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## Bring the Self Back In: An Empirical Critique of the Oversocialized Conception of Women in Sport

Kimberly Ann Tyler-Ayers

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**BRINGING THE SELF BACK IN:  
AN EMPIRICAL CRITIQUE OF THE OVERSOCIALIZED  
CONCEPTION OF WOMEN IN SPORT**

by

**Kimberly Ann Tyler-Ayers  
Bachelor of Arts, Honors, University of Winnipeg, 1990**

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

May

1992

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This thesis meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

Harvey Knud

Dean of the Graduate School

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#### ABSTRACT

This study takes a grounded theory approach to female socialization into sport. It argues that social learning theory provides an inadequate theoretical framework for understanding female socialization into sport due to its emphasis on external socializing agents. This focus encourages an oversocialized view of the individual that generally fails to recognize the central role of the self in the socialization process. Semi-structured interviews with college level athletes, semi-athletes and non-athletes illustrates the prominent role of the self throughout the life course in socialization and social behavior.

CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

This study is concerned with female socialization into sport. A critique and my own athletic experiences revealed that the current literature did not give a complete nor accurate picture of this process. It was designed as an attempt to move our understanding of female socialization into sport beyond its present state. To this end, it was guided by a grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) approach to theory development. Semi-structured biographical interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 22 college women. Some women were current members of university athletic teams, some were engaged in extracurricular athletics, and some were currently uninvolved in athletics.

Based on the analysis of these data, it is argued that social learning theory provides an inadequate theoretical framework for understanding the process of female socialization into sport because it fails to recognize the central role of the self (Mead 1934) in the socialization process.

Social learning theory, with its emphasis on external "socializing agents," encourages an "oversocialized" (Wrong 1961) view of the individual. This leaves us with the image

of a passive, unreflective individual who is acted upon by society (Erickson 1992) rather than the one doing the acting. In contrast, symbolic interactionist theory (Blumer 1969; Mead 1934; Rosenberg 1979) gives prominence to the role of the self in both socialization and social behavior.

This first chapter offers a rationale for this study. Research in this area which uses social learning theory to address the issue of female socialization into sport is inadequate in its explanations. The outline I propose goes beyond the work of previous researchers. By using the symbolic interactionist framework, I am able to include the central role of the self (Mead 1934) in the socialization process. This allows a more complete picture than the one offered by those using social learning theory. This chapter also gives a brief summary of the remainder of this thesis.

Chapter two reviews the existing literature on female socialization into sport, which typically falls into three major categories. These studies emphasize the role of personal attributes, major socializing agents and opportunity set. A sports autobiography of the author is presented to show a person maintaining her commitment to sport, and an athlete identity, mostly in spite of socializing influences. It is followed by a critique of the literature. The critique contrasts the existing literature with my own experiences as a female athlete. It is argued that although the literature makes sense, it gives an incomplete picture of female

socialization into sport. The methods traditionally used do not allow researchers to capture the life histories of women athletes.

The focus of chapter three is on research methods. It describes the sampling frame, data collection instruments, and the operationalization of key variables. Denzin's (1989) sensitizing approach is used to discuss the subjects' definitions of a few essential concepts and demographic data on our subjects are presented.

Chapter four presents the findings of this study in two sections. The first part presents findings from this research which are generally consistent with that of the literature. It focuses on the influence of others throughout the biographies of women in my study. The major agents of socialization which are seen as most influential in the lives of young women are presented for each level of school (elementary, junior high, high school and college). The second section focuses on the unique contribution made by this thesis to the literature. Instead of looking at the influence of others, it focuses on the influence of the self in creating a self-sustaining athletic identity.

Chapter five offers a reconceptualization of the nature of women's sport socialization. The distinction between social identity and personal identity (Hewitt 1989) is used to compare athletes and semi-athletes. It is argued that athletes have not developed a central personal identity.

Their biographies do not place the self at the center but instead, place societal agents such as parents, coaches and peers there. Because the self does not play a crucial role in sport socialization for athletes, they have not developed a self-sustaining identity. Semi-athletes, in comparison, have developed a personal identity. The reason they have acquired a self-sustaining athletic identity is due to the active role the self played in their sport socialization. Implications of this study are presented and directions for future research are described.

## CHAPTER 2

### WHAT WE KNOW OR THINK WE KNOW ABOUT FEMALE SOCIALIZATION INTO SPORT

The existing literature on the socialization of females into sport is limited. What does exist is somewhat redundant in that most are quantitative studies that focus on major socializing agents such as mother, father, siblings, peers, coaches and teachers. These studies consistently reveal that parents tend to be most influential during childhood (ages 6-12) and that peers and coaches take over as the major socializing agents during the adolescent years (c.f. Greendorfer 1977; Higginson 1985). Recent quantitative studies add little to this body of knowledge that was established in the 1970s.

Albert Bandura's (1977) social learning theory provides the theoretical orientation of this literature. Research on socialization into sport typically falls into three major categories of emphasis. The first explores personal attributes. These studies, although few in number, emphasize characteristics such as satisfaction with sports skills and self-confidence which are associated with sport participation (c.f. Butcher 1983; Gregson and Colley 1986). Other studies in this tradition focus on sports and physical activities that



are either appropriate or inappropriate for female participation (c.f. Colley, Nash, O'Donnell and Restorick 1987; Csizma, Wittig and Schurr 1988).

The second area of social learning theory research examines the role of major socializing agents. This is where most of the research lies and, therefore, it has had the greatest impact in accounting for women's involvement in sports. These researchers describe the impact of various agents of socialization and at what stage they are most influential in the athlete's life (c.f. Greendorfer 1987; Higginson 1985; Smith 1979).

The third and final focus of research is on opportunity set. Although some studies have been conducted in this area, most of this work is dated (c.f. Greendorfer and Ewing 1981; McPherson, Guppy and McKay 1976). Opportunity set studies examine the importance of Title IX in allowing females equal access to sport funding (Eitzen and Sage 1989). They also focus on social class, birth order, race, and geographic location as they relate to sport participation (Greendorfer 1978; Hasbrook 1987; McPherson et al. 1976). As the work in this area shows some promise, additional studies on opportunity set would be useful.

The next part of this chapter focuses on early socialization. It sets the stage for a discussion of the literature on sport as outlined above. The review of the existing literature is followed by the sports autobiography of

the author. The autobiography shows a woman able to maintain her commitment to sport, and an athlete identity, mostly in spite of socializing influences. Finally, a critique of the literature is presented. This critique illustrates the incomplete picture of female socialization into sport by drawing on my experiences as an athlete.

### Early Socialization

According to McPherson:

Socialization is a process whereby individuals learn skills, traits, values, attitudes, norms, sanctions, knowledges, and dispositions associated with the performance of present or anticipated social roles. (1982, p.250)

Socialization is a process that begins at birth and continues as the child grows. Parents are a major socializing agent, and whether they realize it or not, many reinforce sex-stereotypic behavior.

Studies conducted on the way parents treat infants illustrates this point (Delk, Madden, Livingston and Ryan 1986; Walum 1977). When an infant was dressed in a pink, frilly dress, "she" was smiled at more, viewed as "sweet" and having a "soft cry," and described as passive, tiny, soft, and fine-featured. Parents also offered Beth (the infant) sex-stereotypic toys such as dolls. The parents were then shown Adam who was dressed in blue overalls. "He" was described as aggressive, strong, alert, and well-coordinated. In

actuality, Beth and Adam were the same six-month-old child (Delk et al. 1986).

This type of behavior on the part of parents illustrates how sex typing occurs right from birth. Sex typing does not stop here, however, but continues as the child grows. The decorating of childrens' rooms is another example (Rivers, Barnett and Baruch 1979; Robinson and Morris 1986). Boys' rooms tend to have more educational and art materials, more spatial toys, more sports equipment and military toys. Girls' rooms, in contrast, have more dolls and domestic objects. Moreover, their rooms tend to be decorated with more floral motifs, lace, frills and ruffles. This research reveals that parents tend to engage in stereotypic behavior whether they realize it or not.

The type of play that children participate in reflects their socialization. Kane (1990) and Power and Shanks (1989) found that fathers tend to encourage gross motor activity in boys, such as jumping, running and throwing, more so than in girls. Perhaps this is due to the fact that fathers see their daughters as too fragile for rough play. Girls are expected to be dependent and stay close to home whereas boys are encouraged to explore their environment and be independent. One of the most consistent findings is that boys engage in more physical, aggressive, "rough and tumble" play than do girls (Kane 1990; Lever 1976; MacDonald and Parke 1986). Boys

tend to play outdoors, play in larger groups and engage in competitive games more than girls.

Boys are typically allowed to display aggressive behavior (Lewis 1972) and are generally more active than girls (Pomerleau, Bolduc, Malcuit and Cossette 1990). Moreover, boys learn at a very early age which activities are sex appropriate (Lewko and Greendorfer 1982). Those who fail to adhere to traditional sex roles by playing with girls' toys, or having feminine personality characteristics, are negatively evaluated (Pagot and Leinbach 1983; Martin 1989). The situation for girls is another matter. Girls are permitted to play a variety of activities throughout childhood (Lewko and Greendorfer 1982). Even if they do adopt cross-sex characteristics, they are not evaluated as negatively as boys (Martin 1989). Male and female children are socialized differently with regard to sport participation. This type of behavior is apparent in their play and in games before the child enters organized sport (Lewko and Greendorfer 1982).

In North American society, males have traditionally been expected to be independent, aggressive and competitive while females are expected to be supportive and nurturant (Eray 1988; Die and Holt 1989; Kane 1990; McPherson 1982). Males are expected to possess these traits in preparation for their place in the job market. The types of behavior required for the job market are fostered through sport participation.

Thus, some argue that many sports encourage aggressive and even violent behaviors (Bray 1988).

The woman's task in society has traditionally been that of reproductive work. Reproductive work requires her to be nurturant and nonviolent, two traits that are inconsistent with sports participation. Females practice and learn these traits in childhood through playing with dolls and engaging in domestic tasks (Bray 1988).

Reproduction is no longer the only job for which women are responsible. They also engage in economic labor outside the home as well. Die and Holt (1989) argue that because the role of women in society is changing, women now occupy positions which were traditionally male dominated. They note that this has not only happened in the business world but in the world of sports as well. Women are now seen as having many of the characteristics (aggression, achievement, assertiveness) that have traditionally been associated with males (Die and Holt 1989). The possession of these traits make it easier for women to compete in organized sport.

### Role Conflict

A double standard exists in North America in terms of how boys and girls are socialized into sport (Fasting and Sisjord 1985). In general, sport socialization follows sex role socialization (Fasting 1987; Gregson and Colley 1986). Traditionally masculine traits such as competitiveness and

leadership, valued characteristics in males, are encouraged in sports. However, these traits are discouraged in female socialization. Girls learn at an early age that sport participation is valued positively for males but not for them (Fasting 1987; McPherson 1982). Females, therefore, have fewer opportunities than males to develop strong intrinsic motives for sport. This differential socialization or double standard remains an important influence on female participation in sports (Fasting and Sisjord 1985).

The girl who decides to play the athletic role may experience role conflict (McPherson 1982). She is faced with the dilemma of either behaving according to her ascribed gender or following her interest as an athlete. Her ascribed gender consists of being gentle, unassuming, passive and inactive. This is at odds with the sport role where she must be aggressive, competitive and independent. The dissonance created by these contrary roles may be too much for her to balance. Therefore, she may drop out of organized sport to resolve her dissonance (Lumpkin 1984).

Allison (1991) provides a summary and critique of studies dealing with role conflict. She argues that past research lacks empirical support for particular findings on this topic.

Despite the popular notion that female athletes constantly struggled with their femininity, most of the studies came to the same unexpected conclusion: role conflict appeared to be relatively low among female athletes. (Allison 1991, p.50)

Allison (1991) argues that some researchers are so preoccupied with role conflict that they are unwilling to give up traditional images of the female athlete. Despite research that reveals that athletes do not view role conflict as a problem, many researchers cling to this belief. Contrary to what Fasting and Sisjord (1985) and McPherson (1982) report, Allison (1991) argues that "the concept of female/athlete role conflict has outlived its usefulness" (p.50).

#### Personal Attributes

The focus on individual differences is an attempt to determine if there are certain characteristics associated with sport participation (Gregson and Colley 1986). In their study of 15-and 16-year-old males and females in Great Britain, Gregson and Colley (1986) found that sex role attitudes did not influence sport participation for either sex. They further discovered that the presence of stereotypically masculine traits was a highly significant predictor of sport participation for females but not for males. Their study also focused on parents who participated in sports. Gregson and Colley (1986) argue that these parents served as role models for their children and seemed to increase the probability of their children's sport involvement.

Another part of the research on personal attributes focuses on age. A study conducted on early and middle

adolescent girls found that younger girls were very concerned with the game and participated in cheering on teammates, jumping up and down and encouraging and touching each other. The middle adolescent girls, in comparison, de-emphasized the game. They engaged in talk unrelated to the game, focused on their hair and make-up, and avoided the ball if it came toward them. They obviously took seriously the message that sports are not for females (Williams-Savin, Bolger and Spinola 1986).

In explanation, Williams-Savin et al. (1986) state that girls are allowed to be "tomboys" in elementary school but if they continue in competitive sport at the junior high level, they will be labelled lesbians. Parents, teachers and peers pressure her to quit as she gets older, stating that sport participation is unladylike, masculine and physiologically harmful (McPherson 1982).

Research which addresses why girls become involved in sports also examines the role of personal attributes. A study of 11-to 16-year-old girls found five factors related to participation in physical activity. These factors include (1) satisfaction with sport skills; (2) significant others (especially parents); (3) opportunity set such as socioeconomic status and total sports equipment; (4) traits such as independence, assertiveness and self-confidence; and (5) a positive attitude toward physical activity and competition. Since this study only included activities provided through the school, opportunity set was not a major



factor. However, sport skills, self-confidence and assertiveness were essential to physical activity (Butcher 1983).

Finally, there are two other notable studies that focus on the social appropriateness of certain sports for female athletes. Both reveal that many sports and physical activities are sex-typed. Colley et al. (1987) found that inappropriate sports include wrestling, boxing, and weight-lifting; sports which all include the use of heavy objects, bodily contact or face-to-face opposition. In comparison, appropriate sports include tennis, golf, gymnastics and skiing. These sports are characterized by lighter objects, accuracy but not a lot of strength, and little or no body contact. Csizma, Wittig and Schurr (1988) report that females are more likely to participate in sports that are "appropriate" for their gender (cheerleading, aerobic dancing, figure skating) rather than engaging in "inappropriate" activities such as boxing, football, or wrestling. Csizma et al. (1988) argue the reason females are more likely to participate in sex appropriate sports is due to social acceptability. This theme emerges more completely in the next section as we focus on major socializing agents.

### Major Socializing Agents

This section focuses on major socializing agents and their impact on participation in sports. It is important to note that the relevance of these agents depends on both the child's age and gender. Research on early socialization typically uses Bandura's (1977) social learning theory (Butcher 1983; Greendorfer 1977; Greendorfer and Lewko 1978; Gregson and Colley 1986; Kenyon and McPherson 1974; McPherson et al. 1976). In short, Bandura argues that children learn sex-appropriate behaviors because they are positively reinforced by parents, teachers, peers, and other socializing agents for them. Moreover, they are punished for behaviors that are sex-inappropriate. Therefore, sex-role expectations may be communicated by providing opportunities for children to act in sex-appropriate ways (Etaugh 1983). What follows is an overview of studies that examine the influence of various socializing agents.

#### Parents As Socializing Agents

Many researchers focus on family members as the major socializing agents for children into sport. Greendorfer (1978), Greendorfer and Lewko (1978), Greendorfer et al. (1986), Gregson and Colley (1986), and Varpalotai (1987) found parents are generally more influential than siblings on sport participation. They also report that fathers are more

influential than mothers in childrens' decisions to be active in sports. Greendorfer et al. (1986) established that the normative value structure of the family does not generally support female sport participation. However, it does support male participation. The process of sport socialization for boys comes from strong family influence, particularly parent's values, while girls are socialized through opportunities and environmental influences primarily outside the family.

Some argue that parents' involvement in sport makes them particularly appropriate role models for their own children (Gregson and Colley 1986). For example, Seppanen's (1982) study of Finnish families found that childrens' membership in a sports club depended on their parents' regular participation in sport. In short, the greater the level of parental involvement in sports activities, the greater the likelihood that their children will be involved (Seppanen 1982). In this study, sport club membership was more common for boys than it was for girls. One reason girls had lower involvement may be that their mothers had low participation in sport activity. The reason for their mothers' low rate of involvement may have been a result of their own restrictive socialization. The lack of female role models in girls' sport has negative connotations. It is a source of tension and contradiction which suppresses girls' sport from being truly woman-defined (Varpalotai 1987). Although this is an interesting and

worthwhile research topic, it is beyond the scope of this study and is not pursued.

#### School and Teachers as Socializing Agents

Higginson (1985) documented the importance of the family in the socialization process but added a twist to the existing literature. He argued that the socializing agents change in terms of relative significance over time. The agent changed from the parents when girls were under the age of thirteen to the coach and teacher during junior and senior high school. This change in influential agents is clear in the work by Gregson and Colley (1986). They showed that the family is the most influential socialization agent for both genders during childhood yet boys are heavily influenced by their school (Gregson and Colley 1986). Gregson and Colley's (1986) study revealed that parents are more important in sport socialization for females than for males. This contradicts the findings of Greendorfer et al. (1986) in their study of Brazilian children. It is important to recognize some cultures have stricter rules regarding gender specific behavior. Although this is the case in Brazil, it is interesting to see how the socialization process differs in countries outside North America.

Other research in this area supports the argument that physical education teachers and coaches play a more significant role for girls than do parents (Smith 1979). In

school, the teacher has a significant influence on the children and their decision to engage in regular sport activity (Gras 1974). Although Gras (1974) found that parents received recognition for sport engagement in 72 percent of the cases, the sport instructor was also listed 55 percent of the time followed by trainer at 25 percent. Clearly, parents' influence on children's decision to participate in sports was still seen as the most important.

Smith (1979) found gender differences in the amount of encouragement that athletes received from major socializing agents. During the first period of involvement, girls reported 90 percent of the time that their physical education teacher or coach was responsible for encouragement. A larger number of girls than boys also reported that teachers or coaches were more likely to attend their practices and competitions than were parents (a form of encouragement for most performers). Smith (1979) concluded that the reason so many girls participated in sport can be attributed to the availability of appropriate female reference groups. The majority of girls in this study had other girls in their environment who viewed sport as a legitimate activity. To be able to identify with someone from the same sex is an extremely important phase in the socialization process (Smith 1979).

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peers and physical education teachers during childhood (Higginson 1985; Weiss and Barber 1990). However, they received support from brothers not only during childhood but in college as well (Weiss and Barber 1990). There was no mention of sisters as influential by these subjects. The literature notes that some socializing agents routinely discriminate against the young female athlete. Included in this list are female friends, coaches, male friends, mother, and older sisters (Snyder and Spreitzer 1976; Weiss and Barber 1990). It is notable that the type of sport determined whether or not mothers supported their daughters' decision to play the sport. Generally, mothers did not encourage their daughters if they played basketball, but were supportive of gymnastics and track. Perhaps this is due to the fact that basketball, a game of physical contact, is less socially acceptable for females than no-contact sports like gymnastics or track (Snyder and Spreitzer 1976).

Greendorfer (1977) revealed similar findings in her examination of college female athletes. Twenty-four percent of her respondents stated that the school was responsible for their initial sport participation, whereas 71 percent indicated that the family and neighborhood were initially responsible. Greendorfer (1977) concluded that family and peers were the major socializing influences in getting females involved in sport during childhood. School does play a role in sport socialization, but only after most females have

already been initiated into it through their families. Thus, Greendorfer (1977) concluded that school reinforces a previously existing process.

### Mass Media

Although the mass media are not often mentioned in the literature, it is an important agent of socialization. Mass media include both print (books, newspaper, and magazines) and electronic (radio, television, and movies) sources. Although studies to date include both sources, much of the research is on magazines.

According to Kane (1989), two themes in female sport involvement exist in the mass media literature. The first is that female athletes and female sport events are underreported in all mass media. This underrepresentation creates the impression that women are largely absent in the sports world. The second major theme is that even when females are portrayed in the media, they are presented in stereotypic ways. The studies that follow illustrate these prevalent themes.

Bryant (1980) analyzed four popular sport magazines and two local metropolitan newspapers during 1979 and 1980 to determine relative coverage given to women's and men's sports. In 1979, he found that both newspapers and sport magazines were sexist. There was sexist commentary, minimal space allocated to women and few female reporters. Not only were



stereotypes promoted, but females in sport were awarded minimal recognition.

Bryant (1980) found that newspapers increased their sexist practices while magazines improved slightly. He believed that the magazines changed their tactics because of their awareness of readership. Bryant (1980) concluded that although school and college athletic programs have been affected by Title IX, newspapers and sport magazines have not been influenced to the same extent.

Theberge (1991) carried out a content analysis of print media coverage of gender and physical activity. She analyzed four Canadian daily newspapers for a six-month period. She found that none of the newspapers concentrated on women's activity and the percentage of all articles on females alone ranged from 2.7 to 14.2 percent (Theberge 1991, p.40). Much of the newspaper coverage on physical activity does not focus on women as a target group. As such, the results of her study indicate that print media provides little support in the promotion of women's physical activity (Theberge 1991).

Recent work by Duncan and Hasbrook (1988) addressed televised women's sports and how they were portrayed. They note:

It appears that society and one of its most influential institutions, the mass media, discourage female participation in team sports by labeling it unfeminine and by ignoring women's team sporting events. (p.4)

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Bryant (1980) found that newspapers increased their sexist practices while magazines improved slightly. He believed that the magazines changed their tactics because of their awareness of readership. Bryant (1980) concluded that although school and college athletic programs have been affected by Title IX, newspapers and sport magazines have not been influenced to the same extent.

Theberge (1991) carried out a content analysis of print media coverage of gender and physical activity. She analyzed four Canadian daily newspapers for a six-month period. She found that none of the newspapers concentrated on women's activity and the percentage of all articles on females alone ranged from 2.7 to 14.2 percent (Theberge 1991, p.40). Much of the newspaper coverage on physical activity does not focus on women as a target group. As such, the results of her study indicate that print media provides little support in the promotion of women's physical activity (Theberge 1991).

Recent work by Duncan and Hasbrook (1988) addressed televised women's sports and how they were portrayed. They note:

It appears that society and one of its most influential institutions, the mass media, discourage female participation in team sports by labeling it unfeminine and by ignoring women's team sporting events. (p.4)

## Opportunity Set

This section of the literature review focuses on opportunity set. Opportunity set, although not specifically defined in the literature, broadly focuses on the life chances of the individual. The family into which one is born, whether it is rich or poor, black or white and so forth, has an impact on the child's opportunities to become involved in sport and the type of sport. Individuals from lower class backgrounds are unlikely to have the same kinds of sport opportunities as someone from an upper class background. Factors that influence opportunity set include social class, birth order, geographic location, and race (Greendorfer 1978; Hasbrook 1987; McPherson et al. 1976).

Historically, women athletes have been subjected to widespread discrimination in North American sport. Their facilities have not only been inferior to mens' but their opportunities and rewards have also been unequal. Fifteen years ago, women who wished to participate in competitive sports and remain feminine were often confronted with social isolation. These women were seen as going against traditional female gender-role expectations and faced ostracism as a result (Eitzen and Sage 1989).

Sport opportunities available to females today are more abundant than in the past. The primary reason for this is the passage of federal laws such as the Educational Amendments Act

of 1972, better known as Title IX. This legislation required that all schools receiving federal funding had to provide equal opportunities to males and females. Within ten years of the implementation of Title IX, the participation of females in high school athletics rose from 294,000 to approximately 2,000,000 (Eitzen and Sage 1989, p.303).

Prior to the passage of Title IX, only about 15 percent of college athletes were women. Even though many colleges had similar numbers of men and women enrolled, it was not unheard of for women to receive less than one percent of the money that the institution spent on sports for men. While men were given new and expensive uniforms and equipment women at the same colleges used old equipment for long periods of time and engaged in bake sales to finance their athletic programs (Eitzen and Sage 1989). Today funding is more equally distributed.

Although females currently have easier access to sport participation than in the past, their numbers are still relatively low. Estimates of children's sport participation (ages 6-18) revealed that in 1977, 62 percent of boys compared to only 38 percent of girls were actively involved in sports. By 1984, the total for boys actually decreased to 59 percent while girls' participation increased to 41 percent (Martens 1988, p.18). The number of girls participating in high school athletics has risen from approximately 30,000 in the 1970-71 period to 190,000 during the 1986-87 school year (Grant 1989,

p.46). The number of women participating in collegiate athletics rose from 30,000 in 1970 to well over 140,000 in 1986 (Grant 1989, p.46). Clearly females of all ages are more likely to have the opportunity to participate in sport than in the past. Other factors that affect opportunities for sport participation are examined in the sections that follow.

### Social Class

According to McPherson et al. (1976) every child does not have an equal opportunity to become involved in sport. The social class of the child, which is determined by his or her parents, is a critical factor in determining whether or not a child will be able to participate in sports and what kinds of sports. Social class further determines the facilities, equipment, access to private lessons, and coaching available.

Children from upper class backgrounds are more likely to be enrolled in individual sports such as diving or swimming than those from lower class backgrounds because they are expensive sports. Swimming and diving requires the child to belong to a club since the sport is not routinely offered in the local schools until high school. Lower class children are concentrated in sports like basketball because of the low costs of facilities and equipment. For example, basketball hoops are generally set up in the neighborhood at a nominal cost.

Children whose parents engage in sports such as golf where the use of community facilities are often restricted to members of the local country club, are likely to become involved in these types of activities. Eitzen and Sage (1989) argue that children who grow up in a country club milieu tend to become involved in the same sports as their parents and develop the skills necessary for successful performance. Therefore, children from upper class families are attracted to individual sports because those are the sports that their family members and friends play (Eitzen and Sage 1989).

Eitzen and Sage (1989) claim that those at the bottom of the stratification hierarchy are rarely involved in organized teams. These sports are unrealistic because of their expense. People in the lower class are unable to afford the equipment required for play or do not have access to sport facilities.

Hasbrook (1987) studied female adolescents to determine if social class background influenced sport participation. More specifically, she focused on life chances and life styles. Life chances included availability of sport equipment, facilities and club membership. Life styles referred to parental encouragement or discouragement of sport participation in their children. Her study revealed that life chances played a larger role in explaining the relationship between degree of sport involvement and social class background than life styles. Upper class individuals had a larger number of material goods and services specific to sport

(such as sport facilities and equipment) than lower class individuals. Consequently, individuals from upper class backgrounds have a greater opportunity to participate in sports (Hasbrook 1987).

### Birth Order

The sequence in which children are born as well as their spacing is thought to have an effect on the type and degree of sport involvement (McPherson et al. 1976). Children who are born within a close time span tend to interact in play and games throughout the early socialization period. Perhaps it is because they have readily available playmates of similar capabilities that their interest in sport is piqued. Moreover, the ordinal position and sex of children influences the type of environment that they are exposed to as well as the experiences that they will encounter (McPherson et al. 1976). The number of children in a family also interacts with social class to determine the accessibility of some sports.

### Geographic Location

The opportunity to engage in a variety of sport activities is a function of where one lives (McPherson et al. 1976). Geographical area includes climate, city size, topography, and whether the residence is rural or urban. If a child lives in the southern part of the United States, it is unlikely that ice hockey or downhill skiing will be an option.

Even if these sports are available, the social milieu of reinforcement and facilities to encourage a high level of participation is not generally available.

Geographic location is also important because it can actually hinder a child from becoming involved initially, regardless of the child's natural talent (McPherson et al. 1976). If a child has the natural talent to be a downhill skier but lives in the southern United States, the opportunity to participate is not available because the climate does not permit this type of sport activity. Moreover, the social milieu of the south would not encourage or support downhill skiing, but rather baseball, basketball or football instead.

### Race

As noted previously, Greendorfer and Ewing (1981) conducted a study on adolescents to determine whether race and gender differences affected children's socialization into sport. They discovered that black and white children had different mechanisms operating with regard to their socialization. White children were influenced more by specific socializing agents whereas black children were influenced more by situational variables such as opportunity set and values toward sport. As such, white children are involved in sport only as long as they are rewarded and reinforced from specific socializing agents. Black children, in contrast, may be motivated to engage in sports regardless



of socializing agents. Their involvement, however, depends on opportunity set and what is available to them (Greendorfer and Ewing 1981). Success in sports is often seen as a way to economic success. Thus, this may provide extrinsic rewards.

#### Summary

The first part of the literature review focused on early socialization of children. It revealed that parents play a major role in this process and often unknowingly engage in sex-stereotypic behavior. This has long-term ramifications for their children's participation in traditional gender identified activities.

The second part of the literature review described the role of personal attributes in sport participation. Researchers note that personal characteristics such as assertiveness and self-confidence are associated with those females who are involved in sports. It was also shown that the way sports are labelled can encourage or discourage females' level of participation. Females are generally pushed into sports that are seen as socially acceptable for them. "Male" sports have lower rates of female participation than those activities that are traditionally considered "female" sports.

The third part of this literature review highlighted the major socializing agents which include parents, siblings,

peers, teacher, coach, and mass media. The family tends to be the most significant socializing agent in the pre-adolescent years. After that, coaches and peers become more important. Adolescent males tend to receive support from fathers and peers, while mothers and teachers tend to be more influential for females. College students are usually supported by parents, peers, and physical education teachers.

The mass media is an important socializer of children into sport. The mass media typically underreport women's sport and trivialize it and women athletes when sporting events are covered. Instead of emphasizing the athletes' skills, sportscasters tend to comment on the female athlete's beauty or personal life. This type of news coverage portrays females as sex objects who should not be taken seriously. If female athletes and women in general were shown in a more positive light, they could become valuable role models.

Opportunity set was the final focus of the literature review. It took a brief look at the implementation of Title IX and the number of females participating in sports. Opportunity set included social class, birth order, geographic location, and race. Studies on social class revealed that individuals from upper class backgrounds are afforded more sport opportunities, including sports equipment and facilities. Geographic location similarly played a role in the types of sports that children participate in. Children who are born within a close age span are more likely to have

readily available playmates. Finally, studies on race revealed that white children are more likely to engage in sports due to specific socializing agents whereas black childrens' participation in sports depends on opportunity set.

The rest of this chapter is composed of my sports autobiography and a critique of the mainstream literature on sport socialization. The critique contrasts the literature with my experiences as a female athlete. It argues that while the literature makes sense, it gives an incomplete picture of female socialization into sport.

#### My Sport Autobiography

My first involvement with sports began at the age of three when I first learned how to skate. I can still picture myself on the outdoor rink at Bronx Park Community Club. I had the old skates that strapped to the boots (two blades), a white fuzzy coat and a white fur hat. I honestly cannot remember what I was doing out on the ice with my mom who did not even skate. She was walking beside me as I shuffled along and I suppose she was there to keep me from falling. All I remember is that I enjoyed whatever I was doing.

At the age of four, I got my first pair of hockey skates and my father enrolled me on a boys' hockey team. They did not have any ice sports for girls at this time so boys' hockey was the only alternative. I did not realize at the time that

my father told them that I was a boy in order to get me on the team. To me, it was just a group of kids playing hockey. I do not recall if I asked my parents to enroll me in hockey or if it was something that they decided I should do; it was probably the latter at that time. Whatever the case, it was something that I enjoyed for the first few years.

At the age of four when I first played hockey, all the kids wore skates and a helmet but no other equipment. It was not until about age six or seven that we began wearing hockey equipment. I always had short hair when I was younger so it was difficult to distinguish me from the boys. Since all the parents and boys on the team were told I was a male, why would they have cause to think any different?

As I got a bit older, however, I started to feel awkward about being with the boys all the time. They were starting to talk about girls and sex and I felt terribly uncomfortable. It was not so bad during game time because everyone was cheering about the game but afterwards, as well as during practices, it was a different matter. By the age of nine, everyone still thought I was a boy. My name was "Tim," of course, instead of "Kim."

I remember when it was time to get our team picture taken, we had to print our names on a sheet so that it would be spelled correctly at the bottom of the picture. As much as I wanted to write "Tim" my father insisted that I write my real name, Kim. I recall one of the boys looking over and

after seeing what I wrote, he looked at me and said, "Kim? That's a funny name for a guy."

At the age of nine, the guys started changing in the dressing rooms instead of coming fully dressed in equipment to the games which is what occurred previously. Of course, I still came to the games at this later age fully dressed. The only thing I had to put on was my helmet. Imagine the scandal if they found out that this "Tim" was really a girl and was in the dressing room watching all the boys undress.

During a game toward the end of my last hockey season (age nine) one of the parents came up to my father and said, "Tim's a girl isn't she?!" My father just looked at the person and laughed as he responded and said, "yes." This parent went and told all the other parents and they in turn told their sons. I remember getting quite scared at this point because the cat was finally out of the bag so to speak. Although I was about to suffer some consequences, it was almost a relief.

I was hanging around the rink after a practice waiting for my father to pick me up and some of the boys started harassing me about being a girl. They had heard it from their parents and they picked this opportunity to start something when no one else was around. To make a long story short, we got into a fight. It was not that physical but the verbal part of it was enough to make me want to stop playing hockey forever. When my father picked me up, I was crying and I knew

that I never wanted to go back and play on that team again. This worked out for me because once they found out that I was a girl, they would not let me play anyway. This was the part that I was relieved about. I did not care if I never played hockey again, I just was not going back. There was no need for me, I thought, to face those boys again. Why should I put up with the humiliation just because I was a girl? Was there something wrong because I was a girl, I wondered.

For the first few years of my hockey career, I never saw a difference between myself and the boys. It was just kids playing together on the ice. It was not until later on that I noticed a difference. If no one ever found out that I was a girl, I wonder if I would have continued to play hockey?

My father understood that I no longer wanted to play hockey, thank goodness, and that is when we heard of "ringette" the winter sport for girls. This sport had just come into existence within the past year which is why I had not been enrolled in it previously. When I heard that I was going to be playing ringette, I was ecstatic. I loved skating and I wanted to continue playing, but not with a bunch of boys.

At the age of ten, I started playing ringette. It had rules similar to floor hockey and it was a somewhat modified version of ice hockey. There was no body contact allowed. We used sticks with no blade and a rubber ring which resembled an

oversized doughnut instead of a puck. More importantly, it was all girls.

The first year I played, I had a heyday. I was the top player in the league and scored 141 goals my first season. Although I received many glories, there was one negative aspect that I experienced the first season I played. Ringette at that time started at age seven. Ages seven to ten played together on one team. I was ten at the time I started playing and I was tall for my age, 5'2" in fact. Not only was I the oldest on the team, but the tallest in the league. The rest of the girls were only 4'5".

Since I was an above average player, many of the other players on other teams, as well as parents, used to ridicule me saying that I was not really ten but that I was much older than this and that I should not be allowed to play on the team. If I was not a top player, I am sure that they would not have bothered me. I recall this ribbing as if it were yesterday. I remember how bad it used to make me feel because not only were they making fun of me saying I should not be allowed to play but they were drawing attention to my height, something that I was already self-conscious about. However, since the thrill of playing and scoring all those goals outweighed this one negative aspect, I decided to keep on playing.

After my first year of ringette, I realized that I loved this sport and I wanted to continue playing more than

anything. I recall that my mother and father always came to all my games so that made scoring goals that much more wonderful. At least I had someone else to share in the glory and someone who always supported me.

In grade seven, my friends were starting to get involved in indoor track but I had my ringette so I decided that was okay. However, second semester, my friends continued to talk about outdoor track. Since outdoor track began in March, I decided that I would join too because ringette was almost over for the season and I wanted to continue to be enrolled in some type of sport. More importantly, however, was the fact that I felt left out every time my friends went to track meets or were practicing for them which was usually everyday. I guess I figured that if I was also involved in track, I would be able to join in the conversations and feel like I was a member of their group.

I started running long distance and to my surprise, I began by winning every race. I thought this was great. Track was something that I did at school but I still had ringette. None of my friends were engaged in ringette. I continued with track all the way through high school and even though my friends dropped out in grade 10, I continued to run. I liked to run and stay in shape and I also liked going to track meets. I stayed involved in track not because of my friends who later dropped out, but because I enjoyed it and especially winning. My father was supportive in that he came to all my



meets and he was always there for me at the finish line. He did not get me started in track but he always stood by me once I was in it.

I also decided to try out for the volleyball team in grade eight because all my friends were playing. I soon learned that this was a big mistake. The coach only played six players the whole season and unfortunately, I was not one of them.

Volleyball did not even exist in our school until grade seven and yet it was real competitive by the eighth grade. There were try-outs as well as frequently scheduled practices. I do not know how the coach expected us to have well-developed skills when we had never played this sport before in our entire lives. To say the least, I hated being on this team because I never got to play. The only time the coach put me and the other five players in was when we played against a poor team and that did not occur very often.

I recall how upset I used to get in practices because the coach used to put all the first stringers against all the second stringers and it was not even a contest as to who would win. All he cared about was making his six star players better athletes and he used the other six to do this. He was not interested in developing our skills, as long as his top six players got better.

I guess my mistake was trying out for the team in the first place. The two setters on the first line were on the

team in grade seven so I do not know why I thought he would want to replace them. If that was the way the coach felt, he should have only had six players on the team instead of twelve. That would have saved me money (because we had to buy our own uniforms), time and the humiliation of being on a team and not getting to play.

It was great for some girls who just wanted to be on the team and did not care whether or not they played but that was not how I felt. If I was on a team and good enough to make the team, then I should also have been able to play. I never did try out for volleyball again but I guess I always knew that I would have my ringette.

I was still playing ringette in grade eight but was getting frustrated with it because of the caliber of many of the players. Here we were in grade eight and some of the girls were just learning to skate. Since ringette did not begin until the age of seven, I had an advantage over many players since I was enrolled in hockey and was probably the only girl at that time who was.

When I entered the ninth grade, the community started offering tier I, II, and III for ringette which had previously only been offered in hockey. This sounded like the opportunity that I had been looking for. I could try out for tier I and be with players who were just as good or even better than myself. Even though I had no problems making the team, I was no longer first string as was the case previously.

This was just a minor problem but one that I could live with. More importantly, tier I was very strict with 6:30 a.m. practices and a lot more scheduled games. The problem with this was that I lived out of town and I could not get someone to drive me all the time. Moreover, if you missed a practice, you were benched. This was really unfair since all the other girls lived in town and could easily walk to the rink but for me, it was a 20 minute drive. As it turned out, it was a thrill in itself to make tier I but I soon found out that it was not worth it.

Another problem I encountered while playing on this team was trying to fit in with the other girls. They all went to school together and, therefore, had their own clique. As hard as I tried, I found it impossible to become part of this clique. They were just totally different people from me and I just did not fit in. I was also very quiet and shy which made matters worse.

By the end of the season, I had enough of this and decided to go back to playing tier II at the community club. This was still in town but at least I did not have to worry about attending practices. And besides, it cost \$150 to play tier I and that was just for uniforms, jackets and helmets. That did not include paying for the ice. I felt really bad that my parents had to pay out that money just so I could play, especially when I knew they could not afford it. I

realized that being on the best team in the city did not necessarily mean it would be more fun.

The following year, I played community again and had a much better time. Besides, it was the same girls that I had been playing with for the past few years. Even though we did not go to school together, we were still friends.

During high school, a lot of guys that lived around our place used to go to NS (North Springfield) hockey rink and play for hours. I remember it distinctly because I was the only gal that played. Because I went to school with these guys since the age of ten, I did not feel uncomfortable being the only gal. More important was the fact that I was a very good player and, therefore, I did not feel intimidated. They still picked teams and although I was not the first to be chosen, I was far from the last. I do not know how it made the other guys feel to be chosen last but I felt great. They did not give me special treatment because I was a girl but they certainly did not tease me either. They passed me the puck just as much as everyone else and always phoned me when they were going to the rink to play so I could come along. They treated me like one of the guys on the ice and I really liked that. I could play hockey, a game that I love, and I did not have to hide who I was which had been the case earlier in my life.

I asked "Dave," one of the guys from the rink, if he wanted to go into town and go skating at one of the outdoor

rinks there. We usually went to NS which was three miles from our houses but we could not get enough people together one particular evening so we decided to go into town and get a game together. We found a group of men who were willing to play. They were all at least six feet tall and I have to admit, I felt a bit hesitant about playing.

After we had been playing for an hour, it was obvious that the team I was on was going to win and I guess our opponents were getting a little upset. In fact, I went into the corner to get the puck and a tall guy elbowed me right in the eye. This was such a perfect set up since my head was at the height of his elbow. I was so angry because I knew he did this on purpose. Anyway, he cracked the bone just underneath my eyebrow and my eye swelled shut almost immediately. Of course, I continued to play, with a little persuasion from Dave because I did not want to be labelled a "suck." The point is, this would never have happened at NS because guys there did not feel they had to prove anything when they played with me. They just accepted me for who I was and did not have to try to be superior. These city guys, however, had a different attitude and I had the black eye to prove it. Needless to say, I never went to that rink and played with those guys again.

Since moving to Grand Forks, I had to give up ringette which was really hard for me since I have been playing most of

my life. I am still involved with pick up games and some organized sport although in a different area.

I have been to a couple picnics the past two summers and have had some unique experiences playing volleyball with not only a group of men, but with "Marine Men." There are well known stereotypes about Marines such as they are chauvinistic, tough, superior and so forth. Although these characteristics are not present in all Marines (especially my husband), they were in the majority of the ones with whom I played volleyball.

Two summers ago, Randy, my husband, brought me to a Marine Corps picnic. He said that we would play volleyball so I was excited and wanted to go. I was the only woman playing but by now, that is something that I am used to and I do not feel the least bit intimidated. I was, however, expecting these Marines to be awesome volleyball players but that certainly was not the case. In fact, I had to show two of my teammates how to bump the ball.

No one really bothered with me too much until another woman decided to join in. She obviously was not interested in playing volleyball but played for the attention. She had absolutely no volleyball skills. Shortly after she joined in, the guys started commenting on parts of her body which she found flattering and I found nauseating. Because she willingly accepted their comments, they started trying them on me. I immediately let them know that I was not impressed and

then they started playing rough. They would spike the ball at me rather than anyone else and would start ribbing me if I missed it. I knew that they were trying to get rid of me because I was not playing the role of the helpless female like the other woman. I was a good player and I was not about to listen to their rude sexist remarks.

This past summer, we got together for a volleyball game with many of the same players. This time, one of the men asked his wife to play and I joined in and said, "yeah, why don't you?" She said that she would let me stay out there and do the work for all the wives since I was doing such a good job. Go figure.

The team I was on was winning and every time I would serve, the other team could not return the ball. The reactions of the other team members was amusing from my point of view. One of the players, Wayne, took the ball and threw it at his team member yelling at him and asking why he cannot play volleyball. Wayne was obviously taking his frustrations out on someone else because not only were they losing, but they were losing to a woman; something that I learned some of them hate very much.

When Wayne and I finally came face to face in the front row, it was as though we were almost at war. I was doing very well with my tips and every time we would both go up to the net for the ball, I would put it past him. He got so angry with me that the next time the ball went up over the net, he

just slammed into the net making sure he knocked me over. First of all, one is not supposed to touch the net let alone body check your opponent on the other side.

Second of all, I have learned that this is the way many of these fellows are and I have come to accept it and still enjoy the sport. If I took personally everything these men said or did to me, I would never play volleyball again. Fortunately, I am good at the game, I enjoy the game, and I am going to continue playing the game regardless of outside negative influences.

I am presently enrolled in Tae Kwon Do which I attend three times a week. This again is a sport, like hockey, where men have traditionally been involved and where women are not welcomed to the same extent as men. The reason I say this is because of some of the exercises and drills that we do which are obviously not conducive to women. For example, push ups are not an exercise that many women can do because of their lack of upper body strength. Not only that, but most women have never even done a push up. Yet this class requires us to do several a night--on our knuckles.

When we engage in sparring, the main area to hit for points is your opponent's chest. It does not take a genius to figure out that when women get punched in the upper chest, it is going to hurt them a lot more than it is going to hurt men and yet we are expected to engage in this type of behavior, same as men. Although my class now has five women in it, the



instructor still does not take the build of women into consideration.

I recall sparring one night with a male who has a higher belt than me but who is very immature. I do not know if he feels particularly intimidated by having women in the class but he is a very rough person to spar with. When I get paired with him, I really get scared. I recall getting kicked in the shins twice when I was sparring with him. In fact, I got kicked so hard the second time that I nearly passed out from the pain.

Here is this 185 pound male that actually has to prove that he's physically stronger than a 120 pound female. What better way to show his superiority in strength then beating the heck out of me during sparring time. I also take mental notes when he spares with other males and I have never seen him kick anybody else. Perhaps it was just coincidence that I got kicked, twice, but he certainly instilled the fear of sparring with him in me.

I have never been one to quit a sport because of the flack I received from males because if I did, I would be sitting around doing nothing right now. Even though I have the opportunity to engage in some sports such as Tae Kwon Do which has traditionally been for males, a lot of the rules serve men's purposes better. Perhaps I should just be thankful that they are letting me play their game. After all, I am a female right?!

## Critique

The body of knowledge that describes female socialization into sport typically looks at the major socializing agents. Significant agents of socialization in the literature usually include parents, siblings, peers, teachers, and coaches. The literature states that these socializing agents explain why women become involved in sports. At each stage of the athlete's career, however, different agents are seen as more significant than others. Researchers suggest that parents tend to be more influential for children under the age of thirteen whereas peers and coaches take over as the major socializing agents during the adolescent years (c.f. Greendorfer 1977; Higginson 1985).

Although what the literature has to say makes sense, something appears to be missing when it is compared to my own life story. Regardless of who is doing the socializing, or when it occurs, the image we are left with is of an "oversocialized" (Wrong 1961) female who participates in sports only because she has been influenced to do so by others. This image is inconsistent with my own experience.

This problem appears, for example, when no distinction is made between the terms "influential" and "supportive." In my experience, these two words do not mean the same thing. For example, my parents have always been supportive of my involvement in sports but that does not necessarily mean that

they were the ones who got me involved in all my sports, nor that they kept me involved.

A child may ask her parents if she can take part in a particular sport and because her parents give her permission, this may be misconstrued by researchers as parental influence. Instead of the child getting credit for initiating her own involvement, the credit goes to the parents since they were the ones who perhaps gave her rides to games and so forth. From this we can say that her parents are supportive of her sport involvement. However, I do not think that we can automatically assume that they were influential in her decision to become involved.

Based on my own experiences, it is my view that many women get involved in sports on their own but list parents or siblings as influential because these people were supportive along the way. Because the literature focuses solely on agents of socialization, it fails to give credit to the female athlete for her involvement. Instead, credit is given to those around her and once again, the female athlete appears as a passive bystander being acted upon by society rather than as the person who is doing the acting (Erickson 1992). The impression of women we are left with is of individuals who are incapable of making their own decisions as to whether or not to participate in sports.

My sport autobiography shows the fallacy of this view. It reveals a person maintaining her commitment to sport, and

an athlete identity, regardless of socializing influences. My autobiography shows that if I were an individual that was simply acted upon by society as the literature suggests, I would have dropped out of sports a long time ago. Also, since many of these socializing agents actually discouraged my participation (i.e. my experiences with boys and men) then by virtue of what the literature implies, I should have quit participating in sports. Because I continued in sports despite negative reactions from others, there must be some other agent of socialization in operation. The important agent was myself.

As the literature is not rooted in women's lives, but is shaped instead by abstractions such as "agents of socialization," it provides only a partial picture of women's socialization into sport. Moreover, because the quantitative methods used in this research do not allow the richness of women's lives to be captured, the significance of the self has not emerged.

In an effort to explore the matter further, I collected data on the life histories of a sample of college women who represented a range of current involvement in athletics. The findings revealed that, as in the case of my own biography, the existing literature failed to adequately capture the complexity of these women's experiences in and around athletics. What the literature fails to show, in particular, is the importance of an active, reflective, self (Mead 1934)

in the process of female socialization. In the following chapter I explain the design of that study.

CHAPTER 3  
RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter describes the sampling frame, data collection instruments and the operationalization of key variables. Denzin's (1989) sensitizing approach is used to discuss the subjects' definitions of a few relevant concepts. Finally, demographic data on our subjects are presented.

The Sample

The sampling frame includes female college students over the age of seventeen enrolled at a NCAA Division II midwestern university. All non-athletes were enrolled in an introductory sociology course at the time they were chosen for this study. The athletes, with one exception, were not enrolled in this class when the sample was drawn. A purposive sample of 22 students was used to meet specific research needs. I needed to find collegiate athletes who are involved in individual and team sports as well as a group of women who were not involved or only somewhat involved in sports. I wanted to ask questions that would tap into their biographies. Drawing a sample that included a wide range of levels of participation

allowed comparisons on a variety of issues related to women's sport experiences.

Athletes were chosen by three different methods. First, the assistant coach of a team sport provided profiles of all players. I selected one player from each class level (freshman, sophomore, junior and senior) to allow for different levels of experience and maturity. Second, the head coach of another university team supplied me with a list of players and I drew another representative sample to include one athlete from each class level. Finally, I used a snowball sampling technique. I interviewed an athlete enrolled in introductory sociology who was on an individual sports team at the university. She, in turn, gave me the names of three other women who were willing to participate in my study.

Non-athletes were selected from the introductory sociology labs. I asked members of four introductory sociology labs if there were any females who had been involved in organized sport when they were younger but were not involved on a university team per se. A few women in each lab acknowledged that they had been involved and some were currently involved in intramurals. I spoke with them after class and they all agreed to participate. Like the athletes, non-athletes were chosen to represent the different class levels.

The women in this study are all caucasian. The majority were born and raised in the upper midwest. Every individual, with one exception, has played on a team sport. The majority

of the sample grew up in small towns before moving to the much larger university area. Because most of these women grew up in small towns, they may have experienced more traditional patterns of socialization than those who were socialized in larger urban areas. Many of them attended elementary schools where organized sports were offered on a limited basis. Therefore, the majority did not have access to a variety of sports until they reached junior high school. There were some women, however, who were involved in numerous sports from the age of five. They indicated that their sport involvement was through community programs. These programs afforded them greater opportunities for athletic experience than did the local elementary school.

The 22 women who were interviewed ranged in age from 18 to 23 with a mean age of 20 years (Table 1). There was a fairly even distribution of subjects across the school class categories. There were seven first year students, five sophomores, six juniors and four seniors. The parents' incomes of these women were quite similar. There were four individuals who did not know their parents' income when they were living at home. Seven subjects remembered their parents' income as being in the \$30-39,000 range with eleven individuals stating that it was at least \$40,000 or more. In this group of women, fourteen were classified as athletes and eight as non-athletes.



TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

AGE	Percent	Number
23	4.6	1
22	9.1	2
21	31.8	7
20	13.6	3
19	27.3	6
18	13.6	3
<b>CLASS</b>		
Senior	18.2	4
Junior	27.3	6
Sophomore	22.7	5
Freshman	31.8	7
<b>PARENTAL INCOME</b>		
\$40,000+	50.0	11
\$30-39,000	31.8	7
\$20-29,000	0	0
Unknown	18.2	4
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>22</u>

Sampling only allows generalization to the population from which the sample was drawn. In other words, we cannot generalize to the full population. Since this study was purposive and focused on female student athletes and non-athletes at a particular university, we can only generalize to that group. In short, the findings of athletes and non-athletes cannot be generalized back to the full population but only to a group similar to this sample. By full population we mean all athletes and non-athletes enrolled in a NCAA Division II midwestern university.

#### Interview Procedure

I conducted semi-structured taped interviews with all 22 subjects. The tape recordings were used to assist me in writing up my notes. They also allowed me to more accurately capture the subjects' stories than would note taking alone. The length of each interview varied somewhat. Some were as short as 30 minutes while others lasted an hour.

Individuals were asked to sign a consent form before the interview and retained a copy of it for their records. Each subject was informed that she was under no obligation to participate. They were also promised that any information provided by them including their team affiliation would remain strictly confidential. To protect my subjects, I used pseudonyms when referring to them in the analysis. In

addition to protecting their anonymity, pseudonyms make it easier for the reader to follow a particular individual's story.

I began by asking them who was most influential in their decision to participate at each of the four levels (elementary, junior high, high school and college). I also focused on the role that their parents, siblings and they themselves played in their sport participation. Questions centered on whether or not parents ever participated in sports and if they ever practiced with their daughter when she was growing up.

Because this was a semi-structured interview, it was not always possible to ask questions in the same order. Moreover, respondents would sometimes provide an answer that conjured up additional questions that had not been anticipated. Nonetheless, care was taken to ensure that all question areas were covered in the interview. A complete list of the interview questions are located in Appendix A.

At the end of each interview, the subject was given a questionnaire (Appendix B) which took approximately ten minutes to complete. I left the room when they filled it out so they would take their time and answer all questions carefully. If I had remained in the room, some may have felt pressured to finish quickly. Alternatively, some may have been reluctant to write what they really felt. I returned to thank them for participating and to answer any additional

questions that they may have had regarding the interview or the questionnaire.

The purpose of the questionnaire was three fold. First, the questionnaire was used to collect demographic information. Individuals were asked to report their age, class, and parents' income, education and occupation. The second purpose was to gather additional information about their sport participation. The questionnaire included a variety of items that dealt with the types of sports they participated in at each school level. Subjects also rank ordered the major socializing agents in their order of importance at each of these levels. The third purpose of the questionnaire was to act as a "memory jogger." If the subjects were unable to remember something during the interview, the questionnaire gave them a chance to report that recollection.

#### Data Analysis Procedures

In order to make sense of the data obtained in the interviews, I created broad categories into which I could sort responses. Each question asked during the interview was put on a separate index card. I then cut and pasted everyone's answer to a particular question on a separate index card and placed them in the same pile. I carefully numbered the back of each card with an identification number that corresponded to a particular subject. This procedure allowed me to verify

what each person said during the interview. I followed this procedure for every response given during the interview. This way, when I looked for replies to a particular question or an illustrative quote from a respondent, I could go to the appropriate pile and pull out relevant answers.

In addition to the index card system described above, I also created a data matrix. On one side of the page I created categories for each level of schooling. Under these categories I noted the identification numbers of the respondents. Across the top of the page I wrote column headings for the various agents of socialization. This permitted me to check off the appropriate agent of socialization at each level of education for my respondents. As a result I could distinguish which agent was most influential for each respondent at each level of education at a glance.

#### Limitations

There are a few limitations of this design. The subjects were asked to reflect back on when they first became involved in sports. For the majority, this was over 15 years ago. Although all of them gave accounts of when they first became involved and who was most influential at that time, we have to keep in mind the possibility that some of them may not have accurately remembered. Instead they may have given a response

so as to not appear forgetful. Another limitation is that subjects may have succumbed to the social desirability bias. That is, they may have felt pressured to report only what is socially approved. Finally, respondents may have given answers to all questions because they wanted to "help" the researcher. They may have provided answers to an event we were discussing even though they may not have experienced that particular circumstance. What has been reported is an actual account of the information obtained during the interviews but it is an account of what the individuals actually remembered from their past history.

#### Operationalization of Variables

To make research comprehensible, concepts need to be operationalized. However, it can be useful sometimes if a researcher begins without operationalizing every term. Denzin (1989) refers to this process as the sensitizing approach. The idea is to avoid operationalization until after the interview so we can observe the specific meanings that the subjects attach to the particular concept (1989, p.14). This sensitizing approach was used to distinguish between team and individual sports. Although university sports are referred to as team sports (e.g. swimming and diving team, track team) a definitional discrepancy became apparent. During the

interviews, members of a sports team did not see their sport as a team sport but rather considered it an individual sport.

An important distinction is made in this study between individual and team sports. A team sport, such as softball or basketball, refers to a game that requires a group of individuals to work together in order to obtain the overall goal of winning. If everyone in the group does not put 100 percent of their effort into the play, the group suffers. If everyone does contribute 100 percent, the team has a better chance of winning. In effect, team sports create a team identity. In an individual sport such as diving or gymnastics, the participant is not dependent on others because the outcome of their performance depends solely on themselves. If they do poorly, they are the only person to blame. If they win, however, they alone receive all glory and the medal.

Swimming and diving as well as track and figure skating are considered team sports at the university. Individuals try to place in the top three in order to gain points for their team. However, athletes who compete in these sports define them as individual sports. The individual can do well in an event and advance to the nationals on her own regardless of how her team did. Even if the team does not place first, the individual can still win her event and receive credit. In this sense, she is not dependent on other members of her team for recognition. The use of Denzin's (1989) sensitizing approach allowed this discrepancy to emerge through the

interviews with the athletes. Therefore, swimming and diving, figure skating and track are considered individual sports throughout this thesis.

Although I started out with two distinct categories, athletes and non-athletes, it soon became clear that these two categories were not as clear cut as I had originally thought. For all practical purposes, anyone who engages in physical activity can be termed an athlete. If I used a definition as broad as that, almost every woman in my study was an athlete. For my purposes, I labelled an athlete any individual who is on at least one varsity sport team, either team or individual, at the university. Non-athletes are those who do not participate in collegiate sports, the community or the university intramural program. There was a group of individuals, however, who were not on a university team per se, but were highly involved with the intramural program at the university or in the community. This group did not fit into my category of athlete and yet they certainly could not be labelled non-athletes. Therefore, I devised a third category which I called semi-athletes. Semi-athletes were involved in a university intramural program or a sport sponsored through the community.

It is important to keep in mind that these categories are only consistent with each woman's current level of participation or non-participation in sports. That is, even though some women are referred to as non-athletes, they were



involved in sports throughout the different school levels but they no longer play.

The next chapter focuses on the findings of this study and is presented in two parts. The first section focuses on the major socializing agents presented in my study which were consistent with the literature. The second part looks at the role of the self and the part it plays in women's involvement in sports.

CHAPTER 4  
RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter focuses on the stories of athletes, semi-athletes, and non-athletes. The first part of this chapter examines the major socializing agents. The influence of others throughout the biographies of these women are presented and linked to the literature. To be consistent with this literature, the agents of socialization are presented for each of four levels of schooling: elementary, junior high, high school and college. Moreover, the experiences of athletes, non-athletes, and semi-athletes are compared at each level of school. The second section presents findings not discussed in previous work. The focus is on the influence of the self as an active rather than a passive agent in regard to how females are socialized into sport.

Self as a Social Product

Major Socializing Agents During Elementary School

There are a variety of socializing agents that act on the individual including parents, siblings, coaches, teachers and peers. Depending on where the child is in her sport

development, some agents are more important than others. Although the agents of socialization varied for the girls in this study, a pattern emerged.

At the elementary school level, there were eight individuals, a combination of athletes, non-athletes, and semi-athletes, who listed peers as most influential in their decision to participate in sports. Indeed, five of them listed their peers alone--a testament to the power of one's peers. Thirteen subjects reported a combination of other agents including mother, father, brother, sister, and coaches. The socializing agents during this period that were listed most often were mother and father. This is not to say that siblings and coaches were unimportant, but the majority of women cited one or both parents as their greatest influence in the decision to participate in sports.

These findings are consistent with those of Greendorfer (1977). She concluded that family and peers are the major socializing influence in getting females involved in sport during childhood. Other research done on female college athletes similarly reported that they received significant support from parents, peers and physical education teachers during childhood (Higginson 1985; Weiss and Barber 1990). Additionally, they received support from brothers in childhood and in college (Weiss and Barber 1990).

While these findings are consistent overall with the results reported here, there is one important discrepancy

between my findings and those reported in the literature. Higginson (1985) and Weiss and Barber (1990) report that physical education teachers are influential in girls' decisions to play sports. In this study, none of the subjects listed the physical education instructor as important, although two did mention the coach. Perhaps this is because female athletes in the studies by Higginson (1985) and Weiss and Barber (1990) became involved in sport at an early age. Because they had more contact with the coach throughout elementary school, he or she became more influential. The majority of women in my study, however, did not become involved in sports until the fifth grade. This did not leave much time during childhood for girls and physical education teachers to build up a relationship.

There is an important point to be made about parental and peer influence for subjects in this study. During childhood, I found that parents tended to be most influential when their children were involved in individual sports. Peers were more powerful in the decision to play team sports. One possible explanation for this is that individual sports like swimming tend to be expensive. Swim clubs tend to have practices every day which means a lot of driving for parents. If parents are willing to do all this for their children, they have to be somewhat dedicated and, therefore, supportive of their children. Team sports such as basketball require little equipment and, therefore, parental involvement is not as

readily motivated. Thus, parental involvement during childhood may be directly related to the amount of money they must spend for their child to participate.

My findings that parents are more influential for individual sports and peers more influential for team sports was not consistent with the literature. The literature does suggest, however, that those who participate in individual team sports are from a higher socioeconomic background than those who participate in team sports. This last finding was consistent with my findings. Those on individual team sports had parents who made at least \$40,000 a year whereas those on team sports had parents who made under \$39,000 per year.

Greendorfer (1978) and Hasbrook (1987) looked at the social class influence on female sport involvement. Hasbrook (1987) focused on high school females athletes and non-athletes from diverse social class backgrounds. She found that upper class individuals have more access to sport facilities and programs and, therefore, are more likely to participate in sports than those from lower class backgrounds.

Greendorfer (1978) focused more specifically on individual and team sport differences for college female athletes. She found that the lower the father's education, the more likely his daughter was to participate on a team sport. The higher his educational level, the more likely his daughter was to join an individual sport. Greendorfer (1978) originally hypothesized that team sport participants would be

influenced by peers and individual participants by family. However, this hypothesis had to be rejected due to the influence of socioeconomic status. She concluded that team sport participants come from lower class backgrounds while individual team participants come from upper class backgrounds.

### Athletes

The pattern for athletes reveals that for the majority, family support is most important. That is, parents as well as siblings provided crucial support to them. For the nine team athletes, four of them named friends as their sole sport socializing agent. All four began playing sports around the fifth grade when basketball was introduced to them at school. For each of these girls, their friends were the main instigators in getting them to play.

For the remaining five athletes an interesting pattern emerges. Those who listed family as most influential had a mother and father who were involved in sports when they were growing up. This is consistent with the literature on parents' involvement and their children's participation (c.f. Gregson and Colley 1986; Seppanen 1982). Some studies focus on parents' involvement in sport and how they become appropriate role models for their own children (Gregson and Colley 1986). The realization that parents may serve as successful role models has important implications for

childrens' success in sport (Gregson and Colley 1986). Seppanen's study (1982), found that Finnish children's membership in a sports club depended on his or her parents' activity in sport. Apparently, the greater the level of parental involvement in sports activities, the greater the likelihood that their children will be involved.

The five athletes who are on individual teams all listed mother and father as being most influential in their decision to play a sport. In addition, some of them also listed brother, sister and coach. Since these five women are on individual sports teams, it makes sense that their parents are so influential considering the cost involved.

These women not only had parents who participated but many also had a sibling who was highly involved in sports and who played at the collegiate level. All athletes in this study who had a brother or sister already involved in collegiate sports tended to follow in their footsteps. This was especially true when there was support from family members. The athletes themselves offered telling responses.

Laura recalls:

My sister swam, she's three years older than I am and my parents made her start just because she always sat around so they made her take lessons and then put her in swimming. They kind of encouraged me so I tried it and I liked it.

According to Ann:

I suppose my family...had a part in [getting me started] because watching my sister play, my brother play and

just being around it so much. I think that had a lot to do with it.

Those who did not have siblings on collegiate teams still had brothers and sisters who were highly involved in sports, thereby, making their participation more likely. Jodi recalled that her older brothers were always outside playing football and basketball. Because she wanted to play with them, she had to play whatever her brothers were playing. If one is in a neighborhood where all the kids are playing football, there is a good chance that one will join the "gang" and play regardless of what they are playing.

#### Semi-athletes and Non-athletes

Two of the semi-athletes said their parents were most influential in their sport involvement in elementary school. In both cases, their mothers were not involved in sports but their fathers were to some extent. One semi-athlete also listed her older brothers as an influence. The remaining two semi-athletes listed friends as most important. In the later cases, their parents were involved in sports. One of the fathers was even a coach. Cindy, a non-athlete, indicated that she became involved in sports because of her friends and her father. Her father was heavily involved in sports while she was growing up and was also her coach for a couple years. Kathy, another non-athlete, believes that her brother was somewhat influential in her sport participation.



No clear pattern of influence emerged for the semi-athletes and non-athletes in elementary school. They were involved for various reasons. For some of these women, parents were most influential while for others, it was friends or siblings.

#### Major Socializing Agents During Junior High School

The agents of socialization responsible for influencing these women at the junior high level changed somewhat in comparison to elementary school. The athletes whose parents were influential at the elementary school level continued to be influential through junior high. For those women whose friends were initially responsible for their sport activities, other socializing agents such as parents and coaches became increasingly important at this stage. As they got older, the number of socializing agents responsible for their involvement seemed to increase.

In junior high, players start to become more serious about their game. Practices are held more often and coaches start to single out certain people as key players. Because the game is more serious, it seems logical that the coaches would have more influence on participation, especially for more talented players. For example, Jessica reported that ever since junior high, she knew that she wanted to get a scholarship and play a team sport in college. Greendorfer (1977) found that the school plays a role in sport

socialization, but only after most females have already been initiated into it through their families. Thus, school reinforces the sport socialization already underway. Carol, an athlete, illustrates Greendorfer's (1977) point.

I would say at that time it was probably the coaches because track was off season from [my team sport] and they basically wanted most of the...players to be involved in track to stay in shape.

Deanne, another athlete, also supports Greendorfer's contention.

...it was probably my coach because in the eighth grade, he talked to me and I moved up and played junior varsity and stuff. He taught me a lot of things and made me realize that I could get a lot out of [this sport].

One finding that emerged was that while the number of socializing agents who were influential in junior high increased, there was a distinction that emerged by sport. For those who were involved solely in an individual sport since elementary school, parents continued to be the most influential at the junior high level. These women also became involved in team sports during this same period. However, it was not their parents who were responsible for getting them involved; it was their friends. This finding is contrary to some of the literature.

Some research reveals that female friends actually discriminate against young female athletes because of their sport participation as do mothers and older sisters (Snyder and Spreitzer 1976; Weiss and Barber 1990). However, older

sisters in this study were very supportive of their younger sisters. Likewise, girls did not discriminate against their friends. Perhaps this apparent contradiction is due to the fact that these female friends were themselves involved in sport. Thus, it was natural for them to be responsible for getting my subjects involved in sports and being supportive of them once they were. The results of a study by Smith (1979) are consistent with my findings. He found that the majority of girls in his study had female friends who viewed sport as a legitimate activity. Therefore, identification with someone of the same sex who is involved in sports and who sees it as appropriate is an extremely important phase in the socialization process.

One reason parents become increasingly important sources of support in junior high is the economics of sport participation. Practices and games are typically scheduled after school hours and team members need rides. Equally important is the cost of equipment. Although not much equipment is required for sports like swimming or basketball, athletes reported that they depended on their parents for money to pay for uniforms, athletic shoes, sports camps and other sport related things. As Ann reported:

If I wanted to go somewhere or do something that had something to do with sports, they would always be willing to take me. Or... if I needed something for sports or if I needed a pair of shoes, they'd put up the money.

Jessica shared a similar response on the part of her parents. "They never complained about having to pay a little extra more for shoes. And if I needed the money to make a trip or something like that, they were there for me." Responses such as these indicate that as individuals enter junior high, they are dependent on their parents for economic support. Once parents contributed money to their child's sport participation, they tended to become more involved since they were aware of where their funds were going. Emotional support from the parents seemed to follow once they were already contributing economic support.

Semi-athletes had experiences similar to those of athletes. Parents were supportive at the junior high level even if they previously were not influential. Nancy recalled, "My parents' support was big--probably a very, very big issue." For non-athletes, however, there was generally a lack of support. For these women, neither parent was responsible for influencing them during this stage. Friends were mentioned by two non-athletes as most influential to play in junior high while the remaining two non-athletes listed siblings. However, these women seemed to have few if any socializing agents that defined sport as a legitimate activity for them. Thus as the literature suggests, the lack of a favorable definition of sports for women is critical to their participation (Synder and Spreitzer 1976; Weiss and Barber 1990).

Major Socializing Agents During High School

The major socializing agents for athletes that were influential in junior high remained influential throughout high school. Parents were clearly the most influential of all. Parents always came to their athletic daughters' games and provided moral support.

The trend was similar for semi-athletes. Except for Bernadette, all previous socializing agents were consistently supportive. Moreover, parents stood out as the most significant supporters of all. Bernadette's parents were no longer influential once she reached high school. She tried out for a team sport in junior high because her friends were playing but soon realized that this sport was not for her. Bernadette's parents were rather upset when she quit because they really wanted her to play. In high school she no longer wanted to participate in that sport but wanted to pursue other athletically oriented areas of interest. Although the powerful role that the self played in Bernadette's decision to pursue other sports must be noted here, this discussion is left for the next section.

The non-athletes who lacked parental support at the junior high level did not receive it at the high school level either. Two individuals who continued to play in high school were influenced by friends and coaches. Stephanie recalled that a friend and her coach were most influential in her participation at that stage. Her friend was very influential

as she stayed with her in sports from grades 4 to 12. Not only was her coach influential but he was also her favorite teacher as well.

These findings are consistent with those of Snyder and Spreitzer (1976) who focused on high school female athletes. They reported that for team sports, peers, teachers and particularly coaches were very supportive and encouraging of female athletes' participation. In fact, coaches were listed as offering more support than parents to these athletes.

#### Major Socializing Agents During College

The five women athletes on individual sports teams list their mothers and fathers as the individuals who are most influential in their decision to continue in sports. This has been the case throughout their athletic careers. Additionally, two of them also named their coach as influential in their decisions to stay on the team. One of the remaining athletes lists her brother and her friends as most influential while the other lists her sister. Both the brother and the sister who influenced their siblings to stay on the team competed in the same collegiate sport.

In terms of influence for those on a team sport, Deanne listed her parents while Carol named her mother and coach. Carol's parents are divorced and she has not seen her dad in at least five years. Although Carol's mom is still supportive, she says that her coach is the most important

person right now. Carol says, "he is kind of like our father. He kind of gives us a direction..." Of the remaining five athletes in team sports, three of them list parents as most influential. Finally, Allison cites her mother and her twin brother as most influential and Lisa lists her mother. Once again, parents are the primary motivators and supporters of their daughters at the college level.

These findings are inconsistent with the literature on female sport involvement. Greendorfer (1977) found teachers and coaches to be significant socializing agents for female college athletes, but only during adolescence. Greendorfer (1977) hypothesized that teachers and coaches would be most influential during adulthood, but this was not the case in her study. Instead, she found peers to be the most important predictor of sport involvement during adulthood.

One possible explanation could be due to the research method used. Quantitative research may allow the respondent to only list one person as most influential or to rank order in terms of importance. Although parents and peers may be influential, they may decide to list peers because these are the people they are presently associated with. However, qualitative methods allow the person to discuss agents of socialization and, therefore, if two of them are equally important, this would come out in the discussion.

Another possible explanation for why parents were more supportive for athletes in my study may be attributed to

geographic location. The majority of women athletes in this study are either from small towns or lived out-of-state until they started college. Their parents have been supportive throughout their athletic careers and even when their daughter did go away to college, they still came to watch some of their games. When the athletes came to the university town, many had to make new friends since they were not originally from there. Since this was the case, it makes sense that parents would be more influential than peers because they have provided support for a longer period of time.

It is possible that the athletes in Greendorfer's (1977) study went to a university that was in their home town (since she drew a sample from a much larger university than the one I sampled) which could mean that the athletes also had close friends who went on to play collegiate sport with them or who at least went to college with them. This would certainly account for why peers were more important than parents.

#### Discussion

My findings in the first part of this chapter focused on the influence of others throughout the women's athletic careers. Generally, these findings were consistent with the literature but some inconsistencies emerged. This next section focuses on my research findings that are not discussed in the existing literature. The focus is on the influence of



the self in sport participation rather than on the influence of others.

#### Self as a Social Actor

In this section, I focus on findings that emerged that are not noted in the existing literature on socialization into sport. More specifically, it is shown that women are not passive, unreflective individuals who are socialized into sport by society as the literature suggests. Instead, I argue that females play an active role in making decisions in whether or not to participate in sports. As in the first part of this chapter, my findings are reported by level of school and comparisons are made between athletes, semi-athletes, and non-athletes.

#### Self and Socialization During Elementary School

At the elementary school level there were three non-athletes who listed themselves as most influential in their decision to participate in sports. Common responses included, "none of my friends were in it. They didn't influence me. I just tried out because I liked it" or "in grade four, I played because of myself. I thought it was fun. I enjoyed it. My parents never really encouraged it." Kathy said it the best:

In grade three, I couldn't really say anybody [was influential]. I played because I felt the urge. My parents don't really care for basketball so they

weren't influential and the coaches weren't.  
Maybe it was because I wanted to meet other  
people.

Kathy's comments reveal that other people were not influential in her decision to participate in sports. For whatever reasons she became involved, she did so because of herself. Therefore, she was her own most important agent of socialization. This non-athlete shows the critical role that the self plays even at an early age in motivating females to participate in sports.

The trend for semi-athletes was similar to that of the non-athletes although their parents were more supportive. Nancy recalled that she used to watch her cousin, a really good player, participate in soccer. Nancy said that her female cousin served as a role model for her. Soccer looked like fun and Nancy wanted to play. Ever since Nancy began playing soccer, she has involved herself in other types of sports. From this, it seems clear that Nancy's self was influential in her athletic endeavors.

Jackie remembered getting involved in sports because all her friends played. Even though her friends may have been somewhat influential, it was still Jackie's decision whether or not to play. Jackie had previously listed her brother as influential. She said that he was involved in sports and that's all they would talk about over the dinner table every evening. Jackie said, "I guess I felt left out and I too wanted to become involved." When I asked Jackie if her

parents were influential she replied, "they never pushed us to be in sports but they never missed many of our games." Again the importance of parents as a major source of support is illustrated, but they were clearly not influential with regard to getting Jackie involved initially. Jackie became active in sports because she wanted to be involved. Once she was, her parents contributed a substantial amount of support.

When I asked Danielle if her parents were the ones who got her involved in sports, since she listed them as influential, she said, "I wanted to play sports, I like them, they are everything to me." Although Danielle's parents may have been the ones to take her to all her games, she clearly wanted to be involved. When I asked Bernadette about the influence of her parents on her involvement in sports, she replied:

They just kind of say that it is up to us [her and siblings]. If we want to be part of it or not, it's our decision but they encourage it. It's good for us, but they don't make us take anything that we don't want to.

In the existing literature, when parents are noted as influential, we may get an image of a woman who has no control over her participation in sport. Indeed, we may see her as one who has no will to play, but participates because of outside influences "pushing" her to take part. Clearly this is not the complete picture. Even if parents do encourage their children to participate as Bernadette points out, they

certainly do not force them to play. There has to be some desire on the part of the child to participate.

Although non-athletes were not encouraged by their parents to play, they became involved because it was something they wanted to do. Semi-athletes seem to have received more support from parents but were still influential in their own decision to play. Just to demonstrate the importance of the self in whether or not women continue to play sports, I offer an account of my experiences growing up as a female athlete.

As noted previously, I used to play hockey on an all boys team when I was four years old. During the time I played, however, I endured many unpleasant experiences. Despite the negative reactions from outside influences (i.e. teammates, coach, teammates' parents) I continued to play. The point is that if I was the passive, unreflective individual who played only because of societal influences as the literature suggests, I would have quit hockey in face of all the pressure. However, I did not quit because of my love for the game. This reveals that I must have felt very strongly about my decision and I was willing to continue playing. To me, the self was the most important influence at that time.

The experiences of athletes seems to be somewhat different from those of the two other groups. Outside influences seemed more important to them in terms of initial involvement and in maintaining their involvement in sports. The semi-athletes and non-athletes had an identity as an

athlete (during elementary, junior high and high school) because they were so important in their own decision to participate in sports. The currently active athletes, however, seem more dependent on others to maintain their identities as athletes.

One possible explanation is that the majority of athletes did not become involved in sports on their own. Many of them had parents or peers who convinced them to participate in sports and, therefore, the decision was not their own. Carol recalls saying this to her friends when they asked her to join a team sport, "no, no, I don't want to play, I don't want to play, and they talked me into it." As they progressed through school, outside agents tended to be more important in their participation. For example, team players recalled becoming involved in a particular sport because their coach asked them to do so. Because athletes are so dependent on outside influences, it is more difficult for them to maintain their athlete identities without the help of others.

Jodi did not remember why she first became involved in sports. She believed that it was something that everybody did. Deanne recalled becoming involved in basketball and track because all her friends were doing it and it was something she did so she could stay with them. In contrast to these cases, Allison got involved in sports because she enjoyed it. The responses given by the majority of the

athletes made fewer references to the self than was the case with non-athletes and semi-athletes.

Perhaps athletes are individuals who have developed a social identity that makes them more dependent on others and less likely to rebel (Hewitt 1989). Athletes, who are not generally as independent as many of the semi-athletes and non-athletes, may require a "push" from society in order to get them involved and substantial support to maintain their level of activity. Thus, many athletes are unlikely to be involved in sports due to themselves. There is a distinction that appeared in the interviews that must be explicated. The distinction is between the terms "supportive" and "influential." Even though I asked athletes who was most influential in their decision to participate, the responses they gave focused on support instead. For example, when I asked Ann who was most influential at a particular stage of involvement, she recalled:

I never really had anybody who stood out besides my family because they were always supportive of whatever I wanted to do and I think that just made a difference.

When I asked Jessica the same question, she said:

My parents. That's when they became really supportive of what I was doing. They never ever pushed me as far as, "why don't you go to the gym" but they understood if I wasn't going to be home.

Finally, when Deanne answered this question she said, "probably my parents. They didn't make me do it but they were

there when I was doing it [coming to her games]." In all three cases, parental support rather than influence is illustrated.

Because athletes seem dependent on outside influences for support and to maintain their identities as athletes, I believe that they generally assume that these are the people who got them involved. In their minds, those who initiated their sport involvement must be most influential.

#### Self and Socialization During Junior High

Non-athletes tended to share similar experiences at the elementary and junior high level. That is, they still saw themselves as most influential in their decision to continue or to drop out of sport. This raises an interesting question. If parents were not influential at the elementary school level (which they were not), and individuals are still involved in the same sports, (which they were), how can their parents be seen as newly influential in their daughter's continued sport activities? The answer quite simply is that they cannot. This point is obvious in these women's responses.

When Kathy was asked to comment on influential people at the junior high level, she noted, "My friends were most influential. Not because they told me to play but because they played, I wanted to." As Kathy said, she was not playing because her friends wanted her to play. Rather she made up her own mind on this matter. Therefore, friends did not have

a direct impact on her decision. Susan gave her account of why she became involved in an individual sport as well as why she dropped out. She said:

I also tried track (high jump) but it was always practices and I was hardly involved in any meets so I eventually dropped that. None of my friends were in it. They didn't influence me. I just tried out because I liked it.

Susan originally joined the track team because it was something that she liked. Likewise, it was her decision to later drop out. She felt that it was not worth it for her to be involved since she seldom participated in any meets. Gould and Petlichkoff (1988) make a distinction between dropping out of one sport (sport-specific) and dropping out of sports completely (domain-general). An individual who drops out of one sport in order to play another should be referred to as a sport transfer (Gould and Petlichkoff 1988). Susan would be considered a sport transfer since she later became involved in a new individual sport.

Stephanie, another non-athlete who was self-motivated said, "I joined sports because I liked it. It wasn't because other people were doing it and I thought I should do it because they are." By grade nine, however, Stephanie said that sports were just something to do to keep her busy. She recalls quitting a team sport because she no longer liked it and because she did not get along with the coach (c.f. Gould and Petlichkoff 1988). Even though her friends continued to



play, she made up her own mind to quit. Stephanie said, "why be in something that I didn't enjoy as much as I should."

If one reads the literature, one might think it difficult for women to stay involved in sports without parental support, yet these non-athletes persisted without it. Kathy recounted her parents' lack of enthusiasm:

They didn't like [my team sport]. If I was in something my parents would go to it but they weren't excited and didn't know what was going on but that was fine with me. It didn't bother me because they didn't like it.

Reasons for involvement by non-athletes came from within rather than from some outside force. Once again the importance of the self as an agent of socialization is revealed.

It appears that when parents were not supportive, these girls had to work twice as hard to motivate themselves to play and to stay involved. Once they were involved they seemed to have an easier time staying involved because they did not rely on outside influences. One would expect this to be true even after college graduation. Athletes, however, may experience more difficulty maintaining their identities as athletes once they leave college because they are dependent on outside support. Once that support is no longer there, their motivation to participate in sports may dissipate more readily than would be the case for non-athletes or semi-athletes.

For semi-athletes, the influence of the self is quite noticeable during junior high. When I asked Nancy who was most influential at this level, she said:

My parents' support was big - probably a very, very big issue. Sport was sort of an obsession with me. It was something that was in me. It was something that I was good at and I wanted to do it.

This reminiscence again shows how my subjects focused on the support that parents offered them despite the fact that they were asked who was influential. Nancy's answer to the question I really asked resides in the second part of her answer. Sports were something she did because she was good at them. Given her response, the most influential agent for Nancy appears to be the self.

If agents of socialization are as crucial to the individual's involvement as the literature suggests, then why do some women become involved even though they lack outside support? Why is it that others do not become involved despite pressure from parents to participate? The answer to these questions requires that we recognize the self as an active, reflective agent.

Bernadette's father was a coach and she went with him to class a few times just to see what it was like. She soon realized that she was not interested and no longer wanted to go. Her father, however, started to pressure her to play saying "you should take this" but she just did not want to

participate. Her father was definitely trying to influence her to play, but she declined.

When Bernadette got to senior high, she decided that she was interested in trying the sport that she previously spurned. She went along with her dad and she realized that she actually liked the game. When I asked her why she thought she liked it more second time around, Bernadette replied:

I don't know if it was like my dad was saying, "you do this" that's why I didn't like it. I think maybe that I just wanted to do it for myself and that's why I liked it more when I tried it the second time.

Again we see the resilience of an active, reflective self (Nead 1934) in one's decision not to play a sport despite outside pressure. The existing literature is hard pressed to explain this situation.

Danielle has always been heavily involved in sport but her closest friends were not. She recalled that her friends used to go out to parties and she could not go because she had games or practices. This never bothered her, however, because she was doing very well in sports and that is what she wanted to do. Even though she did not get a lot of support from her close friends, she continued her involvement. Danielle's motivation to participate in sports must have been very strong given these circumstances.

I recall joining volleyball in the eighth grade because all my friends were involved and I thought it might be fun. I had the unfortunate experience of never getting to play

because the coach always put in the same six players. I finished the season but when my friends went out again for the team the following year, I certainly did not follow them. I was not going to be on a team where I did not get to play, regardless of my friends' participation. I did not enjoy the game like I originally thought I would so I was not going to join. I decided that just being on the team was not enough for me as I wanted to play. Since this was not going to happen, I chose to leave this sport and tried something else that I thought would be fun.

There were a few athletes who became involved in a particular sport during junior high due to their own influence. Jodi got involved in an individual sport because she liked it. When I asked her if any of her friends were involved, she said, "I kind of talked one other girl into joining." Jodi talked her older brother into joining, too. Jodi seemed committed to her sport, but reluctant to join on her own. Whatever her reasons, she was most influential in getting herself involved. She liked what she was doing and she made up her mind to follow through with it.

Like Jodi, Allison joined a team because it was something she wanted to do. In her own words, "I decided to become involved because of myself more or less." Laura became active in sports at the junior high level in four different sports. When I asked her why she decided to become involved, Laura

said, "Just for the fun of it. I loved playing basketball and I used to be good at it."

Although references to the self were not as common in athletes as they were in non-athletes and semi-athletes, the self still played a role in some of these women's involvement in sports.

#### Self and Socialization During High School

Susan was active in an individual sport at the senior high level because she liked it. Her parents were never very supportive of her sports career and Susan does not cite anyone as being particularly influential in her decision to play. Susan summed up her feelings regarding her support from others this way:

I just really liked [it] and once I got into it...I know that it is not the most interesting sport to watch so I wasn't insulted when no one showed up to any of my meets. At the end of the year when I was holding my letter, it was kind of like - I couldn't say anyone shared in it because they didn't.

Although it may have been difficult at times for Susan to stay involved in sports, she persevered and she alone deserves the credit for this accomplishment.

Kathy is a non-athlete who became a cheerleader in senior high.

I thought cheerleading was cool. I wanted to do it and I liked it. I like to cheer. I like to be different and stick out. When you are a cheerleader, you are in front of everyone else and everyone can see you.

Kathy and Susan demonstrate that some individuals are internally motivated to join sports. They become active regardless of what outside influences do or do not do to motivate them. Since no one was influential for either of these women at any stage in their athletic careers, the importance of the self and the crucial role it plays in some women's socialization into sport is again revealed.

Bernadette, a semi-athlete, recalled what made her decide to become involved in cheerleading:

I've always wanted to be a cheerleader. Just to get the crowd all fired up and...I always used to watch the cheerleaders when I was young. Just sit right down by them and cheer with them in actual games. I thought to myself, "gosh, I want to do this when I get older."

The role of the self is evident in Bernadette's decision to become a cheerleader. Bernadette emphasized that she wanted to get involved in a sport that she liked, not play in one because that is what others wanted. She was motivated to participate in physical activities due to the influence of her self.

Bernadette said that her parents were not influential in any way when she became involved in dance line either, but they were very supportive. Bernadette's dad who is very much into sports was initially disappointed when she told him she was in dance line. But once she was in it, he supported her. The difference between being influential and supportive again emerges as an important distinction. Bernadette's parents did not influence her to become involved in her sports but she

did. In fact, when she quit her team sport in junior high, they were very upset with her because they wanted her to play. After they realized that this game was not for her, they accepted her decision to try other sports and were supportive of her.

#### Summary

At the senior high level, athletes still give credit for their involvement to parents and coaches. There is little, if any, reference to the self. However there is a discrepancy that emerges in what they say. Even though the question asked them who is most influential, they respond in terms of support rather than influence. What can be said for the athletes is that all of their parents were very supportive of their sports during this stage. This support was manifested by parental attendance at their games or giving them money for sports equipment or sport related outings such as sport camps. For semi-athletes and non-athletes, external support and influence took second place to the influence of the self.

#### Self and Socialization During College

By this stage in the game, the women who are referred to as non-athletes in this thesis, are no longer involved in organized sport. Semi-athletes, however, continued their involvement through the university intramural program and through the community. For semi-athletes, including myself,

one agent of socialization is clear in every case. That critical agent at the college level is the self. The following example illustrates this point.

This past summer, my husband and I got together for a volleyball game with the other Marine families. The team I was on was winning and every time I would serve, the other team could not return the ball. The reactions of the other team members was amusing from my point of view. One of the players, Wayne, took the ball and threw it at a team member, yelled at him and asked why he could not play volleyball. Wayne was obviously taking his frustrations out on someone else because not only were they losing, but they were losing to a woman.

When Wayne and I finally came face to face in the front row, it was as though we were almost at war. I was doing very well with my tips and every time we would both go up to the net for the ball, I would put it past him. He got so angry with me that the next time the ball went up over the net, he just slammed into the net making sure he knocked me over. He did this despite the fact that one is not supposed to touch the net let alone body check your opponent on the other side.

I have come to learn that this is the way many of these fellows are and I have come to accept it and still enjoy the sport. If I took personally everything these men said or did to me, I would never play volleyball again. Fortunately, I am



good at the game, I enjoy the game, and I am going to continue playing the game regardless of outside negative influences.

The impression one gets after reading the literature on female sport socialization is that "agents of socialization" encourage females to become involved (c.f. Greendorfer and Lewko 1978; Higginson 1985; Snyder and Spreitzer 1976). In contrast to the literature, Nancy's father discourages her from playing intramurals because he is concerned about her studies. Nancy continues to be involved, however, because she enjoys it. Intramurals are fun and she loves to stay in shape.

Like Nancy, Danielle plays in the intramural program and she works out everyday. Even though she feels pressed for time because of her studies, she still sets aside time to work out. Danielle believes that working out after a test is a great stress reliever. There were times, however, when Danielle got dirty looks from the guys in the gym. They looked at her as if to say, "what are you doing here?" Danielle says that this does not bother her because she is there to improve her body and if the guys do not like her being there, that is too bad.

One last finding that refutes the literature on the power of socialization agents (c.f. Snyder and Spreitzer 1976) is found in Nancy's story. Nancy was under great pressure from teachers, coaches, and friends to go out for teams at the university. She said that she spent a lot of time pondering

this idea but then she decided not to try out because she knew she had to concentrate on her studies. She figured, "you can only go so far in athletics anyway. It's not like you are going to go pro." If Nancy was a "puppet" of society like the literature suggests, she would have tried out for a team considering all the pressure she received from major socializing agents. Nancy, however, resisted this pressure and decided not to try out.

The experiences described by semi-athletes in this study reveal that the self is more important to them than society at the college level. Women participate in sports for their own reasons. Likewise, if women decide they no longer want to be involved, they can choose to exercise that choice. The literature suggests this would be difficult at best given the importance of outside influences (c.f. Greendorfer 1977; Greendorfer and Lewko 1978; Higginson 1985; Kenyon and McPherson 1974; Snyder and Spreitzer 1976; Weiss and Barber 1990).

#### Chapter Summary

The major socializing agents for all 22 subjects were examined in the first part of this chapter. The agents of socialization reported by the women in my study were found to be consistent overall with the literature. The second part of this chapter emphasized research findings not reported in the existing literature. It was shown that the self is an

extremely important agent of socialization in the participation of most women. The later discussion showed that it is impossible to make any sense out of these women's athletic biographies without making reference to the self and its motives. What emerged was insight into how women make the decision to engage in athletics not because of someone else but because of themselves.

Although interviews with athletes did not reveal as many references to the self as was the case for semi-athletes and non-athletes, we cannot conclude that athletes become involved in sports only because of outside influences. As it has already been shown, when athletes were asked to state who was most influential in their sports activities, they responded by talking about parental support.

In retrospect, the idea of asking respondents who is influential in their decision to play a sport is a rather ineffective question. As we saw in this chapter, all the respondents, but athletes in particular, did not carefully distinguish between influences in sport participation and support. Therefore, instead of asking subjects who was influential, we should ask, why do you participate in sports? If individuals participate because they are "pushed" into it as the literature suggests, this question would clarify the issue.

In the chapter that follows, I build a case for using symbolic interactionism in studies of sport participation

using the findings that emerged in my research. I also illustrate how social learning theory as it is currently used is less useful than the current literature seems to suggest.

CHAPTER 5  
DISCUSSION

This study focused on the process of female socialization into sport. Based on a critique of the existing literature and my own experiences as a female athlete, it has been argued that the current body of research does not give a complete picture of this process. This thesis was designed as an attempt to move our understanding of female socialization into sport beyond its present state. To this end, it was guided by a grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) approach to theory development.

What follows is a brief account of why social learning theory is inadequate as a theoretical framework to study the socialization process. As a result, I turn to a symbolic interactionist approach which provides a better handle on dealing with this issue. A discussion of a self-sustaining athletic identity is presented and it is debated as to whether both semi-athletes and athletes obtain this identity. Since non-athletes are not involved in sports at the college level, the main focus in the rest of this thesis is on semi-athletes and athletes.

### Reconceptualizing Women's Sport Socialization

The existing literature which uses social learning theory to explain the process of female socialization into sport provides an inadequate theoretical framework. Its primary shortcoming is its failure to include the central role of the self (Mead 1934) in the socialization process. As used, social learning theory emphasizes external "socializing agents" and encourages an "oversocialized" (Wrong 1961) view of the individual and downplays internal or self-referential influences.

My research findings suggest that we should focus on female socialization into sport from a symbolic interactionist framework. This perspective highlights the role of the self in both socialization and social behavior. The data from my interviews are consistent with the symbolic interactionist approach. This approach suggests that we conceptualize sport socialization as a problem of adequately developing a self-sustaining identity as an athlete.

An "identity" is defined by Hewitt (1989) as "to be like others and yet also to have qualities that make one different from them" (p.152). In short, those with an identity, "know who they are, what they are doing, and where they are going" (Hewitt 1989, p.152).

Semi-athletes stated that they first became involved in sports because of themselves. That is, sports looked fun and

they were doing something that they wanted to try. Although semi-athletes listed their parents as supportive, they were not influential in getting them started in sports. Similarly, a few athletes became involved in some sports because they wanted to try them. However, the majority of athletes noted the impact of outside influences on their initial participation in sports as well as their continued sports play. Semi-athletes who are currently enrolled in sports through community and intramural programs stated that they participate in sports because it is fun and they want to stay in shape. These women no longer receive outside support yet they stay active in sports. I too continue to participate in sports despite some negative societal responses and limited support.

Semi-athletes have an identity. They are similar to other athletes in that they are involved in sports, yet they have qualities that distinguish them from others. These distinguishing characteristics focus on the important role the women's self played in their socialization into sport.

The reason semi-athletes pursue sports is due to their self-sustaining identity as athlete. This athlete identity is not a role separate from themselves but is actually part of who they are. They are not dependent on external socializing agents for their participation in sports. These women have committed a lifetime to sports because of the important role that their self played throughout their athletic careers. The

athletic identity is something that belongs to them. It is a part of their life history and they have earned the right to own it.

Athletes may also have an athlete identity, but I do not believe it is self-sustaining. That is, they seem unable to hold onto their identity as athlete without the support of others. Athletes' own stories indicate that their involvement in sport is not readily attributed to the self. The majority of women athletes relate stories of dependence on outside influences to get them involved. For example, many team playing athletes did not want to initially become involved in their current sport but were convinced to join by their friends. Two team players hated playing the sport they are currently involved in and wanted to quit, but were convinced by their mothers and by their friends to stay on the team. The involvement of individual competitors was due to their parents signing them up for a particular sport. Laura's recollection that she did not like her individual sport at first but her parents' encouragement to stay involved illustrates this point nicely.

Since athletes receive so much motivation from external "socializing agents," their self sustaining athletic identity seems less secure than it is for semi-athletes. The only reason athletes seem to have an identity as athlete is because they still receive encouragement and support from society. Thus, this thesis suggests that once athletes complete their



four years of collegiate sports, it is unlikely that they will be able to maintain an athletic identity. Hewitt's (1989) work also seems to support this argument.

Hewitt (1989) distinguishes between social identity and personal identity. The former looks at the person's sense of identification and integration with regard to the community and culture while the later looks at the continuity and integration constructed by the person in relation to the self. I argue that both athletes and semi-athletes have a social identity but only semi-athletes have developed a personal identity too.

Athletes and semi-athletes are creators of life histories and as such, each of them has a sport biography. Their biographies describe past experiences which include victories as well as failures. The biographies of semi-athletes are constructed in such a way that their sport experiences center around the self. They attribute their past and present sport involvement to themselves. Bernadette, a semi-athlete, played a team sport in junior high because she wanted to see what it was like. Once she started, her parents wanted her to stay involved. Regardless of pressure from her parents to participate, Bernadette decided to quit because she did not like it. Since Bernadette's biography is unique to herself, she should be able to decide whether or not to participate based on her own view. Biographies of athletes, however, do not place the self at the center. Instead, they place

societal agents such as parents, coaches and peers there. Their biographies emphasize those who they perceive as influential and supportive throughout their sport careers.

Hewitt (1989) supports this contention. He argues we each have a biography. Because these biographies are ours, much of what happens is due to ourselves and not interaction with others. Others may want us to try or not to try certain sports, as was the case with Bernadette, but in the end, the individual is the one who decides what is in her best interests.

I am not arguing that athletes in collegiate sports do not want to participate. Rather, I suggest that their participation rests on the amount of encouragement and support that they receive from others. Athletes participate in sports more for others than for themselves. Participation brings many external rewards such as encouragement and support from parents, peers, coaches, student body and mass media. Semi-athletes, in comparison, do not receive any of these external rewards and yet they are still motivated to play. Semi-athletes play for their own reasons such as to stay in shape or have fun rather than playing sports to satisfy others. To further illustrate the point of a self-sustaining athletic identity, we must delve deeper into the distinction between social identity and personal identity.

Hewitt (1989) notes that, "to emphasize social identity is to choose conformity over rebellion, staying over leaving,

and dependence rather than independence" (p.192). This characterization fits the athletes in my study. Throughout high school, many team sport players were involved because of the pressure they received from others to participate, not because they wanted to play. Instead of "rocking the boat" so to speak, these women conformed to what parents and coaches expected of them regardless of what they wanted to do.

Shannon and Lisa, two team players, recalled that after playing their first year of collegiate sport, they wanted to drop out. Lisa remembered crying to her mom telling her that she was going to quit. She did not get along with the coach and she hated playing. Her mom told her to stay with the sport and that it would improve the more she played. Lisa took this advice and continued to play. Shannon described a similar incident during her interview. Both athletes illustrate the second component of social identity; staying over leaving.

The data in this study reveals a definite display of dependence on the part of athletes. By the college level, one would think that women play sports because athlete is their master status. On the contrary, some athletes continue to stay involved only because their teammates encourage them to do so. At the college level, some of them still cite their friends, usually teammates, as being most influential in keeping them on the team.

If college athletes do not receive support from parents, or lack close ties with other teammates, there is a good chance that they will discontinue their involvement in their current sport. If this is true, what are the chances that they will continue to be involved in sports after these socializing agents disappear?

According to Hewitt (1989) personal identity, "incites rebellion, urges departure, and favors going it alone in the construction of a special and individual self" (p.192). This description fits the semi-athletes and non-athletes in this study very well.

Rebellion is illustrated by Stephanie, Bernadette, Cindy and Kathy in their decision to quit a team sport, and in Susan's decision to quit an individual sport. Nancy also decided against playing collegiate sport despite pressure from peers, teachers and coaches to play. Even though these agents of socialization urged them to continue playing, they decided that they no longer wanted to participate.

Bernadette is a classic example of a woman who departed from what her parents expected of her. They pushed her to play a team sport so when she decided that it was not for her, she really went it alone. She later became involved in more traditional female sport activities despite what others had to say. All of the semi-athletes and non-athletes in my study seemed comfortable with going it alone. In this way, they

emphasize the important role of the self in their sport participation.

Social identity and personal identity can be broken down into two groups which further illustrates the distinction between athletes and semi-athletes. Hewitt (1989) discusses two ideal types, exclusivity and autonomy, that focus on the problems that Americans face with regard to the issue of identity. Exclusivity best describes the athletes of this study whereas autonomy characterizes semi-athletes and non-athletes.

Exclusivity emphasizes social identity at the expense of personal identity. That is, the individual is encompassed by a single community that provides the standpoint from which the person acts (Hewitt 1989). The athlete is so dependent on outside influences that the only way they construct an athlete identity is by identifying with a group similar to themselves. This group (i.e. their sports team) provides the foundation for their behavior.

Autonomy stresses personal identity at the expense of social identity. That is, individuals are independent, avoid the community and regard their acts as contributing to the achievement of goals (Hewitt 1989). As we already pointed out, semi-athletes and non-athletes are very independent when it comes to sport participation. They decide their goals, (i.e. whether or not to quit sports) and they attain these aspirations regardless of what others have to say.

While women in this study were shaped by their social experience, having one's own biography surely separates them from being fully encompassed by society. If these women were stripped of the element of self, they would be no more than a "puppet" doing exactly as society wishes (Hewitt 1989). Indeed if this were so, Wrong's (1961) oversocialized conception of self would bear reexamination. This is not the case, however, as the life histories of semi-athletes and non-athletes demonstrates.

There is a lot more at work in females' socialization into sport than merely being influenced by outside socializing agents. Clearly the self plays a crucial role in sport socialization as illustrated by the life histories of non-athletes and semi-athletes. An active self is responsible for the self-sustaining athletic identity that many of these women hold. The reason they develop and hold this identity is due to the important role that they themselves played in their own sport socialization experiences. Many of these individuals began sports due to their own motivation and continued their involvement despite obstacles created by others. This laid the groundwork for their future sport participation regardless of support from others.

Athletes who are more dependent on outside influences for support, have not developed this self-sustaining identity. Rather, they define themselves as athletes only as long as they are supported by others. When they are no longer in the

limelight and receive attention and support from others, then motivation to engage in sports will dissipate.

### Concluding Remarks

Since this study revealed the crucial role that the self plays in the socialization of females into sport, future research should attempt to adopt the symbolic interactionist framework to better understand this process. Adopting a narrow conception of social learning theory as the primary theoretical framework for this topic has outlived its usefulness. It is time to change our focus. That is, we must give up the notion of people as passive, unreflective individuals who are acted upon by society. The image of an "oversocialized" (Wrong 1961) human being seems inadequate. We must focus on the role that the self plays in the sport socialization process. That is, future research must treat the individual as an active, reflective (Mead 1934) being who is not merely a robot of society but as a being who plays an important role in their own sport socialization.

APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. When did you first become involved in sports?
2. What types of sports did you first become involved in?
3. Who was most influential when you first became involved?
4. What types of sports did you participate in at the junior high level?
5. Who was most influential at this stage?
6. What types of sports did you participate in at the senior high level?
7. Who was most influential at this stage?
8. Do you have any brothers or sisters?
9. Were they involved in sports?
10. Did you ever practice sports with your siblings?
11. How well were your skills developed by high school?
12. If your parents were supportive of your sport participation, how so?
13. Did your parents participate in sports when you were growing up?
14. Did your parents ever practice sports with you?
15. How do you feel about competition?

16. Does competition relate to other areas of your life outside of sports?
17. Have you ever had any sport experiences that you would consider unique?
18. Do you label yourself an athlete or a jock?
19. What does being an athlete or jock mean to you?
20. Did you ever play with the boys when you were in elementary school?
21. Did they treat you any differently?
22. Did you ever play pick up games when you were growing up?
23. During childhood, how much time did you spend doing traditional boy things versus traditional girl things?
24. What would you consider traditional boy things?
25. What would you consider traditional girl things?
26. Did you consider yourself a tomboy when you were growing up?
27. Why did you consider yourself a tomboy?
28. Did you engage in sports with boys at the junior high or high school level?
29. Did they treat you any differently?
30. Would you rather play on a team with all girls, all boys or mixed? Why?
31. Are you currently involved in any sports?

32. Do you participate in pick up games?
33. Do you think that you would have gone as far as you did in your sports if it wasn't for the support of your parents?

**APPENDIX B**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE**

## Questionnaire

- 1) How many years in total have you played in sports?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ years
- 2) How many hours per week do (did) you spend in team sports?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ hrs/week
- 3) At what level(s) do (did) you compete? Check all that apply.
- ( ) elementary  
 ( ) junior high/middle school  
 ( ) high school  
 ( ) college  
 ( ) community sponsored  
 ( ) pick up games (e.g. getting together with friends)
- 4) Which of the following best describes your level of participation in sports at each level:
- |                    | High | Moderate | Low | None |
|--------------------|------|----------|-----|------|
| a) elementary      | ( )  | ( )      | ( ) | ( )  |
| b) jr. high/middle | ( )  | ( )      | ( ) | ( )  |
| c) high school     | ( )  | ( )      | ( ) | ( )  |
| d) college         | ( )  | ( )      | ( ) | ( )  |
- 5) How would you rank yourself with regard to the following continuum? Check one for each continuum.
- | very assertive | somewhat assertive | a little assertive | not at all assertive |
|----------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| ( )            | ( )                | ( )                | ( )                  |

very competitive	somewhat competitive	a little competitive	not at all competitive
( )	( )	( )	( )

6) Why do you participate in sports? Check all that apply.

- ( ) to have fun
- ( ) to stay in shape
- ( ) improve skills
- ( ) learn new skills
- ( ) do something I'm good at
- ( ) the excitement of competition
- ( ) to play as part of a team
- ( ) to go to a higher level of competition
- ( ) the challenge of competition
- ( ) my friends all played

7) What kinds of things keep you from participating in sports?

- ( ) homework (school responsibilities)
- ( ) job
- ( ) no longer interested
- ( ) no sport available
- ( ) family responsibility
- ( ) Other \_\_\_\_\_

8) On a regular basis, how many different sports did you participate in? \_\_\_\_\_

- 9) How many team sports do (did) you participate in on a regular basis? \_\_\_\_\_
- 10) How many individual sports do (did) you participate in on a regular basis? \_\_\_\_\_
- 11) What kinds of sports do (did) you participate in? Check all that apply.
- ( ) softball
  - ( ) soccer
  - ( ) hockey
  - ( ) volleyball
  - ( ) track
  - ( ) basketball
  - ( ) swimming/diving
  - ( ) figure skating
  - ( ) Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 12) What problems, if any, have you experienced while involved in sports?
- ( ) coach played favorites
  - ( ) coach was a poor teacher
  - ( ) not getting to play
  - ( ) too much pressure
  - ( ) too competitive
  - ( ) sport took too much time
  - ( ) too much emphasis on winning
  - ( ) no longer fun
  - ( ) none that I can think of

- 13) During childhood (ages 6-12) which of the following were most influential in your decision to participate in sports? Please rank order: 1 for most influential, 2 for less influential, etc. Give a value of zero (0) to those who didn't influence you at all.

( ) Father                      ( ) Friend(s)  
 ( ) Mother                      ( ) Physical Education Teacher  
 ( ) Brother(s)                  ( ) Coach  
 ( ) Sister(s)                    ( ) Other \_\_\_\_\_

- 14) During adolescence (ages 13-17) which of the following encouraged you to continue to participate in sports? Please rank order: 1 for most influential, 2 for less influential, etc. Give a value of zero (0) to those who didn't encourage you at all.

( ) Father                      ( ) Friend(s)  
 ( ) Mother                      ( ) Physical Education Teacher  
 ( ) Brother(s)                  ( ) Coach  
 ( ) Sister(s)                    ( ) Other \_\_\_\_\_

- 15) How supportive was each person in your decision to participate in sports?

	Not at all	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very Supportive
Father	( )	( )	( )	( )
Mother	( )	( )	( )	( )
Brother(s)	( )	( )	( )	( )
Sister(s)	( )	( )	( )	( )



Friend(s)	( )	( )	( )	( )
P.E. Teacher	( )	( )	( )	( )
Coach	( )	( )	( )	( )
Other	( )	( )	( )	( )

- 16) Did your father and/or mother participate in sports while you were growing up?

	Not at all	Sometimes	Quite a bit	A Lot
Father	( )	( )	( )	( )
Mother	( )	( )	( )	( )

- 17) Did your father and/or mother ever coach any type of sports (team or individual) while you were growing up?

	Not at all	Sometimes	Quite a bit	A Lot
Father	( )	( )	( )	( )
Mother	( )	( )	( )	( )

- 18) During childhood (ages 6-12) did your closest friends participate in sports?

( ) Yes

( ) No

- 19) During adolescence (ages 13-17) did your closest friends participate in sports?

( ) Yes

( ) No

20) What is the highest education completed by your father and mother?

	Father	Mother
( ) grades 0-6 . . . . .	( )	( )
( ) grades 7-9 . . . . .	( )	( )
( ) grades 10-12 . . . . .	( )	( )
( ) some post secondary e.g. Tech School. . . . .	( )	( )
( ) university graduate . . . . .	( )	( )

21) What was your parents total family income while you were living at home (or if you still are at home)?

( ) less than \$10,000  
 ( ) \$10,000 - \$19,999  
 ( ) \$20,000 - \$29,999  
 ( ) \$30,000 - \$39,000  
 ( ) \$40,000 or more  
 ( ) don't know

22) What is your father's occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

23) What is your mother's occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

24) What is your ethnic background?

( ) White  
 ( ) Hispanic  
 ( ) African American or Black  
 ( ) Asian/Pacific Islander  
 ( ) American Indian/Alaskan Native

25) How do you feel about the sports activities that are provided at UND? Do you think there should be more? Or less? Please specify.

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AGE \_\_\_\_\_ years old.

What is your class?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Freshmen
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sophomore
- \_\_\_\_\_ Junior
- \_\_\_\_\_ Senior

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