitiveness the players possess through their display of intensity and emotion on the court.

Within the campaign the players' emotions are front and center for the viewer to experience along with the players. The players' emotions function to reveal the players' passion and competitiveness for the game, thus debunking previous myths that the women's game was all for fun and not to be taken seriously. The cuts of players pumping their fists, Rebecca Lobo angrily screaming, and crowds cheering, establish an aura of reverence and excitement for women's basketball ("Hallelujah," 1998; "Join In," 1998). The cuts represent a connection created between the players and the crowd through excellent, intense play that can be respected and cheered for by any fan. The "outbursts" by the female players during the game break the traditional model of being ladylike and instead show that emotional responses by women can be admired. The continual shots of the crowd on the playground or in the arena cheering to show their respect and admiration of the players reaffirms the players' abilities. The shots of the crowd and the sounds of their cheers within the advertisements function to reinforce the players' abilities and respect for the athletes, thus breaking down artificial binaries between male and female players. The advertisements signify a challenge to the dichotomy between male and female athletes by representing admiration and support for the female athlete in the same way the male athlete is supported. The "Join In" campaign, though, is not without a focus on the personal side of the players, which shifts the gaze of the audience from respect to reverence and creates new meaning for audience support.

In one of the commercials the players are used as gospel singers, which feminizes the players and functions to negate the respect that is established through some of the shot selections discussed above. Instead, the cheering fans and encouragement of the players signify a process that redefines the meaning of the players' actions through the shift in the gaze to reverence created in the flagship commercial of the campaign. Ruthie Bolton-

Holyfield, Cynthia Cooper, and Nikki McCray are a trio of WNBA players who walk into a playground in street clothing and belt out the “Join In” theme song. The advertisement opens with an aerial shot of a male and female player competing for a rebound on an orange hued playground court. The next shot is of the three WNBA players being followed by a camera onto the court as the camera cuts to a female player driving to the basket against her male competitor. The camera then pans to Bolton-Holyfield singing the first lines of the theme song (“Cynthia Cooper,” 1998). Throughout the advertisement the shots cut back and forth from the players singing and their fellow WNBA players and fans cheering. The cutting back and forth between the three WNBA players singing and the fans or players cheering functions to show the emotion that the players have and create for the fans. What becomes problematic from a feminist perspective about this commercial is the position within which the commercial places the three singing players.

The use of their gospel talents functions to show their personal attributes and feminize them to the audience, while failing to show them in a powerful position. The players are to be gazed at within the orange hued lighting and are not allowed to ever sing directly into the camera. When showing the trio of singers on camera the crowd behind them becomes fuzzy and indistinguishable to the viewer. The focus is placed on the players, but the viewer is not encouraged or given a reference point for what all of the players and fans are cheering about. Instead the viewer watches as the players gain followers with their gospel talent and walk off of the court toward the streets in awe of their singing abilities (“Cynthia Cooper,” 1998). The positioning of the female athlete in this instance gains attention not for her athletic skills, but her singing abilities which takes attention away from her athleticism and allows her to be appropriated within the masculine gaze. This appropriation functions to limit the female athletes' ability to challenge the

masculine sports hegemony because the advertisement has relegated an emphasis of her abilities to feminize her in the personal sphere rather than allow emphasis on her athletic skills in the public domain. The modifying of the gaze from respect to reverence further limits the female athlete and delegitimizes the action shots' capacity to create respect for the athletes. The establishment of reverence of the female athlete continues within the verbal discourse of the advertisements through the campaign theme song and the soundtrack of "Hallelujah" to one of the commercials. The verbal discourse also presents feminist representations within the announcers' discourse, but ultimately the linguistic hierarchy becomes appropriated through the privileging of participation that the advertisements encourage. The participation is framed as spiritual in nature for the players and their fans. The appropriation of the feminist discourse in the end weakens the female athletes' challenge to the masculine sports hegemony.

Within the "Join In" campaign the linguistic hierarchy consists of such terms as "competitiveness," "teamwork," and "athleticism," but the ultimate term that creates the value of the campaign is encompassed in the campaign slogan of participation from the athletes and their fans. The campaign is driven by the players, their background, the announcers who are describing the plays that are appearing on the screen from previous games, and most importantly, the theme song created for the campaign. Verbal discourse in the "Join In" advertisements is more diverse than that found in the "We Got Next" campaign, but still creates a particular narrative for the audience to adhere to. The campaign narrative begins through an individual advertisement of Nikki McCray, who is also a part of the singing trio. In her individual advertisement the narrator states: "Ever since Nikki McCray was a little girl she wanted to be a professional basketball player. She knew it wouldn't be easy. Now Nikki McCray is all grown up. She is the shooting guard

for the Washington Mystics. Now it wasn't easy. She just makes it look that way" ("Nikki McCray," 1998). The voice-over about Nikki establishes the dreams of players and reinforces that their participation is valuable through hard work and athleticism. The little girl has now grown into a professional who is competitive, athletic, and uses teamwork to achieve her dreams of being a professional basketball player.

The linguistic components of athleticism and competitiveness are established through an advertisement with Michele Timms and Teresa Weatherspoon commenting on one another and the commentators describing the game footage interspersed within the advertisement. In their joint advertisement, Timms and Weatherspoon are seemingly talking to interviewers, who are never seen by the audience, complimenting one another's skills and competitiveness. Timms specifically states within the advertisement, "The intensity she brings to the table, or the court I should say is just unbelievable. The ultimate in leaders. She is just an incredible athlete. She's an incredible individual, which makes you love her even more" ("Michele Timms," 1998). Weatherspoon describes Timms as, "One of the top point guards in the league. Fiasty. We both play with the same passion for the game and we know what it takes to win" ("Michele Timms," 1998). The complimenting of each other reinforces the competitive and athletic nature of each player. The players' comments highlight the notion that the WNBA has the top players and best play in the world. The complimenting of players does not end with Timms and Weatherspoon, but is elaborated on by the calling of games by announcers. The announcers' descriptions become a part of the advertisements as the plays they are describing are spliced into the montages. The announcer comments vary from "for three to win it," to "goes up and GOOD!," to "Thewanda crossover, slips and reverse, good!" ("Join in," 1998). The announcers' discourse is a description and reinforcement of the athletes' superior skills.

The announcers' discourse compliments the incredible play shown within the advertisements and functions to create credibility for the league. These elements of the advertisements, though, are only a subset in the linguistic hierarchy to the creation of the ultimate term in the campaign theme song.

The theme song creates the linguistic hierarchy of teamwork, competitiveness, and the ultimate term of participation. Participation becomes the dominant value through its importance in creating the other portions of the linguistic hierarchy and is particularly representative of feminist representations of what the sporting hierarchy should be, but feminism is undermined when the song feminizes the players through emphasis on spirituality that is a part of their private lives. The song lyrics are: "People get ready. Get, get into the spirit. Come on. Join in everybody. Everybody join in. Working together mind and soul. Dreamin', dreamin', believin', believin'. This is where you want to be. Oh! Join in everybody! Everybody join in! Join in everybody!" ("Cynthia Cooper," 1998). The song is directed toward the audience as a spiritually styled plea to join in with the league through participation and viewership. The audience is created as the necessary component of the league and the spirit is built within the love for the game. The theme song emphasizes the working together of mind and soul, which epitomizes teamwork on the part of the players and a following of the league by the fans. The framing of participation as spiritual in nature is also established by another advertisement in the campaign that has a female gospel singer belting out "Hallelujah" as the soundtrack to the advertisement, while exuberant players and fans flash across the screen. The discursive framing of participation within the "Join In" campaign functions to create placement of the fans as important to the league and its success both on and off the court. The reverence of the gaze continues with the verbal discourse reflecting a new way to view the female athletes, which deflects

attention away from the power of their athletic skills. The reflection of the “Join In” campaign of what it means to participate changes the view of the female athlete and denigrates the credibility that the female athletes create through their superior play. The reflection of reverence functions to deflect attention away from criticisms of the league that the play was sloppy, too slow, or that the male game is superior through the spiritual acceptance of the players and their skills.

Through the construction of reverence in the “Join In” campaign visually and linguistically the position of the female athlete in the public sphere changes when compared to the “We Got Next” campaign. The players' skills are delegitimated as a reason to follow or be a fan of the league because the emphasis is on a more feminine and spiritual side for the fans to latch onto. While this reflection of reality creates a bond between players and fans, it fails to create respect for the female athlete. The position of the female athlete selected for the campaign reflects teamwork as a part of a spiritual way to overcome adversity, not as a way to win basketball games or improve a players' skills. The campaign ultimately deflects attention away from athletes' ability to challenge the masculine hegemony, instead allowing the appropriation of female athletes because they lack the same intense attitude and fans who follow the game for the talent levels.

#### “We Got Game”: Establishing the Masculine Gaze and Women's Athletic Skills

The “We Got Game” campaign departs from the gospel singing trio's theme song with an emphasis on the game of basketball and the same attitude that was projected in the “We Got Next” campaign. Highlights of previous seasons and cheering fans are dominant in the four advertisements analyzed from this campaign. There are additional “We Got Game” advertisements that are not used in the analysis because they aim to project a

relationship with the fans. These advertisements depict travel with the players to destinations as a part of a community outreach program and are not reflective of the overall strategy created by the campaign. The soundtrack of the four advertisements analyzed connotes power, dominance, and credibility for the female athlete. The linguistic hierarchy is made up of announcer commentary and the campaign slogan. The “We Got Game” campaign is representative of feminism through its constructions of the female athlete as powerful and empowering, but the masculine gaze created in one advertisement raises the possibility of feminism being appropriated by signifying female athletes as sexy and skilled.

The visual components of the “We Got Game” campaign predominantly represent a construction of the female athlete as having superior talents that should be recognized by the viewer. This construction of the female athlete is created through the sounds of the game presented in the advertisements and the barrage of actions shots of players and fans. The sounds of the game dominate this campaign by including loud heart beats, heavy breathing, the ball hitting the floor, cheering, and bass lines to accentuate the ferocity and passion for the game the players have (“We got game,” 1999; “WNBA is cool,” 1999). These sounds reinforce the play that is being presented on the screen: superior ball movement by the players for an easy score, a perfectly rotating basketball through the net, a player picking off a pass and making a dash for the basket, or the multiple shots of players striding onto the court with little to no emotion on their face while looking down court to what seems to be their opponents (“Baby get loud,” 1999; “We got game,” 1999; “WNBA is cool,” 1999).

Cuts to the audience cheering after the good plays within the montage of the advertisement reinforce the players' skills and admiration the fans have for the players. The

players' and audiences' emotions that come through within the montage in the form of pumping of a fist, a tap to the chest, or arms in the air connote an acceptance and appreciation of the players' actions and experiences on the court. These emotions can represent a challenge to the masculine hegemony which claims that female players lack the skills or desires to play a competitive game of basketball. Instead, the fans' reactions affirm the players' actions and encourage them to play harder, while also establishing that these players do "have game." The feminist representations of the athletes as gender neutral, though, are counteracted by the use of black and white footage and extreme close-ups on players' faces. The black and white representations introduce the masculine gaze to the campaign and possibly destabilize the feminist message embedded in the visual and linguistic hierarchy of the advertisements.

The visual components of the "We Got Game" campaign introduce a new component into the WNBA advertisement montage by using black and white footage in parts of the advertisements. Black and white presentations of players are featured in two advertisements to create a focus on the emotions of the players, but the different framing of the players with the camera changes the way that the players are viewed by the audience. Of the two advertisements featuring black and white montages, the first advertisement, "Black and white," (1999) is dominated by close-ups on players' faces with color action shots of game footage interspersed to serve as reference points to the game. The black and white technique also is used in a second advertisement where the game footage is dominant and the technique works to frame particular moves by players against their defender to show emotion and highlight the athletes' skills ("We got game," 1999). The use of black and white and the ordering of close-ups within the montage in the first advertisement encourages fetishization of the players by focusing on the players' more

feminine and sexual side. The encouragement of fetishization in the extreme close-ups of the players' faces threatens the construction of the other three advertisements within the campaign. These advertisements emphasize the players' skills and intensity. The second advertisement which uses black and white montages to focus on game action is in alignment with the dominant theme of the campaign by using game action footage and shots of fans cheering for the players.

The "Black and White" (1999) advertisement establishes a masculine gaze by opening with close-ups of the players staring into the camera with sweat dripping down their face or intensity being shown by the player through her turn of her head toward the camera. The advertisement then cuts to color shots of the players excited and celebrating. The camera returns to the close-ups of the players in black and white, but with the camera's return the players are smiling into the camera or are being caught with a smile on their face by the camera. When the players are caught by the camera they are not looking directly into the camera; instead, their eyes are looking up at the camera or they are peeking at the camera from the corner of their eye. The close-ups become very extreme, with the face of the athletes occupying the entire screen. The advertisement cuts back and forth with each return consisting of more smiling and laughing, but the masculine gaze is solidified in the last frames of the commercial. The final sequence consists of a Sparks player running backward on the court with her arms pumped out in front of her, then cuts to Lisa Leslie laying her head on a basketball and looking passively into the camera, and then the camera cuts to the final frame which consists of miniature black and white photos of the players as a quilt for the background. The WNBA logo, ball, and "We Got Next" appear on top of the quilt of black and white faces ("Black and white," 1999). The commercial entices a masculine gaze from the viewers through the use of extreme close-

ups, loss of looking into the camera with intensity, and Lisa Leslie's passive look into the camera at the end. The final shot of Leslie staring into the camera is a bit extended and acts as a signifier of how to assign meaning to the shots of the players that have just been seen smiling and laughing for the camera. The advertisement contrasts the intensity of the action shots with an unveiling of a more feminine side to the players through the cuts back and forth to the extreme close-ups of fun loving players. The laughing and smiling of players connotes a playful demeanor that strips the power away from the action shots and encourages the establishment of a masculine gaze toward the players. The masculine gaze, though, is not continued within the other advertisements of the campaign or the second advertisement which has black and white camera techniques.

The difference that appears in the second advertisement where black and white representations of players are used is that the players are framed within a box that transforms the color action around them to black and white ("We got game," 1999). Within these framings of players, the focus is placed on the strength, intensity, and skills of the players being highlighted. An example of the black and white framing is when two players are going up for an opening tip with the camera focused closely on the ball and the players' extended arms reaching for the ball. The players' arms are framed off from the rest of the shot. The framing is also used on a Sparks player driving to the basket against an opponent ("We got game," 1999). Use of black and white where the rest of the environment surrounding the framing is in color directs the viewer's attention toward the contents of the black and white framed action. In the instances of the action-packed "We got game" (1999) advertisement that is complemented by black and white framing the focus is placed on their skills and intensity directed toward the game, which runs counter to the close-up shots of players' emotions within the "Black and white" (1999)

advertisement. The placing of focus on the intensity and skills of the players works to counteract a masculine gaze from being implemented by the audience by directing attention to a non-traditional role for women. The verbal discourse within the advertisements complements the barrage of action shots and functions to thwart the enactment of the masculine gaze. The verbal discourse used within the campaign is representative of feminism through its use of gender-neutral language and emphasis on framing the female athlete as competitive and successful, thus preventing a gender dichotomy from being established.

While this campaign is not as narratively driven as the first two WNBA campaigns, the linguistic hierarchy is communicated through the announcer's descriptions of the game action that is present within the advertisements, the soundtrack of one of the advertisements, and the slogan for the campaign. The "We Got Game" campaign frames the female athlete as having exceptional skills, thus again making the ultimate term "competitiveness." Framing the WNBA and the players as competitive represents a challenge to the masculine hierarchy of sports and is indicative of a feminist approach to language through its non-gendered nature of evaluating the action without comparison or bias.

The campaign slogan for the advertisements is representative of the linguistic hierarchy, but is not the only creator of competitiveness as the ultimate term. The discourse used by the announcers is particularly crucial and has historically been a place where the female athlete has been denigrated (Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988). In the "We Got Game" campaign the descriptions of the female athlete are complementary, objective, and elevate the female athlete to new heights. The male and female announcers' comments vary from "Unbelievable!" to "Behind the back, beautiful!" to "Welcome to the WNBA"

to “Oh man! What movement of the basketball” and “Spin move to the middle. Are you kidding me?!” (“Baby get loud,” 1999; “Black and white,” 1999; “We got game,” 1999; “WNBA is cool,” 1999). The comments of the announcers reinforce the incredible play on the screen with telling discourse about the female athlete. The commentators are seen as experts by the viewing audience and even they are in admiration of the play on the court, thus building credibility for the female athlete and her game. The discourse of the announcers represents a change from previous commentary typical in coverage of women's sports that placed the female within a secondary role and used personal background stories as a focus point. The linguistic hierarchy within this campaign instead views the female athlete as a player without any gender qualifying statements before descriptors of her abilities. The linguistic hierarchy's representation of competitiveness as the value of the campaign is derived from the slogan “We Got Game,” the approval of announcers, and the theme song. The representations of the ultimate term of competitiveness visually and linguistically reflects a game that is exciting and skilled, while deflecting attention away from comparisons to the WNBA's male counterparts in the NBA or between players. This deflection of attention to skill level is complicated by the masculine gaze that is created within one of the advertisements and runs the risk of reflecting a reality where the athletes are sexy and have skill. A reflection of sexy and skillful denigrates the female athlete and fails to challenge the way that the masculine sports hegemony constructs the female athlete.

The “We Got Game” campaign reflects a reality of a basketball game that is action packed, while deflecting attention about how it varies from the male game by being played below the rim instead of the above the rim. The reflection of competitiveness is created as a lack of differentiation between the two types of play through announcer comments.

These announcer comments of “that is what it is all about” and “crowd on its feet” deflect criticism from the league as being inferior because there is affirmation from the crowd that it enjoys the game (“Baby get loud,” 1999; “Black and white,” 1999). What becomes problematic are the signifiers that go along with the announcer comments because the visual representation that accompanies the “that is what it is all about” statement is within a commercial that fetishizes the female athlete through the male gaze. The reflection that this statement potentially creates is of the female athlete as sexual object. The competing reflections of reality contain the deflection of male comparisons and affirm the female athlete in radically different ways. The female athletes may have game, but they also have sexuality that could potentially lead to their appropriation and denigration.

### Summary

The marketing scheme the WNBA created was found to be a success after the first season exceeded attendance projections through its focused energies in setting the tone and credibility for the league. The problem the league faced was keeping fans in the seats of the arenas and in their homes after the novelty of the first year wore off. The WNBA tried to continue the success of that first campaign, “We Got Next,” with the “Join In” and “We Got Game” campaigns. All three of these campaigns projected the image of the league and have a great impact on the representation of the female athlete. Each campaign had its own challenges to overcome. “We Got Next” had to gain the attention of the world and make it fans of the new league. “Join In” had to keep the high levels of support that the first season saw while also expanding the league into two new cities. The “We Got Game” campaign saw the largest obstacles of the three campaigns. “We Got Game” came

during an era of expansion and decline in attendance. The campaigns each brought their own representations of the female athlete and of the WNBA.

The “We Got Next” campaign is representative of a feminist challenge to the masculine hierarchy of sports by creating the female athlete as athletic, skilled and powerful. The gaze upon the athletes created by the campaign accents the players' attitudes and intensity toward the game and builds credibility and respect for the female athlete among the viewers. The verbal discourse reaffirms the female athlete as credible by making the ultimate term “competitiveness” and highlighting her skills within the advertisements. The establishment of a respectful gaze and attitude, though, did not continue with the “Join In” campaign.

The “Join In” campaign marks a shift in the framing of the female athlete in a perspective of reverence and spiritual connection. While the campaign has feminist components within it, by encouraging fans to be a part of the league and players showing their emotions and experience, it creates a gaze and linguistic hierarchy that destabilizes the female athlete's power. The female athlete's power is established by her skills; in contrast, by framing her abilities in a more feminine light, her credibility becomes susceptible to being appropriated by the masculine sports hegemony as a way to denigrate her further. The power of the female athlete becomes reestablished within the “We Got Game” campaign, but a different threat could destabilize the female athlete's challenge to the masculine sports hegemony emerges through the representation of the masculine gaze in one advertisement.

The “We Got Game” campaign appears to be representative of feminist values through its use of action shots focusing on players' skills and competitiveness, but the female athlete becomes devalued when the campaign establishes a masculine gaze in one

of its advertisements. The masculine gaze is not employed in all of the commercials, however, and in comparison to the other advertisements appears to be an anomaly. The campaign still creates the female athlete as credible through the framing of her game as superior visually and linguistically. Within the “We Got Game” campaign the masculine gaze is countered, but in the “This Is Who I Am” campaign analyzed in the next chapter the advertisements solidify the masculine gaze upon the female athlete through sexualizing the female athlete.

## CHAPTER IV

### “THIS IS WHO I AM”: STRONG, FEMININE, AND SEXY

#### Background

The “This Is Who I Am” campaign began during the 2002 and 2003 NBA playoffs and set a new image for the WNBA (“Michelle Branch,” 2002). Amid continuous declines in attendance and viewership, the WNBA made a shift toward showing more of the personal side of the athletes (Anthony, 2003a; Dempsey, 2002; Dillman, 2003; Rose, 2001; Wertheim, 2002). With five years of professional play behind the league, the WNBA saw attendance figures that were stagnant even though the league had expanded quickly and was well received (Rose, 2001). One sports writer who traveled with a WNBA team for a week commented:

The WNBA remains something of a niche sport, an unknown quantity even among many basketball fans. TV ratings are minuscule. Attendance, at roughly 8,700 per game, has plateaued. Teams walk unrecognized through their hometown airports. This season's biggest headlines have come from the suggestion of a players' strike...As the WNBA continues to lose, if not hemorrhage, money—the league is tight-lipped about how much—there are even whispers of its possible demise. (Wertheim, 2002, p. 58).

The decline of the league attendance was accompanied by a decline in television ratings; the games had never been seen by as many viewers per week as during the inaugural

season. In addition, one of the original broadcast networks, Lifetime, dropped its broadcast of WNBA games in 2000 due to low ratings (Dempsey, 2002). In 2002, the WNBA switched broadcast networks from NBC to ABC with games continuing on ESPN and then signed the Oxygen network to broadcast one game a week (Dempsey, 2002). Due to low viewership the league had to share advertising revenue with the networks and this cut into league profits (Dempsey, 2002). Those attending games were primarily women or families and the league perceived a lack of a male fan base (Rose, 2001; Wertheim, 2002).

The league not only faced a steady decline in fans, but also experienced decreased support from NBA owners for the league that led to the restructuring of ownership in 2002. Previously, ownership of teams was to be confined to the cities and owners of current NBA teams. The revised structure also meant that ownership of the teams was relegated to the individual teams allowing other NBA owners to be relieved of their responsibilities to assist in funding the WNBA. The move toward decreasing league-wide financial support of the teams caused an increase in pressure by owners for their teams to turn a profit (Dixon, 2002; Hohlfeld, 2003; Parker, 2003; Smith, 2002). Before the start of the 2003 season, two teams folded (Orlando and Portland) and two teams were relocated (Dixon, 2002; Smith, 2002). The Utah team moved to San Antonio, while the restructuring of ownership allowed a non-NBA owner to buy the Miami team and play the games on Native American casino grounds in Connecticut (Dixon, 2002; Smith, 2002; Woolsey, 2003).

The restructuring of the league and falling attendance figures were not the only problems facing the WNBA before the 2002 and 2003 seasons. The league faced a growing demand from the gay and lesbian community to recognize their support of the

league and presence at games. The individual teams were encouraged to market to their fan base and began to target their lesbian fans, but the league remained icily silent on the issue (Wertheim, 2002). The league has even gone as far as erasing mention of one New York Liberty official as being in a committed same-sex relationship from the media guide profiles of employees (Wertheim, 2002). Gay and lesbian groups argued that the league attempts to make the arena and broadcasts more family friendly marginalized the lesbian fans of the league (Wertheim, 2002). Within the context of falling attendance, movement of teams, change in ownership, and a lesbian backlash the “This Is Who I Am” campaign was born.

Created by NBA Entertainment, this advertising campaign focuses on showing the all-around personalities of popular players within the WNBA (Anthony, 2003a; “Getty images,” 2001; Evans, 2003; Riley, 2002; Wertheim, 2002). The “hypersexualization’ of women’s sports” in the advertisements features women in provocative and traditional roles that have historically discredited the female athlete (Wertheim, 2002, p.58). The “This Is Who I Am” campaign marks a shift toward constructing the women as more than basketball players and includes their personalities, interests, and sexiness within the advertisements (Anthony, 2003a; Riley, 2002). The league has used the campaign to get audiences acquainted with the players as well as court male fans (Riley, 2002). The “This Is Who I Am” campaign also seems to be aimed at soothing the social tension about players’ sexuality by only promoting players who are heterosexual (Wertheim, 2002). The commercials feature the players talking about their interests outside of basketball as well as talking about their games. The inclusion of sex appeal in the campaign has been acknowledged by the league (Anthony, 2003a) and will be a major focus of the analysis in this chapter.

### “This Is Who I Am”: Appropriating the Female Athlete

The 2002 and 2003 campaign, “This Is Who I Am,” constructs the female athlete in seemingly contradictory ways visually and discursively within the nine advertisements analyzed. Five of the advertisements come from the 2002 campaign with four of them being individual portrayals of WNBA players discussing basketball and their everyday lives. The fifth advertisement from the 2002 portion features Michelle Branch singing on opening day of the 2002 season atop Madison Square Garden, including a montage of Branch's concert, game footage, and the players in various poses. The four advertisements from the 2003 portion of the campaign have different montages, but are created around the same thread of discourse and visual images. The only difference among the texts is whether every athlete says something or if a particular shot of an athlete is included.

The 2002-2003 campaign visually constructs the female athlete as feminine, yet aggressive. She is beautiful, yet a highly skilled player. Discursively the female athlete is revolutionary, determined, athletic, glamorous, and a responsible parent. The tensions created surrounding the female athlete construct a new image of her as feminine, athletic, and revolutionary. The visual representation of the female athlete to the viewer undermines the feminist messages embedded in the text and appropriates the female athlete into the masculine sports hegemony, quelling any threat that she may pose to its power base. The constructions of feminism within the advertisements are framed to depict athletes as non-threatening to the audience and the sports hegemony by turning a masculine gaze toward them. The masculine gaze reframes the feminist discourse within the advertisements to create the female athlete as a sexual object that also plays sports.

The “This Is Who I Am” campaign constructs a new image of the female athlete through its blending of action shots and visual emphasis on the feminine side of the athletes. The action shots of the players are similar to those used in previous advertisements with the players making passes and drives to the basket, but also include in the 2003 portion of the campaign the first dunk in a WNBA game by Lisa Leslie (“Lisa Leslie,” 2002; “Sheryl Swoopes,” 2002; “Tichia Penichiero,” 2002; “Teresa Weatherspoon,” 2002; “This is,” 2003). The selection of game footage projects the female athlete's skills and talents as part of her power to challenge the sports hegemony, but the feminist construction of sports becomes destabilized by the emphasis on showing the private and personal side of the players.

The camera has the ability to frame the female athlete as powerful by focusing on the player's strength, agility, or intensity. The camera may create athletic strength by focusing on a player's muscles or quickness in getting around defenders in game action. Agility may be created when the camera catches a player going up for an acrobatic layup, while intensity is perceived when the camera focuses in on a player's face showing her emotions during the game. Within the “This Is Who I Am” campaign all of these camera shots are present. In one shot Jennifer Azzi is lifting barbell weights above her head with the camera focused on a closeup of her back and angled upward allowing the sun to create a glare on the camera lens (“This is,” 2003). The camera shows the players' strength and intensity when they stare into the camera and point their finger directly at the audience (“Sheryl Swoopes,” 2002; “This is,” 2003). The camera reveals the players' determination about the game through these shots by emphasizing the players' movements that connote defiant attitudes and highlight their skills as legitimate. The legitimizing of skills is especially true with the inclusion of Lisa Leslie's dunk because it erased differences and

criticism of the women's game as being inferior to the male game. The camera catches all of the players' swagger and sass toward the audience, but the shots that follow or precede these powerful images function to construct a masculine gaze upon the athletes that undermines the players' skills as basketball players, effectively neutralizing any power the female athlete may have against the masculine sports hegemony.

The masculine gaze upon the athletes in the advertisements is formed through a visual focus on the players' femininity and sexuality. The athletes' femininity is communicated through the advertisements' montage of camera angles, lighting, players' dress and actions, and the ordering of these sequences. The players are given the ability to talk directly into the camera possibly creating a projection of authority from them, but the images surrounding their actions emphasize their sexuality and seductiveness. Within the 2002 portion of the campaign, each player recounts a narrative about herself to the viewer. The most striking example of how the campaign softens the players' appeal to the audience is with Lisa Leslie. In the opening of her commercial, Lisa Leslie appears from behind two basketballs placed in each of her hands ("Lisa Leslie," 2002). Leslie is then looking into the camera from the corner of her eyes as she moves the basketballs away from her face. The commercial then cuts to game footage of Leslie and back to Leslie in the right hand side of the screen. The shot of her is from the waist up as she discusses her life while in the background black and white images of Leslie are tinted green and fade in. The images have Leslie blowing the audience a kiss fading into a profile of Leslie passively glancing out of the corner of her eye with a smile toward the camera. The individual advertisement of Leslie establishes her femininity by having her blow the audience kisses, fiddling with her hair while staring into a mirror, and laying her head on a basketball while looking up at the camera in an extreme close-up. Lisa Leslie uses her modeling experience to establish

her beauty and sexiness to the audience through a softer focus on her and her look into the camera. This kind of feminine construction is not only created with Lisa Leslie, but extends to the entirety of the campaign.

The voyeuristic gaze upon the female athlete is further established within the 2002 portion of the “This Is Who I Am” campaign when the camera catches the players looking at themselves in mirrors, even when they are doing poses that, it could be argued, exhibit their power. Historically, the mirror has been used in advertisements to symbolize the judgmental gazes of the world upon the individual peering into the mirror (Marchand, 1985). The mirror represented a reflection of the individual in the advertisement to the audience of their true essence of woman by being addicted to vanity (Marchand, 1985). The four 2002 individual advertisements play on the use of vanity and gazing when placing the players in front of mirrors with the camera placed behind them to catch them gazing upon themselves. In her advertisement, Lisa Leslie is playing with the back of her hair and doing a ballerina spin, while Sheryl Swoopes pumps her arms above her head, moves her arms in a circle above her head while looking downward, glaring at herself while dribbling the basketball, dons an Egyptian pose, and moves her extended arms holding basketballs around herself (“Lisa Leslie,” 2002; “Sheryl Swoopes,” 2002). The camera gazes at Teresa Weatherspoon while she watches herself spin a basketball on one finger, look at her arms extended with each hand holding a basketball, dribble a basketball between her legs, and flex her right bicep (“Teresa Weatherspoon,” 2002). In Ticha Penicheiro's advertisements, she swaggers up to the mirrors while dribbling a basketball through her legs, stares at herself in a tank top with her chiseled abs showing and a basketball held in the base of her arm against her hip, and playfully flexes her arms with her cheeks puffed out (“Ticha Penicheiro,” 2002). The actions of the players may not seem that seductive or

sensual when viewed in isolation, but the camera filming the players' actions in the mirrors adds a new dimension. The players are caught in action and with what seems to be little recognition that the camera is watching them, making them passive participants for the viewer's gaze. The mirror reflects a private moment that the players have for all the viewing audience to see; these shots represent the players as objects to be watched. Passivity is created when the players are not allowed to face the camera in their mirror moments, thus objectifying the players for the viewing audience.

The voyeurism encouraged by the mirror shots of players is accentuated by the players' actions when facing the camera, further stabilizing the masculine gaze within the entirety of the campaign. The masculine gaze is reinforced when the players in the advertisements are shot in softer lighting, use angles that emphasize the curvature of their bodies by placing the camera further away and looking upward at the players, and are dressed in evening gowns, skin tight leather outfits, or tank tops ("Lisa Leslie," 2002; "Sheryl Swoopes," 2002; Ticha Penicheiro," 2002; Teresa Weatherspoon," 2002; "This is," 2003). The 2002 portion of the campaign also features all of the players in a studio setting with curtained backdrops colored with lights and soft lighting on the players. While the players may be dribbling through their legs or pumping their fists, the lighting softens the perspective the audience takes towards them by encouraging viewers to look more at their sexuality than their athletic movements in the frame. The shots of the athletes are contrasted with a few action shots that function to reveal the feminine and aggressive side of the athletes, but concentrate on the more docile and calming construction of the athletes as models and individuals rather than basketball players. In contrast, the 2003 campaign uses outdoor settings, with the desert, canyons, pools, and waterfalls surrounding the athletes. The scenery changes some of the lighting of the athletes when in the sunlight, but

when leaning against a tree or walking down a runway the players are shot in the same lighting used in the 2002 campaign to emphasize their sensuality to the viewer. By placing the players in evening gowns and in positions typical of models, viewers are encouraged to look at the individuals as beauty pageant participants who are displayed for the audience to judge. This position of power to judge the athletes' appearance locates the body as the criterion for evaluating the players, thus denying an understanding of them as players.

The types of camera angles and players' looks into the camera reinforces the players' sensuality. In one sequence of shots Ticha Penicheiro is framed in a close-up of her face, the camera then cuts to game footage of her, and then back to her leaning against a yellow Chrysler Prowler in a skin tight black leather outfit running her hand down the fender and hood of the car. She is no longer looking at the camera, but at the car and the audience could easily confuse her with a car model ("This is," 2003). The advertisements have Sue Bird lying in a hammock hugging a basketball close to her head, and a shot of her sitting against a tree and turning her head toward the camera to gaze into it. The sequence then cuts to her leaning back on her extended arms in a pink tank top with the camera panning upward a bit from her waist to her face ("This is," 2003). In the same campaign as Sue Bird's montage, Lisa Leslie strolls down a runway constructed in the middle of a pool in a gold evening gown. Even images that seem powerful initially in the campaign are undermined later by the sequencing of shots. In one such contradiction, Jennifer Azzi is featured looking into the camera with her finger pointed toward the audience, but in a later shot she gazes into the camera while running her left hand through her shoulder length black hair with the camera panning around her in slow motion ("This is," 2003). The players may be talking directly into the camera, but the angle of the shot

emphasizes their femininity with the game footage becoming shorter and more sparsely distributed within the advertisements (“This is,” 2003).

The powerful images of the athletes created with the inclusion of game footage become secondary elements, there to reinforce that these women are basketball players, but are primarily sexy, feminine, and therefore not a threat to the masculine sports hegemony. The montage of the advertisements allows the players' athletic accomplishments to be featured, but not dominate the advertisements because they are to be constructed as models as well (“Michelle Branch,” 2002; “This is,” 2003). The construction of the players as feminine undermines their challenge to the masculine hegemony and runs counter to the feminist notion of how an athlete should be represented. Featuring the players in more feminine or traditional roles of motherhood functions to deflect focus away from the aggressive and competitive nature of the female athlete. The deflection of recognition of the players' skills is equatable to the treatment that the female athlete has faced since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The female athlete's femininity has been used to destabilize her ability to be competitive, aggressive, and skilled for fear that gender dichotomies may be erased. The visual emphasis on the femininity of the athletes counteracts the action shots by placing the players into traditional roles that continue the masculine sports hegemony. The use of femininity subverts the feminist challenge to the masculine sports hegemony by appropriating the female athlete through a construction of her power to appeal to fans, but then destabilizes those images to reinforce the power of gender dichotomies. The construction of feminism and femininity is also present within the verbal discourse of the advertisements and functions to create a new way to think of the female athlete.

The verbal discourse used in the “This Is Who I Am” campaign mixes the players' personal interests with their love of the game. In the advertisements the players describe their outside interests and personal attributes, while still addressing basketball. The linguistic hierarchy constructs the players as athletic and glamorous through the multitude of aggressive and passive characteristics that the players exhibit. Constructing the athlete as athletic gives her the ability to challenge the masculine sports hierarchy, but privileging femininity within the players' narratives risks allowing this feminist discourse of the athletes to be appropriated. The narratives in the advertisements create a middle ground and multiple opportunities for both challenge and appropriation to occur.

The feminist discourse within the linguistic hierarchy creates a powerful and independent image of the female athlete, while emphasizing her athleticism. In the 2003 campaign Ticha Penicheiro tells the viewing audience, “I am what I am. Can you handle that?” (“This is”). Sheryl Swoopes (2002) professes to the camera, “This girl can play” (“Sheryl Swoopes”). These statements by the athletes construct an image of an independent athlete who can play the game that she loves and not be worried about what the outside world thinks of her. These sentiments resonate throughout the campaign from Teresa Weatherspoon (2002) talking about her athletic family, or Ticha Penicherio in her 2002 advertisement talking about her abilities that are often compared to Magic Johnson. The 2003 portion of the campaign opens with Swin Cash stating, “I am part of a new revolution” and “I am always trying to win” (“This is”). The advertisement goes on to feature Jennifer Azzi (2003) telling the audience “I am not afraid to lose, but I don't like it” (“This is”). The advertisements even feature Lisa Leslie discussing her ground breaking dunk with the statement “I am the first woman to dunk in the WNBA, but I won't be the last” (“This is,” 2003). The discourse by the players constructs them as athletes who are

intense, focused on winning, and skilled. This framing of the athletes as skilled, intense players functions as a feminist challenge to the sports hierarchy by aiming to erase gender differences through the players' discourse. The notions that the players hold of themselves frame the game as not having inherent differences and instead create a focus on how the players are powerful and warriors for being athletes. The feminist framing of the female athlete, though, becomes problematized with the discourse creating the female athlete as glamorous as well as athletic.

The campaign uses the personal narratives of the athletes to drive a larger campaign narrative of the athletes as glamorous players. The personal narratives are established in the 2002 portion of the campaign and are at times a little jarring for the audience to take in. The narratives include information on the athletes' personal lives, but seem to be disjointed or tangential to the viewing audience. The advertisements lack cohesion between what the players discuss with the audience and vary from Lisa Leslie (2002) professing her love for her mother, to Sheryl Swoopes (2002) telling the audience that she is a true Texan, to Teresa Weatherspoon (2002) challenging the audience to a bowling match and telling her mom hello, and to Ticha Penicheiro (2002) professing her love for Portugal. Each player in the 2002 campaign states her love for her mother, the game, New York City, or Portugal to accentuate their portrayal of their emotions. The 2003 campaign features various statements such as, "I am glamorous, so what?," "I am responsible because I know my son is watching," "I am your sister. I am your daughter. I am the girl next door" ("This is," 2003). These statements by players reinforce their femininity by focusing on personal qualities that are outside of the realm of basketball and create identification with them as individuals within the private sphere. The discourse counteracts the feminist construction by positioning the players into the private sphere where their

traditional roles become reinforced and disempowers their ability to challenge the masculine hierarchy. The framing of the athletes as glamorous and athletic functions to reflect a reality where the athletes are feminine first and can play the game of basketball second. The reflection created in the advertisements' visual and verbal discourse functions to reframe the female athlete and allow for her appropriation into the masculine sports hegemony.

The visual and verbal discourse within the “This Is Who I Am” campaign function together to create a new female athlete for the viewing audience. The advertisements have hints of feminism embedded within them, especially in the verbal discourse, but these come into competition with the femininity projected by the athletes especially in the visual aspects. The visual images in the advertisements function as signifiers for the meaning of the verbal discourse, thus creating a new meaning for the feminist discourse within the advertisements. The new revolution that the advertisements reflect locates femininity as of great importance to and part of female athletes' power.

The advertisements' visual images and verbal discourse reflect the female athlete as beautiful. The meaning created through the advertisement is that beauty is a part of the athlete's sexual allure to fans and her ability to be a professional model. Beauty becomes an important part of the players identities and personalities. The masculine gaze that is created in the advertisements functions to subvert the feminist messages within the advertisements by deflecting attention toward the athletes' sexual prowess. Jennifer Azzi's powerful discourse on disliking losing becomes discredited when the advertisement cuts back to her running her hand through her hair in alluring manner while the camera is panning around her in slow motion (“This is,” 2003). Lisa Leslie's feminist discourse regarding her dunk becomes undermined by her placement in the advertisement in a gold

evening gown (“This is,” 2003). The privileging of the sexual aspects of the players and the masculine gaze functions to appropriate the feminist discourse. By putting the women in more traditional feminine clothing and making the game footage secondary, the dominant gaze over women as inferior and sexual objects is reified, not contested.

These gazes change the meanings of the words that fade, then disappear, in the final shot of each 2003 commercial. These words are:

Fearless I Am Power

Warrior Daughter

Pride This Is Who I Am

Journey Glamorous

I Am Confident Strength

Shining Star Revolution (“This is,” 2003).

Through the visual representations of the athletes within the commercials, the words that once would have been challenging to the hierarchy of sports are weakened to allow for their appropriation into the hierarchy without any fundamental changes to its values. As the set of words above fades in turn, the three final words that appear before they dissolve, leaving “This Is Who I Am,” are: revolution, daughter, and warrior (“This is,” 2003).

Warrior may be the last word that is present, but the reflection created by the advertisements has the female warrior being viewed as sexy and fun to watch, thus continuing the patriarchy of sports. If these words came at the beginning of the advertisements, the construction of the female athlete would have been shocking and seem out of place. The advertisements deflect attention away from the athleticism and feminism the players exhibit by reframing what their play means to the audience and by privileging the sexual over the athletes' athleticism.

### Summary

The “This Is Who I Am” campaign was developed during a time of falling attendance and viewership for the league. The league also was facing the possibility of closing down large parts of itself. Before the 2003 portion of the campaign two teams had folded and two had relocated. The change in ownership structure forced team owners to start trying to turn a profit quickly or abandon women's basketball.

The campaign effectively abandons the women's prospect of being respected by the viewing audience by making them subject to the masculine gaze that objectifies their bodies and achievements. The masculine gaze is created through the visual images of the advertisements placing a softer focus on the players, having them dress in more seductive clothing, and the lack of inclusion of game footage or shots showing the players' athleticism. The players are shown blowing the camera kisses, running their hands down car fenders, and hugging basketballs. The visual aspects of the advertisements reinforce the players' femininity and privilege a more traditional role for the women. The action shots that are included in the advertisements are counteracted by the montage of the advertisements by having the player pose in a gold evening gown on a runway or through the playfulness exhibited in other camera shots. The masculine gaze changes the persona of the female athlete and controls her ability to challenge the sports hegemony.

The linguistic hierarchy created within the advertisements privileges the players as athletic and glamorous. The athleticism portrayed within the advertisements allows the players to show their strength and individuality for the viewing audience. They claim power over themselves by being a part of a new revolution, which seemingly could be a part of the feminist challenge to the sports hierarchy. The problem is that the new

revolution makes the athletes glamorous. The personal narratives of the players place them in more traditional roles and delegitimize their abilities. The feminist message becomes undermined when the players are put in the traditional roles and these images function to destabilize the athletes' ability to prevent appropriation into the sports hierarchy.

In the advertisements the representations foreground a beautiful female whose athleticism is secondary. She is strong, but sexy. The feminist constructions of the athletes flexing their muscles and showing off their skills become deflected when the advertisements reflect a masculine gaze upon the female athlete. The masculine gaze allows for voyeurism and viewing the female athlete as a sexual object. The gaze also functions to reframe the discourse of the female athlete allowing for her appropriation into the masculine sports hegemony. The threat the female athlete posed to the sports hegemony is quelled when her feminist discourse and images are neutralized by her appropriation into traditional female roles.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Summary

The masculine sports hegemony has denigrated the female athlete through the denial of team, denial of participation, and placement of emphasis on femininity. The sports hegemony creates team sports as masculine, while individual sports are portrayed as feminine. Through this construction male sporting events are a must-see and women's events are non-events and secondary. The WNBA was met with a wave of support and hope that the league would succeed in challenging the sports hegemony to allow female athletes to be marquee players. Through the support from the league and all of the fans who watched the 1996 women's Olympic team, the WNBA was constructed and hailed as the best challenge to the patriarchal sports hegemony by placing a women's team sport, one traditionally viewed as masculine, within the sporting landscape. The WNBA was heralded as feminism incarnate to create legitimacy for the female athlete who had been denied media coverage and been denigrated for so long by the masculine sports hegemony. Previous leagues may have failed, but the backing of the NBA created legitimacy and hope for the survival of the league. The WNBA advertisements created to publicize the league are representative of its ideology and are influential in constructing the image of the female athlete within the sports culture and social culture at large. Four WNBA campaigns were

analyzed with feminism being the overarching perspective informing the application of the psychoanalytic gaze and the linguistic hierarchies of Burke (1950/1969).

The WNBA advertising campaigns have evolved from the “We Got Next” advertisements highlighting the intensity and focus of the players on basketball to the “Join In” campaign's focus of spiritual reverence for the players. The “We Got Game” campaign returned to a spotlight on the players' skills and competitiveness, but also hinted at the players' sexuality and began the emphasis upon the masculine gaze. Within the “This Is Who I Am” campaign individual advertisements were used, but unlike the “We Got Next” campaign they placed the emphasis on the personal side of the players. The masculine gaze dominates the “This Is Who I Am” campaign and uses feminism as a commodity narrative to reinforce gender norms. The WNBA advertisements have visual and verbal discourse representative of feminism, but the feminist representations become appropriated through the juxtapositions created overall among the four campaigns. This appropriation of feminist discourse undermines the challenge the skilled and competitive constructions of the female athlete represent to the patriarchal sports hegemony by focusing on traditional norms, femininity, and heterosexuality.

The WNBA's advertisement campaigns represent the female athlete in a multitude of ways. The advertisements show the players in game footage driving to the basket, making a perfect pass to a teammate, shooting a jump shot, staring down their opponents, and having intensity toward the game. The players also are shown in evening gowns, tank tops, and leather outfits. The representation of the female athlete shows her as powerful and passive, athletic and sexy. These constructions of the players in the advertisements represent the appropriation of the female athlete through juxtaposition and an emphasis on femininity (Dow, 1992; Dow, 1996; Shugart, Waggoner, & O'Brien Hallstein, 2001).

Appropriation also occurs through the masculine gaze and its sexualizing of the female athlete in an attempt to make beauty the ultimate value.

Feminist ideals are present within the advertisements by highlighting the players' skills and competitiveness. The "We Got Next" campaign places the players' success at the forefront and constructs the athletes simply as basketball players. They are shown with sweat dripping down their faces and playing against others with stern looks on their faces. This representation of the players becomes secondary within the advertisements via the emphasis placed on spirituality, their personal lives, and their sexuality. The WNBA's construction of the players as having the skills necessary to play a competitive game are undermined with the shift in focus toward their private lives and the domestic sphere. The players' sexuality dominates the later advertisements' message and negates previous constructions of the players. When viewed in contrast to and in comparison with one another, the WNBA advertisements create a juxtaposition between the intensity of the players and the femininity that they retain.

The juxtapositions within the advertisements articulate that the success of basketball is in conflict with the ability of the players to retain their femininity and personal lives. The players are shown with sweat dripping off their faces, catching their breath, practicing the game, and lifting light barbell weights, which all connote the players' hard work toward becoming better athletes and successful within the public sphere. The private sphere is represented within the advertisements with the players providing personal narratives about being mothers, their families, and their personal interests, coupled with emphasis upon the players' sexuality through the way they are dressed and shot by the camera. The competing representations of the players in the public and private sphere displaces a feminist emphasis on deconstructing binary differences between the spheres.

The advertisements construct differences that are required to be successful within the two spheres and force a choice on the players. If they are intense and strong, then their femininity is lost. If they are feminine, then their ability to challenge the patriarchal sports hegemony is lost through suspicions that they lack the skills and competitiveness to be an athlete.

The paradox for the female athlete as having to choose between being feminine and denigrated or athletic and lesbian is recreated within the advertisements. The texts appropriate the feminist messages of athleticism and power through a focus on the players' femininity. By focusing on femininity the players are created as sexual objects for the audience to gaze at while undermining the players' ability to challenge the sports hegemony. When the athletes' femininity is created the sports hegemony has the opportunity to undercut the players' legitimacy as athletes by denigrating their skills and role on a team (Bryson, 1989; Creedon, 1994; Sabo & Messner, 1993). Through the focus on femininity, the advertisements articulate the individuals as superior thus displacing the role of the players as a team. As explained in Chapter One the sports hegemony uses denial of team to reinforce that team sports are masculine in nature and that women lack the ability to be competitive within them. This continues a privileging of experience that creates males as being inherently better athletes (Duncan & Hasbrook, 1988). The masculine gaze within the advertisements appropriates the female athlete into the patriarchal sports hegemony.

The femininity of the players becomes dominant throughout the WNBA's advertisements by creating reverence for the players in the "Join In" campaign, the "Black and White" advertisement's initiation of the masculine gaze in the "We Got Game" campaign, and the entirety of the "This Is Who I Am" campaign. Sexuality and male desire

are created within the advertisements and are representative of third-wave feminism (Shugart, Waggoner, & O'Brien Hallstein, 2001). Third-wave feminism argues that representations of sexuality are liberating to females and resist the dominant patriarchal paradigm within culture. The representations of sexuality and desire within the WNBA advertisements, though, are not liberating for female athletes or the culture at large because they make them susceptible to the masculine gaze which is used to reinforce gender norms. The gaze denies female athletes the power to construct their own identity or perception of their bodies. The female looks into a mirror to only be at the mercy of the culture's gaze and construction of the woman as vain. The athletes' placement in evening gowns and sexually alluring clothing reframes them as models, not athletes. The advertisements' commodity narratives use the athletes' highly defined bodies of musculature and power that are used to play the game of basketball with the highest of intensity and skill against the athletes (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991). Their bodies become loci of power and that power is defined by beauty standards, not athleticism. The masculine gaze's reinforcement of beauty standards quells the athletes' threat to the sports hegemony by deflecting attention away from their skills and toward their sexuality; the result is a message that denigrates the women's game. The masculine gaze appropriates the feminist challenge of strength and power the athletes exhibit within all of the advertisements through the representation of the athletes as sexual objects to be devoured by the viewers. The gaze sexualizes the female athlete and emphasizes her heterosexuality.

The sporting arena has not been without fear of the athlete as a lesbian and the WNBA is no different. The WNBA faced public criticism from its inception about its gay and lesbian fan base, as well as not advertising to it. In the early years the league argued that they were not aware of a gay and lesbian fan base, but allowed the individual teams to

advertise themselves to their markets. The WNBA allowed teams to acknowledge and celebrate their gay and lesbian fans by attending functions with them or recognizing them at games. The league went as far as erasing homosexual references from their media guides and choosing only heterosexual athletes to be in their advertisements (Wertheim, 2002). The effect of the choices that the WNBA made regarding the sexual orientation of the female athlete and the construction of the gaze during the “This Is Who I Am” campaign is indicative of the heterosexualization of the female athlete.

At the turn of the twentieth century and into the 1930's there were growing worries that sports would masculinize women or that women would feminize sports. With the entrance of Mildred “Babe” Didrikson into the sporting climate the worry over masculine female athletes became even more present and worrisome (Cahn, 1994). The culture backlashed against masculine women by labeling them lesbian and calling them brutish in an attempt to delegitimize their athletic prowess. The cultural upheaval created a standard that athletic women should keep their femininity or risk being ostracized by society. This cultural standard is symptomatic of postfeminism's notion that women are punished in their private lives for success in the public sphere. If the female athlete is too strong or too assertive, then she loses her femininity and risks not gaining the love of a man. The heterosexualization of the female athlete within the WNBA advertisements, however, quells threats that the players may be lesbian while reinforcing traditional gender norms that the players would not want to prevent themselves from being able to gain the companionship of a male. By reinforcing the players' femininity, and erasing any notion that there may be lesbian players within the league, the sports hegemony has the ability to prevent challenges to the patriarchy while reinforcing the hierarchy of sports by making women more feminine and thus less skilled at being true athletes. The WNBA

representation of the female athlete through their advertising campaigns articulates the female athlete as powerful and skilled, but these representations are undermined by the construction of the female athlete as sexy, feminine, and heterosexual. The implications of the WNBA's discursive representations of the female athlete endanger her ability to counter the masculine sports hegemony and the patriarchal gender norms it creates within society.

### Implications

This thesis has expanded on Nick Trujillo's (1991) notion that advertisements which have the possibility to maintain hegemony should be investigated in an attempt to understand how the hegemony continues the dominance of masculinity within society. The WNBA serves as a challenge to masculinity in sports, but its promotion by the NBA is symptomatic of a larger cultural problem regarding how appropriation allows the dominant ideologies of masculinity to continue. While the implications created by the WNBA may not be what the league intended, the advertisements' implications are crucial to a broader understanding of how commodity narratives allow and encourage patriarchy to continue within the sports arena and the culture at large (Goldman, Heath, & Smith, 1991; Kilbourne, 1994). The representations of the female athlete within the WNBA's advertising scheme presents four cultural implications: 1) they undermine the credibility of the female athlete continuing dominance in the sporting arena; 2) they continue the use of feminism as a commodity narrative to prevent empowerment of women; 3) they legitimize and further the masculine gaze making women sexual objects; and 4) their enthymematic nature allows the masculine gaze to be communicated in 30-second spots furthering sexual objectification in society.

The female athlete comes under attack within the WNBA advertisements because the advertisements shift the focus away from her skills and negate the dichotomies between men and women's basketball by using appropriation as a means to denigrate such players. When the league began in 1997 after the watershed of support for the 1996 women's Olympic participants and women's basketball in particular, there was promise and support for the female athlete to make strides towards challenging if not tearing down the masculine sports hierarchy. Instead, the WNBA has seen its high and low points of public support, but that does not seem to be enough for some owners. Since the conclusion of the 2003 season, one of the league's eight inaugural franchises, the Cleveland Rockers, has folded because the owner claimed he was losing too much money (Anthony, 2003b; Peticca, 2003). With owners' focus being on turning a profit the WNBA turned itself into "beauty-athletic contests" reminiscent of the 1920's and 1930's (Cahn, 1994, p. 4). The players were no longer only athletes, but dames on display for the crowd. By highlighting their feminine side and focusing on the players' beauty the league's advertising techniques turned the tide of progress against the WNBA players and the female athlete more generally. The focus on femininity degrades the female athlete, even when the league seems to be espousing feminist ideology. This step back in representations of the female athlete is symbolic of the power that the masculine gaze wields in the media and requires more attention to be paid to it. The appropriation of feminism by the masculine sports hegemony is indicative of the struggle that female athletes go through to gain credibility and the power that is held over athletes. Through appropriation the masculine sports hegemony proves that inclusion of the female athlete will not be enough to change the ideology present within sports; instead, legislative and cultural changes will have to be achieved for the female athlete to be free from denigration by the sport hegemony.

The commodity narrative represents a dangerous challenge to feminism and the consuming public through its ability to be representative of feminism, but reify patriarchal gender norms through the fetishization that is created within the advertisements. The WNBA advertisements are representative of Goldman, Heath, and Smith's (1991) argument that the feminist discourse within advertisements is not empowering for the consumer and instead reinforces patriarchy. Through commodity narratives, the WNBA's discourse of feminism is appropriated in an attempt to sell beauty to the viewers. The advertisements' use of mirrors signifies a return to turn of the century advertising techniques in an attempt to depict the female athlete as being gazed upon by male viewers and in need of beauty to be successful. This construction of the female athlete as needing beauty and feminine qualities for success undermines the feminist messages while signaling support for traditional gender roles. The female consumers are "sold" female athletes whose basketball prowess has allowed them to be successful, but what the viewer is shown are individuals who pay attention to vanity and privilege and view these as most important. Through the connotation that beauty is crucial or at least an important characteristic in gaining success, gender dichotomies continue within society and sports. The commodity narratives enable empowerment to be undermined through fetishization and pose a large threat to the challenging of patriarchy.

The female athlete is constructed as a sexual object within the WNBA advertisements and this representation quells the threat that the players represent to the sports hegemony and patriarchy within society. By constructing the athletes as sexual objects their bodies become a locus of power to be used against the female. Through the ability of the masculine gaze to turn empowering messages into demands on the female to accomplish norms of how their body should look, the risk of eating disorders continues to

rise in the culture (Bordo, 1993). The masculine gaze negates the powerful images of the athletes and threatens females' power to dictate control over their bodies, thus allowing the patriarchy to retain power over females. By being able to control the body, the patriarchy is able to retain control and enforce dichotomous gender norms, which denigrate females and the sports they play.

The previous implications of this analysis establish the danger that the masculine gaze poses to women. The masculine gaze encourages sexual objectification even within an advertisement that is only 30 seconds long. The integral and confounding component of the masculine gaze are its ability to create signifiers so easily within advertisements that are widely understood and held by the viewer. The linguistic components become reflected to have new meanings to the audience in alignment with the visual, thus disempowering feminist messages within the advertisements. The enthymematic nature of the masculine gaze is the largest threat to the female image within the media through its ability to so easily transform a powerful image into one that is sexually alluring and objectifying. The signification process of the gaze threatens the feminist discourse and functions to continue patriarchy. The problematic nature of the gaze raises larger questions of how the culture creates the signification process that allows the gaze to envision sexualization. An understanding of and challenge to the commodity narratives is formed through the ability of the viewer to create oppositional readings to the advertisements, but even then the sexualization reinforces the cultural norm of domination. Renovating the signification process of the masculine gaze and commodity narratives becomes integral in challenging the sexualization that occurs through their enactment. For the masculine gaze and commodity narratives to be thwarted the signification process of transforming the individual into a sexual object must be completely prevented. Through action shots and

focus on play the WNBA was able to thwart sexual objectification at least in their early advertisements. For any successful challenge to the patriarchy the same form of framing that created respect for the WNBA players must be present in all advertisements, not only select campaigns.

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