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# "The future of football is feminine" : a critical cultural history of the U.S. women's national soccer team

Eileen Marie Narcotta-Welp  
*University of Iowa*

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“THE FUTURE OF FOOTBALL IS FEMININE”: A CRITICAL CULTURAL  
HISTORY OF THE U.S. WOMEN’S NATONAL SOCCER TEAM

by

Eileen Marie Narcotta-Welp

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy  
degree in Health and Sport Studies in the  
Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

August 2016

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Susan Birrell

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Eileen Marie Narcotta-Welp

has been approved by the Examining Committee for  
the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree  
in Health and Sport Studies at the August 2016 graduation.

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To my former athletes. You all inspired this research.

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tongue continues to keep me on the edge of my seat and my feet firmly on the ground. I thank you for your wise perspective on life.

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## ABSTRACT

*“The Future of Football is Feminine” : A Critical Cultural History of the U.S.*

*Women’s National Soccer Team*, focuses on the historical and cultural construction of the U.S. women’s national soccer team. The public and academic discourse that constitutes women’s soccer in the U.S. consistently links the game with the feminist legislation of Title IX, and positions male coaches as benevolent patriarchs who grant young girls and women the right to play. The combination of these two dominant narratives confronts the historical narrative of women’s soccer from an uncritical and celebratory space, which represses and decenters lines of power. I challenge these steadfast discourses by locating this team, and thus, women’s soccer, in a larger cultural frame critical of neoliberal, postfeminist, post-racial, and sexual politics. Through an examination of U.S. newspapers and magazines, United States Soccer Federation (USSF) and Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) documents, and extensive soccer-specific journals and magazines, I explore the intersection of capitalism, feminism, and racism in women’s professional sport.

This research also examines how the media and other corporations have cultivated the U.S. women’s national team and its individual stars, such as Mia Hamm, Brandi Chastain, Kristine Lilly, Abby Wambach, and Hope Solo to promote themselves as consumer conduits through which moral and ethical behaviors circulate and influence civil society. Since the mid-1990s, young female soccer players find themselves at an ideological crossroad of individual choice and self-discipline. The soccer field has been promoted as a space of gender and racial inclusion as well as economic and political freedom while subtly reinforcing the exact opposite. Moreover, I examine the historical

and ever-shifting landscape of women's soccer, and how neoliberalism as an economic and cultural theory is central to the use of race, class, gender, and sexual ideologies to develop women's soccer in the United States.

## PUBLIC ABSTRACT

In the summer of 2015, the U.S. women's national soccer team won its third World Cup, easily beating Japan, 5-2, in the championship game. Over 25 million soccer crazed fans watched the final, marking this game as the most watched soccer match in U.S. soccer history. Young girls, boys, and soccer fans supported and cheered for U.S. women's soccer players like Abby Wambach, Hope Solo, Carli Lloyd, and Alex Morgan, who became house-hold names throughout the tournament. The excitement that swirled around the team conjured up images of the U.S. team's last World Cup win at the 1999 Women's World Cup, and their iconic ascendancy to the pinnacle of sport. But how has the U.S. women's team come to capture the imagination of a nation?

Academic and public discourse has defined the historical development of the team through a gendered lens that uncritically celebrates the team as a white, middle-class, and heterosexual space. However, the U.S. women's national team is a production of a particular historical cultural formation; thus, it can not exist outside of the economic and cultural context that shaped it. This dissertation is a first step in critiquing a seemingly unassailable cultural icon, recognizing that the most normative of spaces sometimes need the most interrogation and examination. Therefore, I explore the intersection of capitalism, feminism, and racism in order to provide new narratives about the U.S. women's soccer team and unlock the potential for women to control their own bodies and mediated representations.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	xi
PROLOGUE .....	1
INTRODUCTION .....	6
A Decade of Transformation: United States Soccer Federation and the Making of a Neoliberal Juggernaut .....	9
Theoretical Frameworks.....	20
Neoliberalism.....	21
Postfeminism and Sexual Politics.....	23
Post-racism/Multiculturalism. ....	26
Research Methodology .....	28
Chapter Outline .....	29
CHAPTER ONE — GIRLS RULE, BOYS DROOL: THE CONSTRUCTION OF A FEMINIZED NICHE SOCCER MARKET .....	34
In With the Out Crowd: Situating Soccer in U.S. Sport .....	40
“Real” Americans Hate Soccer.....	43
She’s the Man: Michelle Akers-Stahl and the Tenuous States of U.S. Soccer in the early 1990s .....	48
She Has a Shot Most Professional Men Envy. ....	51
“We Can Add Status and Prestige to the USSF, but...” .....	62
A Whole New World: Women’s Soccer as a Niche Market and the Cultural Feminization of American Soccer.....	68
Conclusion.....	81
CHAPTER TWO — GIRLS JUST WANNA HAVE FUN: POSTFEMINISM AND THE 1999 WOMEN’S WORLD CUP .....	83
Creating a Movement: Selling Tickets, a Movement, and a Lifestyle .....	90
Womenomics: Feminism, Neoliberalism, and Selling Tickets. ....	90
“The Girl Effect” Movement: Title IX and a Postfeminist Women’s World Cup Mission. ....	98
They Make How Much?: Continued Inequities Even in the Face of Equality.....	105
Imagine the Possibilities or Not: Drawing a Postfeminist Boundary Around the Game of Soccer. ....	110
Conclusion.....	124

CHAPTER THREE — A BLACK FLY IN WHITE MILK: THE 1999 WOMEN’S WORLD CUP, BRIANA SCURRY AND THE POLITICS OF INCLUSION .....	127
For White Girls Only? Soccer and the Politics of Exclusion .....	132
The Maintenance of Compliance: Being a Black Postfeminist in a White Postfeminist Game .....	144
A New Face of Racism? Briana Scurry and the Politics of Exclusion .....	150
Conclusion.....	158
CHAPTER FOUR — MOVE OVER, BITCH!: THE UNRAVELING OF GIRL POWER IN POST-9/11 AMERICAN SOCCER .....	161
Riding the Postfeminist Wave: The Continued Battle for Equity After the 1999 Women’s World Cup .....	166
“Return of the Guy”: The Declining and Shifting Permutations of Girl Power .....	180
Changing of the Soccer Guards: Reasserting Men and Masculinity in the USSF. .	183
A Collusion of Masculine Proportions.....	191
Profiting Off of the Backs of Female Athletes.....	196
Soccer Damsels in Distress: Hero Narratives and Domesticity .....	203
Conclusion.....	213
CHAPTER 5 — GOING SOLO: THE 2007 WOMEN’S WORLD CUP, HOPE SOLO, AND THE PRACTICE OF FREEDOM .....	216
Gilding the Lilly: The 1999ers, Kristine Lilly, and the Governance of a Dominated State .....	221
Teach that Girl Some Manners!: The Governing of a Dominated State and the Politics of Exclusion.....	230
“And That’s What I Think”: Hope Solo and the Practice of Freedom .....	240
Shifting the Discourse?.....	245
Conclusion.....	252
CONCLUSION — OVERTIME!.....	256
APPENDIX — LIST OF HYPER-LINKS TO INTERNET VIDEOS .....	267
REFERENCES .....	268

## LIST OF FIGURES

1. Adidas Advertisement Published on December 8, 1991, to Notify the U.S. Public of the U.S. Women's World Championship Victory in China on November 30, 1991 .....53
2. Women's World Cup Preview Photo of Starting Goalkeeper, Briana Scurry ..... 167
3. Women's World Cup Preview Photo of Starting Forward, Mia Hamm (Left), and Starting Midfielder, Michelle Akers (Right) ..... 168

## PROLOGUE

I am a Title IX baby. Born in 1977, just five years after the ratification of Title IX, I had access to opportunities in sport at all levels: instructional, developmental, high school, college, and semi-professional. I grew up attending gymnastics and karate classes; playing on numerous soccer, basketball, and softball teams; and competed with the boys in my neighborhood in tackle football, wiffle ball, bike races, and tag. My mother, who jogged incessantly (I am assuming as a way to deal with four children), took us to any and all practices, and jumped at the chance to coach my soccer, basketball, and softball teams. Yet, none of these opportunities or experiences seemed extraordinary to me. Had not girls and women always had access to play sport and play it competitively?

My mother never directly discussed the notion of Title IX or the ongoing ramifications of the gender equity battle, but she did consistently remind me that I was lucky to have the opportunity to participate in sport. She would tell us stories about how she loved to play field hockey in grade school and that she was resentful towards her parents for not allowing her to continue that passion in high school. When my mother and both of her sisters reached the young working age of fourteen, her father made them get jobs after school while her six brothers were allowed to run track, play baseball, basketball, and golf in high school. This lack of opportunity did not sour my mother's love of sport; rather, she developed it through her passion for Boston sport teams. We saw her angst when the ball went through Buckner's legs in the 1986 World Series, we saw her unbridled joy when the Celtics won the 1986 NBA championship, and we saw her utter frustration for the dreadful Patriots teams of the 1980s. My mother

demonstrated that same passion when she coached our teams or watched us compete. It was she who instilled a love of sport in all of her children.

What I do distinctly remember is the day I fell in love with the game of soccer. My love of soccer was not an illustrious affair, however. There is no anecdotal story - I did not love the game the moment I touched a soccer ball, or have some gifted technical skill for the game. I had played soccer from the age of five, but was always spun into boredom as a mass of five-year olds circled and attacked the ball like a swarm of bees. I was on the edge of attrition from the sport, when in the fall of 1985, at the age of eight, I was drafted to my mother's team, the Rainbows.<sup>1</sup> We wore red and white polyester long-sleeved uniform tops, bottoms, and socks that were itchy and hot, and black cleats that felt like asphalt on a hot summer's day. Some games felt like physical and mental torture. I would compete only when the ball came close to my vicinity, and then proceeded to pick weeds and chat with other players when the ball disappeared into what seemed to be a far away corner of the field. But on one hot and humid Saturday in September, my mother did something drastic – she put me in as the goalkeeper.

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<sup>1</sup> I was quite unhappy with the name the rainbows – a short cut version of Rainbow Brite. Rainbow Brite (Chalopin & Heyward, 1984) was a TV Series about a young girl who is responsible for protecting the colors of the rainbow from evil villains who hate everything colorful. At that moment in time, I remember thinking that name was too soft, and wanting a team name that felt more significant. I wanted the team to be named the Goonies, but another team had already taken it. *The Goonies* (Donner & Bernhard, 1985) directed by Richard Donner was a G-rated film about a group of kids who set out on an adventure in search of treasure in order to save their homes from foreclosure. The movie opened at #2 at the box office and made over \$61.5 million.



As the whistle blew to start the game, I was ecstatic to play. The torturous hot and humid conditions drifted out of my consciousness as I focused on the most important item on the field – the ball. Instantaneously, I knew this position was special: I could use both my feet and hands; I was allowed to dive in front of players’ feet; it was a requirement to get dirty; and, most importantly, I got to wear a different shirt than everyone else on the team. As a young field player, I had been confused as to what my purpose was as a central midfielder or outside defender. Most of the time, I felt like a chicken running around with my head cut off. I could not define my significance to the team. However, the second I stepped into goal, I had a clear purpose – do not let the other team score. To this day, I am not sure if my mother was frustrated with my sheer lack of interest in the game or if she just needed another body in the goal. Regardless, I was hooked.

My participation timeline in the game of soccer mirrors the rise in the popularity of women’s soccer in the United States along with the increase in sport participation opportunities in high school and college afforded by Title IX. In the 1980s, British expatriates, who played for the North American Soccer League, and U.S. born coaches, who formerly coached only boys’ and/or men’s soccer, introduced developmental opportunities for young girls and women on traveling club teams and Olympic development programs (Grainey, 2012; Tossell, 2003). The early 1990s presented young women who wanted to play at a higher level with a greater number of college choices that sponsored women’s soccer programs than ever before (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). I participated in club and high school soccer and was the first athlete in my small Massachusetts town (regardless of gender) to receive an athletic scholarship to a NCAA

Division I school. However, it was recreational, club, and Olympic development opportunities that allowed Mia Hamm, Kristine Lilly, Julie Foudy, and thousands of other American girls, like me, to craft their soccer skills beyond the educational sport setting, and offered them a *chance* to compete at the highest level of competition, the U.S. women's national soccer team.

To be completely honest, I along with others with whom I have played and coached, tend to be unaware of the long, global history of soccer, and the implications it may have had on American culture. Instead, as a female player and coach, soccer seemed to have no past. It appeared as if players and coaches of women's soccer were writing the history of the game with each new opportunity to play, win or lose. I remember briefly hearing about the U.S. women's national soccer team winning the first Women's World Cup in China, and their close defeat in the 1995 Women's World Cup in Norway. Regardless of the lack of media attention the U.S women's team received in the early 1990s, just knowing the team existed fueled my drive to compete. I was drawn into Nike and Reebok's female empowerment advertisements and catch phrases. I felt a sense of freedom on the field; I was told and felt that I could do anything.

The 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta was my first foray into seeing the women's game on television. Granted only a few of the Olympic Games were televised on tape-delay, and the gold medal match was not aired on the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), but I could finally watch the best players in the world. As Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) Secretary General Sepp Blatter stated at the 1995 Women's World Cup – the mid-1990s truly felt as if the “future of football [was indeed] feminine” (Degele, 2012, para. 1). But by 1999, I realized opportunities were

now limited as I played my final year in college. Instead of undiluted joy when Brandi Chastain struck the penalty kick to win the 1999 Women's World Cup, I felt immense jealousy and anger storming inside my body. My coaches, friends, and the media kept recounting the importance of Title IX in my sporting experience, but I felt somehow deceived. With no professional league, my only option to stay in the game was to coach. It was not long after graduation, as an unproven and inexperienced collegiate coach, that I began to question the overall impact of Title IX on my own sporting experiences. It is with this dissertation that I finally begin that quest.

## INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2015, the U.S. women's national soccer team won its third World Cup, easily beating Japan, 5-2, in the championship game. Over 25 million soccer crazed fans watched the final, marking this game as the most watched soccer match in U.S. soccer history. Young girls, boys, and soccer fans supported and cheered for U.S. women's soccer players like Abby Wambach, Hope Solo, Carli Lloyd, and Alex Morgan, who became house-hold names throughout the tournament. The excitement that swirled around the team conjured up images of the U.S. team's last World Cup win at the 1999 Women's World Cup, and their iconic ascendancy to the pinnacle of sport. But how has the U.S. women's team come to capture the imagination of a nation?

Academic and public discourse has defined the historical development of the U.S. women's national soccer team through a gendered and racialized lens that uncritically celebrates the team as a white, middle-class, and heterosexual space. The overbearing mediated and ahistorical reproduction of the women's game, consistently links the economic and cultural success of women's soccer to Title IX (Longman, 2000a; de Varona, 1999b; Lisi, 2013; Stewart, 2005; Wahl, 2011) and male coaches as benevolent patriarchs who grant young girls and women the right to play (Crothers, 2006; Grainey, 2012). I challenge these steadfast discourses by locating this team, and thus, women's soccer, in a larger cultural frame critical of neoliberal, postfeminist, post-racial, and sexual politics. Through an examination of U.S. newspapers and magazines, United States Soccer Federation (USSF) and Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) documents, and extensive soccer-specific journals and magazines, I explore the intersection of capitalism, feminism, and racism in women's professional sport.

Academic discourse on women's soccer is limited, with a majority of this scholarship centered in the United Kingdom and Europe (Caudwell, 1999; Caudwell, 2002; Caudwell, 2003; Caudwell, 2007; Caudwell, 2011; Cox & Thompson, 2000; Jeanes, & Kay, 2007; Meân, 2001; Mennesson & Clément, 2003; Scranton, Fasting, & Pfister, 1999), and supplementary at best when compared to the U.S. professional sporting space. Sport scholars have attempted to situate women's soccer within the American sporting context (Markovits & Hellerman, 2004; Martinez, 2008; Sugden & Tomlinson, 1996; Williams, 2007); however, since the inception of the women's national team in 1985 only two scholarly articles exist that examine this team. Christopherson, Janning, and McConnell (2002) and Shugart (2003) examine the mediated narratives surrounding the U. S. women's national team during the 1999 Women's World Cup and found the reproduction of normative gender roles and heterosexualization of U.S. athletes.

There has to be other reasons for the growth of the women's game beyond the neatly packaged academic discourses of heterosexualization, women's soccer as an American exceptionalism, and the public discourse of Title IX. For instance, federally funded educational institutions do not provide most participation opportunities in soccer. Rather, the United States Soccer Federation (USSF) – a non-profit organization that is affiliated with the global soccer organization, FIFA – is responsible for the 4.1 million youth, senior, and professional soccer participation opportunities, 1.67 million of which are female (Fédération Internationale, 2007).<sup>2</sup> I believe that women's soccer in the U.S.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Acosta and Carpenter (2014) 93.3 percent of the 1,281 NCAA affiliated institutions sponsor women's soccer. The average number of participants on a women's collegiate soccer team is 25.

must be located in a larger cultural frame, one that focuses on the USSF and the U.S. women's national soccer team, in order to contest the over-reliance of Title IX and the benevolent patriarch as central narratives in U.S women's soccer history.

I trace the development of the U.S. women's national soccer team from the early 1980s to the mid-2000s and interrogate critical moments or ruptures in the historical narrative of the U.S. women's soccer team shaped by the confluence of neoliberal, postfeminist, post-racial, and sexual politics. Since the mid-1990s, young female soccer players find themselves at an ideological crossroad of individual choice and self-discipline. The soccer field has been promoted as a space of gender and racial inclusion as well as economic and political freedom while subtly reinforcing the exact opposite. Thus, I examine the team's individual stars, such as Michelle Akers, Mia Hamm, Brandi Chastain, Kristine Lilly, Abby Wambach, and Hope Solo, as they are each a specific historical representation of the team during its development and growth.

My arguments are as follows: I contend that the rise of neoliberal economic policies along with the escalation of postfeminist values associated soccer as a female game in the U.S. between the mid-1980s and 1990s, reaching a peak at the 1999 Women's World Cup. However, these understandings do not remain static over time;

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Therefore, the NCAA offers nearly 40,000 women's soccer participation opportunities. The National Federation of High School Associations reported in 2014 that 11,502 schools sponsored girl's soccer providing 375,681 soccer-playing opportunities. Just over 405,000 were offered through federally funded educational institutions (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2015). On the other hand, in 2008, the USSF reported 1.67 million girls registered on youth club and senior amateur teams (Key Statistics, 2012).

rather, they are redeployed in various ways to suit particular cultural and political agendas. Therefore, after winning the World Cup in 1999, previously held conceptions of the U.S. women's national soccer team began to shift after the turn of the millennium. After the 1999 win in Pasadena and the advent of a new professional women's soccer league in 2003, the wave of public support for women's sport, and thus, women's soccer began to dwindle. I argue a significant shift in the cultural and political American landscape that coincided with the terror attacks on September 11, 2001, provided the economic and cultural space for the USSF to reassert the U.S. men's national team and its fledgling professional soccer league as the face of U.S. Soccer. Furthermore, I argue that the retirement of legendary 1999 World Cup winning team members created a specter that haunted the rise of a new generation of national team players, which, in turn, denied the creation of new spaces of identity within the U.S. women's national team, women's soccer, and women's sport.

### **A Decade of Transformation: United States Soccer Federation and the Making of a Neoliberal Juggernaut**

The game of soccer has never been defined as a "truly" American and masculine sport. Played by immigrants and identified as a socialist game, soccer existed only at the margins of American culture.<sup>3</sup> By the 1960s and early 1970s, well prior to the Office of Civil Rights HEW regulations mandated by Title IX, which defined soccer as a contact sport, and therefore masculine, young men and women were encouraged to play the

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<sup>3</sup> For a more in depth discussion on soccer's cultural history in the United States see: Alan Bairner's (2001), *Sport, Nationalism, and Globalization: European and North American Perspectives*; Andreis Markovitz's (1988), "The Other American Exceptionalism – Why There is No Soccer in the United States," and John Sugden's (1994) "USA and the World Cup: American Nativism and the Rejection of the People's Game."

game. Specifically, women and girls were becoming tired of field hockey restrictions of “...crumpling up over a stick and a little ball” (Fields, 2008; Scala, 1978, p. 21N).

Soccer was a simple game; there was little skill required, fewer rules, and it was more physical, empowering a new generation of athlete on the pitch (Romano, 1979). The grass roots development of club soccer on the east and west coasts continued to supplement the rapid growth of women’s soccer in both high schools and colleges.

In 1978, there were even efforts by the men’s North American Soccer League (NASL) to promote women’s soccer. Alaina Jones, an account executive for the Washington Diplomats and director of women’s soccer, arranged soccer clinics for women and girls in the Washington, D.C. area, and even approached the USSF about the need for a women’s soccer organization (Feinstein, 1978). The USSF told Jones there was no need for a women’s organization; however, she began thinking about establishing her own group. In this feminist moment, sporting women were generally reluctant to travel established sport paths into upon male-dominated organizations. Instead, women felt women’s soccer must be controlled and developed by women (Ladda, 1995; Scala, 1978). Jones stated, ““We’re not out to compete against the men or create problems for anybody. We just want to play soccer the way they do”” (quoted in Feinstein, 1978, p. 17). Unfortunately, the USSF thwarted efforts to found a U.S. Women’s Soccer Federation.

In 1979, the newly formed USSF Ad Hoc Women’s Committee met at the Airport Marina Hotel in Dallas, Texas to discuss the charge of FIFA officials and President Gene Edwards, which instructed the USSF and its state associations to help establish women’s soccer throughout the United States. This directive was a response to the “inofficial [sic]



organizations” that staged two Women World Cups without sanctions from FIFA (as cited in Williams, 2007, p. 21).<sup>4</sup> The USSF Women’s Committee meeting, chaired by Jimmie Wofford, Director of North Texas State Soccer Association, and attended by five female representatives (one national representative and one from each of the four regions) denied women the opportunity to develop a separate women’s organization for the USSF determined that it could advance a more “...sound women’s program” (United States Soccer Federation, 1979, p.1).

The Women’s Committee’s first course of action was to host the “First Annual North Texas Women’s Soccer Seminar,” in which women players, women’s team coaches, and women referees “...zeroed in on the special needs and unique problems of women playing the world’s most popular team sport” through patronizing sessions such as “How to Make Mommy Run...Kick...Score,” “There’s More to Soccer Than Kicking

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<sup>4</sup> Jesolo, Italy was the site of the first unofficial Women’s World Cup (Coppa del Mondo 1970), in which Denmark beat Italy 2-0. However, it was the second unofficial Women’s World Cup (Mundial 1971) staged in Mexico that began to worry FIFA officials. This unofficial World Cup, backed by South American commercial businesses presented women’s football in exceeding sexist ways (e.g. pink goals, hot pants, and beauty salons in the dressing rooms so that the girls could properly present themselves for interviews and commentary) (Williams, 2007; Soccer Goes Sexy, 1971). Many invitational or friendly tournaments grew throughout the 1970s – the Women’s Asian Tournament, the Coppa Europa per Nazioni in 1979, international tournaments in Canada (i.e. Robbie Tournament-1969) and the U.S. (i.e. Washington Area Girls Soccer Tournament-1974) (Williams, 2007; The Robbie, 2015; WAGS Tournament, 2015). The fears of FIFA stemmed from the notion that profit-seeking organizations or private individuals not affiliated with FIFA or national associations would start to organize matches and tournaments for women’s teams. In order to protect women’s football from any “unwelcome influence,” it was FIFA’s responsibility to shield women’s soccer from such improprieties (Williams, 2007).

a Ball,” and “What Does Physical Fitness Really Mean?” (North Texas Women’s Soccer Association, 1979, para.1, 4). This seminar seemed to be successful for in 1980, the USSF’s Executive Committee proposed the first Federation-sanctioned soccer championship for adult women in two divisions, 19-and-over and 30-and-over (United States Soccer Federation, 1980a). Any team enrolled to play in a league registered with the Federation and affiliated with the State Association recognized by the Federation could compete for the title of “champions of the United States” (United States Soccer Federation, 1980b, p. 16).

This feeble attempt to subsume women’s soccer under the Federation umbrella was also a strategic maneuver to maintain authority over soccer in the U.S., for the USSF was an organization in crisis. The financial and managerial disagreements between Youth, Senior, and Professional divisions challenged the Federation’s ability to carry out the responsibilities of a FIFA-recognized national governing body (United States Soccer Federation, 1980a). Specifically, threats by the Youth division to separate from the USSF and independently incorporate spurred the Federation to restructure, thus, administratively, economically, and publically reasserting its centralized authority as ONE federation (United States Soccer Federation, 1980a, United States Soccer Federation, 1980b).

The 1981 ratified Federation structure placed each division back under the guise of the USSF, but the organization remained on tentative ground. Internal conflict remained as divisions competed for limited funds. The Federation was consistently operating with a large deficit, and its financial future seemed bleak. In fact, for most of the 1970s, the USSF budget relied on the membership dues of state and local associations

in the Youth and Senior divisions, and depended heavily on the gracious funding from the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) (United States Soccer Federation, 1982a). In 1982, the USSF, as a non-governmental body, applied for non-profit 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt status, but withdrew its application due to language within the 1976 Tax Reform Bill that denied tax breaks to organizations providing athletic facilities and equipment (United States Soccer Federation, 1982b). This tax-exempt status was important to acquire for if the Federation failed to do so, the Youth and Senior Divisions would incorporate separately to achieve 501(c) (3) status, thus disbanding the USSF and its status as the national governing body for soccer. A tenuous tax status also influenced corporate sponsorships and marketing opportunities. Without this status and the tax breaks it guarantees the sponsoring corporations, the USSF could not promise corporations positive dividends (United States Soccer Federation, 1982b).

Under a Republican controlled senate during a deep economic recession, President Ronald Reagan amended the 1976 Tax Reform Bill granting 501 (c) (3) status to “qualified amateur sport organizations” that operate exclusively to foster national and international amateur sport competitions (i.e. promoting sports for children, promoting and regulating a sport for amateurs, training for Olympic and Pan American Games) (Internal Revenue Service, 1999, para. 2). Interestingly, this amendment was attached to the 1982 Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act, which constituted one of the largest tax increases in U.S. history. The act emphasized compliance and IRS collection procedures for both corporations and individuals as it closed many tax loopholes for corporations, but set the stage for future economic hardships middle- and lower-class American citizens faced during the Reagan era of conservative economic policies

(Steuerle, 2008). Even with the news that amateur sport organization could apply for 501 (c) (3) status the Federation's financial struggles remained top priority; thus, the announcement that a "Women's National Team now exists" was met with little fanfare (United States Soccer Federation, 1983, p. 30).

Achieving 501 (c) (3) status in August of 1984 solidified the structure of the Federation, but cash flow remained a significant operating issue. To supplement the growing Federation budget, the Board of Directors and the membership agreed to appoint Soccer USA (SUSA), a joint venture group of West Nally and International Marketing Group, as marketing director of the Federation and the exclusive agent of the National Team program. Under financial stress, the USSF focused on fielding an improved men's national team while the women's national team remained a concept stuck in the annals of committee meetings. With no real FIFA sanctioned tournament on the horizon there was little impetus to field a women's team.

As early as 1980 there was a push to get women's soccer into the 1984 Olympic Games. Women's International Soccer (WINS) organized tournaments in Los Angeles in combination with conferences to discuss the national and international competition, and networking for women's soccer. FIFA did not support this tournament. Instead, FIFA had already agreed, "...that in exchange for maintaining the number of teams in the men's Olympic Final competition, the introduction of a women's event would be postponed" (Williams, 2007, p. 23). Also, FIFA came to the fitting conclusion that the standard of women's soccer was not at a level that should be presented to the world in the Olympic Games (Williams, 2007).

FIFA acted slowly. FIFA's President, Dr. João Havelange, began to discuss a FIFA-sanctioned Women's World Championship in 1985, but no real progress was made until the 1988 test event in Guangzhou, China (Williams, 2007). Therefore, in preparation for this upcoming event, the U.S. player development committee "...recommended the development of a real Women's National Team, with games to be played in 1986 (emphasis original)" (United States Soccer Federation, 1985 p. 7). This team formed even more quickly than anticipated. In fact, USSF meeting minutes indicated that FIFA's announcement of a women's championship provided a "reason" for the USOC's long "overdue franchising of women" (United States Soccer Federation, 1985, p. 7). With the potential of a FIFA-staged tournament, the USOC agreed to have women participate for the first time in the National Olympic Sports Festival in Louisiana. The first women's national team practiced in cow pastures and were issued old men's practice uniforms, which needed "USA" sewed on them the night before they left for *Il Mundialito* ("Little World Cup") in Jesolo, Italy (Griendling, 2000). After only three days of practice, and two weeks together as a team, the U.S. women's team placed fourth out of eight teams signifying its emerging dominance.

This remarkable achievement went relatively unrecognized as the USSF prepared its bid to host the 1994 FIFA World Cup. Now financially stable, the USSF was considered FIFA's golden child, literally and figuratively. The success of soccer in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games demonstrated to FIFA that the U.S. could host not only a successful soccer tournament, but also provide an business model that could pay

massive dividends to FIFA and the soccer community.<sup>5</sup> Werner Fricker (1987), President of the USSF, spoke to this notion:

Financially, the World Cup can leave a lasting positive legacy for soccer just as the 1984 Olympics did for amateur sports in the United States. Staged properly, using American business principles, a World cup has the potential to be a wellspring for future growth of the game. Already several significant corporations - Coca-Cola USA, Gillette and Union Pacific - have shown their faith by helping us prepare the necessary bid materials. Like us, they see a bright future for soccer in America (p. S12)

The USSF, still funded by the USOC, also received positive financial dividends of over \$2 million from the monetary success of the 1984 Olympic Games (United States Soccer Federation, 1985; United States Soccer Federation, 1989).<sup>6</sup> The USSF continued to employ “American business principles” to raise awareness of U.S. Soccer through a more mature approach to sponsorship and brand identity. The Federation signed a three-year licensing agreement that trademarked the Federation’s crest, earning royalties for any clothing, balls, badges, patches, and pins that donned this mark. Moreover, the Federation entered into 17 profitable corporate sponsorships with companies such as

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<sup>5</sup> The 1984 LA Olympics saw crowds flock to the Games exceeded all expectations. In turn, soccer was the best attended sport in the entire Olympic program - some 1,421,627 soccer fans attending matches out of an overall Games attendance total of 5,797,923 (United States Soccer Federation, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> By 1989, the USSF had received in excess of \$2 million from the 1984 Olympic Games distribution and grants. Former USSF President Gene Edwards, and now USOC representative for the USSF stated about the Federations good fortune, “Not a bad windfall without working for it. It is therefore a vehicle which must be preserved above all else” (United States Soccer Federation, 1989, p. 30).

Anheuser Busch, Proctor and Gamble, Coca-Cola, and various airline companies (United States Soccer Federation, 1987; United States Soccer Federation, 1988b).

USSF officials continued to marginalize the women's game as the U.S. women's team prepared for its 1988 "test tournament" in China (Williams, 2007). The team, which contained future stars such as Mia Hamm, Kristine Lilly, and Julie Foudy was only briefly mentioned after a long account of the men's national team at the Annual General Meeting of the Federation in 1988. After a tournament, in which a young American team placed fifth out of twelve teams, and played in front of an average of 35,000 soccer fans in China, USSF President, Werner Fricker could only muster this comment to the USSF membership, "...the women's team gave an excellent account of themselves at the first FIFA-organized Women's Invitational Tournament last month in the People's Republic of China" (United States Soccer Federation, 1988a, p. 1).

What was of most importance to the USSF was the 1994 World Cup bid. With the confluence of a now booming U.S. economy, a successful soccer tournament at the 1984 Olympic Games, a tax status that benefitted both the Federation and its all-to-willing corporate sponsors, it comes as no surprise that USSF received the 1994 World Cup bid on June 30, 1988 (United States Soccer Federation, 1987). On July 31, 1988, FIFA President, Dr. Havelange addressed the National Board of Directors, offering FIFA's full support and expressed hopes for the a continued close and friendly relationship for "...the benefit of our mutual efforts, interests and prosperity in the sport of soccer" (United States Soccer Federation, 1988b, p. 6). The men's national team qualification for the 1990 World Cup in Italy along with the USSF procurement the 1994 World Cup led to increased interest in the game of soccer at the community level, from

the media, and corporate America. The USSF finalized long-term television and marketing contracts that paid the Federation more than \$1 million per year and guaranteed more television exposure than ever before (United States Soccer Federation, 1990).

Seemingly anonymous, in 1991, the U.S. women's national team won the inaugural Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) tournament in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, defeating Canada in the finals 5-0, and outscoring tournament opponents, 49-0 (U.S. Women Advance, 1991; U.S. Women Advance, 1991b; United States Soccer Federation, 1991).<sup>7</sup> As the women's team prepared for the first official FIFA-sanctioned Women's World Championship for Women's Football for the M&M's cup<sup>8</sup>, the USSF was prepared to take "...the Federation into the Marketplace" (United States Soccer Federation, 1991, p.1). At the 1990 USSF Annual General Meeting, the Federation membership elected Alan Rothenberg as President over incumbent Werner Fricker signaling a major change in

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<sup>7</sup> Under the guidance of FIFA, CONCACAF is one of six continental governing bodies that administer the sport of soccer. It is comprised of 41 member associations throughout the North and Central American region and is composed of a Congress, Executive Committee, General Secretariat and several sub-committees. Offices are located in Miami, New York, Guatemala City and the Cayman Islands. CONCACAF manages competitions, such as the biennial Gold Cup for full national teams; offers technical and administrative training courses; and actively promotes the development of football (CONCACAF, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> FIFA was reluctant to bestow their "World Cup" brand onto the women's tournament. After this tournament proved successful, the second tournament held in Sweden in 1995 was officially called the FIFA Women's World Cup.



philosophy. Fricker had led the Federation with what *Washington Post* writer, Steve Berkowitz (1990) asserts, was “a soccer-as-a-avocation” approach while Rothenberg led the Federation “into soccer as-a-business” (p. B3). One of Rothenberg’s first major “business” decisions was to hire an individual with outstanding business acumen in the position of executive director/secretary general. Rothenberg hired, Hank Steinbrecher, a marketing executive at Quaker Oats Company in Chicago, former Olympic official, soccer coach and player (United States Soccer Federation, 1991). Within six months of Steinbrecher’s hire, the USSF had signed a \$27 million licensing agreement, with Amerisport, Inc., the largest in the history of the governing bodies for the USOC, to promote and market Federation-licensed products. Moreover, the USSF produced a new U.S. Soccer logo in order to establish a new brand identity, one that would resonate with global soccer consumers (United States Soccer Federation, 1991).

On November 30, 1991, competing half way around the world in China, in relative obscurity, the U.S. women’s national team beat Norway, 2 to 1, in front of 65,000 fans, to win the first-ever FIFA-sanctioned World Championship for Women. Considered celebrities in China, the U.S. women’s team returned home to an empty airport terminal with only few reporters and their families waiting to meet them (Coffey, 2015). There was no ticker-tape parade or the alluring marketing opportunities the 1994 World Cup USA would promise. Instead, over the next eight years these women produced an unprecedented winning culture that is difficult to rival in any sport.

The on-field success of the U.S. women’s national soccer team is unprecedented. Since winning the FIFA World Championship for Women for the M&M’s Cup in 1991, the U.S. women’s national team has won two more FIFA World Cup titles, in 1999 and

most recently in July of 2015, four Olympic Gold medals, and six CONCACAF Gold Cup championships. By 2015, their overall record stood at 432-60-64, an astounding winning percentage of 83.5 percent. In the 551 games played, the U.S. women's national team has scored 1,691 goals while allowing only 360 goals to be scored against them, resulting in an impressive five goals for to one goal against ratio (United States Soccer Federation, 2015).

Off the field, the transformation of the USSF from a volunteer-based, national governing body with tight connections to the USOC, a government sponsored organization, to a high-level non-profit business model benefitting from massive private corporate sponsorships speaks to the structural power of sport as an economic engine and a male preserve. However, I argue that the structural transformation of the USSF was not designed for the women's game to succeed. Instead, the adjustment of the USSF to neoliberal economic policies, in fact, opened a small economic and cultural door for the U.S. women's team to develop into a niche market and thus, a cultural phenomenon.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

In this study, I use Harvey's (2005) understanding of neoliberalism as a way to define how the U.S. women's national soccer team developed into a valuable niche market. I understand neoliberalism to be constituted by and constitutive of the cultural and theoretical frames of postfeminism, multiculturalism, sexual politics; each has its own unique history and formation and when applied in this historical context they constitute an interconnected process or a relationship. This connection may promote one perspective over the others at any given historical moment, but there is an

interdependence on lines of power in order to critically analyze the specific cultural moment (Birrell & McDonald, 2000).

### **Neoliberalism.**

According to David Harvey (2005), neoliberalism is “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2). The main achievements of neoliberalism are the commercialization and commodification of everyday life (Harvey, 2005; Ingham, 1985), and the notion of “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey, 2005, p. 160). Accumulation by dispossession redistributes capital upward, enabling the wealthy to accumulate capital through the withdrawal of resources from the poor and marginalized, the privatization of the social sphere, the gentrification of urban centers, and the corporatization of governmental and/or community fostered spaces, such as public utilities, schools, and suburban shopping spaces (Andrews, 1999; Harvey, 2005; Howell & Ingham, 2001; Ingham, 1985).

I argue that the USSF transformed itself into a non-profit organization operating on neoliberal principles. The Federation’s transformation from a national organization of soccer subsidized by the USOC to an independently functioning non-profit business that benefitted from the riches of private corporate sponsorship demonstrates the neoliberal shift in economic policies Reagan instituted during his presidency, and the desire of the USSF to protect soccer as a male preserve. FIFA and the USSF both understood that for soccer to truly be a global game U.S. corporations needed to help build awareness of the

sport through American and global consumers. But the most telling comment came from USSF Executive Vice President Kevin Payne, at the 1991 Annual General Meeting three years prior to the 1994 World Cup, “The post-1994 goals of the USSF and its members should be...To have the U.S. National Team win the World Cup” (United States Soccer Federation, 1991, p. 8). Already identified as a financial success, Payne looked beyond the budget sheets to reinforce a development plan for the usually overmatched men’s national team. Payne never even discussed the potential of the U.S. women and the upcoming first-ever FIFA sanctioned Women’s Championship; rather, the USSF goals remain male-identified in scope and practice.

According to Duggan (2002, 2003) and Nikolas Rose (1996), the construction of neoliberal politics has relied on identity and cultural politics that take place in contexts shaped by the meanings and effects of race, gender, sexuality, and other markers of difference. The temptation to submit to individual economic interests is tempered by a neoconservative ethics that focuses on the importance of a normative collective over the exceptional individual in the hopes of forming a more stable body politic (Harvey, 2005).

I am most interested in the effects the commodification and consumption aspects of neoliberalism have on U.S. women’s soccer. I examine the U.S. women’s soccer team as part of the sport-media-commercial complex (Rowe, 1999) and interrogate how the media is complicit in reproducing neoliberal ideologies. The pretense – freedom of choice – under which this occurs, positions the market as a site where subjectivity is freely negotiated. If an individual’s first social act involves the commodification of self or selling their labor for wages, then we can infer that consumption shapes the production of social identities (Chasin, 2000). For those who successfully “sell” themselves and

their talents, there are abundant rewards in the world of consumer culture (Harvey, 2005). This notion provides liberal consumer-citizens with power and agency to make cultural choices in society and for their own lifestyles that must align with normative gender, race, class, and sexual assumptions (Andrews, 1999; Chasin, 2000; Howell & Ingham, 2001; Ingham, 1985).

I interrogate the moments when women's soccer stepped into both the U.S. and global market consciousness. Specifically, I analyze the feminizing strategies and discourses within U.S. culture that positioned soccer as a predominantly female game, and thus a niche market. But I must also step outside the borders of the U.S. to examine the role of U.S. women's soccer in FIFA President Sepp Blatter's global declaration, "the future of football is feminine" (Degele, 2012). From this critical discussion, I expose the narrow construction of the U.S. women's national team as a white, middle class, heterosexual icon. This analysis expands the discursive function of the team to include marginalized discourses, and begin the process of liberation from neoliberal strategies (Foucault, 2003). To do this, I must investigate the governmental tools of postfeminism, multiculturalism and/or post-racism, and concepts of sexual politics in a post-9/11 America.

### **Postfeminism and Sexual Politics.**

Angela McRobbie's (2007) describes the concept of postfeminism in her influential essay *Postfeminism and Popular Culture: Bridget Jones and the New Gender Regime* as a "double entanglement" (p. 28). A "double entanglement" is a duplicitous process that works in part to incorporate, assume, and naturalize aspects of feminism, while simultaneously commodifying feminism through the model of woman as an

empowered consumer (McRobbie, 2007; Tasker & Negra, 2007). Postfeminism erases the “personal is political” rhetoric of the late 1960s and 1970s feminist movement and replaces it with an apolitical version loaded with feminist and neoliberal language of individualism and freedom of choice and ideas about the authentic self and lifestyle (Cole & Hribar, 1995; Duggan, 2003; McRobbie, 2007).

McRobbie (2007) notes that postfeminism is mobilized through a rhetorical and mediated combination of female success, the unpopularity of feminism, and life politics. High profile and/or newsworthy achievements of women and girls validate the notion that the systemic and structural discrimination of females is an issue of the past, and social institutions are recognized as “progressive” for their commitment to this social change. This move towards a depoliticized feminism has caused a rift between young women and more established feminist politics. The market focus on the individual demarcates the central difference between the “we” politics of second-wave feminists and the “I” culture of contemporary women. Strategically, second-wave feminist strategies are “historicized and generationalized” (p. 32) as out of date. This approach slowly, but surely unravels the structural and ideological work of feminism, allowing for the introduction of a new type of feminism that is based upon lifestyle.

Lifestyle politics, as Ingham (1985) discussed them, is the crux of postfeminism (McRobbie, 2007). Within this context, girls and women are offered the illusion of choice. They must choose the culturally-appropriate choices in marriage, career, and self-expression. These choices are grounded in a popular feminism that displaces democratic imperatives through the “hyperaestheticization” of everyday life, post-civil rights discourse, and what McRobbie (2007) calls the “girling of femininity” (Andrews,

1999; Cole & Hribar, 1995). The hyperaestheticization of every day life is deployed through marketing schema that contain narratives and images of luxury as the single mode of self-expression. This self-expression occurs in conjunction with tropes of “girl power,” and offers a fantasy of transcendence and postfeminist liberation – a life, in which a woman can literally “have it all” – a successful career, a happy marriage and family, and financial stability. Moreover, racialized marketing of postfeminist culture commodifies, not politicizes, difference. In this case, female black stars are cast as role models mediated through images and narratives of safe and acceptable blackness and femininity (McPherson, 2000). Thus, mediated representations of women in contemporary culture are predicated upon an ahistorical trajectory of activism that remain steadfastly in the past in order for culture and society to entrust in a logic of progression.

However as freeing these choices appear to be, they represent a “modality of constraint” (McRobbie, 2007, p. 36). Women are compelled to make the “right” choice, but if the “wrong” choice is made, there is no structure in place to guide or assist them; thus, the lifestyle construct produces new and deceptive areas of injustice. Despite the freedom the market appears to create in this new cultural order, the new female subject is always called upon to make the “right” choice. Further, she must withhold any critique in order to count as a “progressive” and “refined” individual (McRobbie, 2007, Tasker & Negra, 2007).

After the September 11, 2001 attacks in America, the dominant response was neoliberal practice and an appetite for war (Harvey, 2005). In post-9/11 culture, marketing strategies had to morph to reassert and protect the liberal notion of freedom.

According to Ann Kaplan (2003), "...the trauma of 9/11 seems to be a breaking point in the U.S. Or...an irrevocable line has been drawn on both conscious and unconscious levels between 'before' and after'" (p. 54). In response to this moment, U.S. culture, as Susan Faludi (2007) suggests, sought to "rein in a liberated female population" because the female empowerment movement of the late 1990s was "implicated in our nation's failure to protect itself" (p. 21). At this time, the ideological retrenchment of working-class masculinity and white male patriarchy depoliticized women again as cultural rhetoric argued for a return to more traditional gender roles and a feminine heteronormativity (Allen, 2002; Faludi, 2007; Kusz, 2007; Tasker & Negra, 2007). The remedy for this perceived failure was two-fold: the reassertion of white masculinity in American culture and the erasure of the female voices – while the U.S. continued to define itself as the arbiter for global feminist standards – and (Allen, 2002; Drew, 2004; Faludi, 2007; Kusz, 2007; Mayhall, 2009; McRobbie, 2009; Puar, 2007).

Postfeminism and the inclusion of a sexual politics is an integral theoretical construct to the analysis of the U.S. women's national team. I analyze how power is exercised through marketing strategies of both the team and specific individual players, including Mia Hamm, Julie Foudy, Brandi Chastain, and Briana Scurry. However, I also examine the team post-9/11, as well specific individual players, including Kristine Lilly, Hope Solo, and Abby Wambach to capture the shifts in postfeminist strategies and cultural meanings.

### **Post-racism/Multiculturalism.**

The term multiculturalism emerged from the Civil Rights Era and spread fast and furiously throughout 1980s American culture (Goldberg, 1994; Omi & Winant, 1994). I



conceptualize multiculturalism as a discourse which denies race-based social inequality on the premise that America is a colorblind and/or post-racial society, as described by Michael Silk and David Andrews (2012). During the rise of neoliberalism in the 1990s, a commitment to the notion of multiculturalism became ubiquitous in business, government, civil society, and education policy. Melamed contends that this uncritical acceptance of neoliberal multiculturalism functions in three ways. First, it legitimated neoliberal practices by adopting an “official antiracism” stance that appears to protect racial inequality as a problem in the U.S., while instituting government policies that protected corporate interests in global capitalism that often entailed hidden racial injustices. The equality rhetoric of “diversity” and “freedom” are associated with “economic freedoms,” that signify a particular kind of human rights the U.S. must secure for the world. Second, neoliberal multiculturalism infuses the transnational into racial formations, which privileges the multicultural American citizen as more legitimate than the multicultural world citizen. Third, neoliberal multiculturalism displaces the racial reference altogether, decontextualizing and depoliticizing race from its historic past. It is here we see a “post-racial” society.

Using Goldberg’s (1994) understanding of monoculturalism and Melamed’s (2006) definition of neoliberal multiculturalism, as well as the context of neoliberal multicultural policy, I investigate the racial formation of the U.S. women’s national team as a historically “all-white” team. More specifically, I examine media representations of selected players in order to identify whether their mediated racial formations advance a neoliberal multicultural agenda.

## **Research Methodology**

Gender, as a constructed category, is central to understanding the mediated practices of female athletes at the center of this study. Informed by feminist critical cultural studies, I use a critical cultural history approach to examine the cultural and political dimensions of the U.S. women's national soccer team. Cultural understanding is bound by language; therefore, language and representation are important factors to comprehend the social world in which we live. Thus, it matters the ways in which people, events, and practices are written about, constructed, (re)produced, and resisted (Parratt, 1998).

Texts, regardless of form, are polysemic and a site of contested meanings through which counternarratives are uncovered and exposed. Therefore, gender, as a point of analysis, is not and cannot represent a complete assessment of meaning. Instead, present in all sporting conjunctures is the interdependence between lines of power along with a strong focus on contextualization in order to determine the weight of impact for each moment. Therefore, it is imperative to pay critical attention to the ways that race, class, gender, and sexuality are articulated in a particular incident (Birrell & McDonald, 2000).

In the case of the U.S. women's national team, it is important to examine alternative ways to study the past. Susan Birrell (2007) argues in her article titled, "Approaching Mt. Everest: On Intertextuality and the Past as Narrative," that scholars need to expand the conceptualization of narratives through the use of intertextuality as a methodological tool. An examination of Everest points to how the narratives of summiting Everest throughout the twentieth century carry "ideological messages that empower some views while dismissing or obscuring others" (Birrell, 2007, p. 3).

Intertextuality assumes that the past is never settled, narratives of the past are imbued with vested interests, and that meanings bleed into the narrative of present events. The intertextual nature of the quadrennial occurrence of the World Cup schedule makes this methodology applicable to this analysis. The dominant narratives created around the 1999ers have constrained future iterations of the team, while the actions of Hope Solo in 2007 interrupt this narrative and compel us to reread the events of the past.

To examine this women's sporting phenomenon, I analyze of U.S.-based newspapers and magazines, specifically the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and the *Washington Post*, and extensive soccer-specific journals and magazines, such as *Soccer America* and *Soccer Digest*. I augment this analysis archival documents from the United States Soccer Federation (USSF) and Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA).

### **Chapter Outline**

After the U.S. women's national teams historic win at the 1991 FIFA World Championship for Women for the M&M's Cup held in Guangdong, China, they arrived home to friends and family, but no fan fare, no ticket tape parades, and only a few media personnel (Coffey, 2015). How then, by the end of the decade did this team become a symbol of sexual liberation, and how did the game of soccer become female in the United States? I argue the refinement of neoliberal strategies, such as governmentality, situate this team and this sport as a niche market ripe to create and sell postfeminist and post-racial technologies to a suburban audience. Chapter One pinpoints the beginning of a feminized discourse that marked the game of soccer as female in the early 1990s.

Michelle Akers-Stahl, through her “masculine,” and extraordinary play, represented a pivotal and transitional figure during a moment when female athletes and women’s team sports came of age in a mediated, image conscious culture. In a sport that must continuously deal with its own vague gendered issues in U.S. sport culture, Akers-Stahl negotiated a particular performance of masculinity that became not only entrenched within the fundamental character of U.S. soccer, but also positioned women’s soccer as a niche market within an ever-increasing neoliberalized global economy. Yet, I argue that Aker-Stahl’s particular style of embodiment that denied her full representation within an emerging postfeminist context, and reveal how Nike positioned Mia Hamm to become the marketable face of U.S. Soccer and the first individual who successfully sold the game to the American public.

The second chapter focuses on the various strategies used to market the 1999 Women’s World Cup. Winning the 1999 Women’s World Cup quickly canonized the U.S. women’s national team in the annals of women’s sport history. This chapter seeks to intervene in this canonization to reveal counternarratives that expand the meaning of this team and this sporting moment in sport history. I argue that neoliberal postfeminist and multicultural marketing strategies were used to sell the Women’s World Cup and the U.S. women’s national team/individual players to an uneducated American soccer public. More specifically, Nike, the Women’s World Cup Organizing Committee, and media employed these postfeminist and post-racial notions to package girls’/women’s empowerment as a safe, inclusive, and multicultural space. Moreover, the expansion of “girl power” into sport provided marketers an opportunity to expand the demographics of women’s soccer fans to men between the ages of 18 and 35 through the use of a “sexy

femininity.” Yet, these messages of empowerment systematically hid the continued inequity in women’s sports and U.S. Soccer while serving to further perpetuate and constrain ideas of femininity.

But then, how can Briana Scurry, the U.S. women’s national team goalkeeper and the only black player in the starting lineup, be understood within a white, postfeminist and post-racial discourse? In the third chapter I contend that Scurry’s black body is tempered by postfeminist ideals and a homogenized team culture that protected white, middle-class values. The media employed a post-racial discourse using a colorblind rhetoric in order to market the team to an audience composed primarily of white, middle-class families, obscuring the subtle and pervasive racist ideology persists that continued to define Scurry as different.

The fourth chapter examines the failures of this seemingly successful women’s program in the context of declining investor confidence due to the dot com bubble burst of 2001 and in the wake of 9/11. In a climate of fear and trauma, I argue that 9/11 reaffirmed an ideological shift away from an American consciousness that overtly supported feminist ideals to an American consciousness steeped in the reassertion of white masculinity in sport (Kusz, 2007; Silk, 2012). Even the most un-American of American sport (i.e. soccer) reproduced these notions. I contend that post-9/11, the combined force of FIFA, the USSF and Major League Soccer worked to reassert white, middle class, masculinity. Moreover, the events of September 11, 2001, also dislocated the cultural stronghold of postfeminist girl power, rearticulating nationalism through a neofifties lens that reinforced domesticated white femininity and conventional white masculinity (Faludi, 2007; Kusz, 2007; McRobbie, 2009). This domestication is

illustrated through the mediated representation of Mia Hamm, the consummate postfeminist superstar, and her courtship and marriage to Major League Baseball player, Nomar Garciaparra.

Chapter five explores the dynamic player of Hope Solo – a white, lower class, heterosexual goalkeeper, who in the 2007 Women’s World Cup incited the first public controversy in U.S. women’s national team history when she spoke out against head coach Greg Ryan’s decision to bench her for the semi-final game against Brazil. While many identified Solo’s conduct as the reprehensible attempt to gain notoriety by a spoiled athlete (Bechtel, 2007a; Hill, 2007; Lopresti, 2007; Ruibal & Lieber Steeg, 2007; Timmerman, 2007), I contend Solo’s outburst was more meaningful than a random act of perceived jealousy. Oppressed by the cultural memory of the 1999ers and the presence of Kristine Lilly, the last remaining 1999er to play on the women’s team, Solo’s outburst, I argue, constituted a “practice of freedom,” (Foucault, 1997, p. 281). Through the ethical practice of truth-telling she shifted the historical narrative and cultural characterization of the US women’s national soccer team. Her actions helped to loosen the limiting culture of sisterhood and postfeminist ideals strongly embedded within the culture of the team and facilitated through media narratives. The relaxing of these cultural mores has allowed for a more open and inclusive team culture.

The conclusion titled, “Overtime!” brings the analysis to present day. The chapter begins with a description of the Gatorade-produced Abby Wambach retirement commercial, “Forget Me.” This Gatorade commercial is first and foremost, a commentary on Wambach and her legendary career, but it is also a tribute to the growth of women’s soccer and its mediated representation in the United States (Gatorade TV Ad,

2015). Wambach provides a touchstone for each chapter. Built much like Akers, but constructed and indebted to the play and mediated image of Hamm, Wambach struggles to fit in to the postfeminist soccer imaginary that governs her conduct. And it is Wambach who benefits from Solo's "truth-telling," an act that helps her shape the future of the national team culture and its mediated representation as a more open and inclusive space. While she implores the American public to forget her, we must never forget the historical and cultural formation of this team, for the fight for equality in sport is never finished.

## CHAPTER ONE

### GIRLS RULE, BOYS DROOL: THE CONSTRUCTION OF A FEMINIZED NICHE SOCCER MARKET

“They were pathetic,” shuddered Linda Whitehead, Secretary of the English Women’s Football Association, as she reminisced about the first England – United States match up in 1985, in which England beat the U.S., 3-1.<sup>9</sup> Whitehead expanded, “We got three goals and one player with a broken nose...plus another who was treated the next day for a severe knee injury. They were brute force and relatively ignorant. In other words, all competitively aggressive, but with the subtlety of a Patton tank” (quoted in *Joining the Revolution*, 1990, p. 33).

A second meeting between the U.S. and England in 1988, demonstrated the growth of the U.S. women’s national team. The U.S. team lost to England, 2-1, but according to Whitehead, “...they had lost none of their competitive edge, they had added much greater skill and subtlety” (quoted in *Joining the Revolution*, 1990, p. 33). In 1986, under the guidance of newly appointed head coach Anson Dorrance, the men’s and women’s head soccer coach at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, the U.S. women’s national team began to integrate an increased level of tactical understanding with their trademark athletic skill.<sup>10</sup> Within five year of its existence, the U.S. women’s team transformed from “...a group of misfits and hooligans” (quoted in Mahoney,

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<sup>9</sup> This game was played at the Mundialito Invitational Women’s International Tournament in Jesolo, Italy. The U.S. team finished fourth out of four teams losing to England, drawing against Denmark, 2-2, and eventually losing to Denmark in the third-place match (Seal, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> In retrospect, Dorrance is considered the “architect of the women’s game” (Kennedy, 1999, para 1).



1991e, p. F3) as team captain April Heinrichs described, into a team one soccer reporter noted as, “...widely considered to be the finest in the world” (quoted in Powell, 1991, para. 2). This transformation was not an easy or simple transition; instead, the road to success was a hard and complex negotiation between a women’s team that wanted the right to play and a male-dominated institution that attempted to diminish their successes.

The U.S. team conducted three training camps and traveled on three international tours in preparation for the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) Women’s World Championship. On ten dollars a day per diem, washing their own laundry, hanging their uniforms on clothes lines outside of youth hostels, enduring long bus rides and few niceties, the future success of the U.S. women’s team is a curiosity (Bondy, 1991). Dorrance begrudgingly noted the team’s quick development despite the lack of resources was because “...women elsewhere in the world are just as far behind in their development as we are,” (Goff, 1991a; quoted in Isenhardt, 1991b, p. 31; Mahoney, 1991b) and “...before 1990, we had a lot of close (games). But this team is coming of age now” (quoted in Polis & Linke, 1991, p. 2). The American advantage was psychological. Dorrance carefully crafted his training sessions to develop a relentless, competitive atmosphere, “...if you want to accomplish anything you have to believe. We wanted them in the position of being the team to beat. We didn't want a Cinderella World Cup team...We’re a team with a strong mentality. We’re combative” (quoted in Nance, 1991, p. 1C).

The U.S. women’s team also carried the historical burden of inferiority as the men’s national team has suffered years of ineptitude on the field. Michelle Akers-Stahl, a consummate goal scorer for the U.S. team and considered the world’s best female player,

commented on the importance of winning the Women’s World Championship, “...the impact, the true importance of winning is that we will impress the ‘real’ soccer people” (quoted in Basler, 1991b, p. B19). She and the U.S. team did just that. In front of 65,000 fans and FIFA officials in Guanghzo Stadium, and with live feeds or tape-delayed highlights of the game beamed to over 100 countries, the United States beat Norway 2-1 in the first-ever FIFA Women’s World Championship final (Akers-Stahl, 1991b).<sup>11</sup>

FIFA President João Havelange handed over the Women’s World Championship trophy to captain, April Heinrichs. The U.S. team, hands raised with flower bouquets and medals around their necks, hoisted the trophy to the sky in a gesture of U.S. women’s soccer’s remarkable present and promising future. But as they landed – the reality of their “fame” set in. Expecting crowds of news reporters and fans, as they had experienced in China, the team stepped onto the tarmac and back into relative obscurity.<sup>12</sup> Future star, Mia Hamm stated, “No one met us at the airport, there were no ticker-tape

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<sup>11</sup> The United States Soccer Federation (USSF) did not commit any national coverage to this tournament, but did sign a cable television deal with Sports Channel. The SUSA, marketing arm of the USSF, drafted a deal, in which up to six tape-delayed games were broadcast in eight two-hour time blocks. The broadcasts did not start until December 1, the day after the final game of the tournament, but did agree to broadcast the final only three days after the conclusion of the tournament, if the U.S. got that far. Otherwise, the group stage game versus Brazil would be shown (Mahoney, 1991d).

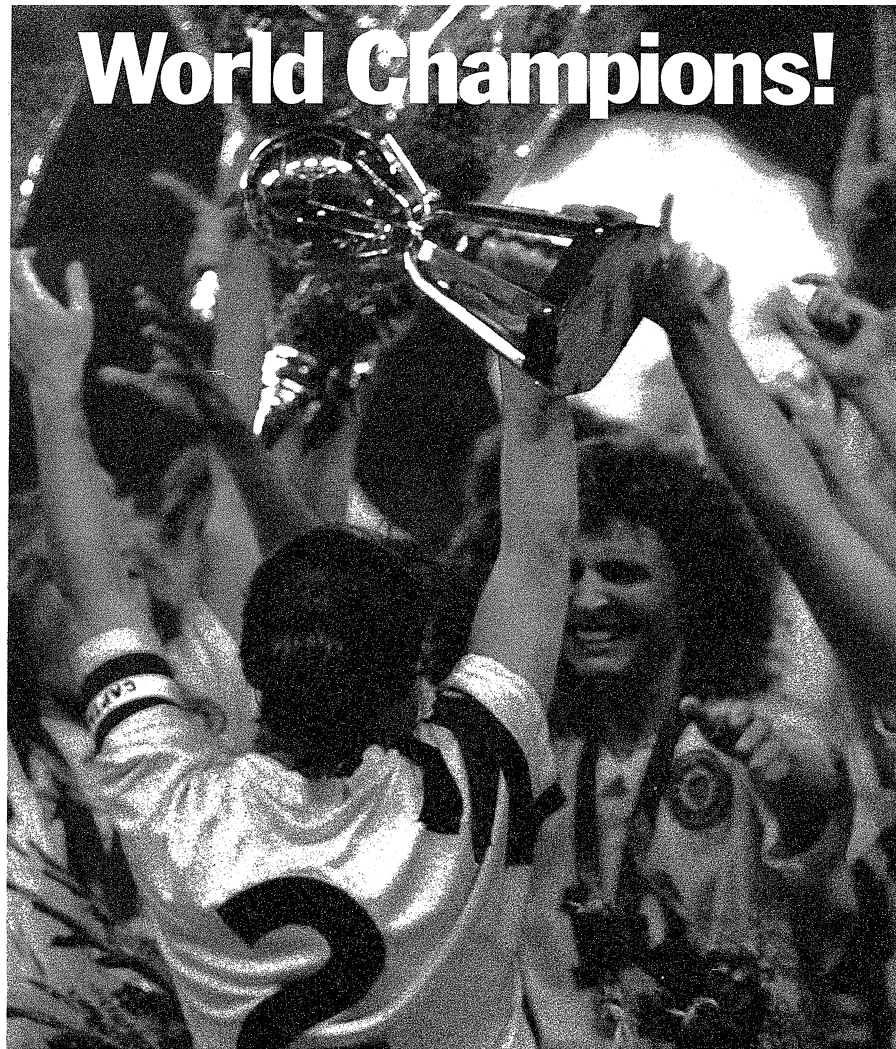
<sup>12</sup> At this point in my research, I have found only three national newspapers that covered the 1999 Women’s World Championship – *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Washington Post*. There may be others, but access to newspaper databases have limited my access. Regardless, the coverage of the tournament was marginal at best, with 21 articles spanning the time between the team’s CONCACAF win in April to the end of the World Championship in December.

parades. One of our sponsors (adidas) took an ad out in the papers to let people know we had won” (quoted in Longman, 1999b, p. D1). (See Figure 1). Michelle Akers-Stahl added, “we just did this huge thing, and you come home and it’s life as usual. But at the same time, the people that were aware of it were going crazy. It was this weird dynamic between unaware to people that were fanatics” (quoted in Abnos, 2015, para. 43). The players hugged in the empty terminal and said their goodbyes. Some caught rides with family while others raced off to meet connecting flights. The Women’s World Champions faded off the back pages of the few newspapers that had reported their incredible journey. They began a long four-year wait to compete for their second title in Sweden.

Fast-forward fourteen years to the incredible spectacle of the U.S. women’s national team winning the 1999 Women’s World Cup hosted by the United States, and it is puzzling to understand how soccer became “...decidedly a game for girls” and a cultural phenomenon (Campbell, 1999, para. 4). In this chapter, I move beyond the popular narrative of Title IX as an explanatory model for women’s sporting success in order to demystify the U.S. women’s national team’s seemingly rapid cultural ascent into the hearts and minds of the American public by locating this team within a cultural and economic neoliberal context.

Michelle Akers-Stahl and her emergence as the preeminent soccer player in the United States, regardless of gender, is central to the development of the U.S. women’s national team and its mediated representation. In her prime, no American male or female player rivaled her technical and tactical skill and her competitive fire. Recognized by the

international and U.S. soccer community as the best women's soccer player of all time, Akers-Stahl play was said to parallel that of international superstar Pelé, elevating her



**We'd like to congratulate the US women's team for winning the FIFA Women's World Soccer Championship in Canton, China. We salute Carin Jennings for winning the adidas Golden Ball as best tournament player, and Michelle Akers-Stahl for winning the adidas Golden Boot as top goal scorer. As world champions, you've become an inspiration to us all.**

**adidas welcomes FIFA members to the World Cup '94 Draw.**



**adidas is an official supplier of US Soccer.**



*Figure 1.* Adidas Advertisement Published on December 8, 1991, to Notify the U.S. Public of the U.S. women's World Championship Victory in China on November 30, 1991 (Source: *New York Times*, 1991)

international status well above that of the perennially downtrodden U.S. men's team. (Longman, 1999b, para. 7; Santich, 1992; Scherr, 1992). She represented a pivotal and transitional figure during a moment when female athletes and women's team sports came of age in a mediated, image conscious culture. In a sport that must continuously deal with its own vague gendered issues in U.S. sport culture, Akers-Stahl negotiated a particular performance of masculinity that became not only entrenched within the fundamental character of U.S. soccer, but also positioned women's soccer as a niche market within a neoliberalized global economy.

I contend that the white, middle-class suburban appropriation of this foreign game along with the U.S. women's victory at the first-ever FIFA Women's World Championship opened a space for the women's team and its players to decenter the U.S. men's soccer program and define soccer in the United States as a women's game. I argue that Michelle Akers-Stahl's elite play on the field embodied the superior technical and tactical abilities most often associated with respected, foreign, male professional players. This position associated her with a masculine space no American-born male soccer player had yet to successfully fulfill publically, without violating the highly-policed gendered space of American sport. Yet, as a female athlete she had to also navigate the gendered dynamics of male-dominated organizations, such as the USSF, FIFA, and U.S. media outlets, that downplayed her and the team's accomplishments. While she represented soccer in the U.S. as now categorically, female, I argue that it is this same embodiment which also denied her full representation within an emerging postfeminist context.

In a developing neoliberal economic context of the late-1980s, the USSF transformed from an alliance of dedicated soccer volunteers into a non-profit corporation

that closely followed neoliberal economic strategies to promote the World Cup USA 1994. Simultaneously, a cultural shift in sport marketing to include women, helped to situate this team and this sport as a niche market. I trace the beginnings of postfeminist and multicultural marketing strategies by examining the shifting economic, cultural, and political climate in relation to the U.S. women's team. Specifically, I explore the juxtaposition of Michelle Akers-Stahl and Mia Hamm, as Hamm rose to national and international stardom in the mid- to late-1990s. It is Hamm, not Akers-Stahl, who became the marketable face of U.S. Soccer and the first individual who successfully sold the game to the American public.

### **In With the Out Crowd: Situating Soccer in U.S. Sport**

Historically, soccer has held an inferior position within the U.S.'s isolationist sporting culture and is considered a second-tier sport in comparison to the 'big 3' American sports of football, baseball, and basketball (Bairner, 2001; Markovitz, 1988; Markovitz & Hellerman, 2004). Considered the sport of second-rate athletes who are unable to compete within the hyper-masculine regulations of American football, soccer in the United States has had little national tradition of masculine prowess (Sugden, 1994).

In the American imagination, soccer becomes connected to suburbia. According to David Andrews (1999), the vision of the American suburb that pervades the popular imagination is "...that of the European American post-war bourgeois utopia. These suburbs are dominated by an aesthetic and consumer-oriented possessive individualism, underpinning a more self-righteously advanced adherence to notions of achievement, morality and privilege" (p. 38). Nestled within its new suburban context, soccer began to connote a sense of sophistication and worldliness, characteristics associated with the

white, middle- to upper-class new cultural disposition of what Andrew's (1999) notes as, "competitive aestheticism" (p.47). The mid-1980s turn towards an "...aggressively individualizing neo-liberal economics of the Reagan administration" (Andrews, 1999, p. 44) encouraged widespread consumer spending that distorted socio-economic boundaries, and resulted in a more sophisticated mechanism to secure social distinction – a reliance upon the aesthetic. Suburban existence was now an effect of consumer "taste" through which lifestyles were assessed not only through financial and educational resources, but also from the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, and appearance signifying individual choice and sophistication (Andrews, 1999). As Pierre Bourdieu (2002) notes, taste is an "acquired disposition to 'differentiate' and 'appreciate' ...to establish and mark differences by a process of distinction" (p. 101). Soccer, considered the world's pastime, defined by fans and players alike as "the beautiful game", and its upper-class European connections to elitist colleges and Universities produced a taste of urbanity beyond the borders of the United States (Giulianotti, 1999). Thus, in their search for distinction, white, upper-middle-class families chose to invest their time and money into a sport that produced another, but seemingly more sophisticated approach to performing a sporting masculinity.

Soccer remains at odds with the hypermasculine American sporting culture as it is defined against the physical and mental characteristics of American football, which feature hypertrophic muscular bodies, brute force, violent collisions, and strategically calculated play calling. Traditionally, soccer players are of average build, usually no taller than six feet tall and less than 200 pounds, a body type more suited to run the six plus miles most will cover in 90 minutes. Yet, physicality remains essential to the

competitive nature of the game as it requires controlled aggression, perseverance, tenacity, grit, courage, and fortitude. Field players attempt to avoid violent collisions through anticipation and tactical awareness and elegant but bold individual skill or passing techniques. They must also manage any mental and emotional concerns within the organic flow of the game through risk-taking and an instantaneous form of resiliency. However, this performance of “controlled” masculinity does not distance soccer players from the desire to compete and win the game. Soccer players display their passionate and competitive physicality as they battle shoulder to shoulder for possession of a loose ball, defend their goal as individuals and as a team, or foul opposing players throughout the course of the 90-minute game.

These qualities of a soccer player advance the definition of manhood on a world stage, but connote an inferior masculinity and feminizing of the game in the U.S. As a dominant international presence in sport, the American public expects the U.S. to be successful at the highest competitive level. The clumsy and unsophisticated play of the American men’s team in comparison to the highly skilled and tactically nuanced European game was an international embarrassment that relegated the American men’s team to the margins of international men’s soccer. How could the American public support a game that does not reproduce American masculinity and has experienced only failure on the world stage? This reversed gendering of soccer in the U.S. not only questions the U.S. male soccer player’s masculinity, but also compromises his ability to reproduce his own nation (Puar, 2007). It is unlikely that the U.S. men’s team or a particularly successful U.S. male player could ever disrupt this gendered association;



instead, it would eventually take the U.S. women's national team and its star, Michelle Aker-Stahl.

**“Real” Americans Hate Soccer.**

“No American whose great-grandfather was born (in the U.S.) is watching soccer,” stated Ann Coulter, American conservative pundit, on her blog in 2014 (para. 21). In her post, she criticized soccer for its foreign roots, liberal affinity, and emasculated approach to sport. Yet, soccer's solid growth and acceptance as an American sport in the last twenty years belied the nativist and isolationist narratives that had long stymied its cultural acceptance (Markovitz, 1988; Sugden, 1994). Soccer has developed a mass following as “...the go-to sport of the thinking class” (Williams, 2014, p. E1). A generation of children influenced by their parents' participation in the American soccer boom during the 1970s and 1980s, grew up playing and admiring the game for its “Europhilic allure” and “fashionable otherness” (Williams, 2014, p. E9). Soccer's distinctly cosmopolitan and elitist “taste” defines this game as a white, middle-to upper-class phenomena.

Increased television and news media coverage of FIFA men's and women's World Cups, along with the expansion of cable networks such as Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN), made the broadcast of English Premier League, Champion's League games, and the U.S. organized Major League Soccer (MLS) more readily available to a U.S. audience. It is difficult then, for many soccer supporters to remember a time when the game was not an important aspect of American sporting culture. Yet, this shift did not happen overnight.

John Sugden (1994) argues that soccer's foreign heritage initially marginalized the game from mainstream American professional sport. According to Andrei Markovitz (1988), "Bourgeois America created a new identity which prided itself on being explicitly different from that found in aristocratic Europe" (pp. 128-129). As such, the development of American nativist sports, such as baseball and football, "crowded" soccer out of America's sport space (Walvin, 1975). Baseball and its populist values was unquestionably a tool for Americanization while American football incorporated the ideology of rugged individualism, "...making physical prowess, heroic individualism and the triumph of good against evil central to the whole performance" (Sugden, 1994, p. 233). By the 1920s, these "nativist" sports had cornered the U.S. sport market training millions of boys and young men in the art of American masculinity.

More contemporary sentiments about soccer developed out of the tension between economic expansion and cultural isolation (Bairner, 2001). The constant threat of Communism in the U.S. during the late 1940s and 1950s, seen as entrenched in ethnic immigrants, raised further suspicion of foreign games (Markovitz, 1988; Sugden, 1994). The relentless foreign phobia because of the Red Scare further stigmatized the game. As Sugden (1994) notes, "A series of espionage trials...the outbreak of the Korean War...and the rise of Senator Joseph McCarthy...exaggerated the paranoia of the American public who became suspicious of all things which were not stamped 'made in America'" (p. 240). These political sensibilities marked the game as "other," and otherwise, "unmanly," entirely inappropriate for "real" Americans.

Still, several attempts to develop soccer as a professional American sport took place in the U.S. during the 1960s and 1970s. At various points and within distinctly

different markets, the International Soccer League, the National Professional Soccer League, the North American Soccer League (NASL), and the United Soccer Association all competed for customers within a growing sport media market (Andrews, 1999; Sugden, 1994). The NASL emerged victorious and eventually posed a serious, if momentary, challenge to the 'big 3' sport culture. Using amateur players from the NCAA and signing foreign talent to fill central roles helped the NASL establish a foothold in the American sporting imaginary. The acquisition of Pelé, who was still considered to be the greatest player in the world, by the New York Cosmos gave the league global legitimacy (Sugden, 1994). World famous foreign players' eager to extend their playing careers came to play in the NASL, and attracted the necessary attendance boost the league desperately needed. The New York Cosmos were regularly attracting over 50,000 fans to their home games at Giants Stadium in the late 1970s (Andrews, 1999; Sugden, 1994). But the novelty of the NASL began to wear off and damaging litigation battles with the National Football League over issues of cross-ownership led to the eventual demise of the league in 1984 (Andrews, 1999; Oliver, 1992; Sugden, 1994).

Although the overuse of foreign players is often cited as the principle reason for the downfall of the league (Tossell, 2003; Wangerin, 2008), its mere presence in American sporting culture served to soften the negative historical connotation of foreignness that had stigmatized soccer for so long. Consequently, this Americanization of soccer provided a space for youth soccer to flourish in the 1970s and 1980s (Andrews, 1999). Many middle class parents and physical educators, who worried about the physical dangers of American football, began to experiment with soccer as an alternative autumn sport for children. In 1962, less than two percent of American high schools had

sponsored competitive soccer, but by 1988, more than 35 percent supported soccer as an interscholastic sport (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2015). As Sugden (1994) notes, “Soccer now had a youth caucus which was not so obviously dependent on immigrant and ethnic involvement” (p. 243).<sup>13</sup>

Soccer’s growth as a spectator and a participatory sport coincides with the dramatic political presidential shift between Carter and Reagan administrations. With America situated within what President Carter had labelled a national “crisis of confidence” in its own economic, political, and even sporting identity, soccer became a symptom of the ineffectual leadership of Jimmy Carter. U.S. patriotism and nationalism in the late 1970s captured the essence of an America affected by weak diplomacy and economic insecurity. Ironically, when America felt “small” and at its weakest – some Reagan public relations workers even said “feminine” - the NASL recorded its most significant attendance records (Jeffords, 1994; North American Soccer League, 2015).<sup>14</sup> In a 1980 *New York Times* article titled, “American Soccer’s Sickening Gentleness”, *Washington Post* news reporter Hank Burchard wrote:

U.S. Soccer has only the faintest glimmerings of world-class class...It is a small wonder that the United States is in retreat all over the world. Other

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<sup>13</sup> Although no academic research exists that has determined the meanings of former international NASL players on the development of U.S. youth soccer, a quick Google Search with the keywords of “NASL” and “youth soccer” demonstrate the wide involvement these foreign nationals have had within the organization and advancement of the game in the United States.

<sup>14</sup> The most successful attendance years of the NASL mirror Jimmy Carter’s presidency between 1977 and 1980, when it averaged between 13,800 and 14,900 fans per game (North American Soccer League, 2015).

nations cannot take us seriously when their diplomats come here and see such scenes as one that took place recently on a Northwestern Washington playground. The red team of an organized league, decimated by one of those childhood illnesses that sweep schools, could muster only seven players...The red team, leading 2-1 a halftime, lost several more players to stomach cramps; the blue team coach called for volunteers to play for the enemy, got plenty, and cheered his boys as they whipped their own team. Such un-American activity will hardly produce grownups fit to reassert U.S. international dominance.

The Israelis, now, know what soccer is about. In Tel Aviv, in 1975, a fan ran onto the field and stabbed an opposing player to death. No weakening of moral fiber there that might encourage the Arabs to have another go (p. B1, B5).

In the absence of a competitive and professionalized U.S. national team in international competition, an American soccer identity was linked with the throngs of suburban youths and their cossetting parents who made up the soccer boom of the 1970s and 1980s. The acceptance of soccer by white, middle-class America by no means indicated soccer's full recognition by mainstream culture, but the political climate of the Reagan era did not welcome it. As an emblem of American national identity, Ronald Reagan promoted the "hard body" that symbolized strength, labor, and courage, all characteristics of his political and economic philosophies. The reproduction of rugged individualism, muscularity, and the invincible masculine body through images of Reagan himself at his ranch, films such as *Rambo* and *Dirty Harry*, and nativist American sports

reinforced *the* American identity as a white, hardened male form (Jeffords, 1994).

Soccer, with its association to a weakened form of masculinity was a sport filled with “soft bodies,” that stood little chance to “threaten” the hegemonic space of the ‘big 3’ sports (Jeffords, 1994; Markovitz, 1988; Sugden, 1994).

The weakened state of the USSF in the early 1980s along with the deplorable play of the U.S. men’s national team on the field supported the notion of Reagan’s soft and failed bodies. Therefore, this time of transition for U.S. soccer and cultural marginalization of the men’s national team left a space for the developing, but exceedingly successful U.S. women’s national team, and more symbolically Michelle Akers-Stahl, to infiltrate the masculine sporting space. Akers-Stahl’s captivating play on the field demonstrated the technical and tactical skills of the best foreign players in the world while successfully positioning her female body within a “weaker” masculine space that did not violate the highly-gendered and Reaganized milieu of American sport.

### **She’s the Man: Michelle Akers-Stahl and the Tenuous States of U.S. Soccer in the early 1990s**

In the 1980s, the USSF’s transformation from a sport governing body run as avocation to one restructured, managed, and organized during a Reagan neoliberal economic context affected the early development of the U.S. women’s national team. Corporate sponsorships, marketing strategies, and non-profit tax status granted the USSF legitimacy within the global sporting infrastructure of FIFA. In 1988, FIFA awarded the USSF the rights to host the 1994 World Cup in the United States.

The USSF was certain it could stage a world-class event of international proportions, but was less clear whether the men’s national team could compete on that

international stage. As development money was funneled to the men's national team program to increase exposure and cultivate international experience, few resources were given to the up-start women's team. Yet, in 1991 that unknown U.S. women's team did what no men's U.S. team has ever come close to – won a World Championship (Mahoney, 1991a).

Prior to the first-ever FIFA Women's World Championship in 1991, the Federation wasted no time making bold claims to the U.S. soccer community about the significance of the women's national team success on the overall marketing processes of soccer within the United States (Rothenberg, 1991). USSF President, Alan Rothenberg (1991) made rhetorical gestures regarding the teams' potential importance stating that, "40 percent of all youth players in the United States are female. One out of three youngsters under the age of 18 plays soccer, and of that number, 50 percent are women" (p. 2). Also, the success of this team began to signify the United States as a developing soccer nation and marked the USSF with an international identity (Basler, 1991a; Basler, 1991c). In fact, Chris Casey (1991) of the United States Youth Soccer Association went so far as to suggest that, "Years of soccer frustration could get swept away in the explosion [of winning the Women's World Championship], which might touch off an inferno of interest among until-now indifferent American observers" (p. 31). Thus, the women's team was firmly carrying the U.S. flag into the international soccer arena.

When examining attendance numbers at U.S. women's games played domestically during 1990, significance of their marketing allure is debatable. Charles Isenhardt (1991a), a reporter for *Soccer International*, discussed this notion:

Considering the national team's international success, you'd think that U.S. fans would be crashing the gates to see them. Think again. The combined attendance at six international games played by the United States last summer was recorded at 1,800, with a single-game high of 500. By comparison, during the 1987 China tour, the women played in front of 76,000 people. Some called it the largest crowd ever to watch an all-female sporting event (p. 31).

In preparation for the Women's World Championship the U.S. women's team played two domestic friendlies against Norway in late summer of 1991. These games drew only 4,758 and 5,563; the later game was, at that time, the largest crowd ever to witness a U.S. women's team match in the United States (U.S. Soccer Game, 1991).<sup>15</sup> However, these numbers pale in comparison to the half million spectators who attended the 26 matches of the Women's World Championship (Bloom, 1991).

Even with domestic and international attendance numbers demonstrating the national and global recognition and approval of international women's soccer, the USSF did little to promote the women's game and the U.S. women's team. Too busy with the

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<sup>15</sup> What is of considerable interest, is that the Northeast is considered the birthing ground for the game of soccer in the United States. Thus, it was a smart marketing move for the USSF to play these games in areas that have tight connections with youth and adult divisions of the USSF. For more information on the Northeast and the historical development of soccer see: Sugden, J. (1994). "USA and the World Cup: American Nativism and the Rejection of the People's Game." In A. Tomlinson and J. Sugden (Eds.) *Hosts and Champions: Soccer Cultures, National Identities and the USA World Cup*. Surrey, UK: Ashgate; Markovitz, A. (1988). The Other American Exceptionalism – Why There is No Soccer in the United States. *Praxis International*, 8, 125-154.



logistical management of World Cup 1994 USA, the USSF failed to negotiate media contracts with television or newspapers leading up to the women's tournament. Rather, Hank Steinbrecher (1991), USSF Secretary General and Executive Director, made a seemingly half-hearted gesture in *NEWS⚽LINE*, the USSF monthly bulletin for U.S. Soccer Federation Leaders, asking members to "...urge their local newspapers to be on the *lookout* for AP's coverage of the event (emphasis mine)" (p. 4). Poul Hyldgaard, Chairman of the FIFA Women's Committee, on the other hand, began efforts to further develop the Women's World Championship announcing a two-day seminar on how to further promote women's football. Despite pleas for increased involvement at the international level from USSF Women's Committee Chair, Linda Grant, the USSF played only a minor role as the Federation had no representation on the FIFA's Women's Committee, and would not until 1995 (United States Soccer Federation, 1993; 1995). Regardless of the Federations lack of interest and involvement in women's soccer, the play of Michelle Akers-Stahl positioned U.S. Soccer as the current and future leader in the development of the women's game

### **She Has a Shot Most Professional Men Envy.**

Michelle Akers-Stahl and women's soccer grew up together. The daughter of the first woman firefighter and ambulance driver in Seattle, Wash., Akers-Stahl had sporting dreams that only a Title IX influenced culture, and progressive, modern mother-figure could support (Hersh, 1991; Plummer, 1991). At first, her soccer career seemed ill-fated. In 1974, at the age of eight and coached by her mother, Akers-Stahl, positioned at goalkeeper, cried after every loss and vowed to never play the sport again. Her mother's encouragement to continue and a position change to forward at the age of ten generated

the inseparable bond between Akers-Stahl and soccer (Nelson, 1991). Because of the lack of girls' teams in the late 1970s, she competed on and against boys' team in what she called, "...tomboy soccer – skinned knees and getting in fights" (quoted in Plummer, 1991, para. 7).

As Akers-Stahl entered high school her parents divorced and she began to act out in destructive ways. She never mentions specific actions, but does describe this time as one in which she "...was a brat and a rebel...let's just say I wasn't arrested" (quoted in Hersh, 1991, para. 12). Her high school basketball coach, Al Kovats, became her primary confidant as he invited her to train with the boys' soccer team in the spring season. She did compete with the girls' soccer team in the fall, but it was her competitive nature and technical ability when competing against the boys in the spring that stood out to Kovats. He noted that, "From the standpoint of skills and shooting ability..., she could hold her own with the boys. She is in harmony with the ball. She makes music with the game of soccer" (quoted in Hersh, 1991, para. 14).

After graduating from high school in 1984, Akers-Stahl continued to make music with the game of soccer as she moved onto the University of Central Florida (UCF) to compete for the Knights. With seemingly no viable playing options available after her impending graduation, it appeared that her athletic career would come to an inevitable dead end. However, in 1985, after years of fielding a women's team on paper, the USSF finally sponsored the first tryouts for the U.S. women's national team at the Olympic Sport Festival in Louisiana. As a NCAA All-American and annual contender for the Hermann Trophy, awarded to the top collegiate women's soccer player, it is not surprising she made the first-ever U.S. women's roster. Only days after making the team,

Akers-Stahl scored the first-ever goal for the U.S. women, in the 38<sup>th</sup> minute of their second game in Jesolo, Italy, a 2-2 tie against Denmark.

As the U.S. women's team struggled to find an identity on the field, Akers-Stahl found it difficult to remain on the field. In 1988, she suffered a concussion during a game in China, and she did not return to the field for almost two years. On numerous occasions during this time, the USSF refused to medically clear Akers-Stahl to play, even with medical reports from independent specialists that affirmed her recovery and overall good health. The conflicting reports between the USSF and Akers-Stahl's own medical team stalled the process of her returning to play. She contends the injuries were "imaginary" and she had to resort to "legal alleys" to rejoin the team (quoted in Nelson, 1991, para. 17); although, Dean Linke, USSF media relations co-director claimed that, "U.S. Soccer just wanted to make sure she was completely healthy" (quoted in Nelson, 1991, para. 16).

A potential collusion to keep Aker-Stahl off the field is worth investigating. I contend that Michelle Akers-Stahl represented a threat to the USSF's international identity as she embodied the sort of masculinity that no U.S. male player had yet to epitomize. Standing at 5 feet 10 inches tall and weighing in at 150 pounds, Akers-Stahl's stature and musculature reproduced the ideal male soccer body. Even her bushy, curly, seemingly unruly mane mimicked the hair of some of the best male talent in the world, such as Roberto Baggio and Carlos Valderamma.<sup>16</sup> But it was her play on the field that

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<sup>16</sup> *Sports Illustrated* reporter, Kelly Whiteside, noted in a 1995 article that "With her unruly mane of curls, Akers is the Alexi Lalas of women's soccer" (para. 2). Lalas gained notoriety and fame after the 1994 World Cup USA. He managed to play one season in the Italian Series A with club Padova. Club

elevated her status well beyond the confines of U.S. soccer. She had mastered not only the technical art of the game playing against boys and men during her youth, but also the tactical awareness and mental toughness of a forward and target player. A constant battler, she was aggressive with a finishing mentality in the 18-yard box and a proficiency in possession as she was able to absorb punishing blows from defenders. FIFA described her as, “The woman of five faces: the goal poacher, the free kick expert, the markswoman, the penalty taker, and the best header of a ball in the (game)” (China 91, 1991). After a two-year battle with the USSF to rejoin the team, Akers-Stahl demonstrated her superior skills at the 1990 Olympic Sport Festival scoring five goals and helping the team beat European powerhouse, Norway, twice. The USSF responded by naming her the 1990 Female Player of the Year.

Akers-Stahl implicitly credited the impact Title IX has had on athletics, but cited masculinity as the most appropriate form of play, “...in the USA, women are encouraged to be athletic...People see us play and they are amazed. They don't think we should be able to play at that level. The greatest compliment we can get is when people say we play like men” (quoted in Nance, 1991, p. 1C). Many in the international and soccer community called her “The Female Pele” – the equivalent to the best known male

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Padova finished the 1994-1995 season in last place. Thus, I find this comment a bit disturbing. The reference is offensive to Akers-Stahl as Lalas is a mediocre American male player who had never advanced beyond the round of 16 in the men’s World Cup. Akers-Stahl, was a world champion, and her success far outweighs that of any male American player. Per the argument I am making in this chapter, this quote demonstrates the dissonance the American sporting media continues to perpetuate in relation to gender and sport.

soccer player in the world (Santich, 1992; Scherr, 1992).

Along with skill and tactical proficiency, physicality defined Akers-Stahl's game. On the field, she scrapped doggedly for loose balls; bumped, pushed, and shielded the ball in her possession; and powered headers towards goal with the snap of her waist. Her passion teetered between competitiveness and self-inflicted abuse. Teammate Carin Gabarra, stated that ““She cared so much about making sure she left every ounce of effort on the field...there were times when even Anson had to tell her to take it down a notch because she would just go so hard all time [sic] time, to the point to where she would risk injury”” (quoted in Abnos, 2015). Prior to the Women's World Championship, she split open her right knee falling onto a sprinkler head during training. She played the tournament with 35 stitches but it did not dampen her aggressive play. Akers-Stahl demonstrated to fans and skeptics alike that she was a player who, “... played the game with the rugged commitment of a man” (Bloom, 1991, para. 5).

In 1990, Akers-Stahl became the first female soccer player to sign a sport marketing contract, an important development for women's soccer. Significantly, she signed with Umbro, a foreign soccer specific equipment company that sponsored the likes of the legendary Brazilian and English men's national teams of the 1960s and 1970s. Umbro had the power to define who and what was significant within soccer's cultural market. In fact, it cornered the market early, signing Pele as chief spokesperson, at the peak of his legendary career. For Akers-Stahl to sign with Umbro then, was not only a strong statement about the development of women's soccer, internationally and in the U.S., but also a powerful cultural demarcation that she was one of the two best players in the world (Diaz, 1995; Jensen, 1993).

The connection to Pele, through Umbro, certainly encouraged the association of masculinity with Akers-Stahl, but the praise of soccer legend Pele himself, solidified this connection. Soccer legend Pele, who 15 years earlier had introduced soccer to a generation of young Americans, closely watched the play of the U.S. women's national team and focused solely on Akers-Stahl. Pele sang her praises, "I like her because she is intelligent, has presence of mind and is often in the right position. She's fantastic" (quoted in Hersh, 1991, p. 39). In 1999, Tony DiCicco, former goalkeeper coach and then head coach of the U.S. women's national team, reminisced about Aker-Stahl and the growth of women's soccer, "Michelle is the first player that created universal acceptance for the women's game. People like Pele and Franz Beckenbauer, they saw her play and realized that women could play the game as skillfully and tactically proficient as men could" (quoted in Longman, 1999b, para. 7).

Heading into training for the first-ever FIFA Women's World Championship it was clear that Akers-Stahl had proved herself to be the best in the world. In fact, head coach Anson Dorrance believed that, "Michelle Akers-Stahl has been the catalyst of our emergence to the world-class level we're playing at today" (quoted in Isenhardt, 1991c, p. 42). Prior to 1990, Akers-Stahl had scored 15 goals in 24 international appearances, but in 1991, she dominated the game like no other player had or would, scoring 39 goals with eight assists in only 26 games.

In an exhibition match prior to the Women's World Championship, Aker-Stahl scored on a free-kick just outside of the penalty area. A few minutes later, Akers-Stahl exploded at the referee in the midfield after being carded for a hard foul. She was handed a red card and ejected for abusive and vulgar language. Coach Anson Dorrance was also

ejected for arguing with the referee on the field. The October 13<sup>th</sup> headline from the *Washington Post* gave credence to her skill, and her physical demeanor, “U.S. Team Gets Mad – and Even: Akers-Stahl Gets Goal, Ejection in Exhibition” (Goff, 1991b, p. D3). “I just lost my temper and said something I shouldn't have” Akers-Stahl said (quoted in Goff, 1991b, D3). Dorrance’s ejection confirmed this understanding of Aker-Stahl. Dorrance defended her physical play and her aggressive comportment towards the referee. Dorrance’s support demonstrated to international soccer, and to the few reporters covering the U.S. women’s national team, that Akers-Stahl’s masculine actions were not only acceptable, but also of high value.

FIFA, however, consciously discouraged women’s physicality, noting in a majority of its tournament reports (i.e. Women’s World Championship, CONCACAF tournament) that discipline was maintained on the pitch as tackles remained within the rules and female players always recognized the referees’ authority (Fédération Internationale, 1991). In 1991, Akers-Stahl led the U.S. national team in on-field infractions with two yellow cards and one red card<sup>17</sup>, an indication of her tenacious and

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<sup>17</sup> Red and yellow cards are used as means to discipline players. A yellow card is used to caution players while a red card results in a player’s dismissal from the game. A player is given a yellow card when a player is guilty of unsporting behavior, shows dissent by word or action, persistently infringes the Laws of the Game, delays the restart of play, fails to respect the required distance when play is restarted with a corner-kick, free-kick, or throw in, enters or re-enters the field of play without the referee's permission, deliberately leaves the field of play without the referee's permission. A player receives a red card for a serious foul play, violent conduct, spits on an opponent or any other person, denies the opposing team a goal or an obvious goal-scoring opportunity by deliberately handling the ball, denies an obvious goal-scoring opportunity to an opponent moving towards the player's goal by an offence punishable by a free

aggressive play, and her disdain for the sportsmanship discourse associated with women's sport (Cahn, 1994; Cole & Giardina, 2013).<sup>18</sup>

Receiving a red card during a warm-up game for the Women's World Championship in China confirmed Akers-Stahl's reputation as the most competitive player in the women's game. A red card is devastating to a team. The player is required to leave the field immediately, and is not allowed to reenter the game, and the team must continue on with one less player. While receiving red cards are never encouraged, it is a clear signifier of masculine qualities such as hard hits, physicality, and violence (Fédération Internationale, 2015a). Akers-Stahl was the first women in USSF history to receive a red card, an act that may have set the stage for her acceptance within the male version of the game.

Akers-Stahl shone brightest on the biggest stage, the FIFA Women's World Championship. She seemed to single-handedly take over games, leading all players with ten goals in the tournament and earning the Golden Boot.<sup>19</sup> The most significant of the ten goals Akers-Stahl scored came in the final game. Tied 1-1 at halftime, U.S. goalkeeper coach Toni DiCicco approached her, put his arm around her shoulder, and said in a deliberate tone that it was her responsibility to win the game. She remembers, "It was one of those truths. Inside, it struck me. Like 'Yes, I am gonna have to win this.

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kick or penalty kick, uses offensive or insulting or abusive language and/or gestures receives a second yellow card in the same match.

<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, the only other player on the U.S. women's national team who had more than one major infraction was Mia Hamm, Akers-Stahl's heir-apparent, who would eventually become the face of U.S. soccer, Nike, and women's soccer, globally, in the late 1990s.

<sup>19</sup> The Golden Boot is the award given to the top goal scorer at a FIFA World Cup.



I know” (quoted in Abnos, 2015, para. 25). As many of the great male players before her, Akers-Stahl knew being the best player on the field required more than brilliant technique and a genius understanding of tactics; it demanded passion, drive, grit, and determination, and she displayed all of them.

After the Women’s World Championship, Akers-Stahl and thus, women’s soccer, received admiration from the most elite men’s national team in the world. One incident exemplifies this. While playing professionally in Sweden, Akers-Stahl attended the European men’s championship. After the game, she was asked to board a bus carrying one of the men’s team that had just finished their game. Hesitant at first, since she thought no one on the bus would know who she was, she cautiously walked up the steps. As she approached the top step, the men began to clap: The German men’s national team, 1990 FIFA World Cup champions, gave Akers-Stahl a standing ovation (Jensen, 1993).

Attendance at U.S. women national team games on American soil steadily grew from a few hundred spectators in the stands to four to five thousands soccer fans each game. Akers-Stahl’s stellar play on the field during the 1991 Women’s World Championship advanced the team’s popularity, and she became a cult hero within the youth soccer community. Thousands of soccer playing girls and boys, who dreamed to one day “play like Michelle,” attended games in their youth soccer club jackets to catch a glimpse of Aker-Stahl in action, and hundreds more mobbed her at game’s end for her autograph. In fact, Akers-Stahl even received a letter from a young boy who declared, “I want to play for the U.S. women’s national team” (quoted in Jensen, 1993, para. 17). By 1995, she was even called “the Michael Jordan of women’s soccer,” (quoted in Whiteside, 1995, p. 73) compared to His Airness as the best in their respective sport. As

the embodiment of U.S. soccer, Michelle Akers-Stahl was a player both boys and girls, wanted to emulate (Tresniowski & Cole, 1991).

On August 31, 1992, Sam Foulds, sent a letter to Hank Steinbrecher, USSF General Secretary and Executive Director, with copies to USSF President, Alan Rothenburg, U.S. Women's National Team Head Coach, Anson Dorrance, and *Soccer America's* founder and publisher, Clay Berling, about the declining media coverage of the men's national team hosting of the World Cup in 1994. Worried about the "lethargic" approach the popular media was taking toward the men's national team and this future international event, Foulds (1992) suggested an incongruous, but meaningful suggestion:

WHY NOT HAVE MICHELLE AKERS-STAHN PLAY FOR THE AMERICAN NATIONAL MEN'S TEAM in an international exhibition in the United States? She is an, exceptionally, fine player and I would be willing to bet, that she would sustain my confidence in her. Maybe, she might score a goal or two.

It would, surely, arouse an inert news media. It would acknowledge the tremendous growth of women's soccer in the U.S. and I could imagine the animated discussion it would evoke in many American households. In addition to emphasizing the depth of the acceptance of soccer as an American pastime, it would be darned good entertainment.

Women have competed against and with men in a number of competitive sports but seldom in a contact game such as soccer. It could be a unique occasion and thus, truly, newsworthy (emphasis original) (para. 4-6).

As USSF historian from 1972 until 1994, Foulds possessed the power to shape the historical narrative of U.S. soccer. This letter, whether it was intended for public viewership or not, revealed a great deal about the state of U.S. soccer in the early 1990s. Even with improved marketing strategies surrounding the 1994 World Cup and increased funding to the men's national team, U.S. soccer still could not produce a team or a player that connected with the U.S. public. Foulds underscored this point and the men's national team's historical failure with his suggestion to add Akers-Stahl to the roster. His praise for Akers-Stahl and her goal scoring abilities goes beyond the field. According to Foulds, Akers-Stahl's play and name recognition would positively evoke discussions about soccer in the most unlikely of American households. But more importantly, Foulds' letter precipitated the acknowledgment of U.S. soccer as a feminized sporting space.

Although Akers-Stahl's embodiment of masculinity was ideologically accepted within the "weaker" masculine space of the U.S. soccer community, her defined musculature, "manly" soccer stature, and visceral and aggressive play on the field did violate feminine norms in U.S. culture. As Susan Cahn (1994) argues, reporters try to restore femininity, and therefore heterosexuality, to the successful athlete by, "...searching for any evidence of feminine activity and interest that might offset the 'masculine' sporting achievements" (p. 213). Akers-Stahl's marriage to Roby Stahl, a former collegiate soccer coach and director of Post-to-Post Soccer Clinics, was a constant source of discussion and signaled her heterosexuality (Hersh, 1991; Jensen, 1993; Plummer, 1991; Whiteside, 1995). She was questioned about having children (Diaz, 1991; Plummer, 1991), how she was able to divide her time between maintaining a

marriage and a career (Cart, 1991; Goff, 1992b; Hersch, 1991; Sun, 1991), and was expected to confirm her happiness in the marriage (Diaz, 1991; Herbst, 1991; Hughes, 1991). Regardless of these assurances about her sexuality, the American public still did not embrace Akers-Stahl.

In the early 1990s, a new type of feminism bubbled underground infusing punk music and zines with messages combining individual empowerment and contradiction (Butler, 2013; Heywood & Dworkin, 2003). But there had not yet been a defining feminist and cultural moment that could market a female athlete with the gendered contradiction Akers-Stahl embodied. The best soccer player in the United States remained untapped and marked as unsellable to the general American public.

#### **“We Can Add Status and Prestige to the USSF, but...”**

Soccer’s turbulent historical narrative in American sport positioned the game as a “weaker” or “feminine” game. Akers-Stahl’s elite play on the field, a gendered performance no U.S. male player had yet to personify, represented the further feminization of the game. Even President George H. W. Bush noted the gendered meaning of the World Championship win in China for U.S. soccer, ““Someone once said that the sport was the first great separator of the sexes. For the sake of the male ego, I hope the men start catching up” (quoted in Goff, 1992a, p. F9). The men’s team never caught up. Instead, Akers-Stahl and the U.S. women’s team became role models in the soccer community; both boys and girls tried to emulate their style and success.

The USSF continued to support FIFA’s vision of soccer as unequivocally male even as Michelle Akers-Stahl and the U.S. women’s team were becoming the public face of U.S. soccer. In a 1981 FIFA Technical Committee Report, women’s soccer was to

come under the jurisdiction of the National Associations. Interestingly, mixed-gender soccer, as suggested by Foulds above, was sternly not permitted as it would imply that “...women [deserved to] benefit from training and coaching facilities on a national or local basis within countries” (as cited in Williams, 2007, p. 144). This gendered notion remained a persistent precept as the U.S. Federation moved from an amateur to a professional model. Although a welcomed and needed change for a Federation intent on staging the sport’s biggest sporting event, Gianfranco Borroni, President of the Amateur Division of the USSF, noted in his 1992 Report to the Membership that conversations about professionalization had “...only occurred at the highest levels of the pyramid and not down at the grass roots” (United States Amateur Soccer Association, p. 11).

Therefore, even within a post-Title IX context and a shifting economic and organizational structure, the USSF continued to strongly enforce inequitable funding to the women’s program. The Federation’s main goal was to elevate U.S. soccer’s status internationally, and they saw only one way in which to do that – a robust commitment to a floundering men’s team and a benign neglect of a wildly successful women’s team.

Anson Dorrance has been characterized in U.S. soccer history as the benevolent patriarch who imbued female players with the knowledge to succeed in the international arena. In addition to the credentials and international experience to be the U.S. women’s head coach, he was the ideal personality to reinforce the USSF’s dogmatic position on women’s soccer. As head coach of the U.S. women’s national team, Dorrance was responsible for creating and establishing a team culture and philosophy. A firm believer in the inherent biological and social differences between the sexes, Dorrance coached a group of women to believe in their physical abilities and surpass their “gendered

limitations” on the field (Bloom, 1991; Crothers, 2006). Dorrance believed that, ““Men and women do think differently...What I hope I can do with all the women I train is to help them be ambitious, to be responsible for their own success, to understand how good they are, and to develop self-confidence”” (quoted in Isenhart, 1991d, 26-27). However, these same beliefs hindered the political development of these “Title IX babies.”

By 1991, the team had gained a modest amount of media coverage from soccer publications and a few national newspapers, such as *USA Today* and *New York Times*. Much of the discourse surrounding the team involved tactical strategies and statistics, but questions about funding and inequitable treatment remained a noteworthy storyline. In five years’ time, the U.S. women’s national team emerged as an international contender, but a contender that was not paid for its labor, wore hand-me-down uniforms from the U-20 men’s national team, and received only room and board and ten dollars per diem when training or competing (Isenhart, 1991d). As many as thirteen contract players on the U.S. men’s national team were paid up to \$50,000 for their labor, while the team were outfitted in new adidas uniforms and gear, and received no less than room and board and \$25 per diem (Nance, 1991).

Dorrance publically reinforced and endorsed the USSF’s inequitable treatment of the women’s program and its players. When asked about the meager budget the USSF allotted for the training and travel, Dorrance used the same rhetorical argument used to defend the underfunding of women’s programs in NCAA athletic programs:

I understand their (the USSF’s) commitment to us. Every coach wants more, but we can’t ask for more than our share. Right now, there’s a priority to develop the men’s team, because they’re going to generate the

revenue for all of us. At the collegiate level, we can't begrudge the football team its resources because they make the income that we (soccer coaches) are spending. We can add status and prestige to the USSF, but we can't generate money (quoted in United States, 1990, p. 34).

In reality, international men's friendlies played on American soil produced only a small fraction of the overall USSF budget for the national team program. Instead, it was a shift in economic and organizational philosophy that funded all of the divisions and programs under the USSF umbrella. Hank Steinbrecher, as General Secretary and Executive Director, managed to bring the USSF, the largest of any governing body supported by the USOC, "into the marketplace," and negotiate a multi-million-dollar licensing agreement with Amerisport, Inc. (United States Soccer Federation, 1991, p. 1). Thus, Dorrance's reasoning for underfunding the women's program seems moot. As the USSF financially moved into the marketplace, Grahame Jones (1991), a reporter for *Soccer International*, made the argument Dorrance seemingly could not: "...surely there must be some money coming in. Surely a little of it could be used to promote the women's team between now and November" (p. 62). Unfortunately, the U.S. women's team and its players were caught between a structure that allows them to participate and an ideology that continued to deny their value.

To justify the USSF's rationale for not paying his players, Dorrance fixated upon the structure of professionalized sport. He did caucus for the USSF to sanction a women's professional soccer league, but agreed that the contemporary sporting structure was neither obligated to provide professional opportunities, nor required to pay female athletes. Citing the sports market, Dorrance argued that, "Unlike the men, the women do

not have paid contracts with the national team, nor does the program have sponsors. *There isn't a market for women.* They aren't the full time professionals the men could be, so the Federation isn't under the same pressure (emphasis mine)'' (quoted in United States, 1991, p. 34) to pay them. U.S. women's players, Mia Hamm and Michelle Akers-Stahl, echoed his sentiments employing a discourse of passion, sacrifice, and love for the game. Hamm stated that, ''[Money is] not why we are in this. People try to pit us against the men's team... We don't have salaries, we're not paid to play to help motivate ourselves to keep training everyday... We can't sit around and say 'what if?' We just love to play soccer'' (quoted in Robb, 1993, para. 4-5). Akers-Stahl commented further on the issue of their free labor, ''We don't complain. We're not in it for frills. Some people can't pay their mortgages, and singles have no social life. But we're giving all we have to win the Cup'' (quoted in Nance, 1991, p. 1C.).

However, after the dominant performance of the U.S. women's national at the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) tournament in April, 1991, representatives of the USSF and the members of U.S. women's team, that included Michelle Akers-Stahl and captain April Heinrichs, met to discuss compensation. In the end the players signed an inequitable contract. Between July 1 and December 1, 1991, the U.S. women's team received \$1000 per month, regardless of tours or training camps; incentive bonuses, depending on the team's match results; an additional \$30 per day when they are with the national team, including training sessions; incentive bonuses; and health insurance covered by the Federation.

The players chose to share the incentive bonuses equally, rather than use a sliding scale based formula upon individual performance. The influence of Dorrance's



philosophical views on gender are again reaffirmed by his players. Dorrance mentioned that, “Women have a superior understanding that relationships are more important than the game. Their decisions about athletics involve how much they enjoy or get along with the people they play with” (quoted Isenhardt, 1991d, p. 26). Akers-Stahl (1991) noted the difference between the men’s and women’s team:

In our women's system, the whole team is awarded for positive team performance, whereas in the men's system the individual is awarded for goals scored, etc. We choose the team emphasis because we want to keep our team chemistry and competitiveness like that of a close family working together to achieve a common goal...ours being the World Cup this November (p. 4).

Captain April Heinrichs confirmed this sentiment, “We decided to do it that way, rather than have starters get more than substitutes, and subs get more than the people sitting on the bench...We all share in the money equally” (quoted in Mahoney, 1991c, 22). The U.S. women’s players understood the contract was minimal at best when compared to the men’s program, but sided with the Federation stating the team was, “very excited the USSF has made us a priority among this organization and...for supporting us in our goal to win the World Cup this November 1991” (Akers-Stahl, 1991, p. 4). However, on December 1, 1991, the day after their World Championship win, their contract expired, leaving players wondering if they had the financial means to continue playing. More importantly, the competitive future of this team was in a state of limbo.

## **A Whole New World: Women's Soccer as a Niche Market and the Cultural Feminization of American Soccer**

Between 1992 and 1993, the USSF's sole focus was to prepare for the 1994 World Cup USA. Determined to leave a legacy for soccer in the U.S. that could institute and sustain a professional soccer league as mandated by FIFA, the USSF worked to create an attractive, marketable event that could be sold to soccer families and ticket-buying sports fans in America. Hank Steinbrecher signed marketing agreements with companies, such as American Airlines, Budweiser, Coca-Cola, Gatorade, and M&M/Mars (Snickers Brand), that focused on soccer's alignment with the American middle-class family values. He noted that, "American soccer now offers a richly diverse market for corporations, an uncluttered target of 40 million soccer Americans. Its most visible components are mom and dad driving to a soccer game in the mini-van with two kids, the family dog and the neighbors on a Saturday morning" (quoted in Soccer Sees Sharp, 1992, p. 1).

By 1993, the U.S. soccer community had demonstrated its support for the game with an overwhelming demand for World Cup tickets. USSF President, Alan Rothenburg, applauded the "soccer family" for their partnership as it "showed to the rest of the soccer world and corporate America that our soccer people want to see high quality soccer and furthermore, that they will support high quality soccer events. The emphasis on 'quality'" (quoted in United States Soccer Federation, 1993, p. 5). Although the U.S. men's national team could not field a "quality" team, the U.S. general public was privy to elite men's soccer for the first time since Pelé graced the fields of Giants Stadium as a New York Cosmo. The corporatized 1994 World Cup USA was a

commercial success, garnering more than \$350 million in revenue and over \$60 million in profit. The profit generated continues to endow programs of the USSF and its subsidiary foundation both of which are committed to the growth of soccer in the United States.

Yet, at the sport's most popular moment in U.S. sport history, the U.S. women's national team fell further into obscurity. Between 1993 and 1994, the team played only 20 games, eleven on American soil, with no contract. In 1993, Dorrance discussed the status of the team:

We are a well-kept secret. There's a combination of factors working against us. Women's teams aren't really followed athletically. We're soccer and that's not mainstream American sport...These girls don't play for the publicity and attention. They play because they love the game. They weren't brought up in front of crowds of 50,000 or seeing their names in headlines. We understand where we are in the American sport cultural fabric – we're not there yet (quoted in Robb, 1993, para. 8-9).

What is important to note, is that these “girls” did literally grow up in front of 50,000 plus crowds with their names in the headlines of international newspapers and soccer publications, but they continued to be a relatively unknown product in the United States.

In late 1993, cultural tides began to shift in favor of women's soccer. On September 20, 1993, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced the addition of women's soccer to the 1996 Atlanta Olympic schedule after a battle that had begun more than a decade earlier at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics (U.S. Soccer, 1984). The introduction of women's soccer into the Olympic schedule instantaneously strengthened

the credibility of the sport in the eyes of the American public and corporate sponsors.

Linda Grant, chairperson of U.S. Soccer's Women's Development Committee, stated that "Playing in the Olympics will allow women's soccer the opportunity to be exposed to an entirely new audience,' one where '...the Olympics ring closer to home than many other international world championships'" (quoted in Martin, 1993, para. 4-5).

The U.S. women's national team garnered sponsorship support from USSF Corporate Sponsors Budweiser and Sara Lee, which helped pay to fly team members to select training camps (New Day, 1993). Moreover, in 1994, the marketing tide altered significantly. With new marketing data demonstrating women as "...a majority of fitness enthusiasts as well as a surprisingly high percentage of sport fans, sport participants, and potential product buyers," (American Sports Data, 1995, p.1) sporting good manufacturers and corporations began competing for female consumers. Soccer, recognized as the fastest growing sport globally, became the primary target of many athletic products. The Upper Deck Company was the first to recognize the women's national team as a "...viable part of the marketplace" (Lange & Van Dyke, 1994, para. 3). As marketing partner of the World Cup 1994 USA, The Upper Deck Company issued its first set of trading cards featuring both men's and women's U.S. soccer athletes.

But it was Nike's emergence within the global soccer market that solidified women's soccer as a niche market. With little to no tradition in the soccer market, Nike grabbed defending World Cup champion Brazil and the United States as its two main high profile clients. Reflecting on Nike's entrance into the soccer market, Joe Elsmore, Nike's soccer sports marketing manager for the United States, noted that, "We wouldn't have done the deal if we couldn't have gotten the women," (quoted in DeSimone, 1998,

p. 30) for both the U.S. women's team and the female market in the United States were the largest and strongest in the world. So much so, Nike in conjunction with Edelman Public Relations Worldwide, ramped up its marketing campaign for the U.S. women's team and their bid for their second World Cup title in Sweden. This publicity machine concocted a "Road to Sweden" tour, in which the team played several matches in various soccer-friendly U.S. cities, and finagled player appearances on several national morning television shows, such as "The Today Show" or "Good Morning America." Prior to the team's departure for Sweden, Edelman produced a Media Day event at City Hall in New York City. Here, Nike unveiled its uniforms, specifically geared and tailored for the U.S. women's national team, players were pitched for interviews, and the team ran a soccer clinic and donated soccer equipment to groups that benefit from Participate in the Lives of Youths (P.L.A.Y) organizations (Edelman, 1995).

Nike had found a marketing strategy that spoke to women as neoliberalist consumers on both an individual and collective front. In 1990, Nike hired two "alleged feminists" (LaFrance, 1998, p. 87) Charlotte Moore and Janet Champ from the Wieden and Kennedy ad agency to manage a new ad campaign (Cole & Hribar, 1995). These two women capitalized on the growing youth girl power movement of third wave feminists such as the Riot Grrls, by using a discourse of empowerment to promote their products. Self-esteem, self-affirming statements, and celebration of the authentic self – the new language of empowerment – were central features of Nike's ad campaigns (Cole & Hribar, 1995). By the mid 1990s Nike ads managed to construct and sell both collective and individual feminism back to girls and women in the form of athletic shoes and other athletic apparel. Michael Messner (2002) argues corporations such as Nike:

have found peace and profit with liberal feminism by co-opting a genuine collective quest by women for bodily agency and empowerment and channeling it toward a goal of individual physical achievement that is severely limited by its consumerist context... (while promoting) individual women's agency expressed as identification with corporate consumerism...that firmly situates women's actions and bodies within the power relations of the current gender order (p. 87).

These so-called feminist representations, used in conjunction with traditional signs of femininity, produced contradictory messages (Carty, 2005; Heywood & Dworkin, 2003). Nike managed to blend these two ambiguous messages into a corporatized, commodified, and commercialized feminism. Nike linked gender equity, individuals, uniqueness, and gender inclusion with the essentialized gender roles espoused in postfeminist rhetoric (Cole & Hribar, 1995). This was exactly Nike's strategy: every woman - feminist, conservative, mother, daughter, tomboy, or girly girl - could see herself in the ad campaign and imagine herself as an athlete.

Edelman drew from its vast media contacts and pitched various narratives that pinpointed individual athletes. The lucrative endorsement contract Mia Hamm signed with Nike in 1993 positioned her as both a "sport and business personality" (Edelman, 1995, p. 11). Marketed to *Baby, Shape, Fitness, Parents* and *Good Housekeeping*, Joy Fawcett, the only mother on the team, became the nation's first soccer mom. Because of their "flair" and "unique look," Hamm, Julie Foudy, Tisha Venturini, and Carla Overbeck, were promoted to middle class, white women's publications, such as *Vogue*, *Elle*, and *Cosmopolitan*. On the other hand, Briana Scurry, Staci Wilson, and Thori

Staples, the three black players on the team, were pitched to only the marginalized and “black” publications of *Jet*, *Ebony*, *Essence*, *Vibe*, and *Heart & Soul*; thus, revealing the early marketing efforts of women’s soccer as a white, middle-class space.

The inclusion of Julie Foudy (sponsored by Reebok), Joy Fawcett (sponsored by adidas), and Carla Overbeck (sponsored by Fila) precludes the notion that Nike and Edelman did not want to promote athletes signed with direct competitors. Nike most likely wanted to focus on its own interests and not freely promote its competition. But the absence of Michelle Akers<sup>20</sup> – although not a Nike-endorsed athlete – is significant. The mere fact that Akers, although struck with Epstein-Barr syndrome, but still widely considered the best women’s player in the world, was not a focus of even one of their marketing strategies produces an important cultural message: Akers and her embodiment of masculinity did not complement Nike’s version of the new acceptable hybridized female athlete. One lifestyle pitch that was emphatically crossed off the list stated, “Business stories such as Hamm, Julie Foudy, and Michelle Akers signing lucrative endorsement contracts with major shoe companies. Is this the new wave of athlete to be marketed in the later half of the ‘90’s?” (Edelman, 1995, p. 11).

Akers’ presence on the field was negligible in the 1995 Women’s World Cup. She suffered a concussion and injured right knee within the first 20 minutes of the first match against China. Defending their quest to repeat would prove to be a difficult path for the U.S. as many national team programs had improved since 1991, but without Akers, the chance for a repeat championship was diminished. Pelé agreed, “I think it

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<sup>20</sup> Michelle Akers-Stahl filed for divorced her husband, Roby Stahl in September 1994, and quickly dropped the hyphenated name.

will be difficult for the Americans. But the Americans have a good chance, especially if Michelle is playing. She's the key'" (quoted in Akers Set to Rejoin Team, 1995, p. B18). Even though she played in the semi-final against eventual champions Norway (albeit on one leg and with a pounding headache) her absence undermined the team's goal to defend their championship. No other player stepped up to fill her shoes. U.S. soccer and women's soccer, more generally, seemingly needed Michelle Akers to be a star on the field, but Nike was focused on a seemingly gentler version of Akers – Mia Hamm. Mia Hamm provided FIFA and Nike a personality who exhibited a "woman's" style of play.

With a new champion, FIFA had proclaimed women's soccer as its own entity, separate from the men's game. FIFA Secretary General Sepp Blatter, noted that women's soccer would "inevitably" adopt elements of the men's game, but that the women's game has a personality all of its own. Blatter felt that female soccer players provided a distinctive women's style of play, characterized by a certain "elegance, [and] attacking flair'" (quoted in Trecker, 1995, para. 14), which had prevailed over a more robust impersonation of the men's game. He made gross predictions that placed women's global participation in soccer, in the first decade of the millennium, equal to the number of participants as men – a masterful marketing move from a former adidas-trained businessman and public relations profiteer (Jennings, 2007; Trecker, 1995). The future of football as Blatter had stated in 1995 was indeed feminine, as Americanized as it was. Preparations were underway for the first-ever women's Olympic tournament at the 1996 Atlanta Games, and FIFA had granted the USSF, situated in the largest corporate athletic market in the world, rights to the 1999 Women's World Cup (Berkowitz, 1996; Yannis, 1996).



The 1996 Atlanta Games, thus, became Hamm's introduction to the media, and hence, the U.S. public. NBC devoted few resources to cover the women's soccer tournament, but Hamm's scoring presence and athletic ability along with the impressive crowds drew the attention of newspaper and magazine reporters.<sup>21</sup> Like Akers, Hamm embodied a particular type of masculinity on the playing field, as both Akers and Hamm were compared with male players. After a win against Denmark in the first game of the Olympic tournament, for example, "Mia Hamm showed once again that she is one of the most dominant soccer players in the world, male or female, refusing to be stopped over and over again" (Vecsey, 1996a, p. C3). Moreover, both women were compared to Pelé. In the first ever women's soccer Olympic final, in which the U.S. team won a gold medal, Hamm "...in Pele-like fashion...was both the difference – and the focus of everything that happened. Hamm had a hand – or a hamstring – in every U.S. strike" (Weber, 1996, p. K2154). But, unlike Akers, the media placed Hamm definitively within the U.S. sporting context.

Mediated narratives emphasized Hamm's competitive drive and athletic ability. She was compared to gritty baseball legend Pete Rose, as she "chas[es] the ball

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<sup>21</sup> During group play, hosted at the Orange Bowl in Miami, Fla., the U.S. women's national team played against Denmark, Sweden, and China, recorded attendance records of 25,303, 28,000, and 43,525, respectively. In Athens, Ga., the semi-final against Norway broke these records again, as attendance was marked at 64,196, only to be outdone by the final versus China, in which the attendance was 76,489 – a record that stood until the 1999 Women's World Cup final, held in the Rose Bowl, in Pasadena, Calif. (United States Soccer Federation, 2015).

obsessively, the way Pete Rose used to pursue base hits” (Vecsey, 1996b, p. B9). Her athleticism, like Akers’, was even likened to His Airness, Michael Jordan:

One look at Hamm in action will tell you that she shares His Airness’s furnace-like competitive fire and focus. Hamm lurks wide on the wings, waiting patiently for the ball...when she gets it, she sets off the defense’s alarm bells. Explosively fast, Hamm often outruns the support of her teammates, leaving her to fend off two or three defenders (Saporito, 1999, p. 62).

Hamm next appeared in a now iconic Gatorade commercial titled, “Michael v. Mia” (Michael v. Mia.mov, 2015). The song “Anything you can do I can do better” is used to frame Mia Hamm and Michael Jordan in a gendered battle of athletic icons. While Mia and Michael dominate their respective sports, Gatorade portrays these two athletes equally competing against each other in tennis, fencing, and track. Neither athlete gives up until the final scene of the commercial. Face to face on a judo mat, Mia grabs Michael’s gee, steps in front of one of his legs and easily tosses him to the floor as she states, “I’m not gonna stop”. Rick Burton, a marketing professor from the University of Oregon<sup>22</sup>, believes that ““If Jordan is the athletic ideal, the icon, the greatest athlete of our time, it was really a notable achievement to show, not only equality, but Mia defeating

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<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that Rick Burton led the University of Oregon’s Warsaw Sport Marketing Center. He initiated the University of Oregon’s engagement with Fudan University in Shanghai, China, and worked closely with Nike as they developed business lines in China (Rick Burton, 2015). It is no surprise then, that Burton would positively spin this commercial with two Nike sponsored athletes in a way the fosters positive results for both Gatorade and Nike.

him” (quoted in Longman, 2000a, p. 99). The image of Mia Hamm flipping any black male athlete, let alone Michael Jordan, produced one of the most powerful images ever shown of a female athlete.

From an outsider’s perspective, it is difficult to discern why Hamm was selected over Akers as the spokesperson for women’s soccer. Both were equally talented on the pitch, but Akers had a significantly greater list of accomplishments. I contend Aker’s embodiment of masculinity that constructed the representation of American soccer as a female game, also denied her full representation within an emerging postfeminist context. While Hamm played with the same vengeance, competitiveness, and drive as Akers, their bodies stood in stark contrast to one another. Akers at five feet, ten inches tall and an incredibly muscular frame towers over Hamm’s five foot, five inch, slender build. Akers emphatically used her body to battle against opponents for possession or space on the field. Hamm, on the other hand, tended to receive balls at her feet or running into space, in which she was able to utilize her balletic moves to spin defenders into the ground. Finally, Akers never attempted to contain her unwieldy mane of curls while others like Hamm, conformed to the ever-pervasive and culturally significant ponytail. As Jamie Schultz (2014) writes in *Qualifying Times*, “...the ponytail constructs and normalizes a particular version of femininity...it conveys significant understandings and expectations about the girl or woman to whom it is attached and by extension, to others who participate in sport and physical culture” (p. 2). Thus, the current version of female athleticism in the sport of soccer, shaped in particular by Nike, limited who and what type of player belonged in the emerging women’s soccer imaginary.

Hamm also embodied all of the neoliberal and postfeminist tropes Nike commercials supported – specifically the now acceptable contradiction between athleticism and femininity – meaning you can be as athletic as men on the field, as long as you present yourself as feminine off the field. In “Nike’s Commercial Solution,” Shelly Lucas (2000) argues that Mia Hamm represents the blending of both athleticism and femininity: she balanced her competitiveness, passion, and physical achievement on the field by modeling essentialized gender norms of beauty, passivity, and heterosexuality off the field.

Just after winning her first ESPN “Espy” award in 1997, Mia Hamm was named as one of *People’s* 50 Most Beautiful People. The image of Hamm in *People* captures her sitting on a white sandy beach wearing a tank top and simple pants. Golden brown from the sun, Hamm smiles shyly at the camera with arms crossed; her left hand, clearly displaying her wedding ring, is draped casually over her bare feet. This image encapsulates the branding of Mia Hamm as beautiful, heterosexual, and passive. In *People*, Julie Foudy remarked that, “Mia has natural beauty. It’s not something she has to spend \$1000 on” (quoted in Mia Hamm, 1997, p. 90). Akers, on the other hand, did not possess the “natural” beauty of Hamm. Her stature, musculature, and chiseled jaw line did not signify normative feminine beauty in the eyes of Nike officials. Thus, her masculine features may have sparked speculation about her sexuality, especially after divorcing Roby Stahl in 1994; at this particular historical moment, sexual ambiguity was not a profitable quality.

Femininity is generally equated not only with beauty and heterosexuality, but also with care for others rather than self. The more masculine identified qualities of

autonomy, self-reliance, and achievement that girl's and women are suspected to acquire through sport must be mitigated through gendered acts of self-sacrifice and teamwork in order to be true to a feminine morality. As M. Ann Hall (1988) argues, "The conflict between gender and culture exists only in the realm of femininity because masculinity is (sport) culture" (p. 333). Mia Hamm represents an almost passive female, apologetic for her tremendous talent in the male-centered, male-dominated, and male-identified world of sports. On the field, she is not only a fierce goal scorer, but also a selfless passer. Off the field, she is depicted as shy, insecure, self-less, humble, and the first to deflect attention away from herself to her teammates. "Even her handshake is noncommittal, as if it might reveal too much" (Longman, 1999d, p. A1).

In 1999, Jere Longman (1999d) of the *New York Times* wrote, "While she accepts that she is a pioneer...she wears the role awkwardly, like wearing a fur coat in the dead of summer...there is a reserve about her...as if she should succeed at a high level but should not stand out from the others" (p. A1). Leslie Heywood and Shari Dworkin (2003) note that sportswriters often downplay the competitiveness of female players and emphasize how teamwork and building relationships motivate female athletes. Hamm, the poster child for this selflessness, consistently refers to her teammates in interviews, declined to have her own autobiography publicized, and insisted that her teammates be included in Nike's advertisement campaigns. In 2000, Hamm wrote a letter to her teammates on the Women's National Team that was published in *Women's Sports and Fitness*. She wrote:

Sports isn't about awards or world championships, though those are great.

It's about the relationships we have with one another...We're players who

believe in each other and work extremely hard for one another. From the bottom of my heart, you guys, we did it together (quoted in Reed, 2000, p. 76).

Hamm's uncomfortable relationship with the spotlight and constant worry that her teammates do not receive the credit they deserve, reveals Hamm as not only the ultimate team player, but also the ideal postfeminist woman.

On the field, Akers was the consummate player, but off the field she was not the ideal version of the postfeminist woman. Strong in voice and confident in conviction, she led many politically "feminist" crusades for the development of the U.S. women's national team and women's soccer. She held a position on the USSF's women's committee, and negotiated the team's first contract preceding the 1991 Women's World Championship. In 1995, she spearheaded a labor battle with the USSF over bonuses and salaries prior to the 1996 Olympic Games. Although eight other players, including Mia Hamm, were involved in the "lockout," Akers took a lead role and accomplished substantial results that significantly benefitted the women's program.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, in a

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<sup>23</sup> The USSF did not pay the women's team players under contract for the fourth quarter of 1995. The USSF claimed that the women made personal sacrifices of careers and family, and thus, were not called upon to play during this time. In the original contract, the USSF guaranteed bonus money for only the gold medal claiming that guaranteed money for second or third place indicated that the team was complacent and not committed to winning the gold medal in Atlanta (Jones, 1995; United States Soccer Federation, 1995a; United States Soccer Federation, 1995b). After "locked" out of training camp in early January, in which particular players' airline tickets were cancelled, the USSF and the team came to an agreement for January 1, 1996 to September 30, 1996: \$250,000 in the player bonus pool for Gold; \$100,000 in player bonus pool for Silver; \$0 for Bronze; \$2500 bonus for making the Olympic squad; current monthly salary,

context that values the subtle depoliticization of feminist ideals through the marketing of beauty, passivity, and blatant heterosexuality, Akers and all that she represents, became her own biggest detractor denying herself the opportunity to finally reap the rewards she most surely initiated.

## **Conclusion**

In the complex and shifting economic and cultural framework of the USSF and U.S. sport, Michelle Akers was a formidable and steady representation of masculinity within U.S. Soccer, a coveted position to possess within U.S. soccer. She embodied the qualities of the best male players in the world, and therefore stood out as U.S. soccer's top player, per soccer's comparatively "weaker" masculine perception within U.S. sport. Akers' play and mediated representation prior to and during the 1991 Women's World Championship, while limited in scope, initiated soccer's ascendant position as a female game in the U.S. Her genius play on the field and impressive international reputation, however, did not exempt her or the U.S. women's national team from having to navigate the seemingly implicit gender bias found within the philosophy of their head coach, Anson Dorrance, and the financial structure of the USSF as it attempted to strategically position the Federation under the guidance of FIFA. These ideological and structural constraints have historically oppressed many female athletes and/or teams into marginalized positions in sport, but the mid-1990s presented a monumental shift in how female athletes were perceived and marketed in U.S. culture.

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between \$3000-\$4000 would be paid as long as position on team is maintained, along with an injury protection clause (Steinbrecher, 1995).

Nike's emergence as a global soccer leader and its focus on women's sport pushed women's soccer into the U.S. cultural limelight. Although the soccer community had raved about the women's team and its fearless leader, Akers, since 1991, the general public took notice only after Nike promoted the team and its young and relatively untested star, Mia Hamm. Hamm's blend of femininity off the field combined with her "acceptable" masculinity on the field gave corporations the first widely marketable female athlete who played a team sport. Her slender build, All-American looks, deferential demeanor, and ponytail attracted a new generation of female soccer players and further solidified the game of soccer as a female in the U.S. Yet this same approach also constructed privileged ideological boundaries around the definition of a U.S. women's soccer player. This definition denied Akers both a meaningful and profitable location within an ever-evolving postfeminist and multicultural context.

Thus, it is Hamm – not Akers – who is heralded after the 1996 gold medal win in the Atlanta Olympic Games, and thrust into the spotlight as the USSF and the Women's World Cup Organizing Committee prepared for the 1999 Women's World Cup. Akers said of Hamm, as the most visible spokesperson for U.S. women's soccer, "I do get really tired of people asking, 'So, what's it like to have been what Mia is now?' I'm asked that all the time, and I want to throw a forearm at the person's throat...(But) Mia's platform is much larger. That attention can be overwhelming, or it can propel you to a deeper greatness" (quoted in Rushin, 1997, pp. 66-67). Hamm, along with her teammates, were propelled to a deeper greatness in 1999, but a greatness constructed upon a façade of gender equity and a marketing campaign steeped in the consumption of "girl power," an ironic form of depoliticized feminism.



## CHAPTER TWO

### GIRLS JUST WANNA HAVE FUN: POSTFEMINISM AND THE 1999 WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

The 1999 FIFA Women's World Cup tournament was to be Mia Hamm's defining athletic moment. Since the 1996 Atlanta Olympics Games when, in relative obscurity to the American public<sup>24</sup>, the United States beat China in a close 2 – 1 match, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the United States Soccer Federation (USSF), Nike, marketers and the organizing committee for the 1999 women's world cup pushed the young, talented Mariel (Mia) Hamm into soccer's cultural limelight. She was called the "The Poster Girl" (McDowell and Wahl, 1999; Longman, 1999d; Longman, 1999h) and "The Chosen One," (Lieber, 1999b; Vecsey, 1999a; Vecsey, 1999b) a shy and humble teammate, but a relentless competitor and fiery attacking player, whose accolades reached far beyond the lines of the pitch.

By all accounts, in 1999, Mia Hamm was the best player in the world. Heading into the 1999 Women's World Cup Hamm was awarded the 1998 Chevrolet/ U.S. Soccer female Athlete of the Year award for an unprecedented fifth year in a row, became only

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<sup>24</sup> In the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) chose not to cover the women's soccer tournament even though this was the first time soccer had been elected as an Olympic sport. Instead, NBC decided to air numerous hours of women's gymnastics, women's swimming and diving, and women's basketball in order to appease their female viewership. NBC did give scoring updates throughout the 8-team tournament, and showed some deference by airing the last 10 minutes of the gold medal game, which had a crowd of 76,489 breaking a world record for the largest crowd to witness an all female sporting event (Women's Olympic Football, 2015).

the third player in international play to score more than 100 goals, and finished with 20 goals and 20 assists in 25-games. Head coach Tony DiCicco praised his fleet-footed striker, “...fact of the matter is that Mia just got better in 1998. She had the greatest year of any women’s player in the history of the game” (quoted in U.S. Women, 1999a, para. 1). She exemplified all that was advantageous and profitable in the women’s game: exceptional talent, an impeccable decorum, and an unwavering commitment to the future of women’s soccer.

Born in 1972, the same year as Title IX, provides an epic backdrop to Hamm’s personal story and athletic career.<sup>25</sup> A “Title IX baby,”<sup>26</sup> she was the literal embodiment of this law as she earned an athletic scholarship that provided her access to an education and a training environment that helped to cultivate her technical and tactical skills. However, with opportunity comes responsibility. In this cultural moment, she was responsible for carrying the banner of women’s sports, being an icon of women’s soccer, and mastering the art of public relations (Lieber, 1999a). Marketers, promoters, and journalists alike cultivated Hamm as *the* sports role model for the more than 7.5 million girls who played soccer in the United States. Rarely are athletes asked to assume the economic and cultural burden of opportunity that Hamm was expected to bear that

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<sup>25</sup> ESPNW.com named Mia Hamm the top female athlete of the Title IX era. “In the 40-year era of Title IX, no athlete has epitomized the modern female athlete like Mia Hamm” (ESPN Video, June 12, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> “Title IX baby” was an expression giving to young female athletes in their athletic prime during the late 1990s and early 2000s. These athletes were the first to reap the monetary rewards of the historic passing of Title IX. There were more female athletes than ever before playing sport at the developmental, high school and college level than ever before (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; de Varona, 1999b).

summer (A Hesitant Hero, 1999; Longman, 1999d; Wahl, 1999b), for if she failed or the team failed to reach anything less than the finals, the largest women's sporting event, many feared, would become "...a diminished athletic and commercial affair" (Longman, 1999d, p. A1; Wahl, 1999a).

Hamm and her teammates were paraded throughout the country on a nine-game Nike sponsored tour, aptly named the "Road to Pasadena" as Pasadena, CA, was the hallowed ground of the Women's World Cup final (U.S. Women, 1999b; U.S. Soccer, 1999a). Although Hamm was stuck in an eight-game scoring drought leading up to and during the early part of the tour, she managed to score the record-breaking 108<sup>th</sup> goal of her career before the beginning of the Women's World Cup. Anson Dorrance, former U.S. women's national team head coach and Hamm's collegiate coach at the University of North Carolina, felt that she might be stretched to her limits, "All of us might be asking her to do too much. I have a great fear it will burn her out, on the field, off the field" (quoted in Soccer Triumph, 1999). Teammate Tiffney Milbrett, who played forward alongside Hamm expressed a similar sentiment, "Mia takes the burden really seriously on herself. She needs to realize she's not alone. The team will be fine" (quoted in A Hesitant Hero, 1999, para. 14).

In fact, the team was fine. Most fans came to see the spectacular play of no. 9, but left the stadiums having fallen in love with the girl-power message that was neatly woven into the team's culture of closeness, sisterhood, and family. Hamm started off the tournament against Denmark with a goal and an assist in front of a record crowd of 78,972 (Bondy, 1999; Longman, 1999h). As the tournament wore on, Hamm's tired and battered body did not perform up to her competitive goal-scoring standards. Instead, she

became more of a silent threat as she assisted other players' goals and tirelessly tracked down players defensively. The American public began to recognize and identify with players such as Kristine Lilly, Julie Foudy, and Cindy Parlow along with reserves Tisha Venturini and Shannon MacMillan (USA 99, 1999). No longer was it Hamm's sole burden to bear the weight of women's sport and the future of women's soccer – the team had risen to the occasion. This was most evident in the final of the women's world cup.

On July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1999, in front of 90,000 screaming fans in Pasadena, 40 million U.S. television viewers and worldwide audience of 240 million in over 70 countries, the U.S. women's soccer team battled China for the women's world cup title (Record TV Numbers, 1999; Harvey, 2007b). The whistle blew at the end of regulation play, signaling the end of 90 minutes of defensive play with few scoring opportunities for either side. Tied 0 – 0, both teams readied themselves for two 15-minute sudden death overtime periods. In the tenth minute of overtime, Kristine Lilly saved the game with her head. A Chinese corner kick rocketed into the six-yard box, connecting with a Chinese player who headed the ball over the out-stretched fingers of U.S. goalkeeper, Briana Scurry. In one quick side step, Lilly left her duty as post-player and slide to the middle of the goal. As the ball careened toward what seemed to be its eventual destination, the back of the net, Lilly headed the ball up and out of danger. Play continued for another 20 minutes until the final whistle blew. The match ended in a tie; individual penalty kicks would decide the winner.

The first two rounds ended in a tense two-to-two deadlock as Chinese players Xie Huilin and Qiu Haiyan, and U.S. players Carla Overbeck and Joy Fawcett all made their penalty kicks. Scurry made a miraculous save against Liu Ying, parrying a hard and low

shot to the right hand corner of the goal out of bounds. After Scurry's incredible save, Kristine Lilly, the most experienced international player in the world, lined up and buried her shot. Mia Hamm, who is punishingly self-critical, went fourth although she had repeatedly refused to take penalty kicks during the season (Longman, 2000a). With reassurance from her coach and teammates, Hamm walked confidently to the penalty marker and struck the ball as hard as she could. When the ball struck the netting, Hamm performed her signature two fist hand pump and ran back to meet her teammates at half field. Players Zhang Ouying and Sun Wen made the final two penalty kicks for China. With the score now tied four to four, Brandi Chastain, the final shooter, jogged to the penalty marker. Later she would describe her jog from half field to the penalty marker, "I felt a great calm as I walked up to my kick. There was no crowd noise. I didn't look at Gao Hong, the goalie, who had psyched me out before in this very situation<sup>27</sup>...I wasn't going to let her do it again, I put the ball down, listened for the whistle and hit the shot heard round the world" (Dear Diary, 1999, para. 8). As the ball hit the back of the net, Chastain fell to her knees, ripped off her jersey, in what Chastain describes as "momentary insanity," (quoted in Longman, 1999m, p. 18) baring her now legendary

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<sup>27</sup> In 1999, Hong Gao was one of the best goalkeepers in the world. Her athleticism was recognized even though she lacked size in goal. However, she had an uncanny ability to protect the goal during penalty kicks. Jere Longman (2000a), author of *The Girls of Summer: The U.S. Women's Soccer Team and How it Changed the World*, wrote frequently about Gao's ability to intimidate or distract shooters during their penalty kick approach to the ball. She would either smile or wink as players placed the ball down on the penalty marker and looked up to identify their target behind Gao. The U.S. national team coaching staff recognized this trend during the Algarve Cup, the March prior to the 1999 Women's World Cup. None of the five players that took penalty shots against Gao that fated afternoon even glanced in her direction.

black Nike sports bra and chiseled stomach to the crowd, a field of photographers, and the world.

It is this singular individual moment, in all of its temporality, which remains within our historical consciousness. Mia Hamm did not have to live up to 'Mia Mania,' as that type of scrutiny and pressure is unrealistic for any athlete to shoulder. Instead, whipping off a Nike jersey, baring a black sports bra and a fit-toned body became ubiquitous with the progress of Title IX, women's empowerment, and women's sport (Bushnell, 1999; Sullivan, 1999; Vecsey, 1999e). In this moment, together with all the passion and intensity demonstrated for three incredible weeks of tournament play, the Women's World Cup positioned soccer, and more importantly, the U.S. women's national team, within the rigid American sport vernacular of football, basketball, baseball, and ice hockey (Markovitz & Hellerman, 2004).

After this historic victory, the media quickly canonized the U.S. women's national team in the annals of women's sporting history, but this moment has drawn little attention from scholars. In the last 16 years only two studies have attempted to take a critical approach to the narratives that surrounded the U.S. women's national team during the 1999 Women's World Cup. Christopherson et al. (2002) examined Women's World Cup media coverage for narratives of gender equality and emancipation. A content analysis revealed that newspaper reporters used several gendered contradictions to describe female athletes. U.S. women soccer players were constructed as good female role models, examples of women's empowerment, and a "new kind of woman" while simultaneously being coded as sex objects and the embodiment of heterosexuality. Shugart's (2003) content analysis documented the sexualization of female athletes. She

argued that the media employed the strategy of sexualization to (re)produce traditional gender norms. This was accomplished through mediated strategies of “passive objectification,” “athleticism as sexual performance,” “vigilant heterosexuality,” and “asexuality as a type of foil.” While informative, these studies reinforce the well-known mediated gender discourses surrounding female athletes (Birrell & Theberge, 1994).

Reexamining the 1999 Women’s World Cup with a more critical eye provides new understandings of this team that go beyond the trope of “girl power,” the effectiveness of Title IX, the paternalistic attributes of head coach Tony DiCicco, and the sexualization of female athletes that dominated U.S. sporting and public discourses (Gardner, 1999; Hirshey, 1998; Wahl, 1998; Ziegler, 1999). This chapter intervenes in this canonization to suggest counternarratives that expand the meaning of this team and this sporting moment in sport history.

In 1999, at the height of U.S. neoliberalism, the Women’s World Cup, the U.S. women’s national team and its individual players were constructed and marketed as an attractive product to sell to a broad audience that imagined itself as a gender-blind, racially progressive nation. I argue that a nexus of postfeminist and multicultural discourses created a singular and marketable version of women’s soccer around the world –white, middle-class, feminine, and heterosexual. These not only characterize, but also mark which bodies are acceptable (or not) in the marketing of the Women’s World Cup and soccer more broadly. Yet, these concepts do not exist within a vacuum, but rather are constitutive of and constituted by the presence of the “other” – the pathological, deviant and/or delinquent body (Birrell & McDonald, 2000; Cole & Hribar, 1995; Foucault, 1995; LaFrance, 1998).

In this chapter, I argue that neoliberal postfeminist and multicultural strategies were used in order to sell/market the Women's World Cup and the U.S. women's national team/individual players to an uneducated American soccer public. More specifically, the Women's World Cup Organizing Committee, and media employed these postfeminist and multicultural notions to package girl/women's empowerment as a safe and inclusive space. I argue that the USSF and FIFA corporatized and commodified the U.S. women's team in order to capitalize on the immense amount of coverage and cultural visibility women's soccer possessed in 1999. I contend that marketing efforts used Title IX, the cultural trope of "girl power," and multiculturalism to sell this team to a generation of "Title IX babies" and a new teen-girl market. Moreover, the expansion of "girl power" into sport provided marketers an opportunity to expand the demographics of women's soccer fans to men between the ages of 18 and 35 through the use of a "sexy femininity." Yet, these messages of empowerment systematically hid the continued inequity in women's sports and U.S. Soccer while serving to further perpetuate and constrain ideas of femininity.

### **Creating a Movement: Selling Tickets, a Movement, and a Lifestyle**

#### **Womenomics: Feminism, Neoliberalism, and Selling Tickets.**

Within the U.S. sporting context, interest and passion for the "foreign" and "weaker" masculine sport of soccer has waxed and waned over the past century (Williams, 2007). In her epilogue to *Women, Sexual Liberation: Kicking Off a New Era*, Fan Hong (2004) notes that soccer (association football), the bastion of traditional masculinity around the globe has ironically become a symbol for women's equality in sport. Soccer's historic failure to connect with an American masculinity has thus,



associated the American and male version of the game with a weak national identity. As Markovits and Hellerman (2004) argue, women's soccer fills a space in the American sporting landscape the U.S. men's team could not, but the rise of the women's game in the U.S. must be examined within the growing and shifting economic (Harvey, 2008) and cultural (Duggan, 2003; Foucault, 2008; Rose, 1996) neoliberal context of the late 1990s.

In 1999, the U.S. economy was cresting atop a massive economic wave.

Companies were reaping the global economic rewards from the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement, which created free trade zones that stimulated a massive global trade market (North American, 2015). Domestically, the Internet created a substantial impact on an already thriving economic market, which saw unprecedented market gains of 16 percent, while the gross domestic product grew an average of four percent per year between 1997 and 1999 (Matthews & Gandel, 2014). Individual consumer and investor confidence was unshakable – a perfect time to exploit a niche market, particularly one defined by gender/sexual liberation (Harvey, 2007a; Hong & Mangan, 2004).

The U.S. women's national team and the 1999 Women's World Cup fit the concept of a niche market perfectly. In the early 1980s, soccer was just beginning to tap into the American consciousness (Fields, 2008). The expansive soccer fields readily available in middle-class, white suburban neighborhoods throughout the U.S., certified the growth and popularity of youth soccer. Soccer was no longer synonymous with a game for immigrants; rather the sport began to proliferate new meanings for the suburban elite (Andrews, 1999). Recreational youth leagues popped up in most towns, large and small, and soon the game expanded to a more competitive and professionalize model – club sports. Club soccer demanded a substantial registration fee to pay for professional

coaching, uniforms and extended travel to games and tournaments. A new “pay for play” soccer culture emerged that fit with the middle-class value of consumer-oriented individualism and competitive consumption. Competitive soccer became what Pierre Bordieu would categorize as “an elective luxury,” affordable only to those with substantial disposable incomes (Andrews, 1999, p. 46). This “elective luxury” fostered an “exceptional” women’s national team program that would lead women’s soccer into the new millennium (Markovits & Hellerman, 2004).

Riding the swell of women’s sports marketing in the mid- to late-1990s, with revenue doubling from \$285 million to \$600 million between 1992 and 1997 (Heidesch, 1999), the Women’s World Cup Organizing Committee understood the potential national and global economic power that lay within this FIFA sponsored event. The Committee’s goal was to stage the 1999 Women’s World Cup as a breakthrough event in order to fulfill newly elected FIFA President Sepp Blatter’s<sup>28</sup> prophecy that - the future of football is feminine (Caparaz, 1999). As forecast in *the 1999 Women’s World Cup Corporate Guide*, the marketing landscape was ripe with economic and cultural markers for success: “The popularity of (women’s soccer) in the U.S. has propelled the U.S. Women’s National Team to an impressive level of *global supremacy* (emphasis original)” making it a “...prime vehicle to reach a market which represents \$52 billion worth of (female) *buying power* (emphasis original)” (Women’s World Cup Organizing, 1999, p. 10). As

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<sup>28</sup> Sepp Blatter was elected President of FIFA on September 8, 1998. It was in 1995, when Blatter, FIFA Secretary General said, “the future of football is feminine” at the M&M Women’s World Championship in Sweden (Degele, 2012; Jude Collie, 1999).

Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (2011) suggest, neoliberalism is “...*always already gendered*, and...women are constructed as its ideal subjects (emphasis original)” (p. 7).

As *New York Times* journalist, George Vecsey (1999a) aptly states, “The United States is not known as a soccer nation, but American promoters do know how to sell a big event” (p. G3). ISL Marketing, FIFA’s exclusive marketing partner since 1982, agreed to collaborate with both FIFA and the Women’s World Cup Committee to market the 1999 event (Vanderpool & Heifetz, 1998; *This is My Game*, 1999). This marketing team attained 19 commercial affiliates, with multi-national corporations such as Coca-Cola, Anheuser-Busch, adidas, and Time, Inc. signing on as Official Sponsors of the Women’s World Cup (Board of Directors, 1999; *Women’s World Cup ’99*, 1999). To many companies this event was a bargain. Official Sponsors paid between \$1 million and \$4 million and marketing partners paid between \$500,000 and \$1 million where as Official Sponsors and marketing partners of the 1998 men’s World Cup paid between \$40 million and \$50 million each (Heidesch, 1999). Although Nike, an Official Sponsor of U.S. Soccer since 1995, was not an Official Sponsor for this tournament, the company made its mark and money through the product promotion of the U.S. women’s national team and its individual players.

U.S. women’s national team players were complicit in the globalized corporatization of the Women’s World Cup tournament. After winning gold in the inaugural women’s Olympic soccer tournament in 1996 and observing the overwhelming fan support in the soccer stadiums, Blatter, USSF president, Alan Rothenberg, and president of the Women’s World Cup Organizing Committee, Marla Messing decided to move the 1999 tournament from small stadiums on the East Coast to large stadiums

throughout the U.S. Co-captain Julie Foudy was ecstatic when she heard the news, “...we were like, ‘Right on, this is something we can do.’ We knew we had the personalities and the talent. We just needed to be promoted better” (quoted in Longman, 1999, p. D1).<sup>29</sup> This increased focus on marketing and promotion fell on the shoulders of the players themselves.

Individual players are quoted in the *1999 Women’s World Cup ‘99 Corporate Guide* reinforcing the value of corporate power to attain success. The players felt corporations as holding the golden ticket to validation. For example, Kristine Lilly, a long time starter on the team, asserted that, “Corporate sponsors have played a major role in the growth of women’s soccer. They provide the exposure we need and they help validate the sport” (Women’s World Cup Organizing, 1999, p. 27). Moreover, the U.S. women’s national team entered into a unique agreement with the Women’s World Cup Organizing Committee. In order to promote the tournament, players agreed to make appearances for the World Cup and chose to surrender any individual or team licensing and promotional rights solely to the event organizers. Thus, as a part of the corporate sponsorship package, organizations received the “extraordinary benefit” of linking their brand with the U.S team or any player of its choosing at no extra cost (Women’s World Cup Organizing, 1999, p. 10). As Michael Giardiana and Jennifer Metz (2005) argue women’s sports are caught up in a “globally organized, transnational matrix of (neoliberal) corporate power designed to capitalize on the physical exploits (of female

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<sup>29</sup> Before the final game of the 1999 Women’s World Cup held the attendance record, the largest crowd to every watch a women’s national team game was the gold medal game at the 1996 Atlanta Games (United States Soccer Federation, 2015).

athletes)” (p. 110). Thus, women’s soccer and the 1999 Women’s World Cup event were subject to and constructed within this matrix of neoliberal corporate power.

Official Sponsors, however, expect that their brand will reach and connect with their target audience to produce new consumers. This can be achieved only if the tournament is accessible and visible to a variety of audiences. In January 1998, Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) and the American Broadcast Channel (ABC), sister television companies, entered into a landmark agreement with the Women’s World Cup Organizing Committee. ESPN and ABC signed on to broadcast a minimum of 64 hours of national television coverage – the largest programming commitment by any network to an international women-only sports event. Steven Risser, ESPN’s vice president of programming, who believed in the future of soccer in the U.S., stated that ESPN “...will be putting all of our resources behind this tournament” (Bell, 1998, para. 8). ESPN, ESPN2, and ABC Sports televised the 1999 Women’s World Cup Draw that was held at halftime of the FIFA World Stars vs. the U.S. Women’s National Team in February, six of the nine-game American exhibition tour entitled “Nike Road to Pasadena,” and all 32 World Cup tournament games. ABC received the honor of telecasting the final at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif.

Television coverage was not limited to the United States. In fact, after the World Cup Draw set group play for the tournament, international sales exploded. Deals were completed in Germany, Italy, Denmark, Norway, Russia and Sweden, as well as with Eurosport, a media corporation that reached 55 countries in Europe and showed close to all the matches of the tournament. Outside the purview of what scholars call Western countries, Brazil, Ghana, Nigeria, and even the Middle East, picked up coverage of the

tournament (Heenies, 1999; Women's World Cup '99, 1999). Messing had predicted that the mediated distribution of this women's only event "will be very strong" (Women's World Cup '99, 1999, para. 4). That it was. On June 30, 1999, the Women's World Cup had better ratings than the NHL. "ESPN has a .82 cable rating in five World Cup games so far compared with a .59 mark on its NHL regular-season games this past season" (Goodman, 1999, para. 1). The Women's World Cup final received an astonishing 13.3 overnight Nielson rating compared to the 11.3 average rating for the NBA finals (Women's World Cup, 1999).

Sponsorships and television contracts help to off set the operating budget of any large event, but the product must sell the event. Grass-roots marketing efforts in 1997 and 1998 at youth soccer tournaments throughout the country had helped raise awareness of the women's team and the upcoming event. U.S. soccer supporters and those parents and kids involved in youth organizations around the United States flocked to see the women's team during their "Nike Road to Pasadena" exhibition tour that took them through most of the key major markets such as New York, Chicago, and L.A (Women's World Cup '99, 1999). Access to players before and after games along with a high quality of play yielded faster and more abundant ticket sales than expected.<sup>30</sup> The U.S.

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<sup>30</sup> However, as event planning moved the tournament from small stadiums on the east coast to large arenas throughout the U.S. many executives feared ticket sales would not justify the move, especially if the women did not make it to the finals. In January of 1999, Alan Rothenberg, the president of the USSF and the chairman of the 1999 Women's World Cup asserted that this tournament was about promoting women's soccer in the U.S. and globally; not, about making money. Yet, in a three-day period in June as the Women's World Cup drew to a start, Rothenberg, calmly stated in New Jersey's *Star Ledger*, "If our team is eliminated in the quarterfinals, I'm fearful of what's going to happen in the finals (July 10 in the Rose

women's team tore through their group matches against Denmark, North Korea, and Nigeria scoring 13 goals while allowing just one. The U.S. team's early success and the high quality of play in other group play games helped ticket sales exceed expectations. Total ticket sales for the tournament rose over 650,000, filling the Rose Bowl to capacity and helping to solidify close to a \$4 million surplus (Longman, 1999n; Mihoces, 1999).

The third Women's World Cup was not only an economic success, but also a vibrant space of cultural reproduction. The numerous corporate sponsors, historic television coverage, widespread Internet presence, and record-breaking ticket sales each demonstrate the substantial cultural capital this event and team possessed. As the Women's World Cup Organizing Committee had planned, the Women's World Cup tournament was the most visible, most successful, and as it turns out, the most marketed and commercialized women's sporting event in sport history.

Yet, this idea alone is limited in scope as the World Cup was not just about selling tickets. This moment was about movement – the ostensible movement of a sport and a team from obscurity to celebrity, from inequality to equality, and from antifeminism to feminism. I do not intend to make these ideas seem simple and trouble-free; rather, it is

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Bowl). It's a very big stadium. That will have a significant impact on the bottom line of the World C" (quoted in Stephenson, June 16, 1999, para. 5). He was quoted a few days later, in a seemingly agitated state, in the *New York Times* that "If the U.S. is in the final, we think we can sell out the Rose Bowl. If they don't, there will be fewer people because some of us will have slit our throats" (quoted in Longman, 1999g, D10). Regardless of the accelerated ticket sales, television contracts, and the Women's World Cup Organizing Committee's grass roots promotional attempts to put on the biggest women's sporting event in history, female athletes continued to be seen as unable to sustain, promote, and market a major female-only sporting event (Andrews, 1998; Cahn, 1994).

the seemingly uncomplicated path this team experienced in their ascendancy of sport in 1999 that I wish to interrogate. I examine the narrative-driven, mediated representation of the U.S. women's soccer team as part of the sport-media-commercial complex (Rowe, 1999) and interrogate how the media, corporate sponsors, soccer organizations, and the players themselves are all complicit in the reproduction of neoliberal ideologies and subjectivities (du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay & Negus, 1997; Haynes & Boyle, 2009).

**“The Girl Effect”<sup>31</sup> Movement: Title IX and a Postfeminist Women's World Cup Mission.**

The year 1999 witnessed the apex of girl power, a neoliberal cultural trope that invaded many aspects of commodified pop-culture life – music, television, film, and even sport. Starting with the underground Riot Grrrl movement, identified by some as third wave feminism, characterized by a satirical embrace of sexuality through zines, music and art, adolescent girls became central to the political movement (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003). At the turn of the millennium, popular culture, mainstream media, and governmental programs constructed new versions of the girl power discourse. For

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<sup>31</sup> The “Girl Effect” Movement is a foundation championed by Nike in collaboration with the United Nations Foundation that sees girls as part of the solution to a global poverty problem. The Girl Effect foundation is tied to many non-governmental organizations that attempt to help girls across the globe through an uncritical application of Global North methods. These methods undermine the local cultural and traditions and further exploit the female laborer of Global South nations, while multi-national corporations tout their so-called commitment to global humanity. While the U.S. women's national team is not the solution for global poverty, the insidious nature of postfeminist rhetoric exploits women athletes as Nike and the 1999 Women's World Cup Organizing Committee applaud the “good work” they are doing to move women's sport forward in U.S. sports culture.



example, Taft (2004) argues that the music group, The Spice Girls, and the television show, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, claimed that the embodiment of girl power through beauty and appearance was “feminist enough” to show that equality had been achieved. The U.S. women’s national team fit seamlessly into this discourse with their hard, fit bodies and charismatic All-American smiles.

Brandi Chastain watched with bated breath for the ball to hit the back of the net, and when it did, she performed what is arguably most memorable celebration in women’s sport history. She ripped off her jersey so quickly it seemed effortless, and as she spun it around in a circle over her head, the joy of the moment was abundantly clear. But it was her next act that was captured in time forever. Chastain fell to her knees, clenched both fists revealing her large biceps, and screamed at the top of her lungs making her abdominal muscles even more defined. Reminiscent of many Rosie the Riveter drawings during the World War II effort, Chastain became a poster girl for a new generation of women:

Liberation, declaration, whatever you wish to call it, this was a defining picture for a cause. When a vibrant American woman named Brandi Chastain can win the World Cup with a shootout kick, then rip off her jersey to reveal only a black sports bra in front of 90,000 fans and 16 million homes [in the U.S.], the symbolism is heavy and the statement is potent (Mariotti, 1999, p. 3)

Chastain became a metonym for the event that became understood as an epochal feminist moment in women’s sport history. With Chastain’s strike and celebration, the team had “...thrust female sports teams into a new century of equality with men” (Powell, 1999b,

p. 59). Chastain felt it was her moment to shine and become a “...vehicle for empowering other women, on the soccer field, in the home and the workplace. It was so amazing to look into the Rose Bowl stands and see the faces of thousands of little girls and women. I wanted to shout, ‘We’re doing this together!’” (quoted in Lieber, 1999b, p. 1C).

Only three days prior to this “epochal moment,” Donna de Varona (1999), chair of the Women’s World Cup Organizing Committee, wrote in a Welcome Note to dignitaries and FIFA association members attending the 2<sup>nd</sup> FIFA Women’s Football Symposium that soccer in the U.S. was “Introduced into communities, without prejudice to gender, by eager volunteers and coaches of the American Youth Soccer Organisation and the US Soccer Federation...” (p. 5). FIFA General Secretary Michel Zen-Ruffinen (1999) also disregarded the historic gendered disparities in sport. In regards to FIFA’s role in women’s soccer development, he stated, “Gender is irrelevant, only ability counts and the aim is total integration, not separation” (p. 1). These statements are exemplars of postfeminist proclivities as de Varona states that soccer in the American context is the only sport to escape gender equity issues, while Zen-Ruffinen asserts gender equality on a broad global scale has been fully achieved through the integration of the game at the highest level (Longman, 1999j; Zen-Ruffinen, 1999). How then, if gender was a non-factor in the national development and global implementation of the women’s game, was the 1999 Women’s World Cup sold to record-setting crowds of spectators, and millions of television viewers based upon a movement grounded in feminist language?

Since women’s athletics continues to be seen as unable to sustain, promote, and market a major female-only sporting event, or to stage a successful tournament,

organizers created a movement<sup>32</sup> – one steeped in empowerment through consumption – that spoke to the masses of past, current, and future generations of female athletes. Second-wave liberal feminist sentiment of empowerment via opportunity, access, and structural advancements provided by Title IX was the simplest of answers. The Women’s World Cup Organizing Committee used postfeminist tropes of progress and opportunity to encourage the connection between Title IX and the Women’s World Cup event (Klein, 1999; Longman, 1999a; Longman, June 11; Sullivan, 1999). As Mary McDonald (2000) argues in her examination of postfeminist discourse used in Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) advertising, the nostalgic remembrance of Title IX invites women and girls to uncritically enjoy the “fruits” of Title IX’s success. De Varona and Messing each naively credit Title IX for the success of the U.S. women’s national team and the Women’s World Cup. De Varona (1999b) wrote of the U.S. Women’s World Cup team as “Title IX babies” who were the first nationally-visible group of women to benefit from a lifetime of Title IX’s enactment (para. 4) while Messing stated that, “Thanks to Title IX...girls now are growing up with the sort of athletic experiences only men used to have...” (quoted in Klein, 1999, para. 16). Journalists weighed in with similar viewpoints. Specifically, *New York Times* journalist, Jere Longman (1999c), wrote, “The World Cup will serve, in large part, as an affirmation of the gender-equity gains made since the passage of Title IX” (p. D1). Thus, in 1999, the cultural value of Title IX remained at an all time high - its significance never in doubt, nor permitted to be questioned.

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<sup>32</sup> I have diligently looked through last five or six men’s world cup pages provided on FIFA.com to see if there are any mission statements in conjunction with their quadrennial tournament. I found none.

Title IX's project of opportunity and access to sport provided a platform to create new consumers (McDonald, 2000). David Andrews (1998) argues that the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) 1996 telecast of the Atlanta Olympics Games, deemed the "Equity Olympics" shaped its coverage around the "hyper-sensitive" female consumer. The Women's World Cup Organizing Committee targeted the notion of the imaginary, liberated female consumer through affective or emotional strategies (McDonald, 2000). To draw the female consumer to the 1999 Women's World Cup the Women's World Cup Committee Organizers drew up a mission statement: "*To stage a BREAKTHROUGH event for women's sports, AND TO INSPIRE the next generation of female athletes (emphasis original)*" (Women's World Cup, 1999, p. 4). The capitalized word of "BREAKTHROUGH" in conjunction with "women's sports" conjures up second-wave feminist sentiments of opportunity and access to the gendered spaces so many female athletes had been denied. It ostentatiously implies that there is only one more structural hurdle to clear for women sports to achieve full equality with men. Yet, the term "to stage" depoliticizes the meaning of this possible breakthrough, signifying the tournament as mere performance and the mission statement as façade. Moreover, the claim "TO INSPIRE" is aimed at women and, effectively, their daughters in order to simultaneously sell tickets and merchandise for the Women's World Cup while also producing the "next generation" of female consumers (McDonald, 2000).

Messing determined the audience for the Women's World Cup would be core soccer fans, teen-age girls and soccer dads. With 7.5 million girls playing the game of soccer in 1999, it became apparent that the largest untapped market was young, teen-age girls (Ryan, 1999). The Women's World Cup Organizing Committee rounded out

marketing efforts straying from Title IX rhetoric, and supplanted notions of individuality within its official slogan “This is *MY* Game, This is *MY* Future, Watch *ME* Play” (emphasis mine) and an official song titled “Because We Want To,” by British teenage pop sensation Billie Piper. Each marketing ploy was chosen for its message of female empowerment (Lines, 1999; Ryan, 1999), but it is the official slogan that was most significant. Through a direct mail and local ad campaign that sought to emotionally connect with mothers, fathers, and daughters of the rising generation of new female athletes, this marketing campaign emotionally connected with individuals through the use of personal language of “ME” and “MY.” Those two words gave the teenage girl a sense of freedom and authenticity to claim soccer and sport as a future choice while her parents, specifically her father, is able to connect with his daughter through sport (Mitchell, 1999). For one such 15-year-old soccer player, the chance to be a part of and feel an emotional connection to the Women’s World Cup was a dream come true:

Megan Dewan...[a] 15-year old from Mahwah (New Jersey), dressed all in red, white and blue, was among thousands of young girls and other soccer fans who turned out to watch the United States women's team play... ‘It really renews my faith, because I know when I get older, I have an option, that I can be anything I want to be, even an athlete,’ she said. ‘Soccer’s my life. It’s my dream to play on the national team’ (McKinley Jr., 1999, D3).

This affective connection of empowerment comes at an economic cost through the consumption of World Cup tickets and merchandise. However, the cultural cost is much greater. The affective language of “ME” and “MY” in the official slogan as well as its

reproduction through the use of “I” by teen-age girls, like Dewan, reduces this so-called feminist movement to the individual self.

To young, aspiring female athletes, the journey to professional athlete then, seems straightforward and effortless, a feat that can be achieved through an act of consumption. Jere Longman (1999f), *New York Times* journalist, discussed Brandi Chastain’s growth into a professional athlete not through hard work and hours of training, but through consuming videos of and attending professional men’s soccer games. Most of the players on the U.S. women’s team loathed watching film, but Chastain was different. She would wake up in the middle of the night and pop in a tape of a Manchester United in order to watch higher-level players and would try to emulate their play in practice or in games. Longman (1999f) noted that, “On this veritable home shopping network, Chastain has picked up the deftness to play with either foot, to bend balls with the inside and outside of her feet and to strike the ball with her head like a fist hitting a punching bag” (p. D5). Invoking the watching of video to the home shopping network is insulting to Chastain as a player. Longman minimizes the years of hard work to improve her technical acumen to an online shopping spree in which she can pick and choose the skills she needs to be successful. Therefore, future players like Megan Dewan can seemingly become professional players, not through hard work and training, but rather buying the right shoes or watching the right video. In the minds of the next generation, Title IX had broken down all gender barriers in sport, and the act of consumption would make all of their girl power dreams come true.

### **They Make How Much?: Continued Inequities Even in the Face of Equality.**

Mary McDonald (2000) argues that the commodification of Title IX as social change deflects attention away from the inequities that still exist in sport. The notion that access continues to be the main issue facing female athletes' aids sport marketers and promoters in the circulation of a consistent empowerment message to consumers. Access is a seemingly simple problem to solve - remove the barriers into male-dominated sport spaces – thus, affording women the opportunity and access to self-fulfillment and autonomy. The mission statement and official slogan for the 1999 Women's World Cup support this notion. The 'BREAKTHROUGH' the Organizing Committee so desperately seeks in its mission statement and the marketing slogan of "This is MY Game, This is MY Future, Watch ME Play" lauds individual achievement and success for women and girls repositioning U.S. Youth Soccer, the USSF, and FIFA as meritocratic realms (McDonald, 2000). This places women's opportunity in sport along a structural binary of success and failure rather than an ideological construction that continues to hinder women's participation and subjectivity in sport.

The U.S. women's national team players reproduce this meritocratic notion in discussions with the media. In a media teleconference only days prior to the start of the Women's World Cup, midfielder Kristine Lilly remarked that "...if we play our best soccer the way we know we can, and do the talking to the media and signing autographs after, then everything gets taken care of on the outside. Our focus is to win it. If we win, I think positive things will come from it" (U.S. Women, 1999c, para. 3). A major disparity, however, loomed large. If the American women won the tournament they would each receive a bonus of \$12,500 from the USSF as compared to the \$380,000 each

American man would have received if they won the 1998 World Cup in France.<sup>33</sup> Again, the women's team chose not to make an issue out of the unconscionable bonus disparity. Brandi Chastain stated, "I don't know what we're worth, but we have gone way beyond what is expected of our players to promote our sport. I think it's going to come around" (Longman, 1999j, SP1). Both players take a passive position in regards to the sexist structure of both the USSF and FIFA as each assumes their access to, participation in, and ultimately, the team's success on the soccer field would eventually afford them pay equality. Self-governed by principles of individual choice and meritocracy firmly grounded in the cultures of the USSF and FIFA, the U.S. women's team focused on self-improvement instead of the large cultural inequities at hand.

The USSF eventually caved to media pressure about the bonus disparity, dug deep into their \$60 million endowment from the successful 1994 World Cup USA, and raised the women's bonus to \$50,000 each (Jere Longman, 1999n). Hank Steinbrecher, Secretary General of the USSF, believed it unfair to compare money between the two

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<sup>33</sup> FIFA doesn't award money to the women because their tournament does not produce the advertising revenue of the men's tournament (Abramowitz, 1999). The cause – the women's game is not nearly as developed as the men. Marla Messing believes this to be fiscally accurate because the women's tournament is such a recent addition to FIFA organizational structure. In 1999, the Women's World Cup was 12 years old while the men's tournament was over 100. Thus, the 1999 women's tournament was not considered to be a big money maker. U.S. Soccer eventually boosted the bonus for winning the Women's World Cup to better reward the achievement and to compensate them for not having any subsidy from FIFA. However, the U.S. men's national team did receive a bonus equal to the women for their last place finish in the 1998 World Cup in France (Abramowitz, 1999). This result is considered one of the greatest disappointments in U.S. Soccer history (Shiple, 1998b; Wagman, 1998)



programs, “If you ask me, we couldn’t pay (the women’s team) enough for what they’ve done for soccer in this country” (Brewington, 1999, para. 7).

Issues with bonus monies are the least of the gendered issues facing the USSF. To support its fledgling sponsored men’s league, Major League Soccer (MLS), the USSF coordinated with the “Nike Road to Pasadena Tour” and the Women’s World Cup Organizing Committee to schedule doubleheaders. Doubleheaders took place during both the Nike tour and the semi-finals of the Women’s World Cup tournament (Klein, 1999). During the 1994 World Cup USA – the U.S. women’s national team did not have any games posted as doubleheaders on the men’s preparatory tour or during the World Cup itself. George Vecsey (1999b), a *New York Times* journalist, summed up the thoughts of most American soccer fans after MLS’s first scheduled doubleheader with the U.S. women’s national team:

Yesterday’s crowd of 23,765 (to watch the U.S. women’s team) might have been bigger if prospective fans had not feared they had to watch the MetroStars first, like taking your medicine before a tasteful dinner. The locals lost to Tampa Bay, 1-0, probably not setting back Major League Soccer more than six or eight years (p. D3).

MLS was struggling to gain a cultural foothold in the American sport market. Yet, in January of 1999, Dr. Bob Contiguglia, President of the USSF, stated in *Soccer Digest* that, “MLS is critical for the development of the sport (in the United States). And for the Federation to be successful, MLS has to be successful” (Collie, 1999). Thus regardless of the success that the women’s national team had at this tournament (on or off the field), they would never be able to carry the cultural weight of soccer’s development

or success in the United States. The women's team and tournament is another avenue through which to sell and promote men's soccer in an already tightly constructed American men's sport market (Markovits & Hellerman, 2004).

Nevertheless, U.S. Soccer is deemed a leader in the development of women's football worldwide. With the U.S. women's 1995 contract set to expire in September of 1999, the USSF and the U.S. women's team forged a "unique" contractual agreement that insured the players would be on the field for the 1999 Women's World Cup. The contract included monthly salaries for all players and a licensing agreement for group pictures. A pregnancy leave policy, which was considered a creative feature of the contract, afforded a player discretion as to when she would cease training/participation, eight weeks of maternity leave and fifty percent of her salary. Also, the agreement placed the U.S. women's team as official spokespersons for the tournaments ensuring that "...USA women's soccer players will be front and center for the promotion of the event, gaining visibility not only for the tournament but for themselves as well" (U.S. Soccer, 1999b, para. 6). This seemingly progressive agenda of access to monthly salaries and a long-fought second-wave liberal feminist crusade for women's rights in the workplace celebrates the USSF as a global innovator and evolutionary. But this discourse also discouraged dialogue about the continued inequities that remain between the USSF's unwavering allegiance to the men's national team program despite the women's clear superiority. Instead, the USSF as a global leader in women's sport, placed personal responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the women's team: on-field success would reap each player the greatest financial reward – far more than the USSF could ever promise.

The relationship between the USSF and the U.S. women's team has always been rocky as prior conflicts over contract negotiations created a vast divide between the two groups. Before the Women's World Cup in 1998, John Langel, a Philadelphia labor lawyer representing the U.S. women's national team, had the foresight to create a limited liability company named the All-American All-Stars. Langel engineered a 12-city indoor victory tour that ran during the months of October to December of 1999. The tour would generate between \$2.3 million and \$2.8 million to be divided equally among the 19 players signed up to compete. If an individual player competed in all twelve competitions she would be guaranteed a minimum of \$121,000. However, this celebratory circuit coincided with a FIFA-USSF planned world victory tour through northern Africa, the Middle East, Caribbean, and Australia. U.S. Soccer threatened to file an injunction to prevent the players from participating in the indoor tour. The USSF argued that any combination of players participating in the tour would constitute the U.S. national team even though they were to call themselves the All-American All-Stars (Schedule, 1999; U.S. Women, 1999d). This action seems contradictory to the "unique" contract signed just months earlier incentivizing each woman to seek opportunities, based on merit, outside of their contractual agreement. Eventually, U.S. Soccer relented and cancelled the conflicting FIFA World Tour in exchange for the players wearing U.S. uniforms, calling themselves the U.S. women's national team, and playing in five Federation-arranged matches in the late fall of 1999 (Schedule, 1999). The Federation did not receive any money from the indoor tour.

The use of postfeminist marketing strategies aided the Women's World Cup Organizing Committee in creating the most successful women's-only sporting event in

history. Their use of Title IX and its signifiers interpolated not only those initially affected by Title IX's enactment, but also a brand new assemblage of young female athletes. Employing second wave language of access and opportunity drew millions to a new message of girl power and empowerment. Unfortunately, these messages of female empowerment rang empty as feminist rhetoric combined with the promotion of consumption heralded an apolitical feminist charge to shopping malls rather than a feminist consciousness.

**Imagine the Possibilities or Not: Drawing a Postfeminist Boundary Around the Game of Soccer.**

The best bet to place in 1999 was on the U.S. women's national team. Not for its expected win in the 1999 Women's World Cup final, but for its appeal to mainstream America – especially teenage girls. According to Donna Lopiano, executive director of the Women's Sports Foundation, the U.S. women's national team had great appeal to middle America and corporate America for the team was “‘pretty much an all-white, little-girl-down-the-street, not-too-tough group’” (Longman, 2000a, p. 272).

The fervor surrounding the U.S. women's national soccer team coincided with the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games where the American women's soccer, basketball, and softball teams each won Gold. The outgrowth of this athletic success was the founding of the WNBA in 1997, the Women's Professional Softball League (WPSL), and the United States Professional Volleyball League (USPVL).<sup>34</sup> The substantial and cultural backing

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<sup>34</sup> The USPVL lasted for only one season, 2002-2003. Established in 1997, the WPSL continues today.

In November of 2002, the WPSL began a rebranding strategy. It began by renaming itself National Pro

of the National Basketball Association set the WNBA apart from the rest. A professional league built upon black female bodies, the WNBA used postfeminist marketing strategies to sell a culturally diverse product to white, middle-class female consumers (McDonald, 2000).

In contrast, the U.S. women's national team seemingly rose from obscurity into an overnight, pop-culture sensation. Keith Cooper, the Director of Communications for FIFA, addressed the team's rapid ascent to celebrity, "They are a cult. But most cults take longer to develop than this one" (Vecsey, 1999e, p. D1). A representation of white, middle-class suburban America, the U.S. women's national team was brimming with "...players who are college-educated, smart, funny, athletic, successful, and attractive" (Longman, 1999j, p. D8). Lauren Whitt, a U-20 national team player, believed the twenty-two women on the senior national team squad literally had it all. "Wow, these women are strong, they're beautiful, they have careers, they have college educations. They conquered the world, so to speak" (quoted in Scoggins, 1999, p. 3). The success of the U.S. women's national team validates the rise of power and popularity in women's sport. In 1999, it seemed female athletes could "have it all" (Cole & Hribar, 1995; Gay, 2012; Lafrance, 1998; McDonald, 2000; McRobbie, 2007; Rosen, 2012).

But the quick rise in popularity to the apex of pop-culture was grounded in the reproduction of a normative postfeminist subject – a white, Western, middle-class heterosexual woman (Butler, 2013; Cole & Hribar, 1995; Lafrance, 1998; Projansky, 2001).

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Fastpitch, and partnered with Major League Baseball as its Official Development partner (a similar approach to the WNBA).

Connecting the U.S. women's team and the game of soccer to suburbia, a national imaginary historically associated with whiteness, denies the racially charged issues of structural racism and in the words of Sara Projansky (2001), "redefine[d] feminism in order to perpetuate heterosexual whiteness as universal" (p. 16). As co-captain Julie Foudy, a white, middle-class, heterosexual player originally from San Diego, Calif., confirmed, "Being feminine was not a goal or a showcase. If people found us attractive, great, but more important we were natural, we were down to earth, we were just like every girl in the stands watching" (Foudy, 2003, p. ix). Foudy's statement lacks a nuanced and complex understanding of culture, as she naïvely articulates the women's soccer imaginary in her own image. (Butler, 2013; Cole & Hribar, 1995; Lafrance, 1998; McDonald, 2000; McRobbie, 2007; Projansky, 2001). In the following pages I examine two commercials "Soccer Barbie" by Mattel that features Mia Hamm, and "Foudy and Chastain" by Bud Light. Each produces a different reading, but accomplishes the same goal – to sell an inclusive subjectivity while subtly reinforcing the notions of whiteness, femininity, and heterosexuality as feminism.

Mia Hamm is the epitome of the All-American girl – white, heterosexual and attractive with a slender, athletic body. She embodies the American dream, overcoming clubfoot as a toddler to develop into the most hardworking, competitive, and talented player in the world. The attractiveness of Hamm and other players on the women's national team is relevant to their popularity. The feminine appearance of a successful female athlete tempers their outstanding athletic achievements in order to reduce fears of masculinization. The famous ponytail of the "girls of summer" was incorporated into the official 1999 Women's World Cup logo. The ponytail is encoded with femininity that

saves Hamm and others who sport this hairstyle from the masculine activities they display on the field (Longman, 2000a; Schultz, 2014).

Hamm and her signature ponytail are encoded not only with female beauty, but also compulsory heterosexuality, reifying heterosexuality as normative and invisible (Cole & Hribar, 1995; Rich, 1996). While Mia Hamm's heterosexuality was not contested, it was a constant point of interest for the media. She married her first husband, Christian Corry, a Marine helicopter pilot she met in class at UNC, when she was 22. Although Hamm and Corry were rarely on the same continent, he remained a consistent figure in articles about her. For example, *People Magazine* quoted him when she was named as one of the 50 Most Beautiful People, and President Clinton requested the U.S. military to fly him from Japan to Southern California in order to see his wife play in the 1999 Women's World Cup final. But, it is Hamm's association with the toy company Mattel and "Soccer Barbie" that sold middle-class, heterosexual whiteness to the masses.

Hamm, however, was not the first female athlete to be used in Barbie's endorsement of women's athletics. In 1997, WNBA New York Liberty star, Rebecca Lobo – a white, middle-class, heterosexual athlete – was the lone representation for WNBA Barbie for a professional league built upon female bodies, over 60 percent of which were black. In fact, WNBA Barbie sported three "white" iterations – Barbie, Teresa, and Kira – and only one "black" figure named Christie.

Since Barbie's inception in 1959, she has had many prototypes, even in the arena of physical culture. There was Gold Medal Barbie in 1976, who wore a red, white, and blue leotard in which she seemingly could win any female Olympic event, and Great Shape Barbie in 1984, complete with exercise equipment, that shifted her focus from

winning medals to individual corporeal improvement. In the early 1990s, Barbie ventured into skiing and inline skating, but it was not until the 1996 Olympics propelled women's team sports into the national spotlight that Barbie was allowed to play with "others."

Over the years, Barbie's friends have moved beyond just her cousin, Skipper and boyfriend, Ken. In the fall of 1990, Mattel announced a new marketing strategy to boost its sales: the corporation would "go ethnic," launching black and hispanic versions. Although multicultural Barbies already existed – Mattel had introduced Ebony Christie in 1980 – it targeted Afrocentric publications and Latin-oriented shows, doubling sales within the year. Anne Ducille (1994) argues that Mattel's introduction of Ebony Christie in 1980 fanned out "...into a rainbow coalition of colors, races, ethnicities and nationalities, [but] all of those dolls look remarkably like the stereotypical white Barbie, modified only by a dash of color and change of clothes" (p. 51). It came as no surprise then, in 1997 when Barbie became entangled in a racial controversy. Mattel and Nabisco teamed up and distributed both a white and black version of the Oreo Barbie. This corporate connection moved Oreo's cultural definition beyond the delicious chocolate cookie with a cream filled center to the derogatory term for a black person who "acts white" – black on the outside, but white on the inside. Barbie's foray into professional sport (i.e. WNBA) could not handle another Oreo mishap; thus, Lobo's endorsement of WNBA Barbie, and more so, her whiteness, helped to temper any racial anxieties, which produced a representation of women's professional team sports as an inclusive, multicultural space.



Soccer Barbie continued this trend. Mattel signed a deal with ISL Marketing and R.O.I Marketing, Inc. to be an exclusive representative for the 1999 Women's World Cup. Along with Hamm's endorsement, Mattel released Women's World Cup Soccer Barbie® (Licensing, 1999). Soccer Barbie comes complete with a goal for 5 on 5 games, a soccer ball, a water bottle to keep hydrated, and a towel to dab any sweat from her brow. Soccer Barbie's looks like the standard Barbie, but the addition of a tab on her back permits her to be a more active subject. Moving this tab up and down controls Barbie's legs enabling her to kick the ball or raise her arms to practice throw-ins. This physicality moves her from a passive to an active actor connecting her with a new generation of active, sport-playing females. However, the underlying message of whiteness and an unattainable corporeal femininity remain strikingly exclusionary.

The consumer can choose a blond or brunette doll – Barbie or Kira - with a red, white, and blue short or long sleeve t-shirt and shorts that carry the Official Women's World Cup Logo along with shin guards, socks and black cleats. Non-white versions are available, but these models do not sport the red, white, and blue; rather, they sport a green and white long sleeved shirt and yellow shorts with the Official Women's World Cup Logo. This demarcation permits the non-white Soccer Barbie's – Christie and Teresa – to belong to a postfeminist soccer imaginary that rejects an all-white, American monoculture. Christie and Teresa represent a multicultural marketing effort tied to the global and nationalistic nature of the Women's World Cup, but they are denied, the opportunity to participate as representations of the U.S. further constructing the women's national team within this postfeminist context as white.

Hamm's Soccer Barbie commercial begins on a suburban soccer field with two young white girls in pink shirts and blue shorts, receiving balls out of the air, technically accomplished in their performance, who declare, "I can be a champion of World Cup soccer!" A shot of Soccer Barbie in front of the goal kicking away a ball to safety is overlaid with the audio of "I can be a goalie like Soccer Barbie." Finally, the girls announce they can be "A power forward" just as a medium shot focuses in on Mia Hamm striking a ball with perfect form as she says, "Like Me!" As Hamm meets with the girls, the ad cuts to the product to demonstrate how it works. The musical score starts, "Be a team player. Be your best. Be a champion. Be a Star. Be Anything, Anything!" Lined up in a row, systematically arranged from lightest to darkest skin, the darkest being the farthest from the viewer, the dolls sequentially strike a ball with their foot. The dolls mirror the skin color of the extra players in the ad. The multicultural team works together along with their Barbie dolls to score a goal, but it seems that only the two young white girls get to celebrate after the victory with pizza and Mia Hamm. Finally, after the young white girls are presumable finished with their pizza party with Mia Hamm, they continue to play with Soccer Barbie. As Soccer Barbie scores a goal, the two girls raise their hands in triumph and shout, "Yes!" (1998 Women's World Cup, 2009).

The postfeminist language of choice and an authentic self are carefully crafted into the beginning of the ad in order to connect pre-teens and their parents watching to neoliberal notions of individual success. The pre-teen white subjects are active verbal and physical participators: through Soccer Barbie they can live out their dreams and be like Mia Hamm and do, literally, "anything." The multicultural bend of this Soccer

Barbie commercial submerges these active white subjects in a colorblind space that allows for each individual, regardless of color, to take part in a postfeminist, post-racial soccer imaginary. This imaginary then, can identify as a racially progressive, gender-blind nation. However, the end of the commercial reaffirms the exclusionary nature of postfeminist culture. Mia Hamm eating pizza with only the two white pre-teen actors reaffirms the space as white and middle class. The girl actors are prepubescent, thus, their sexualities remain innocuous; rather, it is the presence of Hamm and Soccer Barbie that reinforces a postfeminist culture as heterosexual. Finally, the exclamatory “Yes!” shouted by the young girls as Soccer Barbie, white with blond hair, scores a goal literally defends the carefully constructed ideological boundaries that encompass postfeminism and its multicultural ally.

Mia Hamm and Soccer Barbie are not the only individuals selling this notion, nor is the audience confined to just young girls and women. This postfeminist image is also sold to young or middle-aged men who may just be the father of one of the young girls in the Soccer Barbie commercial. Keith Bruce, head of Sports Marketing at Foote, Cone & Belding in San Francisco, Calif. noted that the U.S. women’s national team “...got men to watch their game. Men never wanted to tune into women's sports before” (quoted in Ackerman, 1999, p. 42.)

As Christopherson et al. (2002) and Shugart (2003) argue the U.S. women’s national team members were sexualized through media representations in order to attract male viewers. These images gained an immense amount of cultural visibility for the team. In the 1999 *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Issue, Julie Foudy was photographed in a bikini jostling for a soccer ball with her husband and former head coach at Stanford, Ian

Sawyers (Julie Foudy, 1999). Also, in an issue of *Gear Magazine*, Brandi Chastain posed nude wearing only a pair of cleats and holding a strategically placed soccer ball (Garcia-parra, 1999). Both of these magazines are geared for men between the ages of 18 and 35 who were primed to view women's athletes and their cultural arrival (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003).

After Brandi Chastain appeared on the *David Letterman Show*, the team sent him a picture wearing only *Late Night* t-shirts. Letterman called them "Babe City" and "soccer mammas" while proclaiming himself the team's owner and spiritual guru (Longman, 1999f; Longman, 1999k). Foudy sarcastically called the team "booters with hooters" (quoted in Sullivan, 1999, p.62) while Chastain noted the team is a group of "...women who like to knock people's heads off, and then put on a skirt and go dance" (quoted in Reilly, 1999, para. 6). These sarcastic third-wave accounts of femininity and gender contrast mightily with the seemingly crucial second-wave signifiers of Title IX that have granted these players access to the playing field. Sarah Gamble notes, "...third wave feminists feel at ease with contradiction. Because they have been brought up with competing feminist structures, they accept pluralism as a given" (cited in Heywood & Dworkin, 2003, p. 10). Yet, this contradiction creates a well-defined and recognizable binary framework that continues to privilege a white, middle-class, heterosexual, feminist subject while obscuring the ideological and material consequences of compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, 2013; Gill, 2007).

As Foucault (1978) notes, sex and sexuality are increasingly understood in regards to individual rights: "The 'right' to life, to one's body, to health, to happiness, to the satisfaction of needs, and beyond all the oppressions or 'alienations,' the 'right' to

rediscover what one is and all that one can be” (p. 145). In this context, rights-based political movements have increased in number, but tend to employ processes of consumer culture to achieve political and material goals. Therefore, postfeminist strategies connote not only a neoliberal celebration of choice and individualism and the supposed success of the women’s movement, but also a sex-positive, yet racially exclusive feminist legacy (Butler, 2013; Duggan, 2003). This notion is evident in a Bud Light commercial starring both Foudy and Chastain.

Bud Light, an Official Corporate Sponsor of the Women’s World Cup, produced a commercial with co-captain Julie Foudy and Brandi Chastain. In this ad Foudy and Chastain are partners in fighting crime, satirically akin to both the male crime fighting duo of *Starsky and Hutch*, and the beautiful and stylish female crime fighters of *Charlie’s Angels*.<sup>35</sup> An upbeat 1970s musical score of jazz horns and bass guitars plays as an orange muscle car chases a fleet of foot, male criminal wearing high-heeled boots, a long fur coat, bell-bottom pants, and an oversized fedora. As he runs down an industrial alley, Foudy and Chastain, shown in a split screen, are behind the wheel of a Ford Gran Torino and bearing down on their perpetrator. A quick edit transitions to another split screen – this time with actions shots of both players during a game – with a deep throated

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<sup>35</sup> This ad also elicits similar characteristics to the show *Cagney & Lacey*. As an attractive duo, Foudy and Chastain could represent the brunette Det. Mary Beth Lacey and the blond-haired Det. Sgt. Christine Cagney, respectively. However, unlike this sexualized ad for Bud Light, *Cagney & Lacey* was part of a programming plot that seemed to veer away from a sexy crime-fighting plot by targeting workingwomen. Shows like *Cagney & Lacey*, *Murphy Brown*, and *Kate and Allie* sought to celebrate women’s status as professionals through serious storylines and less objectifying apparel (Levine, 2008)

narration of “They play soccer by day, and fight crime by night – they are the baddest mamma’s on the planet. Foudy and Chastain.”

The commercial continues with Foudy and Chastain, in their white U.S. national team uniforms striking soccer balls at the criminal who is holding a hostage. With deft skill and power, the balls strike the offender, freeing the hostage, and they seize the crook. Foudy and Chastain have individual introductions that focus on their beauty and grace. In slow motion, Foudy steps out of the muscle car with yellow sunglasses and Jaclyn Smith hair while in the next frame Chastain holding a soccer ball smiles and shakes her long Farrah Fawcett locks. The commercial ends with Foudy and Chastain standing with one foot on their felon, as he admits, “You chicks are bad!” The players agree with him, strike a ball at his car - blowing it up - and finish in a freeze frame clasping hands and smiling (Bud Light, 2002).

The Bud Light commercial is steeped in postfeminist images. The initial characterization of Foudy and Chastain as male characters, Starsky and Hutch, positions these female athletes as equals to “bad ass” male crime fighters – equal in strength, stamina, and smarts – as they pummel the felon with the swift, but powerful onslaught of soccer balls. Action shots of Foudy and Chastain in national team games along with the low, rugged voice-over reproduces them as active actors in motion, a position usually held for male athletes, but a subtle nod towards the notion of gender equality (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003). However, this commercial quickly flips this narrative and puts Foudy

and Chastain in good company with those who have reconstructed the feminist legacy of the 1970s *Charlie's Angels* television show.<sup>36</sup>

Elana Levine (2008) argues that the “remaking” of *Charlie's Angels* over the last 30 years signifies the “remaking” of the discourses surrounding feminism and femininity within a shifting historical context. The reimagining of this show through the use of Foudy and Chastain, national team soccer players, provides another site to interrogate how postfeminism has become naturalized and hegemonically entrenched within American society. The original program was grounded upon liberal feminist ideals, but structured around the exploitation of its white stars’ sex appeal (i.e. glamorous hair and makeup). However, like most of the 1990s rebooted versions, this Bud Light commercial uses parody to construct Foudy and Chastain, and therefore the U.S. women’s team, as beyond second wave notions of feminism (Gill, 2007; Levine, 2008).

The commercial places the athletes in a 1970s context making their presence and their athletic ability laughable. It is almost an insult that Foudy and Chastain drive a muscle car to track down a criminal. They are professional athletes, signified by their national team uniforms; thus, they are sure to have the stamina and musculature to chase down and catch a male perpetrator running in high heels and a heavy fur coat. Yet it is the cut to a split screen with on-field actions shots that foretells their success. In this scene, the athletes demonstrate their technical, tactical and athletic prowess

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<sup>36</sup> Parodies of *Charlie's Angels* have been addressed on *Baywatch*, *Spice World*, *The Jenny McCarthy Show*. Other television shows that drew from the *Angels* girl power message were *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, and *Alias* along with the turn of millennium *Charlie's Angels* feature films (Levine, 2008).

foreshadowing the apprehension of the felon through proficient technical skill. These skills would not have been forged without the liberal feminist legislation of Title IX. But Fouady and Chastain are role models of a new generation – one that has reaped the rewards of liberal feminist action – seemingly expanding the discourse to include gender.

Moreover, this Bud Light commercial constructs contemporary women as beyond second wave ideals of femininity. This is expressed most overtly through the sexualized representation of the Angels (Gill, 2007; Levine, 2008). Noticeable from the beginning of the commercial, neither Fouady nor Chastain’s hair is pulled back into the recognizable ponytail of many female athletes. Instead, their free-flowing hair is accentuated, with the use of wigs, to draw attention to their femininity. Wearing their “all-white” kit during the capture of the assailant is a subtle, but a deliberate attempt to link Fouady and Chastain to an “angelic” form of femininity captured in the title of the original show. In addition, the individual introductory shots in slow motion focus solely on their attractive faces while simultaneously mocking the hair and beauty of Angels’ Jaclyn Smith and Farrah Fawcett.

The element of parody rests upon Levine’s (2008) idea of “sexy femininity” (p. 383). She suggests that while sexy femininity was required for the Angel’s to achieve feminist success, it is not necessary for contemporary women like Fouady and Chastain. Their embodiment of sexy femininity mocks the Angels, and plays with contradiction and the notion of pluralism while promoting a sex-positive image (Butler, 2013; Gill, 2007; Heywood & Dworkin, 2003; Levine, 2008). However, the end result is another binary construction of gender. Gender is produced as a “product of nature or of choice,” an ostensible dichotomy of utter constraint and absolute agency, but “...not a prerequisite for success in a ‘man’s world’” (Levine, 2008, p. 383). Therefore, a woman’s success and



self-determination are based upon individual choice and merit. Caught in the interstices of white feminist discourse, Foudu and Chastain among others within the postfeminist soccer imaginary must “choose” whether their femininity is a constraint of biological essentialism or a product of current neoliberal ideals that void any politicized feminism. Ironically, this fabricated binary leaves no choice for women but to bare a sexy femininity, one that continues to reinforces heterosexuality, femininity, and feminism as equals.

This myth that women could or should “have it all,” continues to reign supreme. Mia Hamm represents the ideal athletic woman – superstar player, attractive, white, middle-class values, fit, and married. Even within the multicultural environment of Mia Hamm’s Soccer Barbie commercial, the subtle reproduction of a universal heterosexual whiteness seems glaringly obvious (Projansky, 2001). Mia Hamm’s endorsement of Soccer Barbie constrains our understanding of who is allowed to, and more importantly, who is not allowed to play the game of soccer. This seemingly empowering divide remains empty as the connection to Barbie, an exclusionary figure of ideal beauty standards, disempowers even those who “fit” this imaginary. However, this subjectivity offers the fantasy of power, in which women or girls of any and all social identities and who wish to be part of the U.S. soccer imaginary, police one another and themselves, in the name of empowerment. The mediated representation and marketing of a universal postfeminist subjectivity to women and young girls, thus, maintains its cultural saliency. But the secret about women’s sports, according to Marla Messing, is that men are their major supporters (Klein, 1999). The insidious cultural reproduction of postfeminist ideology in male-driven markets interpolates a new assemblage of “feminist” subjects. In

a post-Title IX context, men who support women's athletics are considered progressive and gender-blind. But the use of images of 'sexy femininity' continue to ideologically contain both women and men by reinforcing a limited version of femininity, and thus, masculinity through postfeminist apolitical notions of gender and sexuality.

## **Conclusion**

During the summer of 1999, a group of 22 women captured the attention of the American nation. Millions of soccer fans, old and new alike, attended games and tailgates or watched televised games at home. Families and friends gathered on July 11, 1999, to watch the final game of the tournament – U.S.A vs. China – at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif. As two evenly matched teams battled for 90 minutes to a 0 to 0 tie. After two grueling 20-minute overtime periods that also ended in a stalemate, penalty kicks decided the winner. A triumphant save from goalkeeper, Briana Scurry, and a miraculous strike from Brandi Chastain won the U.S. women's national team the Women's World Cup. On this day, women were at the top of the athletic world.

Andrei Markovitz and Steven Hellerman (2004) contend the on-field success of the 1999 World Cup carved out a niche for women's soccer in the cultural sport space of the United States. Throughout the tournament, media audiences rivaled those of the big four sports of basketball, football, baseball, or hockey, and far surpassed all of the coverage the men's professional league in the United States, MLS had received in its six years of existence. According to Markovitz and Hellerman (2004) the rise of women's soccer is a form of "exceptionalism" for its ability to succeed in a niche unoccupied by men. But categorizing women's soccer as "exceptional" is a disservice to the legacy of

this team. Rather, this chapter examined the U.S. women's team as an economic (Harvey, 2008) and cultural (Duggan, 2003; Foucault, 2008; Rose, 1997) strategy.

Examining women's soccer as a shifting social construct rather than a fixed absolute creates a critical space to interrogate various discourses surrounding the U.S. women's team. The U.S. women's team's on-field success expanded the cultural sporting space to incorporate women, as a niche market – an important aspect of an ever-expanding neoliberal economy (Harvey, 2008). The swell of women's sports marketing throughout the mid-1990s combined with the success of women's teams at the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games and an emerging neoliberal marketplace at the turn of the millennium was characterized by a context rich in consumer confidence while producing tropes of female empowerment and “girl power” (McDonald, 2000).

But these tropes of female empowerment and “girl power” are problematic. The Women's World Cup Organizing Committee, Official Sponsors, the USSF, the media, and the U.S. women's national team themselves enthusiastically and uncritically adopted these postfeminist notions. Mission statements and official slogans used the Title IX expressions of access and opportunity to render the “girl” athlete as a significant commodity and worthy of attention. This ideological language of rugged individualism and the authentic self inspired young girls and teens to strive for their dreams while gender inequities and economic disparities in sport continued to expand both nationally and globally (Cole & Hribar, 1995, LaFrance, 1998; McRobbie, 2007; McDonald, 2000). Young girls and women could not perceive these inequitable disparities for the postfeminist dream promises them a lifestyle in which they can “have it all” (Butler, 2013; Gay, 2012; McRobbie, 2007; Projansky, Rosen, 2012).

This particular notion of “having it all” has been misattributed to feminism. Individual self-fulfillment was to be a result of structural and ideological changes within culture, not the sole purpose of the varied feminist movements (Rosen, 2012). Still, as this chapter demonstrates, the subjectivity of individuality central to feminist vision of liberated womanhood, foreclosing a space for complex and varied subjectivities. Instead, this denial produces and circulates a culture of homogeneity – a culture that subtly constructs, but then vehemently protects the limits of acceptable womanhood – disallowing bodies marked as “other” (Cole & Hribar, 1995; Foucault, 1995; LaFrance, 1998). Thus, the marketing of the U.S. women’s national team along with their win at the 1999 Women’s World Cup suggests the retrenchment of feminist understandings in American sporting culture. However, this uncritical embrace of postfeminist and multicultural notions by sport marketers, the U.S. women’s national team, and the American public recycles and elevates a depoliticized version of a white, hierarchical, liberal feminist politics of the second-wave over a more complex and intersectional feminist approach by women of color (Hill Collins, 2004; hooks, 2000; The Combahee River, 1983). Therefore, in a postfeminist context, “having it all” continues to be preserved only for those who check the correct identity boxes and fit neatly into a narrowly constructed subjectivity – white, middle-class, and heterosexual.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **A BLACK FLY IN WHITE MILK: THE 1999 WOMEN'S WORLD CUP, BRIANA SCURRY AND THE POLITICS OF INCLUSION**

The dimensions of a soccer goal are eight feet tall by 24 feet wide. The white posts and crossbar are extensions of the end line, which help to define the field of play. The net, extending out of the field of play, symbolizes either triumph or defeat, as soccer balls become entwined in its rapture. It is this rapture that goalkeepers are trained to prevent. Goalkeepers, any age, size, and with varying levels of experience, must defend the same goal. Individual training can help catching and diving techniques while strategic tactical training can facilitate proficient angle play and confident decision-making. But when a goalkeeper is to face a penalty kick, throw any and all training out the window. Defending a penalty kick is one of the most difficult athletic feats in sport for even the most semi-athletic person could poke a ball past a well-trained goalkeeper (Wahl, 1999d). Starting at an enormous disadvantage, a goalkeeper must stand on the goal line and protect 192 square feet. They are allowed to move laterally along the goal line, but would be in violation of the laws of the game if they step forward before the ball is struck. The attacking player begins with the ball placed a mere 12-yards away and is allowed to approach the ball at any speed. A well-struck ball can travel from the penalty mark to the goal in about a half-second, somewhere in the vicinity of 60-80 miles per hour (Mihoces, 2003). Now imagine these odds as you stand on the goal line staring at an opposing player 12-yards away on the biggest sport stage in the world – the World Cup. This was Briana Scurry's reality.

The referee's whistle blew, ending the second overtime period of the Women's World Cup final in a tie, 0-0. Penalty kicks would decide the winner. The Chinese won

the coin toss and elected to shoot first. The first two rounds ended in a tense, 2-2 deadlock as Chinese players Xie Huilin and Qiu Haiyan, and U.S. players Carla Overbeck and Joy Fawcett all made their penalty kicks (Longman, 2000a). Goalkeeper Briana Scurry did not recognize the first two shooters, but as the third shooter, Liu Ying, head down and shoulders drooped, placed the ball on the penalty marker, Scurry immediately recognized her as an outside midfielder who had been running on the flank for 120 minutes. Recognizing her exhaustion, Scurry stared at her and said to herself, “This one is mine” (quoted in Vecsey, 1999f, para. 2).

Scurry did not unlock her eyes from Liu Ying as she crouched into her starting position on the goal line, and waited. As the whistle blew, Ying tentatively approached the ball and Scurry advanced off of the goal line in two quick steps. Ying drove the ball in the air to the lower right hand corner. With her feet set on the ground, Scurry powered herself to the left and propelled her body into the air. Parallel to the ground, Scurry extended both her arms as long as she could make them, and parried the ball with her gloved hands around the post and out of bounds. Pure emotion and intensity erupted from Scurry’s body as she jumped to her feet, pumped her arms up and down yelling to her teammates, “I’m a big badass. Make your kick, I set it up for you” (quoted in Longman, 2000a, p. 272). With the score now tied, 4-4, Brandi Chastain, the final shooter, jogged to the penalty marker. Without even a glance at the Chinese goalkeeper, Chastain calmly approached the ball and struck it with her left foot. As the ball hit the back of the net, Chastain fell to her knees, ripped off her jersey baring her now legendary black Nike sports bra and chiseled stomach to the crowd, a field of photographers, and the world.

The victory solidified the Women's World Cup as the most visible, most successful, and as it turns out, the most marketed and commercialized women's sporting event in history. For three incredible weeks of tournament play, the Women's World Cup positioned soccer, and more importantly, the U.S. women's national team, within the rigid American sport vernacular of football, basketball, baseball, and ice hockey (Markovitz & Hellerman, 2003).

In this chapter, I examine Briana Scurry, the U.S. women's national team goalkeeper and the only black player in the starting lineup, within the context of the media coverage of the 1999 Women's World Cup. Scurry, as a text, is a site of difference. She stands in stark contrast to her white, pony-tailed teammates who freely roam the pitch. In her own words she is "the fly in the milk" (quoted in Longman, 2000a, p. 254).

Scurry's world-class save created an opportunity for the U.S. women's national team to win the Women's World Cup. Yet, media attention was aimed at Brandi Chastain perhaps because as a goalkeeper, Scurry can only save a game, but never win a game. After Chastain's game winning penalty kick, American Broadcast Channel (ABC) television cameras focused on the throngs of white, pony-tailed players celebrating at the top of the 18-yard box, and her winning penalty kick and celebration were plastered on the front page of national newspapers and magazines<sup>37</sup>, and was even the cover of *Sports Illustrated's* 1999 "The Year in Pictures" edition (Colson, 1999).

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<sup>37</sup>. Here is a short list of the national newspapers and magazines articles that used Brandi Chastain as their cover photo: Lieber, J. (1999, July 12). Women's Sports Take Giant Leap. *USA Today*, 1C; Longman, J. (1999m). China Loses After 2 Scoreless Hours on Penalty Kicks: Refusing to Wilt, U.S. Wins Soccer

Scurry, was nowhere to be found in the TV coverage. During the medal ceremony, even as Scurry was being awarded her medal, the cameras panned to soccer star, Mia Hamm. ABC denied anything racial in its after-game coverage, but said it did regret not paying more attention to Scurry (Kaufman, 1999). Photos of Scurry's efforts graced the front pages of only a few regional newspapers, some of which were black newspapers.<sup>38</sup> Shortly after the historic win, *The Wall Street Journal* and black publications of *Ebony* and *Jet* wrote stories on the lack of media attention Scurry received (Kaufman, 1999; Kinnon, 2000; Team USA, 1999). Each article referred not only to the written press, but also the television coverage of the on-the-field celebration and awards ceremony. Moreover, the lack of coverage left many African-American soccer fans disappointed that "...a woman who is becoming a role model to young black soccer players is being overshadowed by the attention paid to her white teammates" (Team USA, 1999, p. 49).

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Title. *New York Times*, 1, 18; Wahl, G. (1999, July 19). Out of This World with the Cup on the Line, a Last-Second Hunch and a Clutch Left Foot Lifted the U.S. to a Breathtaking Victory Over China. *Sports Illustrated*, 26, 84; Starr, M., & Brant, M. (1999, July 19). Girls Rule! Inside the Amazing World Cup Victory. *Newsweek*, 134, 46-54; McDowell, D., & Wahl, G. (1999, June). The Home Team: Women's World Cup Preview. (1999, Summer). *Sports Illustrated for Women*, 62-73.

<sup>38</sup> Here is a short list of the regional newspapers articles that highlighted Briana Scurry in their cover photos: Harris, B. (1999, July 15). Scurry Rocks: U.S. Women Win World Cup on Penalty Kicks; Scurry Makes Pivotal Save. *Los Angeles Sentinel*, 1; The Great Wall. (1999, July 12). *Chicago Defender*, 1; Dohrmann, G. Dream Save; Scurry's Block Opens Door to Title. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 1.



The media covering the 1999 Women's World Cup suggests to the public how Scurry belonged on this "all-white team". Dialogue about her race derailed into language that focused on her childhood growing up in the "lily-white-suburbs" of Minneapolis, in which, according to her own accounts, she did not experience any incidents of racism (Longman, 2000a; Wahl, July 12, 1999); her reserved and non-confrontational persona (Kinnon, 2000; Wahl, 1999c; Philip Wylie, 2003a) muting any potential stereotypes of the angry black woman (Vertinsky & Captain, 1998; Hill Collins, 2004) and the discourse of goalkeepers as unsung heroes positioned outside of the star discourse (Kaufman, 1999; Wahl, 1999c). Scurry is located in a long-standing discourse on race and gender. Black women have faced racially gendered prejudices from the antebellum period to the post-Civil Rights era – the mammy, the jezebel, the sapphire, the matriarch, and the welfare queen. These stereotypes, which materialized through Western colonial discourse, continue to morph into new ones for women athletes of color situated within in the post-civil rights era (Hill Collins, 2004; Springer, 2007).

In this chapter, I argue that the mediated representation of the U.S. women's national team along with the construction of a homogenizing team culture reproduced and protected white, middle class norms (Cole & Hribar, 1995; LaFrance, 1998; McRobbie, 2007; Projansky, 2001; Springer, 2007). How then, can Scurry be understood within this white postfeminist discourse? I contend that media representations of Scurry's black body are tempered by postfeminist ideals and a post-racial discourse and colorblind rhetoric. Henry Giroux (2004) terms this sort of racial discourse as "new racism," and its mediated application helps to advance a particular discourse on race and gender in women's athletics that helped to market the U.S. women's national team to the American

public. These are discourses that understand success in individual terms and deny the continued existence of gender and racial barriers. Thus the critical analyses that had been organized around feminist and antiracist politics of the civil-rights era are replaced with an apolitical model of equality. The contradictory representation of Scurry provides a site to explore these complicated issues.

### **For White Girls Only? Soccer and the Politics of Exclusion**

The steady growth and popularity of women's soccer in the United States can be attributed to the consistency of U.S. national team players Mia Hamm, Michelle Akers, Kristine Lilly, Joy Fawcett, Carla Overbeck and Julie Foudy. Foundational bedrocks of the women's national team program, these six players were on the teams that won the 1991 Women's World Championship for the M&M Cup in Guangdong, China, and placed third in the 1995 Women's World Cup held in Sweden (United States Roster, 1999). They remain essential to the success of the team as each filled a specific role on the starting roster in 1999. Moreover, seven additional players were on the Olympic team that won the inaugural soccer tournament at the Atlanta Games in 1996 (United States Roster, 1999). For three years, the 1999 roster had sweat, tackled, and headed their way to the Women's World Cup. This type of continuity is unprecedented in professional sport. With women's soccer still in its infancy in the U.S. and around the world, consistency in player personnel was imperative to success. However, it was the same continuity that contained the team, each player, and women's soccer within a white, middle-class, postfeminist context denying opportunities of multicultural diversity and understanding.

Without a doubt, the 1999 U.S. women's national team was a unique group of women. Never before had a women's team playing a contact sport garnered so much attention on a national or global scale. Rather, media tend to focus on subjective, individual sports that emphasize beauty, grace, and femininity. Women athletes are problematic as they violate gender norms just by stepping on a playing field, but the ideological implications of this violation are more easily contained when athletes are a singular entity and remain within the boundaries of gender norms (Birrell & Theberge, 1994; Cahn, 1994). Instead, a team presents a conundrum – the possibility of not just one, but a group of players that may resist or challenge the boundaries of traditional femininity. Those athletes who defy conventional gender norms may pollute the narrowly constructed feminine and heterosexual team space tainting it with images of the “mannish lesbian” (Cahn, 1994, p. 175). This notion puts each player, the team, and women's soccer's identity under sexual suspicion. But mediated representations of athletes continue to refute this image through proof of heterosexual success (Cahn, 1994; Kane, 2011; Shugart, 2003).<sup>39</sup> The U.S. women's team provided the public and the media a “bullet-proof” heterosexual image. The U.S. team did not incite scrutiny for they were,

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<sup>39</sup>. Sport historian, Susan Cahn (1994) details the genealogical rise of the “lesbian athlete” in her book titled *Coming On Strong: Gender Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport*. By contextualizing the twentieth-century, Cahn traces the complicated history between gender and sport, in which she uncovers the seeds of contemporary versions of gender ideology in sports. Based upon notions of the “muscle moll” and the “mannish lesbian,” contemporary female athletes must continually prove their heterosexuality both on and off the playing field.

“‘normal,’ ...proper role models for all the girls who will buy shoes and gear (and eventually cosmetics that won't run or cake late in the match?)” (Lipsyte, 1999, p. SP 13).

As a characteristically socialist sport, the game of soccer does not comply with many of the ideals of a contemporary neoliberal U.S. democracy (Sugden, 1994). Therefore, the team’s trademark grace and congeniality were combined with postfeminist notions in order to appeal to American cultural values of individualism and self-discipline. Tony DiCicco, head coach of the women’s national team, stated in the *Chicago Sun Times* article titled “Winning All that Matters to Women’s Soccer Team” that, “‘This is a unique group of women. It’s unique on a lot of different levels. It’s a product of its individual selves and self-discipline, and vision”” (quoted in Slezak, 1999, para. 18). This remark permits all consumers to connect to this team as a group of individuals working to achieve a common goal. The team’s conduct on the field is regulated through disciplining their bodies and minds to foster success on the field. The notion of individual self-discipline to achieve success is not only positioned with professional athletes, but also is a mechanism of a “self-steering” American culture (Rose, 1996). Therefore, the American public can identify with this team of disciplined and hardworking, *successful* soccer players rather than focus on their gender.

This conception can be a difficult pill to swallow, even in this “girl power” infused context, for women athletes cannot be constructed as a symbol for national economic ideals. Rather, this type of rugged individualism has been connected to the most visible male athletes in U.S. sport, e.g. Michael Jordan (Andrews, 1996; McDonald, 1996). Instead, these individual female athletes and their success need to be tempered by a singular group identity that reproduces gender norms (Birrell & Theberge, 1994; Cahn,

1994; Cole & Hribar, 1995, McDonald, 2000). DiCicco stated, ““The players are better individuals when they’re with the team than when they are apart...”” (quoted Slezak, 1999, para. 11). Again, an individual female athlete, such as Mia Hamm, cannot be constructed as a symbol of masculine play and national economic ideals. Rather, ““individuals”” are resituated in the context of team to mitigate any possible gender violation. It is this subtle suggestion by DiCicco, the media, and the team – themselves - to place the U.S. women’s national team back within the boundaries of gender that is troublesome.

The notion of “team” can be read and conceptualized differently when comparing the men and women’s version of the game. Soccer, the ultimate players game, underscores cooperative play in order to advance the ball or defend space on the field. To be successful, each individual must understand and commit to team tactics on the pitch and an overall team culture off the field. In the men’s game, superior individual players are encouraged to produce a spectacle on the field. For example, Lionel Messi is noted for his ability to dribble through numerous defenders in tight spaces while Cristiano Ronaldo is known for his savvy ability to fake out a player through various feints and step-overs.<sup>40</sup> U.S. national team player, Mia Hamm was singled out in this same manner, but with a few additional terms of endearment (Jones, Murrell, & Jackson, 1999). On the field, Hamm is a fierce goal scorer and competitor, but off the field, she is

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<sup>40</sup> Both men are considered part of soccer’s contemporary group of elite players. Off of the field the two could not be more different. Lionel Messi is quiet, demure, and private while Ronaldo enjoys celebrity and the many benefits of this lifestyle. However, because each performs masculinity on the field to such an elite level, Messi and Ronaldo escapes the ideological control that most female athletes face.

depicted as shy, insecure, selfless, humble, and the first to deflect attention away from herself to her teammates. She, unlike male athletes, must first and foremost demonstrate a care for others rather than self.

In order to be true to a feminine morality, a female athlete must emphasize self-sacrifice and teamwork. In 1999, Jere Longman of the *New York Times* wrote of Mia Hamm, “While she accepts that she is a pioneer...she wears the role awkwardly, like wearing a fur coat in the dead of summer...there is a reserve about her...as if she should succeed at a high level but should not stand out from the others” (Longman, 1999d, p. A1). Hamm consistently referred to her teammates in interviews and declined to have her own autobiography publicized. Hamm’s uncomfortable relationship with the spotlight and constant worry that her teammates do not receive the credit they deserve, constructs Hamm as not only the ultimate team player, but also the ideal postfeminist woman. Thus, Mia Hamm was (re) presented as achieving the ultimate task of womanhood – Mia was attractive, married, and was able to successfully fulfill the needs of her family, her teammates, her sponsors, and most importantly, her fans: she could do it all and had it all (Cole & Hribar, 1995; Lafrance, 1998; McDonald, 2000; Rosen, 2012).

Head coach, Tony DiCicco helped to establish and protect the team culture of the U.S. women’s national team.<sup>41</sup> Head coach since 1991, taking over for Anson Dorrance

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<sup>41</sup> Tony DiCicco, the second head coach of the U.S. Women’s national soccer team between 1991 and 1999, was touted as the “father figure” of the 1999 World Cup team. He has four biological children, but was constructed as the father of 20 young female athletes. He was considered the team ethical guru each, emotional leader, and fatherly protector (Brewington, 1999; Jones, 1999). For example, DiCicco spoke

after their 1991 Championship title, DiCicco reevaluated not only their tactical strategies, but also the culture of the team. By 1999, a renewed focus on defending in conjunction with their direct attacking style based on athleticism on the field along with a standardized, feminized, and homogenized team culture off the field produced a women's team that most Americans could support. When asked to describe the culture of his team, DiCicco stated that, “This team has the luxury of finding and developing a group of young women who have many of the same values...If you don't buy into the culture, you're left by the way-side” (quoted in Longman, 1999e, para. 16). In fact, the “core” pool of young women playing the game was at an all-time high in 1999 with 1.5 million girls playing at least once a week (Women's World Cup, 1999). Competition was intense to make state, regional and national age group squads. Therefore, one cannot take even the shortest of breaks when granted a spot on the coveted 20-player national team squad full of “restless overachievers” (Brewington, 1999, p. 3C). There was even pressure on the newest team members, Cindy Parlow and Danielle Fotopolous, two young, white, college graduates, to “blend in” not only to the playing style on the field, but also within the culture of the team (Brewington, 1999, p. 3C). These new players seemed to fit

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about the players as sport promoters, “Sometimes I think the biggest challenge comes from our own group. The demands on the players are tremendous. I understand that they need to promote the game and the World Cup, but I need to protect them from being asked to do too much. Some of these athletes have multiple commercial responsibilities. There are times when I just have to say ‘hands off’ and make sure they have some space” (quoted in Trecker, 1999, para. 11). Both Anson Dorrance, the first national team coach, and DiCicco are constructed as benevolent patriarchs who grant young girls and women the right to play the masculine and foreign game of soccer (Crothers, 2006; Grainey, 2012; Markovits & Heller, 2004).

within the rigid boundaries of a U.S. women's soccer culture without concern and, in fact, their addition to the team worked to further define this space as exceedingly white, middle class, and heteronormative.

Social relationships between players were crucial in shaping the cultural norms on the team (Donovan, 2003). Individual subjectivities develop through the adoption, reinforcement, or resistance to available discourses in a particular social context (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Hey, 1997). Mia Hamm along with the five other foundational players forged a culture based on the gendered discourse of friendship and family. Both individual players and the media constructed the U.S. women's team as "best friends" – a bond that straddle the border of friendship and the second-wave, white, middle-class, liberal feminist notion of sisterhood. Based on the standpoint of equality of the sexes, liberal feminists have and continue to rely upon essentialist notions of sameness in order to unify the women's movement. Liberal feminists downplay differences, advocating a universal "we" or a unified "sisterhood" without questioning the structure of the dominant cultural institution (Heywood & Dworkin, 2003; Mann & Huffman, 2005, p. 59).

Sisterhood, a deep and emotional connection beyond the soccer field, was deemed a necessary component to their success as a group. Starting central midfielder Kristine Lilly described the team as "...a second family. You do a lot better when you care about each other. We are nurturing people, caring people. I'm glad to have my friends out there. It goes a little bit deeper than just sports. We all want to see each other happy" (quoted in Vecsey, 1999d, p. SP6). Lilly's conception of team further entrenches the essentialized and naturalized discourse that women are nurturers and emotional beings.



To be successful and therefore marketable to a broad audience, female athletes must demonstrate these gendered characteristics in order to balance the overtly masculine performance they display during competition. Gary Smith (2003), a sport journalist for *Sports Illustrated* reemphasizes this point. Smith notes that, “the U.S. team becomes sisters, more than any team of men ever became brothers, because their star [Hamm] will have it no other way” (p. 69). As mentioned earlier, narratives about the team’s “reluctant star” Hamm produced a similar feminine discourse of selflessness and care for others (Longman, 1999d). The foundational core of the U.S women’s national team Hamm, Foudy, Lilly, and Akers, along with head coach, Tony DiCicco were the main representatives who could speak to team culture (Bell, 1999; Bushnell, 1999; Kuhns, 1999; Longman, 1999e; Longman, 1999f; Longman, 1999j; Trecker, 1999; Vecsey, 1999d). This group managed to define a tightly constructed and vehemently protected team culture so much so that it often appears that one individual could stand in for the whole team.

This synecdoche was most evident when the team appeared in New York City for a parade to celebrate their historic win. Nineteen players, every player except Michelle Akers, who was still recovering from chronic fatigue syndrome and heat exhaustion from the final, entered the post-tournament media frenzy of talk-show appearances, media interviews, and endless photo opportunities or autographs signings. Never out of sync, the team dressed in matching outfits they had picked months prior to the tournament – “...lavender shirts, black pants, matching sandals and cemented smiles” (Brewer, 1999, p. D1). A Lilith Fair style rock aura surrounded their every appearance, which tended to underscore their heterosexuality and femininity as much as their victories on the field

(Wilgoren, 1999). Even in Washington, D.C., when the capital was mourning the sudden and tragic death of John F. Kennedy, Jr. and his wife, Caroline Bessette-Kennedy, the “team” brought a unified glimmer of hope and cause to celebrate the nation. As the backdrop for media photos the event the U.S. women’s team, who was dressed in the same lavender shirts and black pants from New York City, watched as Captain Carla Overbeck presented President Clinton a No. 99 U.S. Women’s National Team jersey and soccer player figurine on the lawn of the White House. President Clinton lauded their achievement as “America’s triumph” (Longman, 1999o, p. D5) while then-First Lady Hillary Clinton called the team, “our girls of summer” (quoted in Rauber, 1999, para. 11).

Newly minted as America’s girls, the mediated representation of the U.S. women’s team tugged at the heart-strings and wallets of white suburbia with what Cole and Giardina (2013) describe as a celebration of the white, feminine, heterosexual, “suburban girl-child” (p. 539). At the same time, Nike and Adidas introduced advertising campaigns that articulated women’s sporting performances within the safe and attractive context of suburbia. Cole and Giardina argue that mediated representations of the contemporary female sporting icon is a manifestation of a broader discourse that works to celebrate the American way of life in contrast to the imagined gender-deviant Communist athlete. The concepts of sportsmanship and “true” suburban womanhood came to represent U.S. conduct, performance, and moral superiority, and the suburban girl was called upon to negotiate the gender-bending sporting space.<sup>42</sup> This notion was most

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<sup>42.</sup> It must be acknowledged that current notions of sportsmanship and moral conduct are also understood to be an outgrowth of various discourses on gender, race, and class in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. For a more

evident during the late 1990s when New York Times reporter George Vecsey (1999f) described men's professional sport as, "...sated with loutish male basketball and baseball players" (p. D1).

In 1999, the concept of "team" appeared to be missing in men's professional sports, specifically in the National Basketball Association (NBA). Black basketball players dominated the NBA. "Thug" narratives circulated around players, such as Latrell Sprewell and Allen Iverson, for their urban, hip-hop style of dress, braided cornrows, and selfish inner-city pick-up style of play on the court. More specifically, in 1997, Latrell Sprewell was involved in a highly publicized physical altercation with head coach, P.J. Carlesimo in 1997, in which Sprewell choked Carlesimo for verbally attacking him at practice, the media constructed Sprewell and those living a "thug" lifestyle as dangerous, selfish, egotistical players; a lifestyle most white, middle-class consumers could not embrace (Boyd, 2000; Cole & Giardina, 2013; Smith, 2000; Walton, 2001).

A 1999 *And1* commercial titled "The American Dream" demonstrates this notion. Sprewell is getting his hair braided in his signature cornrows with a Jimi Hendrix's version of the "Star Spangled Banner" playing in the background. He makes several statements about his identity in the NBA. The most notable is his final statement, "Some say I'm what is wrong with sports today. I say I'm the American Dream" (Latrell

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in depth discussion on these ideological constructions see: Cahn, S. (1994). *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth Century Women's Sport*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press; Verbrugge, M. (1988). *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Boston*. New York: Oxford University Press; Vertinsky, P. (1990). *The Eternally Wounded Woman: Women, Doctors, and Exercise in the Late Nineteenth Century*. New York: Manchester University Press.

Sprewell, 2008). Hendrix's notable deconstruction of the national anthem in combination with Sprewell's sense of black individuality challenges the whiteness of the American Dream and established a direct contradiction to Michael Jordan's constructed image of family sentiment and devotion (Boyd, 2000; McDonald, 1996). Nike's branding of Jordan tempered racial issues surrounding class and black masculinity that denied historical and stereotypical depictions of blackness in order to sell more products (McDonald, 1996).

Conversely, the *And I* commercial along with the racialized narratives surrounding Sprewell served to expose the inequitable path to the American Dream. However, the media did not focus on the inequitable power lines coursing through this context. Rather, Sprewell and others, such as Iverson, were cast as villains by the media and even former NBA players, outside of the realm of societal and cultural respectability (Higginbotham, 1993). Former NBA guard Walt Frazier commented on the state of men's professional sport in the late 1990s, "...hedonism, racism, cynicism, and narcissism permeate all professional sports today. There has been no clearer manifestation of this truth than the shocking incident involving Latrell Sprewell" (Frazier, 1997, p. A21).

The *And I* commercial aired May 8<sup>th</sup>, the first day of the 1999 NBA playoffs, and a month prior to the start of the Women's World Cup. The U.S. women's national team players are identified as the antithesis to "respectable" black players such as Jordan, Sprewell among other thug-like American professional athletes opened a space in the sporting narrative for the U.S. women's national team to enter the American sport vernacular. Discontented with the ostentatious and selfish culture of men's professional athletics, the America public and the media seemed to clamor for a team or individual

who represented all that was “inherently” good in sport. *New York Times* reporter, George Vecsey (1999c), describes the U.S. women’s national team as an anomaly in a male sporting context focused on individual achievement:

On a free night, most male professional athletes go off with [sic] wife or girlfriend, agent, lawyer, family members, designated best friend, or some interesting combination thereof. And why not? It’s a long season, often a long career, and everybody needs some space.

There is, however, one team that still seeks that ancient state called togetherness. In the mad gathering hurricane of the Women’s World Cup, the American players are committed to remaining as close as they were on the long bus rides from exhibition to exhibition, when they hoped somebody would show up to watch them play (p. D1).

Vecsey’s use of “togetherness” signifies women’s athletics, in particular women’s soccer, as a “wholesome” and “safe” space, one that conjures up feelings of sports’ “ancient” roots and seemingly inherent values of comradery and competition. The U.S. women’s team was constructed as having “no egos” by head coach, Tony DiCicco, eliminating the possibility of any individual selfishness resulting in a team controversy (quoted in Kuhns, 1999, para. 15). Not one player publically complained about playing time, sponsorships, or signing autographs. In fact, Alan Rothenberg, President of U.S. Soccer noted that:

One of the reasons Americans love this team so much was the wholesomeness of the team...they stayed after every game signing autographs until the last young girl left. Obviously you almost never see

that in any other sport of either sex. I think people take notice and say we don't need the anti-hero to be our role-models (Merz, 1999, para. 5, 10).

Cast as soccer missionaries, the U.S. women's national team felt it was their responsibility not only to promote the game of soccer, but also provide a moral and ethical compass for young aspiring female athletes (Longman, 1999a; Longman, 1999c). Kristine Lilly said, "I want these girls to know that they can play at the highest level. We didn't look up to on [sic] the national team because there wasn't one. We didn't wait for autographs because there wasn't anyone to wait for" (Longman, 1999c, p. D4).

The U.S. women's national team served as a very public contradiction to the growing presence of steroid use in baseball and the basketball "thugs" of Allen Iverson and Latrell Sprewell, who were positioned as dangerous to children, sport, and the nation (Cole & Giardina, 2013). In this context, the mediated binary constructions of men vs. women, urban vs. suburban, black vs. white, and cheating vs. sportsmanship encouraged legions of new soccer parents across the nation to attend various Women's World Cup games with their soccer-crazed daughters to catch a glimpse of their favorite role model. But, more importantly, multi-national corporations were attracted to "women's soccer wholesome, family-oriented image" (Brant, 1999, para. 2), which helped to produce the U.S. women's national team as a female sporting icon (Cole & Giardina, 2013).

### **The Maintenance of Compliance: Being a Black Postfeminist in a White Postfeminist Game**

For the 1999 U.S. women's national team the discourse of "team" that surrounded their achievement came to connote a vehemently policed white, feminine, middle-class suburban space. Briana Scurry's black body, a site of unequivocal difference, challenged

these social norms; yet, she did not incite resentment. Within the 1999 sporting context that underscored black male bodies as anti-heroes, it seems disingenuous to imply that race does not matter in regards to Scurry's presence on this team. Thus, in a sporting context that (re)produces a soccer culture of white, suburban, femininity, this chapter explores how Scurry might evade even the most minor of comparisons to the entitled black "anti-hero" figure of the NBA.

Mediated narratives of Scurry are situated in a particular historical neoliberal context enmeshed in postfeminist politics. As with most feminist notions, a postfeminist context has never been a linear, agreed-upon movement. Rather it can be identified as a neoliberal discursive formation based upon consumer based language of individualism, freedom of choice, and an authentic lifestyle (Butler, 2013; McRobbie, 2007). Women – more so than men – were to "...work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, and to present all their actions as freely chosen" (Gill & Schraff, 2011, p. 7; Rose, 1996). The fluid construction of this team as a group of like-minded individuals as well as a singular entity reinforced a sporting space with little room for diverse individual subjectivities. Membership on the U.S. team encouraged commonalities among players along with a universal blindness to individual and group differences (Young, 1989). The mediated regulation of individual conduct as a representation of the U.S. women's team led to a homogenous postfeminist culture that vigilantly, but naively protected its "feminist" boundaries of whiteness, femininity, and heterosexuality.

In *Girls of Summer: The U.S. Women's Soccer Team and How it Changed the World*, Jere Longman (2000a), *New York Times* journalist, argued, perhaps naively, that

the “Competition was authentic, unsullied by the complications of big money” (p. 25). However when Nike, the largest sporting equipment producer in the world, has been the official sponsor of U.S. soccer since 1995, the economic and ideological implications are clear. Nike continues to instruct the American public on how to understand the U.S women’s national team in 1999 and today.

Nike launched two commercials in preparation for the 1999 Women’s World Cup around the theme, “We Will Take on the World as a Team”. The first commercial is situated in a dentist’s office waiting room complete with 1970s décor, *Highlights Magazines* and wood paneling. Brandi Chastain enters the waiting room with her white, male dentist and states, “He had to drill. I got two fillings.” Lounging on the green, pleather couch, Mia Hamm, stands up and declares, “Then I will have two fillings.” Inspired by Hamm’s bold assertion, even though she has “perfect teeth,” Briana Scurry, Tisha Venturini, Tiffney Milbrett and even the white female receptionist all stand and declare their allegiance to the team and the nation: “I will have two fillings” (We Will Take, 2006a).

The second commercial features the women’s soccer team going on a date. Venturini’s date, a bouquet of flowers in hand, walks up to her house via a beautifully manicured walkway. The door opens and the song “Together (Wherever We Go)” is cued as Venturini and her friends come galloping down the stairs. The date quickly realizes he will be going on a date with all five women. He hands each a flower. To his dismay, the “team” proceeds to cram into a small red sedan, share popcorn with each other at a movie, ride a six-person bike, take a ride through a tunnel of love, and end up at the front door with an awkward moment. All five faces stare down at Venturini’s date as



he awkwardly states, “I’ll call you guys?” As he walks away, the five players smile, wave, and shrug their shoulder as if unimpressed by him or the date. They enter the house together as the tag line appears on the screen – “We Will Take on the World As a Team.” (We Will Take, 2006b).

These two commercials construct the women’s national team and women’s soccer within a white middle-class suburban space, thus raising the issue of how Briana Scurry, the only black player in the starting eleven, can be understood within these texts. The ideological imagery of white suburbia and heterosexuality contain Scurry and her dangerous black body. In the dentist’s office, she is flanked by white teammates whose moral declarations of “team” positions her as just one of the girls and therefore, less powerful, safe and non-threatening. Also, by positioning her as part of a date, rather than the central character, her blackness is tempered by the suburban white imagery while her femininity and heterosexuality are assumed and accepted. These narratives of domesticity and team discourse package Scurry’s black, athletic and muscular body into a consumable product for a largely young, white, female audience reinforcing Tara McPherson’s (2000) notion that black female role models are mediated through images and narratives of safe and acceptable blackness and femininity.

The dislocation of Scurry’s race decontextualizes and depoliticizes her from racial politics, producing an image of U.S. women’s soccer that is overwhelmingly white, feminine and middle class. Critical attention must be paid to the way that gender, race and class are articulated in the concurrent discourses of postfeminism and post-racism that surrounds Scurry. The postfeminist assumption of a white, middle-class subject constitutes a subtle form of racial exclusion, and Scurry’s blackness promotes a version

of postfeminism as she conforms to normative conceptions of race, class, gender, and sexuality within these Nike ads (Butler, 2013; McRobbie, 2007; Springer, 2007). As Kimberly Springer (2007) argues, “For African-American women, the postfeminist message is that black women need to know their place within the racial gender hierarchy even if they are permitted, in small numbers, to assume places in the middle class” (p. 272).

The media also constructed Scurry’s black body as the “spice” to a monotonous postfeminist ‘girl power’ culture (hooks, 1992, p. 21). However, her “safe” postfeminist image permitted this temporary breach of mainstream culture in order to commodify this glaring racial difference. In the weeks before and during the tournament, the media focused on the “spicy” discourse of nudity. After the team’s historic gold medal-win at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, Scurry followed through with a friendly bet. She ran naked, with just her gold medal around her neck and a black-panther tattoo on her back, for 20-30 feet down a dark alleyway in Athens, GA (Lounging Around, 1999). A video exists of the event, but it is kept “...under lock and key” (quoted in Shipley, 1999, p. D04).

This narrative followed Scurry to the 1999 Women’s World Cup as journalists asked if she would streak again if they won the tournament; or, better yet, could she convince the rest of the team to join her in a similar celebration in Pasadena, Calif. (Kaufman, 1999; Kinnon, 2000; Longman, 1999a; Longman, 1999k; Lounging Around, 1999; Powell, 1999a; Shipley, 1999). Some journalists seemed disappointed that her intense focus on the Women’s World Cup would not allow for another “wild” act of streaking (Lounging Around, 1999; Shipley, 1999). As a result, Scurry’s black and

tattooed body is exoticized, her naked body repeatedly narrativized for all to imagine, and commodified in a sense, as new consumers are drawn to the difference she possessed. But this difference must continue to be minimized in order to successfully continue selling this team as America's girls.

For Scurry to "blend" back into this "all-white" team and enjoy the rewards postfeminism offers, albeit as narrowly constructed as it is, she must reject any political inclinations (Butler, 2013). Scurry does just this. She noted that, "...it would be like pulling teeth" (quoted in *Lounging Around*, 1999, para. 8) to get her teammates to streak with her after the 1999 Women's World Cup, and downplayed notions of difference to the American public stating, "This time, I will be ordinary and keep my clothes on. That was just a weird thing, a weird promise" (quoted in *Lounging Around*, 1999, para. 3). Downplaying the "streaking" incident of 1996, Scurry denounced both her black body and her agency in order to fit within a white postfeminist imaginary.

In an *Ebony* article, Scurry also renounced the lack of ABC coverage during the Women's World Cup medal ceremony. She stated:

It was interesting that people were saying [I did not have a lot of air time] and then I actually saw the game tape and I had a lot of airtime on me. The only time when I didn't was when they were putting the medal on my neck. I've gotten endorsements, and I've been one of the busiest people on my team as far as running around, so I don't hold any credence with that (quoted in Kinnon, 2000, p. 60).

Although she has become more outspoken in recent years, in 1999, she neither identified as a feminist nor did she embrace racial politics. In post-tournament interviews she

continually downplayed the role race may have in regards to the low number of black girls and boys participating in the game. Rather, Scurry cited social class as the major roadblock to access to facilities and increased participation rates (Kinnon, 2000).

Scurry's disavowal of racism casts her as a seemingly active subject, regulating her own conduct as if it were freely chosen (Butler, 2013; Gill & Schraff, 2011). However, within this neoliberal moment, postfeminism and postracism are modes of governmentality, in the Foucauldian sense, regulating the "conduct of conducts," managing how individuals behave within an economically driven culture (Foucault, 2003, p. 138). In order to market the team to a broad, normative audience, Scurry must not disrupt the central tenets of postfeminism or postracism. Under her own free will, Scurry needs to demonstrate that racial and gender politics are no longer necessary (Banet-Weiser, 2007). In these ways she unwittingly produces herself as a black postfeminist.

### **A New Face of Racism? Briana Scurry and the Politics of Exclusion**

Postfeminism and post-racism work to erase Scurry's race through the assumption of a neoliberal, white, female subject and the erasure of feminist and racial politics. The myths and stereotypes of biological determinism and white supremacy are implicitly reproduced in media representations of Scurry (Vertinsky & Captain, 1998). Scurry's athleticism is constructed in a way that marks her as different from her white teammates. Her athleticism, skills, and decision-making in the goal are naturalized, linking her with racial stereotypes of animality and natural disasters. Scurry is said to have "catlike reflexes" (Longman, 2000a, p. 11), "sprang forward from her haunches" (Wahl, 1999d, para. 12), and "pounc[es]" on balls (Longman, 1999i, D4) while her teammates, like Mia Hamm, performed "wonderfully balletic move[s]" (Longman, 1999i, D4) on the field.

She is consistently linked to the natural disasters, which took her parents' homes in Galveston, TX, and Minneapolis, MN, and to her high school mascot, the tornadoes. *Sports Illustrated* journalist, Grant Wahl (1999c) states, "Scurry, like the freakish events that ultimately led her to the sport, is a force of nature" (p. 37).

The discourse of racialized bodies was most evident in a photo spread of the starting eleven in *Sports Illustrated for Women World Cup Preview Issue* (See Figure 2) (McDowell & Wahl, 1999). Situated against the background of a midnight blue sky and dark forest green field and trees, Briana Scurry does not survey an open field. Instead, she gazes through one of the netted squares that seem to keep her safely caged from the viewer. Stationary in the goal, she is a passive actor, suggesting a lack of power or authority. Her black body is completely covered in her uniform of blue shorts, a red goalkeeper jersey, and oversized goalkeeper gloves. Her sexuality is rendered sterile, while her raced, caged body is seen as animalistic. The only part of her body that is on display is her face. Staring directly into the camera Scurry dares the viewer to maintain eye contact. Her arms, though, produce two contradictory readings. Her right arm grasps the net as if she is confined and desperate to get out of the cage that the netting and the photo boundaries create. Yet, her left arm is dangling through the net as though she is enticing you to join her in the dark space, which feels as if it might lead to an ominous end.

In contrast, the white U.S. national team players are most often photographed looking away from the camera. Though they are generally shot from below, emphasizing strength and authority, their refusal to engage the viewer – and instead focus on

something unseen, off camera – reinforces traditional conceptions of femininity in photographs (See Figure 3). Scurry projects masculinity. In this way, she is threatening,



*Figure 2. Women’s World Cup Preview Photo of Starting Goalkeeper, Briana Scurry (Source: Sports Illustrated for Women, 1999)*

and when combined with her blackness, she must be caged, protecting the viewer. The white players, on the other hand, are free to roam, free to run through the 120 yards of the pitch. They are coded as safe – they are the signifiers of “true” suburban womanhood. When juxtaposed, these photos “should” epitomize a culture accepting of difference. Again, McPherson asserts that female black stars are mediated through images and narratives of “safe” and acceptable blackness and femininity, but representations of

Scurry body compared to her white teammates' challenges this notion (McPherson, 2000). Instead, they show an American culture that continues to struggle with any variance from commonly and historically accepted gender and racial subjectivities.

These colonial tropes of a racialized corporeality on the U.S. women's national team is also linked to Cole and Giardina (2013) notion of high moral standards. To be a female sporting icon, an athlete must conduct herself and her sport performance with a greater level of moral integrity. This notion of upstanding moral behavior grew out of the discourse surrounding the team after winning the Olympic Gold and the FIFA Fair Play



*Figure 3.* Women's World Cup Preview Photo of Starting Forward, Mia Hamm (Left), and Starting Midfielder, Michelle Akers (Right)

(Source: *Sports Illustrated for Women*, 1999)

Trophy in 1996 (Hirshey, 1998; Q & A, 1997; Thompson, 1999; Wahl, 1998). The timing of this award is crucial as it is the only Fair Play Trophy the team has received in

its existence and it linked the discourse of women's soccer as a seemingly all-white, suburban game, with the upstanding moral character of sportsmanship, an ideal of American Democracy (Cole & Giardina, 2013).

In December of 1999, *Sport Illustrated* named the U.S. women's national team "Sportswomen of the Year" for winning the World Cup and creating a "transformative moment...(that) held a nation in thrall" (Bamberger, 1999, p. 46). But, more importantly, this team was cast as "sportswomen" for symbolizing a model of intelligent play and the ideals of sportsmanship (Ballard Spahr, 1999; Bamberger, 1999; Sandomir, 1999b). Co-captain Carla Overbeck added, "We've obviously touched the hearts and moved the spirits of hundreds of thousands across the nation" (quoted in Ballard Spahr, 1999, p. 2). With this added measure of morality, the U.S. women's national team continued to contradict the growing presence of steroid use in baseball and the "thuggish" culture of basketball (Cole & Giardina, 2013).

The 1999 Women's World Cup also "...breathed a new freshness into (the) sport. In the women's tournament, sportsmanship is paramount and the grandstands are filled with exuberant fans" (Mia Hamm, 1999, p. A18). In fact, the outlandish and nonsensical gamesmanship (i.e. flopping or diving) present in the international men's game was notably missing from the women's game. *New York Times* sports reporter, George Vecsey (1999f) commented on the simplicity of the women's game:

Women's soccer is viable for itself, with no apologies. They have ball skills. They can run for 90, make that 120 minutes. They are innately good teammates. They have not yet developed the sophisticated game of the men - but neither do they have the cynical fouls and flagrant flops of



the men. They are a joy to watch. They have sensational personalities. I would not mind seeing a whole lot more of them and their game in the next century (p. D3).

Women's soccer, specifically the U.S. women's team, is connected to the gendered discourse of moral purity.<sup>43</sup> U.S. defender, Brandi Chastain connects the idea of the U.S. team with moral conduct when discussing the difference between men's and women's soccer, "The men's game is much more tactical. We play more as a team, not relying so much on power, but on team play. I think it's the most entertaining soccer. The women's game is about playing good, clean soccer" (Bell, p. TV59). J.P. Dellacamera, an ESPN broadcaster who announced the Women's World Cup final between the U.S. and China agreed:

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<sup>43</sup> In *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Boston*, Martha Verbrugge (1988) argues that 19<sup>th</sup> century white, middle-class womanhood connected moral behavior with health and activity. Good character and moral conduct were necessary for well-being; thus, health was a cornerstone of propriety. The notion that women were purer than men elevated the status of women as moral guardians of both the home and society (Lenskyj, 1987; Vertinsky, 1987). This had health reformers yearning for women to exert their "natural" moral power in order to educate the minds and bodies of the human race (Verbrugge, 1988). Yet, sport remained a male preserve. The connection between women and moral purity reproduced itself as women gained sporting opportunities in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, men went to great lengths to redirect public thought in order to marginalize and trivialize women's participation in sport (Cahn, 1994; Vertinsky, 1987). Although the discourse of purity is sophisticatedly mediated and constructed in narratives of contemporary women's sport, it continues to have the same limiting effects on how gender is performed and understood within sport and society.

The women's game is purer than the men's game. There is less fouling, less diving and less shirt and jersey pulling. Hence, there are fewer stoppages and it's freer flowing. I enjoy the contrasts of the men's game and the women's game. But I like the men's game more, I have to admit. It's better (quoted in Sandomir, 1999a, p. SP9).

Chastain and Dellacamera reproduced this gendered discourse asserting women soccer, and therefore women, are more pure than men's soccer and men, in general.

Underscoring women's soccer players' aversion to foul or bend the rules of the game, Chastain and Dellacamera cast female athletes as upstanding moral guardians who successfully negotiate the gender-bending space of sport (Cole & Giardina, 2013; Lenskyj, 1987; Verbrugge, 1988; Vertinsky, 1987). As Cole and Giardina (2013) suggest the U.S. women's soccer team embodied "true" suburban womanhood as the team's performance along with its conduct on the field demonstrated the moral superiority of American female athletes, and thus, American democracy. But what is astounding is Dellacamera's gumption to reassert soccer as a male sporting space. Citing moral purity as solely fundamental to women's soccer renders it less significant than the men's game. This association places women's soccer outside the purview of male sport reinforcing sport as a male preserve.

In this context, coverage of Briana Scurry's actions during the penalty kick shootout of the Women's World Cup Final opened her up to criticism. Scurry made a miraculous save to position the American side for a win. But the replay revealed that she had in fact taken two or three steps forward before Liu Ying struck the ball. Goalkeepers are allowed to move laterally, but not vertically before the penalty kick is taken.

Questions quickly arose as to whether she had bent the rules to make the save that helped win the game. Unfortunately, Scurry stated to the press that, “It is only cheating if you get caught” (quoted in Scurry Admits, 1999, p. 14). Did she cheat? Or was this just gamesmanship? Did she compromise the U.S.’s sense of moral purity? Donna Lopiano, the director of the Women’s Sports Foundation, believes she did, “Gamesmanship is just another word for cheating” (quoted in Vescey, 1999g, p. 13). Also, the Reverend Paul J. Goda, a professor of law at Santa Clara University noted that “Scurry’s admission that she violated the rules (has been regarded) as unimportant based on the definition of gamesmanship that rejects sportsmanship for the sake of winning...The notion of getting away with what you can get away with has wreaked havoc with integrity” (Scurry’s Ethics, 1999, p. 13).

Regardless of whether Scurry did or did not cheat off the line, this discourse codes her as deviant because she did not adhere to the high moral standards U.S. female athletes are expected to uphold. Given that, she challenges and violates the ethical integrity of “true” suburban womanhood, and more importantly, American democracy. Simply being a black female athlete, Scurry defies the definition of “true” suburban womanhood, yet does not incite resentment for she does not actively seek to disrupt the whiteness of postfeminism. Rather, it is her implied manipulation of the core American sporting value of sportsmanship that exposes her to criticism and places her outside of the white suburban imaginary. Tainting the white moral superiority of American suburbia places Scurry as the “Black Fly in White Milk.”

## Conclusion

Briana Scurry was an integral part of both the 1999 Women's World Cup victory and the marketing of women's soccer to middle America. Her miraculous save during the penalty kick shootout positioned the U.S. team to win the game, and if they had not already, the hearts of millions of American and international fans. Media representations constructed women's soccer not only as a white, suburban, feminine sport, but also as a progressive space accepting of racial and gender difference. However, a critical reading of Scurry's mediated representation reveals a hallmark feature of post-racial and postfeminist rhetoric in neoliberal culture.

The seemingly transcendent cultural success of the U.S. women's national team rests not only with player continuity, but also with the carefully constructed structural and ideological keystones of a strict team culture and neoliberal values. Few changes in the roster between 1996 and the World Cup in 1999 produced a close-knit team that generated wins both on the field and in the media. On the field, this team reproduced ideals of neoliberal America – individualism, self-discipline, and success – and reinforced gender norms through selfless team play. Off the field, players constituted and were constituted by postfeminism; a homogeneous team culture, which underscored heteronormative femininity. Foundational players forged a team culture based upon the gendered discourse of family and the liberal feminist notion of sisterhood. The result was a team culture of synecdoche, or the appearance that one individual, or any individual could stand in for the whole team. Team leaders, such as head coach, Tony DiCicco or players, Mia Hamm and Michelle Akers were instrumental in creating and protecting this team image.

Cole and Giardina (2013) argue that the intersection of the discourses of sportsmanship and suburban womanhood were instrumental in the construction the female athletic icon. Aptly, these discourses were substantial in production of the U.S. women's team's mediated image. Placed in stark contrast to the ostensible black "thuggish" and selfish bodies present in the NBA, particularly Latrell Sprewell, the U.S. women's team penetrated the sternly protected male vernacular of professional sports. White, middle class, suburban, and feminine values became the cultural centerpiece for the way sport "should" be, and constructed the U.S. women's national team as the first team female sporting icon.

However, mediated depictions of the U.S. team, as a group and as individuals, include an implicit, but omnipresent racist and sexist bias. It is Scurry's black body that is central to these cultural biases as postfeminism asserts a white, Western, middle-class heterosexual woman as the normative subject (Butler, 2013; Cole & Hribar, 1995; LaFrance, 1998; Projansky, 2001). Therefore, the addition of Giroux's (2004) understanding of post-racism deepens the complexity of Scurry's position on this seemingly "all-white" team. This conjuncture produced a depoliticized version of racialized postfeminism, in which Scurry conformed to normative conceptions of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Her dismissal of racial politics and her acceptance of a white, postfeminist ideology renders her and her body as innocuous, and therefore, "safe." Regarded as a safe, black female, Scurry and the U.S. women's team can be marketed to an American public viewed as open and inclusive of people of color.

The depoliticization of Scurry' gender and race did not, however, thwart sexist or racist notions. Instead, the suppression of a politicized black femininity from the media

and within the U.S. women's team reinforced what Giroux (2004) asserts as a form of 'new racism.' Mobilized ideologically through language and images, new racism is a more subtle and implicit prejudice. Scurry's black body is both exoticized and commodified, as the account of her streaking nude in the streets of Athens, GA constructed her as a form of "spice" to a dull, white soccer culture. Yet, it is not her black body that inflames a racist discourse; rather, it is her questionable ethics during the World Cup final when she supposedly violated the laws of the game. Scurry's violation of morality, and thus, American suburban womanhood pins her as deviant placing her on the outside of the white suburban imaginary. Although the team was celebrated as an emblem of American womanhood that includes all women, closer inspection reveals it actually worked to maintain narrow ideals of nationalism, gender, and race.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **MOVE OVER, BITCH!<sup>44</sup>: THE UNRAVELING OF GIRL POWER IN POST-9/11 AMERICAN SOCCER**

On June 25, 1998, the U.S. men's national team finished their disastrous World Cup run with a 1-0 loss to Yugoslavia in Nantes, France. In response, Steve Sampson, head coach of the men's team resigned, and the United States Soccer Federation (USSF), committed to producing a competitive and dominant international program, reevaluated the status of the men's and women's national team programs. Placing dead last in the field of 32 World Cup teams exposed weaknesses in the men's program – old veterans with waning skills and little integration of young, fresh talent.

Upon the request of the USSF, a seven-month analysis by Carlos Querioz, a prominent international coach, concluded that U.S. developmental programs did not provide the necessary preparation for international success as compared to the highly professionalized developmental programs for European clubs and national team programs (Sokolove, 2010). Querioz cited the need to identify and immerse young male players in soccer through camps and international travel (Shipley, 1998b; Wagman, 1998). As USSF President, Alan Rothenberg so aptly stated:

We don't have the system that they have everywhere else in the world and that is why we had to create our own...to get where we want to get, which is accelerate the development of high-level competitive players but at the same time recognize that in our society we have to do that within the

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<sup>44</sup> With apologies to Ludacris!

environment that exists today (quoted in Foster-Simeon & Brewing, 1998, p. 13C).

The USSF thus presented Project 2010, a \$50 million Federation plan to *win* the 2010 World Cup title in South Africa. The plan centered upon placing elite players in international training environments, but did not require full-time, year-round participation, since high school and college players may lose their eligibility if they play extensively with the U.S. national team. In order to circumvent these difficulties, the USSF continued its friendly and beneficial relationship with Major League Soccer (MLS). Project-40, a subdivision of Project-2010 and sponsored by Nike, identified and selected youth players to train with MLS teams, in which players received the league minimum salary and a tuition stipend from the USSF (Shipley, 1998b; Wagman, 1998).

In 1998, the notion of the men's national team winning a World Cup title in 2010, let alone making it past the group stage, seemed inconceivable. Project 2010's motto to "win in 2010" was an ambitious and ostentatious goal for a national team program that had just placed last in the 1998 World Cup tournament.

In contrast, Project Gold, the women's national team program equivalent to Project 2010, was a 10-year plan designed to keep the U.S. women on top of the world. More loosely developed, Project Gold focused on the identification and development of the next generation of U.S. women players in order for the U.S. women's national team program to "win forever" – the most idealistic and improbable of sport goals. Each project had its merits, but when placed in context with the other, the grandiosity of the men's motto to "win in 2010" fell flat with the American soccer public already accustomed to winning multiple world championships with the women's team.



After the success of the women's team in the 1990s, the American public had more confidence in the women's team "winning forever" than the idea of the U.S. men winning even once, at the World Cup in 2010 (Brennan, 2000; Wagman, 1998, Wahl, 2000a). How could it not? The women's team was composed of the finest group of players to compete in the game, who had all come of age during the economic boom of the late 1990s and within the cultural context of postfeminist girl power. Only two foundational players, Michelle Akers and Carla Overbeck, retired after the 1999 victory, and with a relatively youthful, but veteran roster, which included the indomitable superstar Mia Hamm, the future – on and off the field – seemed limitless. According to *Soccer Digest* reporter, Scott Plagenhoef (2000), "The all-conquering team have been hailed as post-feminist heroes, leered at by David Letterman, championed by the national media, applauded by faux janitors, and rightly praised as both pioneering and peerless" (p. 18). Soccer had become culturally defined as a sport for girls. In fact, DeMarcus Beasley, a young developmental player for the men's national team, recalled being taunted by peers for playing soccer, "They would say soccer's a girl's game. And that basketball players got all the money" (quoted in Hiestand, 2002, p. 1C). As U.S. soccer braced for the new millennium, the likely combination of women's soccer and post-feminist girl power seemed an unstoppable force.

Yet the time period between 2000 and 2006 produced mixed results, not utter domination, both on and off the field. The team experienced an unfortunate overtime loss to the Norwegians, 3-2, in the gold medal game of the Sydney Olympics. Moreover, the U.S. national team players had taken control of the creation of the first professional women's soccer league only to see it economically collapse. In 2003, the team would

place third at the Women's World Cup that was hosted by the United States after China was declared an unsuitable host due to the epidemic outbreak of SARS. Finally, the U.S. women's team did win gold in the 2004 Athens Olympics, but it struggled to capture an American audience after the retirement of core players Mia Hamm, Julie Foudy, Joy Fawcett and Brandi Chastain. The Project Gold motto of "win forever" along with the media-directed super human qualities attributed to the U.S. women's national team during the 1999 Women's World Cup ebbed toward disillusionment as, "What had seemed certain was no longer certain. Invincibility was replaced by insecurity" (Longman, 2000c, p. D1). What happened to this sporting feminist force? How and why did their seemingly woman-centered cultural power diminish?

I argue the years between 2000 and 2006 placed the U.S. women's national team and its mediated representation in a space of continual complexity. The "girls of summer," America's darlings, who convinced over 40 million people on a fateful day in July 1999 that women's sport mattered, could not reproduce and/or sustain the cultural appeal of that event. The creatively rich postfeminist texts used to market the team were marked with a major flaw - an unflinching allegiance to the demographic of white, feminine, middle-class heteronormativity - limiting its audience and overall economic and cultural power. I argue this unflinching allegiance to women's soccer's core market audience along with mismanagement of funds by inexperienced executives directed the Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA), the first professional women's soccer league in the United States, toward failure as the league kicked off in April of 2001. After a relatively successful first season, however, the entire nation paused on September

11, 2001, as New York City and Washington, D.C., suffered through the unspeakable transgressions of terrorism.

According to Ann Kaplan (2003), "...the trauma of 9/11 seems to be a breaking point in the U.S. Or...an irrevocable line has been drawn on both conscious and unconscious levels between 'before' and after'" (p. 54). In response to this moment, U.S. culture, as Susan Faludi (2007) suggests, sought to "rein in a liberated female population" because the female empowerment movement of the late 1990s was "implicated in our nation's failure to protect itself" (p. 21). The remedy for this perceived failure was two-fold: the shrinkage of the female profile – while the U.S. continued to define itself as the arbiter for global feminist standards – and the reassertion of white masculinity in American culture (Allen, 2002; Drew, 2004; Faludi, 2007; Kusz, 2007; Mayhall, 2008; McRobbie, 2009; Puar, 2007). In a climate of fear and trauma, conservative politics systematically removed and demonized feminism and feminist language, quickly eviscerating many of the ostensible gains the 1990s girl power movement may have made. Instead, most media reinforced the hegemonic version of a heroic, working-class masculinity – an aggressive, individualistic, risk-taker – to defend America's neoliberal "free market" and ensure our national security (Drew, 2004; Faludi, 2007; Kusz, 2007; Mayhall, 2008).

I contend 9/11 marks a breaking point in the American public's understanding of the U.S. women's national team. While the feminist rhetoric of the team as America's sweethearts and Title IX babies continued, I argue that 9/11 reaffirmed an ideological shift away from an American consciousness that overtly supported feminist ideals to an American consciousness steeped in the reassertion of white masculinity in sport (Kusz,

2007; Silk, 2012). Even the most un-American of American sport (i.e. soccer) reproduced these notions. I contend that post-9/11, the combined force of Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the USSF and MLS worked to reassert white, middle class, masculinity. Each institution played a seemingly understated, but crucial role in the organization of the 2003 World Cup and the demise of the WUSA; thus, further delineating who should and can define the nation.

The events of September 11, 2001, also dislocated the cultural stronghold of postfeminist girl power, rearticulating nationalism through a neofifties lens that reinforced domesticated white femininity and conventional white masculinity (Faludi, 2007; Kusz, 2007; McRobbie, 2009). This domestication is illustrated through the mediated representation of Mia Hamm, the consummate postfeminist superstar, and her courtship/marriage to Major League Baseball (MLB) player, Nomar Garciaparra. As the “face of the team,” Hamm’s image instructs the American public how to read and understand the U.S. women’s national team. The domestication of the team’s most popular player (and the most popular female athlete at this time) also works to repress the varied subject formations of new players who entered the national team program. Thus, the team’s mediated representation, however individually fluid, remained robust.

### **Riding the Postfeminist Wave: The Continued Battle for Equity After the 1999**

#### **Women’s World Cup**

At the turn of the millennium, “feminism,” packaged through postfeminist marketing strategies, provided a powerful rhetorical tool that pervaded most, if not all, of American cultural life. These strategies, focused on the rewards women’s sport experienced since the passing of Title IX in 1972 led the feminist charge into the

women's sporting future. The 1996 Olympics gave us the "Year of the Women" (Shipley, 2000b, para. 1), defined by the gold medal finishes in the sports of women's basketball, softball, women's volleyball, and women's soccer (Cole, 2000; Gifford, 1996; Gottesman, 1996; Zoglin & Hillenbrand, 1996). The success of these teams was due not just to wins and losses, but rather focused heavily on public spectatorship. Olympic organizers sold more tickets to women's events in 1996 than were sold for the entire Barcelona Olympics in 1992 (Shipley, 2000b). The crowds promoted the viability of niche markets for women's professional leagues in such sports as basketball, softball, and volleyball (Shipley, 2000b).

The U.S. women's national team rode the wave of feminist success into the 1999 Women's World Cup and captured the hearts and minds of the American public. The "united" women of the 1999 team became symbols of a "new way" to define American life, one in which women, as both a group and individually, would play a prominent role, while the future for men seemed both economically and evolutionarily challenged by feminist accomplishments (Faludi, 1999; Tiger, 1999). A "crisis of masculinity" was in full swing when a woman, former player April Heinrichs, was named head coach of the U.S. women's national team for the first time in USSF history (Allen, 2002; Drew, 2004; Longman, 2000c). Even in the midst of this "crisis" and under the postfeminist façade of complete gender equality in the U.S., the women's national team still had to challenge sexism in sport. This team battled with the USSF in regards to equal pay and the formation and control of a professional women's soccer league.

In September of 1999, the U.S. women's national team contract, specifically defined for the 1999 World Cup, expired. It took three months for the USSF to respond

to the team's legal representation for a meeting to discuss a new contract, and when they did, the team was instructed it must continue to work under the terms of the 1996 Agreement as a contract proposal would not be offered in the near future. The players reluctantly declined this offer and chose to boycott the Australian Cup scheduled in preparation for the 2000 Sydney Olympics (Ballard, Spahr, 1999). Captain, Julie Foudy, responded to the decision, "You can imagine the frustration and disappointment we feel as a team. It was important to us to meet right after the World Cup to reach a new agreement in order that we could focus exclusively on our Olympic training beginning in January 2000. U.S. Soccer refused to listen and have now asked us to accept their last-minute proposal" (quoted in Caparaz, 2000, para. 19).

In response to the player's action, Hank Steinbrecher, USSF chief executive officer and secretary general, stated that, "It's not a boycott or a strike. They're currently unemployed...They chose not to play for their country" (quoted in Caparaz, 2000, para. 8). On the premise that the women's team traditionally loses money for U.S. Soccer and that FIFA does not pay bonuses for playing in the Women's World Cup, although it does so for the men's World Cup, the Federation, Steinbrecher and U.S. Soccer made their position clear: women's sport is *always* a losing venture, thus, equal pay can never be achieved. "They look to us for a weekly paycheck," said Steinbrecher. "We have prepared that team very well and invested very heavily in them, more so than any other team in the world. But that's not a tenable position for a not-for-profit organization like the Federation" (quoted in Caparaz, 2000, para. 27). Steinbrecher had to defend his hard line approach to player negotiations, given that he and other U.S. Soccer officials received six-figure salaries. Moreover, this not-for-profit organization

had recently signed a \$120 million sponsorship deal with Nike; a deal that would not have been agreed upon if Nike “‘couldn’t have gotten the women’” (quoted in DeSimone, 1998, p. 30; Mahoney, 2000).

In the absence of a professional women’s soccer league in the United States that could subsidize the “heavy investment” in the women’s program, the Federation positioned the women’s team as spoiled and money hungry athletes while it promoted itself as the leader of gender equality. Yet, the Federation had squashed previous attempts to establish a professional women’s soccer league prior to the 1999 Women’s World Cup.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> In 1997, fresh off of the win at the Summer Olympics in Atlanta, thirteen eligible members of the United States women’s soccer team agreed to play in the newly formed National Soccer Alliance (NSA). Eight teams were to compete in a 10-week season, playing two games a week between the months of April and June, if and when, the NSA was “sanctioned” with Division I status from the USSF. The league had a solid business plan and the support of major apparel companies, such as Nike and Reebok, and deep-pocketed investors (Discovery Channel CEO, John Hendricks, and retired businessman Randy Byrnes) (Shiple, 1998a). At the same time, the USSF announced the formation of a 10-person committee to study the feasibility of the league. This committee put forth a plan for Division I status, which focused on operating budgets of \$1million, player salaries at a minimum of \$400,000 a team, stadiums with seating capacities of 5,000-10,000, and a capitalization and sponsorship fund that needed approval by USSF a year in advance of the start-up (Langdon, 1997). The USSF did not sanction the league as Alan Rothenberg, USSF president, who founded Major League Soccer (MLS), felt the 1999 Women’s World Cup would be a good springboard for a pro-league to start in the new millennium. Others in the Federation feared the women’s league would compete with the still financially and culturally fledgling MLS. These fears can be connected to legal language used to determine the NSA’s economic viability. Attorney Mark Levinson, an expert in sports law and who represented the men’s national team when it fought the Federation for higher

The American public protested the injustice these female athletes were facing, and demanded they be treated as equals.<sup>46</sup> For example, an editorial from the *USA Today* stated:

The U.S. women have done more to promote the game in 19 years than the men have done in 20. This makes equality crucial. Otherwise, the message sent to millions of children is that not matter how good you are, your gender decides your value. U.S. soccer has an obligation to battle that, regardless of venue or sponsorship (Female Athletes, 2000, p. 14A).

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pay in 1994, was confident the USSF “killed” the NSA as a business entity through the use of language. Levinson stated that, ““The women’s league was stomped on by the Federation -- but it didn’t take stomping. They didn’t embrace it and it died”” (quoted in Shipley, 1998a, p. D08). After the USSF refused to sanction the NSA, Nike interest in the league - with its corporate ties to the Federation - began to fade. Investors, Hendricks and Byrnes pulled their offers as overall risk was too much for the league to overcome.

<sup>46</sup> While at the U.S. Soccer House located in Chicago, IL, I came across a 1999 file that contained over 100 copies of emails/faxes from fans of the U.S. women’s national team. Each email/fax demonstrated not only the intense anger the American public felt for the USSF and its treatment of the U.S. women’s national team, but also the unswayable allegiance the American public had for the women’s national team players. For example, on January 20, 2000, the USSF communications department received a fax entitled, “For Your Consideration.” The fax declared: “Twenty women. The cream of the women’s soccer crop. American women at their finest. They have captured the imagination of the sporting world and won the hearts of millions of young fans. We ask that you treat them fairly and equally. Pay them. Then play them” (Senires, 2000). Eight-two soccer fans placed their signature and email address under that declaration protesting the inequitable labor dispute.



The media wrote about the sexism seemingly inherent in the pay structure of the USSF, “Steinbrecher insisted the pay dispute had nothing to do with gender. But the next moment another Federation insider admitted, ‘There are people who think granting equal pay would upset the men’” (quoted in Howard, 2000, para. 17). Others wrote about the ideological underpinnings used to pay the women less in light of so much success, “You take the best thing that's every happened to you, and you make it your enemy. Even worse, you make your saviors look bad...the damage is done” (Brennan, 2000, p. 3C).

As the veteran players boycotted, players on the U-20 team were called up to play in the Australian Cup, but they soon decided to stand in solidarity with the veterans until a contract was signed. Mia Hamm, the usually demure super-star also demonstrated her power within the structure of the USSF. As the USSF threatened to send a team of 16-year-olds to represent the U.S. in the 2000 Olympics, Hamm stood up and spoke directly to USSF executives:

‘Fine, then I’m done,’ Hamm declared to Langel and her teammates. ‘I’ve won two World Cups and an Olympic Gold medal, and if I retire tomorrow I’ll be quite comfortable with what I’ve accomplished.’ Then, turning to glare at Contiguglia [USFF president], Hamm added this kicker, ‘*You* call Nike and tell them I’m through’ (emphasis original) (quoted in Silver, 2000, p.88).

With this boost of bargaining power, the team forced the hand of the USSF. A contract was agreed upon on January 29, 2000 that extended to the 2004 Athens Summer Olympics, contingent upon the start of a professional women’s league, guaranteed players a minimum salary of \$5000 a month, and an appearance fee of \$2000 per game,

putting the women on equal footing with the men's team, who earn their base salaries from professional leagues (Longman, 2000b).

The USSF attempted to save face by controlling the contract negotiation narrative.

According to the USSF:

U.S. Soccer is extremely proud of its track record in promoting gender equity in American sports. The USSF's progressive development of women's soccer across the world enabled each player on the U.S.

Women's National Team roster in 1999 to earn in excess of \$200,000 last year in salary and bonuses for playing soccer (U.S. Soccer Communications, 2000b).

The USSF also heavily focused on the "historic nature of this agreement (aka 'landmark', 'milestone', 'progressive')" and to "always speak positively about any perceived 'reconciliation' with the players (aka 'have always been confident, positive, optimistic' that a landmark agreement would be reached)" (U.S. Soccer Communications, 2000a) in order to downplay the rampant of sexism in the USSF.

Mia Hamm believed the historic negotiations of Billie Jean King and other tennis players in the 1970s broke the ground for equality to be met, "If not for Billie Jean King setting out to get equal pay of women's tennis, we probably wouldn't be have had the courage to do what we did today...Through the entire process, the one thing we all learned is that, for us to get where we want to be, we all have to do it together" (quoted in Williams, 2000, p. D2).

Even after the negotiations were complete, the tension between the women's team and the USSF was palpable. This tension was not only the sole result of the bad publicity

the USSF endured during the contract dispute, but also involved the establishment of a Division I<sup>47</sup> sanctioned women's professional league. Even in the halcyon days of the new millennium while the American public enjoyed a pre-9/11 glow, the market remained cool to the idea of start-up professional sport leagues (Geier, 2015). In fact, Robert Contiguglia, president of the USSF, felt it was naïve to assume a women's league would flourish when the men's league had continued to struggle financially (Lee, 2000). However, in February 2000, an independent group named the WUSA led by John Hendricks, former investor for the failed NSA, and the players of the women's national team, announced plans to file an application for a Division I women's professional league. John Langel, legal representation for the U.S. women's national team, said ““There was really silence until John Hendricks came along. If MLS had expressed interest at the outset, I don't know what would have happened”” (quoted in Shipley, 2000a, p. D01).

In response, MLS, working in conjunction with the USSF, put forward a business plan that included a partnership between itself and a new women's league. Don Garber, Commissioner of MLS, claimed an internal relationship with a new women's pro league would be financially beneficial to both parties, ““We believe in the women's game and feel with close cooperation from Major League Soccer, it can be successful. We hope that the relationship between the two leagues can be close and beneficial to both in the end”” (quoted in Shipley, 2000a, p. D01). Yet, the women's national team players and

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<sup>47</sup> In this context, Division I has no connection to NCAA Division I athletics. Instead, Division I status designates “premier” or professional status. Divisions are defined by standards for owners, capitalization, and financial operations.

their legal counsel interpreted this relationship as an indication that MLS, and thus, indirectly the USSF, was seeking control of the development of a women's league to prevent competition with sponsors. National team players did not "...demonstrate much excitement over the MLS marriage proposal" (Lieberman, 2000, p. SP11).

The U.S. national team players wanted control over the future of the "own" league. Hendricks, "'intoxicated by what [he] witnessed in the 1999 World Cup and all the sponsorship surrounding that event,'" (quoted in Longman, 2003e, p. D6) recruited national team players on the concept of an independent league. MLS officials said there was a potential to combine efforts with MLS and the Hendricks group, but that the U.S. women's players preferred to remain independent from the men's professional league, with good cause (Shipley, 2000a). The development of MLS was not only a FIFA stipulation for the USSF to acquire the 1994 Men's World Cup and international status in the men's game, but also a \$100 million losing venture in 2000. "'For the MLS to take on another venture isn't in its interest right now,' says Julie Foudy. 'We only get one chance to do this right, and WUSA is focused entirely on the women's game'" (quoted in Wahl, 2000b, p. 38).

Grant Wahl (2000b), a senior writer for *Sports Illustrated*, who covers both the men's and women's national teams, referred to the control women's professional soccer as "The Battle of the Sexes" (p.38). This second-wave feminist language conjures up images of the historic "Battle of the Sexes" between Billy Jean King and Bobby Riggs in 1973. King defeating Riggs was a major symbolic gain for liberal feminists in the 1970s, but framing the contemporaneous conflict as a battle of "the sexes" remains a divisive tool in a cultural institution (USFF) that "prided" itself on its progressive agenda for

gender equality. Returning to antiquated and monolithic conceptualizations sex/gender fails to grasp the complexity of the moment. Instead, it only serves to reinforce and emphasize the acrimonious relationship between the women's national team and the USSF.

The Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA) investment group was comprised of several cable television moguls from TNT and CNN/SI who promised \$40 million over 5 years to confirm the 2001 start date. Much to the dismay of the USSF, Hendricks offered each founding player a financial stake in the league, an arrangement prohibited in all other professional sports leagues, including MLS (Stone, 2000).<sup>48</sup> The U.S. women's team decided to stand in solidarity, even when threatened by major financial risk, against the desires of the USSF. The process to determine which group was given the reins to a pro league seemingly remained with the USSF and its ability to sanction a league. But as French (2000b) noted, the 20 members of the women's squad insisted "...the decision has already been made by those who matter most - them. Any speculation on the subject was put to rest with a missive issued April 17 in which the players made it clear they would 'only play professionally for WUSA'" (para. 3).<sup>49</sup> These actions, forced the hand of the USSF.

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<sup>48</sup> Founding players included: Michelle Akers, Brandi Chastain, Tracy Ducar, Lorrie Fair, Joy Fawcett, Danielle Fotopoulos, Julie Foudy, Mia Hamm, Kristine Lilly, Shannon MacMillan, Tiffeny Milbrett, Carla Overbeck, Cindy Parlow, Christie Pearce, Tiffany Roberts, Briana Scurry, Kate Sobrero, Tisha Venturini, Saskia Webber, and Sara Whalen (O'Leary & Consentino, 2000).

<sup>49</sup> If the USSF officially sanctioned the MLS with Division I status for a women's professional soccer league in the U.S., WUSA would ultimately move forward in their plans without sanction. WUSA advisor and former U.S. women's national team coach, Tony DiCicco felt that, "...sanction will ultimately come

In the end, MLS, and thus, the USSF, gave up its plan to start its own women's league. In the summer of 2000, the WUSA officially received Division I status, USSF's approval to move forward with league operations. The WUSA and MLS talked of sharing "synergies" (quoted in French, 2000a, para. 9) within like markets, and eventually agreed upon a "comprehensive cooperative plan" (quoted in Goff, 2000, p. D01) for marketing, scheduling, expansion and stadium development. Cleverly negotiated, MLS managed to take advantage of the WUSA's cable exposure, reaping the benefits of increased television programming while the WUSA inherited the assistance of a marketing staff struggling to maintain saliency in the American sport market – an unbalanced exchange at best (MLS: League Comes, 2000). The USSF continued to reproduce its marketing scheme – utilize the popularity and success of the women's game to promote the men's game.<sup>50</sup> Just as the USSF used the women's national team as a cultural vehicle to maximize the continued growth of MLS, the WUSA, seemingly in the midst of independence from the USSF, could not escape the oppressive grasp of the Federation. Regardless of the inequitable, but marginal trade-offs, the women's national team persevered, under pressure from the USSF, in securing the rights to form a league of their "own."<sup>51</sup>

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from the marketplace" (French, 2000b, para. 14). However, competing without sanctions could also result in forfeiting their individual rights to play internationally.

<sup>50</sup> The USSF utilized this is same marketing strategy during the 1999 "Road to Pasadena" Tour, and during the first days of the Women's World Cup. MLS games were positioned as opening acts to the women's game, squeezing in a reminder to all fans that MLS and men's soccer was noteworthy in the U.S.

<sup>51</sup> I do not discuss in this chapter the women's national team and their "loss" in the Sydney Olympics gold medal game. To some reporters, this "loss" marked a point of turmoil going forward for the women's

Eight teams, concentrated exclusively on the east and west coasts rounded out the first iteration of the League.<sup>52</sup> But it was on April 14, 2001, when the WUSA finally made history. The inaugural game, played at RFK Stadium in Washington, fielded Mia Hamm's Washington Freedom against Brandi Chastain's Bay Area CyberRays. The contest, labelled "Mia vs. Brandi," drew a record-breaking crowd of 34,148, a number MLS could only dream to gather in one stadium for a men's game (Yannis, 2001a). The game dripped with feminist intentionality as fans watched tennis great Billy Jean King perform the coin toss, and messages of female empowerment encircled the stadium field. For example, outside of WUSA stadiums, the Gillette for Women Venus Ultimate Soccer Goddess Station was open to all fans to bring out their "'inner soccer goddess'" (quoted in Philbin, 2002, para. 3). Fans who visited the station were entered into a drawing to be named the game's Venus Ultimate Soccer Goddesses, had their picture taken at the Goddess Photo Booth, and experienced an interactive area, where hair-decorating and megaphone-making materials were available (Philbin, 2002).

The game ended in a dry, and somewhat uninteresting, 1-0 victory for the home team, Washington Freedom. But it was the sense of accomplishment prior to the game, off the field, that literally vibrated with significance. All of the foundational players of

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team (French, 2001a; Longman, 2000d; Michealis, 2000; Wahl, 2000c). Although the silver medal established Project Gold's motto of "win forever" impossible, the "loss" drew a long shadow over the men's U-23 team and its first ever appearance in the knockout round of the Olympic tournament. The men's program once again remained second-fiddle to the women's team.

<sup>52</sup>. The eight teams of the WUSA were: Atlanta Beat, Boston Breakers, Carolina Courage (originally the Orlando Tempest), New York Power, Philadelphia Charge, San Diego Spirit, San Jose, CyberRays, and Washington (D.C.) Freedom.

the WUSA gathered in the lobby of RFK Stadium's press box. Together, they filed into a secluded freight elevator out of the public eye, and celebration ensued. "[The team] giggled, hugged, horsed around and posed for pictures, giddy with anticipation," (Kuhns, 2001, para. 8) signifying yet another accomplishment for women's sport and women's soccer. In the small and seemingly safe space of the freight elevator, the dream of every U.S. women's player to play professionally in the U.S. had been celebrated and could not be contained – the future seemed bright.

In early 2001, the girl power sport feminist movement moved full-steam ahead with little regard for possible economic or cultural hiccups. The women's sports market was exploding as the internet and the introduction of e-commerce began to influence the marketplace. Hoping to invite a younger, active, fashion-conscious woman to join their brand, Nike stepped up its operations by focusing on the difference between men and women and how they conceive of sport (Wong, 2001). However, several female sport marketing employees from Nike, Reebok, and other sport retail corporations struck out on their own, and established women-centric companies, such as Lucy and Title IX, that focused specifically on the needs of active women of all age and body types by combining fashion with functional sports wear (Johnson & Goldman, 2000; Lucy Activewear, 2004). Ominously, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) and Women's Professional Softball League (WPSL) continued to struggle financially and organizationally (Lien & Heidesch, 2001; National Pro Fastpitch History, 2016; Rhoden, 2015). Still, Hendricks could see no scenario in which the WUSA might fail, "It's hard for us to imagine that [we will fail] with the financial support, the television support we



have. Soccer is something growing in the population, not declining. More and more young people play soccer. We're...optimistic'" (quoted in French, 2001b, p. 20-21).

WUSA's business plan was seemingly unassailable. With investor confidence high in a thriving neoliberal market, WUSA executives had a guaranteed startup funds of \$40 million and a \$24 million rainy day fund for operations and venue development. Moreover, the WUSA banked upon television exposure to aid in the courtship of potential sponsors. Turner Network Television (TNT), a major investor for the WUSA, offered unprecedented television exposure for WUSA games, and thus, critical broadcast exposure for guarantors of the league. Banking on a surge of sponsorship of \$14 to \$20 million and reliant upon the viewership of suburban soccer families recruited from the 1999 World Cup spectacle, the league felt confident it could break even within five years, despite a low attendance expectation of 7,500 fans per game at a meager \$11.50 per ticket. (French, 2001a; Wahl, 2001a).

The WUSA's marketing strategy was a reproduction of those used in the 1999 World Cup, in which the focus remained on young, white, adolescent girls' and women's soccer as a family sport. Soccer had "reached" equality, and those young girls, who wore Hamm and Chastain shirts in the stands, could finally dream about being, not just an Olympian, but a professional athlete (A League of Their Own, 2001; Bell, 2002).<sup>53</sup> The WUSA was positioned, like the WNBA, as a source of inspiration for millions of little

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<sup>53</sup>. In 2001, a poll named Mia Hamm as the most recognizable and marketable female athlete in the United States (Longman, 2001). As such, the WUSA relied heavily upon Hamm as a spokesperson and brand for the league. Seemingly then, Hamm's success on the field was to correlate into the WUSA's financial and cultural success off the field.

girls' who participated on team sports across the nation. The WNBA was criticized for using a similar "pink strategy" that tended to alienate male consumers in an all female space. As Mary McDonald (2000) notes in her article on the early marketing of the WNBA, "...to create new consumers, WNBA accounts construct the league and its advertisers as advocates of gender justice" (p. 35). The WUSA again ignored the public response of the WNBA's marketing plan, and according to Barbara Allen, CEO of WUSA, soccer had "...the ability to go across genders," (quoted in Stone, 2001, p. 54) paying no mind to the fragile sensibilities of the white, middle-class male spectator, the usually targeted sport audience, at risk for being smothered by feminist sporting accomplishments of the mid- to late-1990s.

### **"Return of the Guy": The Declining and Shifting Permutations of Girl Power**

In the first year of play the WUSA claimed success. Even in a now volatile market, due to the slow forming recession triggered by the dotcom stock bubble burst in March of 2000, the WUSA exceeded its modest attendance goals of 7,500 per game, averaging 8,133 in eight cities. The Nielsen ratings demonstrated a small loyal following with a ratings average of 0.4 on TNT and CNN/SI, outshining MLS, which continued to struggle with a 0.26 rating on the heavily watched ESPN channel (Ballard, 2001; Bowen, 2001; Wahl, 2001b). But the Nielsen ratings also revealed expected growing pains. The WUSA had difficulties branding itself in the national lexicon of American sport. The league began with only eight teams, all on coastal shores, and games were smattered with shaky play by marquee players, including Mia Hamm. She seemed exhausted as her touch in tight spaces was unreliable, no longer able to leave defenders in the dust on her way to goal (Straus, 2001; Wahl, 2001b).

The WUSA exposed critical flaws in its business structure. To begin, the WUSA hired Barbara Allen as CEO, and Tony DiCicco as acting-commissioner. These two positions are important to the successful start-up of any professional league, but vital to a start-up women's professional league. Both individuals were well outside of their areas of expertise. Allen, a former Quaker Oats executive who knew little about the sport business – let alone soccer – was responsible for the overall vision of women's professional soccer, recruiting and retaining the very best talent for the league, and making sure there was always cash in the bank. When approached by headhunter about being the CEO of an upstart women's soccer league, Allen thought it sounded like a “cool’ job,” (quoted in Gill, 2001, para. 12) although she refused to relocate to New York City, home of the WUSA's headquarters. DiCicco, former U.S. women's national team coach with no front office experience, was responsible for the day-to-day operations of the league, including labor relations with FIFA, NCAA, and the USSF, TV contracts, and finding new revenues in new media outlets and overseeing the competitive direction of the league (Davidson, 2001; Philip Wylie, 2003b; Wahl, 2001b). Former U.S. national team player Carla Overbeck said about DiCicco's appointment, “Tony has been with us from the beginning. In a way, he is still our coach, showing us the way to victory as we build this league in enduring fashion” (quoted in Women's United Soccer Association, 2001, para. 11).

The limitations of Allen and DiCicco surfaced even before the league began play in 2001. Woefully disorganized, the WUSA did not announce schedules, rosters, or team names until a few months prior to the start date in April (Wahl, 2001b). The WUSA also started behind the eight ball in regards to sponsorship. Hoping to attract five sponsors for

the initial season, only two, Hyundai and Johnson & Johnson, signed on for more than a year. Nike was an initial sponsor in the league, but on a limited basis – an interesting position considering its desire to incorporate women and soccer into their “brand.” It proved to be an immutable bargaining chip of Nike’s corporate sponsorship needs when negotiating with the USSF in 1998. Two years later, only months after the women’s national team had won the Women’s World Cup and Nike had named the biggest building on its campus after Mia Hamm, Nike’s corporate division decided to supply only Hamm’s team, the Washington Freedom, with equipment and apparel. Discouraged by Nike’s decision not to support the entire league DiCicco stated that, ““It wasn’t an easy sell at their corporate level. I wish we had more sponsors. In a launch year, we didn’t do everything we wanted to”” (quoted in Sandomir, 2001, p. D2).

Inexplicably, \$20 million of the \$120 million deal the USSF signed with Nike in 1998 was ear marked for Project 40 – the developmental feeder system for the MLS and the men’s national team. This deal significantly linked Nike, the USSF, and MLS into an agreement that squarely focused on the development of men’s professional soccer in the U.S. with the goal of winning the World Cup in 2010 (Shiple, 1998b; Wagman, 1998). As an independent group, disconnected from MLS and USSF, and therefore Nike, the WUSA was of marginal interest to Nike, unless it could demonstrate a profitable future (Sandomir, 2001). Nike’s decision to opt out of sponsoring the WUSA was unexpected. Nike had elevated soccer to a “core sport” and was successfully competing with other apparel companies (i.e. adidas, Umbro) for the global representation of soccer. Nike’s decision, is incomprehensible because the WUSA seemed to incorporate all of its sponsorship needs: it was the top-flight women’s league in the world, overflowing with

international talent from Brazil, China, and Europe, and it was situated in an American market with the largest and strongest female market interest in the game. What more could Nike ask for? Instead, Nike's withdrawal of support all but doomed the WUSA.

The initial investment of \$40 million that was to be spread over five years of league operations was spent in start-ups costs: the creation of team logos, promotional marketing and advertising costs, the negotiation of facility leases, and salaries of the league executives (Rovell, 2003). And with a record-breaking attendance in the first WUSA game, WUSA executives overestimated the stability of attendance numbers and thus, potential revenue. Hendricks commented that, ““Our spending started to match that expectation [10,000 to 15,000 fans per game] in terms of marketing and player salaries. But what happened was that we settled into a 3,000 to 5,000 attendance level. It wasn't enough to sustain that level of spending”” (quoted in Ourand, 2015, para. 10). Bleeding money, the WUSA did manage to sign a two-year deal with the PAX network reportedly worth \$2 million, but with decreasing viewership in its first year, any hope of negotiating a more financially lucrative deal was nothing more than a pipe dream (Rovell, 2003). Yet, to the general public the WUSA spun its first season as a general success. DiCicco declared, ““We have proven that we're a viable league and we have shown that there is a market for women's soccer”” (quoted in Parker, 2001, p. 1G).

### **Changing of the Soccer Guards: Reasserting Men and Masculinity in the USSF.**

It is difficult to envision a cultural scenario that could change the consciousness of an entire nation instantaneously but September 11, 2001 did just that. The terrorist attacks on New York City, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C. jolted American

consciousness out of its seemingly protected state, and propelled American citizens into a space of political, cultural, and economic turmoil of global proportions (Kaplan, 2003).

Who was to blame for the American borders becoming so porous and weak? How could the American nation understand the reasons for an attack on the very institutions that wield such enormous economic and political power?

The media and American public pressed the political elite for answers, and the response for countless political conservatives was feminism. Allegedly, the revival of American feminism(s) and “girl power” in the late 1990s had “feminized” American men while its “multiculturalist” tendencies left the nation vulnerable to attack (Allen 2002; Faludi, 2007). Susan Faludi (2007) quoted Camille Paglia, an academic and conservative social critic, from a CNN broadcast only a few weeks after 9/11. Paglia discussed the weakening of America men:

‘Well, you see, there is a very serious problem in this country, men and women are virtually indistinguishable in the workplace.’ Indeed, especially among the American upper middle class, the man has ‘become like a woman.’ (Paglia was weirdly, albeit inadvertently, echoing the words of Taliban attorney general Maulvi Jalilullah Maulvizada, who had earlier told a journalist that when women are given freedom, ‘men become like women.’) ...Paglia warned. ‘There is a kind of a threat to national security here,’ she said. ‘I think the nation is not going to be able to confront and to defeat other countries where the code of masculinity is more traditional (parentheses original)’ (p.22-23).

The solution for an alarming feminized populace was the complete re-rendering of America's national identity.

Post-9/11, the American conservative coalition led the movement to reassert white masculinity in the name of healing the nation's heart. Masculinity, linked to acts of heroism by firefighters and police officers at ground zero, underscored physical strength and paternalistic attitudes toward trauma and injury (Drew, 2004). At the same time, male investors and consumers were considered the first to demonstrate resolve as individuals bravely returned to their corporations to work only a few days after the tragic events. These men were, as Stacey Mayhall (2009) notes, "...all soldiers in the 'civilization fight' for an American-led 'market civilization'" (p. 29). President George W. Bush, was swept into this heroic coverage (Faludi, 2007), touted as the new Teddy Roosevelt – a courageous knight, riding with his cavalry – determined to respond with a big stick and a Texas twang.

A number of feminist scholars have argued that to restore white masculinity to its central position and guard against the formation of new feminism(s) the cultural saliency of contemporary feminist gains needed to be displaced and silenced (Allen, 2002; Bhattacharyya, 2008; Drew, 2004; Faludi, 2007; Mayhall, 2009; McRobbie, 2009; Puar, 2007). The public backlash to feminism that came quickly after 9/11 seemed simple, but was in fact complex and deliberately executed. At the same time liberal social critics, such as Susan Sontag and Barbara Einreich, were demonized in the media for their controversial opinions about 9/11; a distaff correction was well underway inside American borders. The media began to disregard female opinions and belittle the feminist voice, but more importantly, the media forced the feminist opinion out of the

media marketplace reducing the feminist profile in American culture. The absence of women's voices went relatively unnoticed, but as Faludi (2007) notes less women were chosen for op-ed pieces in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* and even fewer women were selected to take part in television political commentary show such as NBC's *Meet the Press* or CNN's *Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer*. This trend was also prevalent within the Bush administration with the closing of the Women's Bureau in the Labor Department, dismantling the apparatus to track gender and pay, and closing the White House Women's Office (Bhattacharyya, 2008).

The ironic aspect of feminism's displacement in American culture is that the U.S. considers itself, as does a majority of the Global North, a leader in regards to women's rights. According to Jasbir Puar (2007), "Despite the recurring display of revulsion for attributes associated with the feminine, the United States apparently still regards itself as the arbiter of feminist civilizational standards" (p. 88). Claims of Muslim repression were in contrast to the liberation of western women, or the presumption that Global North women – specifically the U.S. – already enjoy full equality, was a common discourse that defined an American culture consumed by the war on terror. Some scholars (Bhattacharyya, 2008; Eisenstein, 2002; Ferguson, 2005; Oates, 2006; Puar, 2007) argue that the use by the U.S. of a Global North/Global South feminist binary, veiled its actual interests in Muslim women as possible conduits for democratic nation-building and post-war reconstruction. In the post-9/11 moment, this approach succeeded in reifying the U.S. as an international feminist leader while masking its own systematic dismantling of feminism at home.



As the national governing body of soccer in the United States, the USSF occupied a position of power in regards to international women's sport. USSF officials touted the 30-year gender equity movement in sport as inspiration for their "generous" financial support. They felt the women's national team players; should graciously recognize and celebrate the opportunities the USSF had afforded them in light of long historical narrative on gender discrimination of soccer federations in Latin America and the Middle East (Hong & Mangan, 2004; Prouse, 2015; Votre & Mourão, 2004). In fact, Hank Steinbrecher, USSF general secretary, portrayed himself as a champion for the women's national team although the team had no clout with the Federation, "...I worked tirelessly for the women's program. I remember going to the board of directors when it wasn't very popular and asking them to support \$1.8 million for the women when we didn't have it" (quoted in Mahoney, 2000, p. 14).

In the late 1990s, according to Gary Cavalli, commissioner for the women's professional American Basketball League, some fans felt "...women's sport is a cause as much as it is entertainment," (quoted in Rovell, 2003, para. 6) and the general public showed its support for gender equality attending both WNBA and U.S. women's national team games. However, in a post-9/11 America, the cause of gender equity in sport was no longer unassailable. In 2002, Title IX came under attack from the Bush administration. President Bush appointed a 15-member commission to study Title IX and the negative effects the law had allegedly had on men's sport. The commission recommended the easing of some standards for satisfying Title IX through the rewriting of the Department of Education regulations enforcing the law and the guidance it offers

to high schools and colleges.<sup>54</sup> Julie Foudy, a self-proclaimed feminist and the youngest president of the Women's Sports Foundation, was appointed to the commission. She clashed with several of the commissioners who felt Title IX should "Keep Men in Mind" (Schemo, 2003b, p. D1), including retired WNBA player Cynthia Cooper. Foudy even co-wrote with Donna de Varona a minority report, which criticized the testimony heard as biased towards institutions which felt challenged by Title IX regulation.

This backlash against Title IX, while unsuccessfully implemented, encouraged the general sport fan and corporations to question the economic and cultural value of women's sports. As Cavalli argued:

Many people think that women's sport is a cause as much as it is entertainment ...[but]...companies are looking for more of a return on their investment than ever before. They're not going to invest in a sports property to shake Mia Hamm's hand and feel good about themselves. They have to justify it from a bottom line perspective (quoted in Rovell, 2003, para. 9).

In retrospect, Hendricks agreed with Cavalli, "One of the things 9/11 did was depress the sponsorship dollars. We had a very difficult time selling sponsorships after 2001. A lot

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<sup>54</sup> Some of the specific recommendations the commission had for easing the standards of Title IX were: calculating opportunities in sports by counting positions available on sport teams, rather than actual players, and expanding the role of surveys of students' interest in participating in sports (Schemo, 2003a). Calculating opportunities in sports by counting positions would put football (a large-scale revenue producing sport) on par with a women's soccer team (a small-scale non-revenue producing sport). In regards to surveys, they were to be sent via email to college students. If the student did not fill out the survey, their response was noted as if their interests were already fulfilled (Woliver, 2009).

of sponsors cut back and focused their marketing dollars on their advertising rather than corporate sponsorships for things like...the women's soccer league” (quoted in Ourand, 2015, para. 14). During this momentous shift toward conservative political, economic, and cultural life, the U.S. women's national team and the WUSA were at their most vulnerable – a “perfect” time for the USSF to alter the gendered dynamic and reassert men and masculinity as the dominant representation of U.S. Soccer.

In 2002, the success of the WUSA remained the sole focus of national team players. To grow a start-up league and a fan base, superstars must be present and make an impact on the field. Yet, on the third week of play in April, the USSF scheduled a “friendly” against Finland on a Saturday when six of the eight teams in the league had games, two of which were season home openers (Vecsey, 2002). In the international soccer structure, national team games – even friendlies, which are considered practice or tune-up games for qualifying tournaments – take precedence. All players within the national team pool must attend a one-week training camp prior to the friendly, leaving their professional teams in the lurch. It seems unconscionable then, for the USSF to schedule a meaningless game at the very moment the WUSA was struggling to maintain its existence. Jim Moorhouse, director of communications for the USSF, tried his best to defend the USSF's decision. He argued that there was no “magic wand” when scheduling international friendlies around the new WUSA schedule, and that the USSF's main priority was to “...keep the [women's national team] on the radar” (quoted in Vecsey, 2002, p. D2) – an interesting assessment for an institution with an already rocky relationship with the women's national team. This was one of the more egregious

examples of how men's sports organizations conspired to contain women's sport and protect sport as a male preserve.

Post- 9/11, American postfeminist, "girl power" culture began to shrink from the American consciousness as previous marketing strategies that pandered to young girls, soccer moms, and families were no seen as longer effective (Allen, 2002; Drew, 2004; Faludi, 2007; Mayhall, 2009). The feminist "soccer mom" who had proclaimed her rights to civil liberties, such as abortion, social welfare, and gun control in the 1990s, morphed into the "security mom," a woman whose civil liberties were no longer as important as the country's defense budget and the security of her children (Faludi, 2007; Longman, 2003f; Tumulty & Novak, 2003). Then Senator Joe Biden discussed the change he saw in issues important to women on the campaign trail, "...all the women wanted to talk about...[was]...not schools, not prescription drugs. It was 'What are you doing to protect my kids against terrorists?' *Soccer moms are security moms now* (emphasis mine)" (quoted in Klein, 2003, p. 23). Even the car company, Nissan, suggested the soccer mom phenomenon was dead with its commercial headline for the Quest van, "Moms have changed" (quoted in Longman, 2003f, p. SP11). But most importantly, security moms craved a "strong," male presence in their daily lives (Tumulty & Novak, 2003). In retrospect, the WUSA should have as well considering, "It is fathers who generally push their daughters into the sport and more likely to buy WUSA tickets and merchandise" (Longman, 2003f, p. SP11). The cultural context was finally ready to reposition men's soccer as a site of masculinity.

### **A Collusion of Masculine Proportions.**

In order for the U.S. public to have English-language access to all games for the World Cup, MLS commissioner, Don Garber, headed the formation of the Soccer United Marketing (SUM) group. SUM is the premier marketing firm for MLS and the USSF. In 2001, SUM bought the English-language television rights not only to the 2002 Men's World Cup, but the 2006 Men's World Cup and the 2003 Women's World Cup as well. This was a risky venture in the early 2000s as the U.S. still did not have a taste for watching international soccer on television, especially games televised in the late evening and early morning hours. Many Americans slept through the USA's first game. After a win against predicted World Cup-winner Portugal in the U.S.'s first game of the 2002 World Cup, men's soccer "...gained a foothold in the landscape of a normally soccer-indifferent nation" (Whiteside, 2002b, p. 1C). Solid group play placed the American men's team in the knockout round against Mexico, and a decisive 2-0 win propelled the men's team to the quarterfinals for the first time since 1930, where they fell, 1-0, to the eventual World Cup winner, Germany. Regardless of the loss, U.S. soccer believed Project 2010 was paying early dividends. Garber felt the quick success of the men's national team was no fluke, "We knew this day was coming" (quoted in Hiestand, 2002, p. 1C) and young, rising stars Landon Donovan and DaMarcus Beasley were touted as products of MLS.

During the successful U.S. men's national team run in the 2002 World Cup, head coach Bruce Arena, originally from Brooklyn, New York became the homegrown and war-torn figurehead of U.S. Soccer. The success Arena had at the University of Virginia and now with the U.S. men's national team is linked directly to his New York City roots

– a tireless blue-collar work ethic and loyalty, instilled by his father, who was a butcher, and his mother, a school bus driver. As a New Yorker, he understood the pain the city felt after the terror attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> as he too, had lost a close friend and confidant. According the media, Arena was “...the man *most* responsible for the United States’ stunning success in the 2002 World Cup (emphasis mine)” (Clarke, 2002, p. D12; Whiteside, 2002d; L alas, 2002). He was a patriot, facilitating and reproducing U.S. dominance and ascendancy in the world’s most popular game. While in South Korea for the World Cup, Arena became a symbol of American freedom as the team visited an American military base and personally thanked “our troops” for defending freedom (Whiteside, 2002a).

In a post-9/11 context, Arena was championed as a voice of reason in U.S. Soccer. His white, working-class roots and intimate connection with the terrorist attacks on New York City, on display though the success of the U.S. men’s national team at the 2002 World Cup, reinforced the discourse of white cultural nationalism (Faludi, 2007; Kusz, 2007; Puar, 2007; Silk, 2012), that “...resecure[d] Whiteness and conventional forms of masculinity as the normative center of American culture and society in the American imaginary” (Kusz, 2007, p. 79).

During the success of the 2002 World Cup, Arena articulated the sentiment that undermined the “feminist” success and position of the U.S. women’s national team. Two days after the U.S. men lost to Germany in the quarterfinals when he was asked to compare the women’s success to the men’s success, Arena dodged the question by equating the programs to apples and oranges – a familiar rhetorical strategy also used by the USSF when discussing program inequities. Indeed, Arena went one step further

stating, “There's no comparison. This is a *real* world championship we're playing in and what we've done is pretty significant. That's not to say what the women did wasn't significant. But there were no Argentinas, Italys or Frances going home from the women's World Cup (emphasis mine)” (quoted in Bondy, 2002b, p. 54). In one patronizing statement, Arena dismissed the ultimate feminist sporting achievement in recent history and devalued its cultural and social significance. Yet, there was no backlash against this sexist commentary by the media, USSF, or the general public. Instead, coverage featured President Bush and his new found excitement for the men's national team (Bondy, 2002a; Longman, 2002; Whiteside, 2002c).

As the U.S. men's cultural capital grew to international proportions, the WUSA struggled to maintain its economic and cultural saliency. In 2002, the WUSA saw a decrease in league-wide attendance and television viewership. A promising attendance average of 8,104 fans per game in 2001 shrank to 6,957 fans in the second year of the league. Moreover, the switch from TNT to the PAX network, once considered a critical move to secure more families as consumers, was ineffective. In fact, the PAX network averaged a paltry 0.1 Nielson rating for the season (~98,000 households nationwide) down from TNT's Nielson rating of 0.4 (~350,000 households) nationwide (Ballard, 2001; Bowen, 2001; Parker, 2002; Parker 2003a; Straus, 2003c; Wahl, 2001b). The fragile status of the WUSA seemed to spin around an economic axis. Many journalists reported the longstanding recession, corporate indifference, and dreadful management as three key reasons for the WUSA's inability to launch a robust women's professional league (French, 2003; Michaelis, 2003; Philip Wylie, 2003b; Tierney, 2003 Vecsey, 2003a; Williams, 2003). Yet, even with revisions to its management structure and

operation budget, the WUSA managed to lose money at an alarming rate, and by August 2003, the WUSA's debt totaled over \$90 million (Michaelis, 2003).

The WUSA sought out financial aid from sources close to home: the USSF and MLS. Over its three-year existence, the WUSA drew up two proposals for financial assistance from the Federation but was turned down each time, with no explanation (Parker, 2003b). In early August 2003, at the annual general meeting for the USSF, the WUSA presented its most recent proposal, in which it asked for more than \$1 million to help with player development and marketing. WUSA president and CEO Lynn Morgan felt the decision would be beneficial for the USSF as it, "...would show great support for what the women's game has achieved in this country. And it would show U.S. Soccer supports seeing the women's game achieve new heights'" (quoted in Berkowitz, 2003, p. 7C). The Federation expressed the opinion that the proposal, if accepted, would be an unprecedented level of financial support for a pro-league. Yet, the Federation, along with its corporate sponsor, Nike, had already bankrolled the men's player development program, Project-40, for Major League Soccer. Moreover, both MLS and the WUSA have sponsorship agreements with the USSF Foundation, but MLS with better attendance and a wider television reach on ESPN, has a more comprehensive and richer package (Berkowitz, 2003).

Dan Flynn, USSF secretary general, had been charged with evaluating the \$1 million proposal and reporting back to the USSF board of directors, but he dragged his feet and by the middle of September, he had not yet issued his pronouncement. The WUSA folded on September 15, 2003, just days before the 2003 Women's World Cup. "What a shame," said Alan Rothenberg, current USSF board member and MLS



founder, after hearing the WUSA had closed operations. ““They were hanging on by their fingernails. I was hoping they would hang in there until the end of the Women’s World Cup. They were hoping for a shot in the arm”” (quoted in Heath, 2003, p. D01). His concern is clearly disingenuous, in light of the previous decisions by the board, on which Rothenberg sat, not to financially support the struggling women’s league while it and Nike generously supported the men’s league. As a founder of MLS, but more importantly former USSF president, Rothenberg could certainly have done more to assist the growth of women’s professional soccer. Don Garber, MLS commissioner believed if the two leagues worked together they could ““...achieve a whole lot more than if we were to work independent of each other”” (quoted in Goff, 2000, p. D01).

In a competitive sport market, two successful leagues – a men’s league directly tied to the USSF and its standing within FIFA, and a women’s league independently operated under the very institutional structure that has sought to contain their success – could not coexist. Philip Anschutz might have possibly bridged this divide. A venture capitalist and owner of Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG), a worldwide sporting and music entertainment presenter, Anschutz was the most powerful figure in MLS. In 2003, he owned six out of the ten MLS teams, single-handedly keeping the MLS financially afloat as it struggled for relevance in the American sport market (Longman, 2003c).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> In 2003, Philip Anschutz owned six MLS franchises: Chicago Fire, Colorado Rapids, D.C. United, L.A. Galaxy, N.Y. MetroStars (renamed RedBull), and the San Jose Earthquakes. Only two businessmen owned the remaining four teams. Lamar Hunt, a sports promoter of American football, soccer, basketball, and ice hockey, owned the Columbus Crew, FC Dallas and Sporting KC, while Robert Kraft, investor-

Because of the close relationship between the USSF and MLS, Anschutz's power and financial reach stretched deep into the Federation structure. He built the Home Depot Center, considered the crown jewel of American soccer stadiums, which is home to the MLS' Los Angeles Galaxy and the residential training complex for the U.S. men's and women's national teams (Connolly, 2003; Wilner, 2003). Despite his connections with both the men's and women's national teams, Anschutz played a crucial role in the failure of the WUSA. As noted, the WUSA had a contentious, yet courteous relationship with MLS. But for most of the 2003 season league officials were in discussions with Tim Leiweke, AEG's CEO, about the potential of Anschutz investing in the future of the league. As Scott French (2003), a reporter for *Soccer America* wrote, "Many in American soccer had figured that Philip Anschutz, AEG's multibillionaire leader, would play WUSA savior should the need arrive" (p. 23). Instead, in the beginning of September, he decided not to invest in the WUSA and women's soccer – the eventual death knell for the league. Instead, Anschutz and AEG invested in women's soccer through a more indirect method – the 2003 Women's World Cup – an approach that financially benefitted the MLS, and lined the pockets of MLS investors.

### **Profiting Off of the Backs of Female Athletes.**

FIFA awarded the rights to the 2003 Women's World Cup to China, just after the 1999 soccer spectacle. FIFA's decision represented a homecoming to the country that first hosted and helped to raise the global profile of women's soccer in 1991 (Greene, 2015). Then in late April of 2003, China suffered an epidemic outbreak of Severe Acute

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operator the National Football League's (NFL) New England Patriots, headed Kraft Soccer LLC and the New England Revolution (About Major League Soccer, 2016).

Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).<sup>56</sup> To ensure the health and safety of both participants and spectators, China delayed the start date for many of its professional sport leagues, and considered a restrictive travel ban on all athletes competing outside of its borders. Moreover, FIFA postponed the World Cup qualifying tournament for Asian countries along with the 16-team draw for the Women's World Cup, but said it had no plans to move the tournament and had not made any contingency plans (Longman, 2003a). Then, in the first week in May, FIFA voted to move the competition out of China because of world-wide health concerns. Australia, Sweden, and the United States all expressed an interest in hosting the tournament, even with a remarkably shortened organizational timeline of four to five months, but only Sweden and the United States placed formal applications with FIFA (Longman, 2003b; Straus, 2003a; U.S., Sweden, 2003).<sup>57</sup>

From the beginning of the World Cup reallocation process, a high-ranking U.S. Soccer official anonymously reported that the United States would acquire the tournament for a second time (U.S. in Line, 2003). Dr. Bob Contiguglia, president of the USSF, vehemently denied these reports, but conceded that FIFA is “going to want to minimize their risk and still put on a good event. A lot of folks can look at it and realize the United States can do that” (quoted in Straus, 2003b, p. D02). Whether or not the

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<sup>56</sup> In early May 2003, over 6,000 people were infected and 400-plus people had died due to the SARS virus worldwide since its detection in March of that year (Gardiner, 2003a; U.S. in Line, 2003).

<sup>57</sup> The successful 1999 Women's World Cup took over two and a half years to organize. The 2003 timeline was shortened to only four or five months. In regards to preparedness, Australia, Sweden, and the U.S. each had a strong case. Australia was the host runner-up for the 2003 Women's World Cup, Sweden had hosted in 1995, and the U.S. just staged the most successful women's sporting event in history (Straus, 2003a).

USSF could put on a good event was not a question; the USSF proved this fact in both 1994 and 1999. Rather, the issue at hand laid with FIFA's own organizational rules. In an attempt to avoid corruption and favoritism, FIFA Statutes state in Article 80, Number 2, Section A that, "The Executive Committee shall decide the venue for the final competitions organized by FIFA. As a rule, tournaments may not be held on the same continent on two successive occasions" (Fédération Internationale, 2015b). Although Sweden had the soccer infrastructure in place and had successfully staged the 1995 Women's World Cup, FIFA president Sepp Blatter and the executive "emergency committee" waived this regulation because of the "extenuating circumstances," and granted the 2003 Women's World Cup to the United States (Gardiner, 2003b, p.3C).

FIFA's decision stroked the ego of the USSF, as the purported global leader in women's sports. FIFA positioned the USSF as rescuer of the Women's World Cup and a potential savior of the struggling WUSA, which further advanced the heroic narratives so abundant after 9/11. A World Cup on U.S. shores was not only expected to spark corporate interest in a second adaptation of WUSA in either 2004 or 2005 (Longman, 2003c; Longman, 2003f; Mahoney, 2003; Bell, 2003), but also to reinvigorate a despondent fan base who was seemingly unable to relate to the postfeminist "girls of summer" marketing strategies (French, 2003; Hirshey, 2003; Longman, 2003h; Wahl, 2003b). Therefore, Dr. Contiguglia felt the USSF's moral obligation and responsibility to take on the tournament and push women's sport forward far outweighed the potential financial loss and crushing workload. He said, "We believed it was the right thing to do. We believe the 2003 World Cup will showcase the greatest women athletes in the world, and ...they have the proper platform for that" (quoted in Gardiner, 2003c, p. 13C).

Instead, I argue FIFA's decision was cloaked in an economic and cultural rationale that would benefit the growth of men's soccer in the U.S.

In 2003, Chuck Blazer was the U.S. representative on FIFA's executive committee and Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) secretary general. Blazer was known as "...the sport's No. 1 powerbroker in the United States" during his tenure at the USSF (Thompson, Papenfuss, Red, & Vinton, 2014, para. 2). He grew the Federation's income by \$40 million a year by selling television and sponsorship rights to the CONCACAF Gold Cup and the annual Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Champions League tournament for youth club teams. As a FIFA executive, Blazer was deeply entrenched in the U.S. Soccer machine, and thus, helped the fledgling MLS. In 2006, MLS commissioner, Dan Garber spoke of Blazer's, and the U.S.'s power within the international soccer community, "...it's about what influence he's had over the last 10 years...We have an American that sits at the most influential level in FIFA on the Executive Committee...He's just unbelievably important to where we are today and where we're going to be in the future" (quoted in Lichtenstadter, 2015, para. 5-6).

Currently, Blazer is charged in a FIFA corruption case with racketeering, wire fraud, money laundering and income tax evasion. In court records, Blazer, now an informant for the FBI, revealed that he and other members of the FIFA executive committee were key players in schemes that involved the offer, acceptance, payment and receipt of undisclosed and illegal payments, bribes and kickbacks. FIFA has imposed a lifetime ban on Blazer for his involvement in money making schemes that influenced the outcome of World Cup and CONCACAF Gold Cup locations (Bilefsky, 2015; Knight,

2015). In retrospect, Blazer's current indictment looms over any decision made by FIFA and USSF since the late 1990s, and more importantly, negatively colors the decision by FIFA's executive committee to waive its own rule and grant a World Cup to the same continent, let alone the same country, in a consecutive cycle.

On May 21, 2003, just days before FIFA's World Cup relocation announcement, Blazer cautioned that Sweden could "benefit" if FIFA decided it wanted to rotate the World Cup, but that he felt confident the U.S. had the inside-track:

It's not always the biggest and the best that wins; it's who has the ability to put on a quality championship. Sweden runs a superb women's program, and their bid should be taken seriously. But given the circumstances, I think FIFA will look for a solution that is as ready-made as possible. Both from the point of view of facilities and the organization necessary to stage the competition in a short period of time, the U.S. has proven itself (quoted in Gardiner, 2003b, p. 3C).

The USSF had proven itself worthy as it had established a direct paternalistic relationship with MLS, and thus, SUM, its marketing arm which owned the English-television broadcasting rights to the 2003 Women's World Cup. Both MLS and the WUSA partnered with the USSF to organize and manage the tournament, but the glaring economic issues that faced the WUSA compromised its financial and organizational abilities, positioning the women's league and its executives outside the realm of power. Consequently, MLS' central office took on a leadership role providing marketing, promotion, sponsorship and, more importantly, access to MLS stadiums to raise the profile of soccer in the U.S. (Connolly, 2003). As Mark Ziegler (2003), a sport reporter

for the *San Diego Union-Tribune* wrote, “U.S. Soccer is officially the lead organizer of the tournament, but MLS probably wields the most power behind the scenes because its marketing arm controls the television and advertising/sponsorship rights” (p. D6).

However, all expectations downplayed the possibility of a profit with the small possibility to break even (Straus, 2003b).

SUM capitalized on any and all opportunities. FIFA named SUM as the tournament’s host broadcaster, making it responsible for producing and selling the world television feed along with the sale of sponsorship to local companies that did not compete with FIFA’s corporate benefactors. When the USSF was named host for the 2003 Women’s World Cup, these local sponsorship rights became property of the Federation. The USSF promptly sold these rights to SUM, which was able to create packages that included TV advertising opportunities. A September start date put the Women’s World Cup at a disadvantage as it competed against a full television sport market. But with games televised in the afternoons and in the Eastern Time Zone, SUM increased its prices for ad packages by \$250,000, and in some cases by \$500,000 resulting in \$8 million to \$10 million of TV ad time sold. Finally, MLS owners cashed in on stadium deals struck with the USSF. Each venue deal was structured differently, but in effect the Women’s World Cup subsidized MLS owners’ pockets (i.e. Anschutz, Hunt, and Kraft) through stadium rental fees, ticket sales commissions, concessions and parking fees (Connolly, 2003). In the end, the USSF/MLS stripped down version of the 2003 Women’s World Cup soccer tournament made a \$6 million profit – triple the amount of the 1999 Women’s World Cup – even though the U.S. women’s team lost to Germany in the semi-finals (Et Cetera, 2003). George Vecsey (2004a), long-time soccer reporter for the *New*

*York Times*, appropriately summed up the state of U.S. Soccer: the women's team "...face[s] a future without a [professional] league – almost the complete opposite of the men. The American women are No. 2 and it feels flat. The American men are No. 8 and it feels quite heady. The world changes" (p. D4).

A failing women's league and a struggling national team knocked women's soccer off its cultural pedestal and produced a space for FIFA to finally position the men's team to infiltrate the U.S. sport market. With the influence of Blazer on FIFA's executive committee and the fact that MLS owned the television rights to the Women's World Cup, FIFA made a seemingly extraordinary decision appear ordinary. FIFA's decision to grant the Women's World Cup to the United States established a solid financial foundation for which the USSF and MLS would benefit. In fact, 2004 marked the beginning of a decade of expansion for the MLS that saw the addition of ten teams in six different states and three Canadian provinces; however, a growing MLS also signified a future steeped in a gendered battle to resurrect a professional women's soccer league.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The WUSA attempted to revive the league in 2004 with a series of doubleheaders/soccer festivals in order to revive the eight-team, national league format that existed from 2001-2003 (Mahoney, 2003). However, a fully operational women's professional soccer league, renamed Women's Professional Soccer, did not exist until 2009. The WPS vowed to take a more grassroots approach and a closer relationship with MLS, distancing itself from the ineffective management of the WUSA (Ziegler, 2008). Unfortunately, due to internal organizational struggles, the WPS suspended operations prior to the 2012 season (WPS Suspends Play, 2012). A third iteration of a women's professional soccer league began in 2013. The National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) is subsidized by the USSF, the Canadian Soccer Association, and the Mexican Football Federation. Each Federation would pay the salaries of players from their own



Moreover, these economic decisions had significant cultural implications on how we define who can and who cannot represent the U.S. FIFA, the USSF, and MLS all played active roles in the silencing of women's voices and displacing women from the center of U.S. Soccer while it simultaneously worked to restore soccer, and thus, the nation as a male space.

### **Soccer Damsels in Distress: Hero Narratives and Domesticity**

The events of September 11, 2001, displaced postfeminist girl power with a renewed gendered form of U.S. nationalism. The American public consumed and reproduced conservative ideologies of domesticated white femininity and conventional white masculinity through heroic and/or rescue narratives (Faludi, 2007; Kusz, 2007; McRobbie, 2009). Women figured largely in the post-9/11 narrative as vulnerable maidens who stocked their pantries with canned goods or cocooned themselves in the virtues of a nesting, married lifestyle. Men, on the other hand, were constructed as heroes whose repressed masculinity could finally rise from the feminized ashes of the late 1990s (Drew, 2004; Faludi, 2007; Kusz, 2007).

Women's soccer in the U.S. was not immune to this undercutting narrative. In fact, the media constructed the team, and its most notable star player, Mia Hamm, through a lens of vulnerability that tempered their feminist achievements as it amplified the significant participation of men in their success. For example, head coach, April Heinrichs, current players, Tiffeny Milbrett and Shannon MacMillan, and the team's newest player sensation, Abby Wambach, were all subtly enmeshed within this gendered

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national team to keep team salaries below the salary cap of \$200,000. The USSF runs the league offices and sets the league schedule (Lauletta, 2012)

narrative. Heinrichs, formerly April Minnis, grew up not knowing her biological father. Her mother, Patricia married her step-father, Mel Heinrichs, a Denver fireman, and moved to Littleton, Colorado. Even after her mother and step-father divorced she remained in custody with her step-father, ““For some reason my mother and I never connected. There was never any doubt that I’d stay with Heinrichs, my dad.”” (quoted in Wahl, 2003a, p. 66). She fondly called her step-father her ““great savior”” for their common bond with sport (quoted in Longman, 2003g, p. D7). Similarly, Milbrett and MacMillan, both of whom did not have strong relationships with their biological fathers or strong male figures in their childhood, turned to their collegiate soccer coach, Clive Charles, for guidance and strength. Charles, a professional soccer player from down-trodden East London, played in the North American Soccer League and eventually settled down in Oregon to coach both the men’s and women’s teams at the University of Portland. He became a surrogate father to both MacMillan and Milbrett as MacMillan was estranged from her parents as a teenager and Milbrett struggled mightily to “fit in” to soccer, economically and socially. Charles gave MacMillan a sense of family and Milbrett a sense of confidence that propelled them both to the national team in the late 1990s (French 2002b; Vecsey, 2003b).

Moreover, rising national team youngster, Abby Wambach, pointed to Jerry Smith, U-21 national team head coach, not her collegiate head coach, Becky Burliegh, under whose guidance she won an NCAA national championship in 1998, as the person who had the greatest impact on her soccer career. Heinrichs noted that Wambach had ““charisma as a leader”” and ““strength of personality”” on the field, but her motivation and desire to be the best were questioned as she moved into the WUSA and the national

team pool. “We have to be careful not to over tout Abby Wambach,” said Heinrichs. “She’s an under-21 player who’s recently found success at the under-21 [level]. ...Especially when you’re a woman – she’s a woman against younger players in smaller bodies. In the WUSA, with the women’s national team. These are women.” (quoted in French, 2002a, p. 38). Where others saw question marks, Smith saw untapped potential, and challenged Wambach to commit to the game. Wambach said, “...he made me see the potential of my game and made me want to go after it” (quoted in French, 2002a, p. 38) for the first time in her playing career. She made changes to her diet and fitness regime, and worked feverishly on her mental game. By 2003, she was a staple on the U.S. women’s national team starting lineup, the beginning of her long and storied career in U.S. Soccer.

While Heinrichs, MacMillan, Milbrett, and Wambach were all “rescued” or “saved” by men in their personal and/or soccer lives, none was constructed within the realm of domesticity. Rather, it was the mediated representation of Mia Hamm, the consummate postfeminist superstar, and her courtship and marriage to Major League Baseball player, Nomar Garciaparra, that shaped a new, but old narrative of gender, women, and sport. As the most popular, recognizable, and marketable female athlete in the United States, Hamm’s image instructed the American public on how to read not only the U.S. women’s national team, but also, professional women’s sport (Longman, 2001). Thus, from 9/11 until her retirement in 2004, Hamm was domesticated through a neofifties lens that focused more on her personal life than her impressive soccer

accomplishments on the field (Faludi, 2007; Kusz, 2007; McRobbie, 2009).<sup>59</sup> These narratives worked to repress the various subject formations of new players who entered the shifting character of the national team, in order to recreate a singular, marketable, and consumable team personality.

In the spring of 2001, the humble and private Hamm struggled to maintain balance in her life. A shoulder and knee injury slowed her play while demands for her time increased. She was the face of the successful U.S. women's national team and the marketing linchpin to the future success of the WUSA. With commitments to the media, fans, corporate sponsors, and her struggling Washington Freedom team, there was little time for personal affairs. Her seemingly story book love affair with college sweetheart Christiaan Corry, a Marine pilot who was rarely state-side, had fallen apart at the seams, "Our paths never crossed. We were both committed to what we were doing. We found a great deal of security in each other. At the same time, we missed out on a lot. I know a lot of times I wasn't there for him, and that I regret" (quoted in Longman, 2003d, p. SP9). Her personal life became public fodder when she filed for divorce after six years of marriage. Feeling as though she had lost her passion for the game, Hamm wilted under all the pressure (Gordon, 2001; Levins, 2001; Longman, 2001; Making News,

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<sup>59</sup> For the first time in 2001, FIFA presented the Women's Player of the Year award. Mia Hamm, won this award twice in 2001 and 2002. Hamm was quoted after winning the prize in 2001, "It's a great honor for me, but more importantly, it's wonderful that FIFA instituted this award. It shows that the progress women's soccer has made with FIFA is tremendous. Making this an annual award legitimizes our sport around the world. For me, it's always been about progressing the game, and this is progress" (News Services and Staff Reports, 2002; Yannis, 2001b).

2001; Straus, 2002). She played, “the worst soccer of her long career, scoring just six times in 19 games and [was] rarely...[dangerous in] the run of play. She was tired and, in some ways, had become a victim to her own emotional complexity” (Straus, 2002, p. 12).

She found comfort in friends and family, but sought out security and reassurance from the most unlikely of sources: Nomar Garciaparra – star-shortstop for MLB’s Boston Red Sox. They met at a charity soccer event at Harvard University in 1998, when she masterfully beat Garciaparra in a penalty-kick shootout, 4 – 3 (Kennedy & McEntegart, 2003; Smith 2003). Yet, in a quiet meeting after her win, Hamm said to Garciaparra, ““Thanks for throwing it,”” to which he replied, ““I had to let you win”” (quoted in Smith, 2003, p. 63). Smith literally and figuratively under cuts Hamm’s skill and her position as the most marketable female athlete in the world repositioning men, regardless of skill or talent in a particular sport, as superior to women.

The two became quick friends, but it was after her eight-game scoring drought heading into the 1999 Women’s World Cup that their friendship solidified. She called on Garciaparra for advice. He told her to focus on the one thing she can manage, one thing she can focus on during a game, one thing where she can concentrate on the process and not the end result. But, more importantly, he reminded her she needed to enjoy the game (Longman, 2003d; Smith, 2003). Hamm took Garciaparra’s advice to heart, and in the final game of the Nike-sponsored “Road to Pasadena” tour against Japan, Hamm finally scored off of a give and go with Julie Foudy. As the ball hit the back of the net, Hamm ran to Foudy and screamed, ““Can you get this f---ing 500-pound gorilla off my back?!”” (quoted in Smith, 2003, p. 63). After the 1999 World Cup win, she joined Garciaparra to

train at the Athletes' Performance Institute in Tempe, Arizona, during which time he became her primary sounding board (Longman, 2003d).

The significance of Garciaparra giving Hamm advice to break out of a slump does not lie in its occurrence as many professional athletes seek each others' advice on strategy, technique, and mental acuity; rather, the meaning of this action rests within its contextualization in 2003. The story of their meeting and subsequent friendship became significant only when the media knew of their romantic relationship. In Grant Smith's (2003) *Sports Illustrated* article titled "The Secret Life of Mia Hamm" he positions Mia Hamm as vulnerable and mentally weak – an inner battle between a self-critical athlete and a relentlessly driven superstar – struggling to deal with the death of her adopted brother, the pull of family, and her own need to succeed on the field. Smith conveniently skipped over the formative and supportive "platonic" years of their relationship writing, "Let's run straight to the joy – unfettered, uncluttered, unmeasured. Let's fly to Nomar" (Smith, 2003, p. 63).

This rhetorical strategy constructed Garciaparra as Hamm's savior, her security blanket of sorts, while simultaneously elevating him, and his experience in sport as superior to hers. Smith (2003) wrote of Garciaparra and Hamm's relationship:

Just don't spoil it. Don't ask what Nomar's last name is. That's part of his allure, that he's one of a select few athletes whose first name suffices, a star big and bright enough to eclipse her – a cover for the cover girl. God, it is a relief when a slack jawed stranger approaches and walks right past her, to him. Lord, it's a lesson to see how much easier he is with fame, comfortable enough to set boundaries and live by them without

anguish, to give freely without feeling threatened when it's time to, and to say no thank you when it's not. A man she can study, a man she can draft behind when they go to a restaurant or mall, a man who can introduce her to sides of herself she has never met...and to her older self, the nine-year-old whose best buddies were ballplayin' guys (p. 63).

How can Smith reach this conclusion? Hamm is the most recognizable and marketable female athlete in the world, so recognizable in fact, that television commercials showed her image without needing to show her name (Longman, 2004). Did Garciaparra have that level of mediated transcendancy?

Sport remains a male preserve, a perfect medium to revive masculinity in an American culture ostensibly weakened by feminist successes. Therefore, in a post-9/11 context, neither Hamm nor her feminist friends were able to save or rescue her from the depths of private scrutiny and public exposure. It took a man, seemingly more famous than she, to reduce her famous female profile to an unknown, so that she could be "truly happy."

The "true happiness" Hamm finds with Garciaparra presented the opportunity for the world's best female soccer player to finally be draped in narratives of domesticity.<sup>60</sup> On the field she was more assured, versatile, and resilient (Longman, 2003d). As "First Lady of Red Sox Nation" she was observed wearing flowing skirts and dresses, while her

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<sup>60</sup> The media was unable to shape narratives of domesticity around Hamm because her relationship with her first husband, Christiann Corry, did not meet the standard. As she jumped from competition to competition around the globe, he flew between Naval bases in the Pacific. While Corry was a presence in her life, the large geographic distance between them, kept them apart and the media at bay.

now easy demeanor exuded a carefree existence (Gildea, 2003, p. D04; Smith, 2003). So, carefree in fact, that Hamm was noted as "...relishing the prospect of retirement" and "...looking forward to making little Nomars," (Smith, 2003, p. 64) not little Mia's, mind you, notions she never considered before Garciparra proposed to her on a sandy beach in the Bahamas. More remarkable was her final game in a U.S. women's national team uniform. As she graced the field one final time in the second half of a 5-0 win against Mexico, Hamm subtly slipped on a new long sleeve shirt. Her famous last name was no longer on the back: Hamm was replaced with Garciparra. Grant Wahl (2004), who covered her final game in a US women's national team uniform for *Sports Illustrated*, attempted to explain this unexpected conclusion:

Now Hamm can start the family she has always wanted, with her husband, Chicago Cubs shortstop Nomar Garciparra. When she donned a jersey with GARCIAPARRA on the back during the second half of her farewell game, a 5 – 0 win against Mexico, Hamm achieved one last astonishing feat: adopting one of the most famous surnames in sports, yet somehow managing to recede from her singularity; she's just part of a new "team." Soon, perhaps, she'll be just another soccer mom. Which is exactly how she wants it" (p. 20).

To many in the media Mia Hamm – the most famous female athlete in the world – voluntarily decided to renounce her own illustrious career effectively elevating Nomar Garciparra's male privilege as an athlete. The media reaffirmed this notion and raised its cultural significance by connecting her decision to embrace the heteronormative values of marriage and pregnancy as culturally superior to her participation in sport.



Just as white, middle-class neighborhood housewives may have supported each other when their husbands achieved promotion or received a notice of transfer, the media depicted similar support from Hamm's teammates. For example, after the U.S. women's team lost to Germany in the semi-finals of the 2003 Women's World Cup, players were given a day off before training resumed for the third place game. The day off gave Hamm the opportunity to see and support Garciaparra in Game five of the American League Division Series playoff between the Red Sox and the Oakland A's. Hamm was hesitant to leave her team, but Brandi Chastain and Julie Foudy called Garciaparra, who left a game ticket for Hamm, made flight arrangements, and then strongly encouraged her to go (Whiteside, 2003). Moreover, prior to Hamm's retirement in 2004, Garciaparra was traded from the Boston Red Sox to the Chicago Cubs, and she followed him to the Midwest. Learning of the trade just before she was to leave for the 2004 Athens Olympics, Hamm told Garciaparra over the phone, "Hey, just tell me where we're going to be when I get back from Greece" (quoted in Vecsey, 2004b, p. D12). After the trade George Vecsey (2004a), summed up the type of solidarity that now existed on the women's team:

Why just the other day, the husband of one of their teammates was transferred in one of those cold corporate deals from one rich company to another. He had to move hundreds of miles away. The women did not sit around and mope about it. They did something constructive. 'We traded red caps for blue caps,' said Shannon Boxx, one of the newest members of the United States women's soccer team. Out went the Boston Red Sox caps. Some of the players found Chicago Cubs caps and others ordered

them in a show of solidarity for Mia Hamm's husband, Nomar Garciaparra, who was traded in one of baseball's classic midsummer, dump-the-pending-free-agent business deals (p. D1).

In the fall months of 1995 and 1999, the U.S. women's national team had stood in solidarity for gender equity regarding labor issues and equal pay, and successfully achieved parity in 2000. This feminist gain and the postfeminist perception that women's sport had attained equality in American sport along with the event of 9/11 concomitantly repositioned the team from the center back toward the margins of sport. In a post-9/11 context the team now stood in solidarity for Garciaparra, a symbol of heteropatriarchy, a construct that always already defines a woman in relation to her husband, and this case, the entire team.

For this team to shift back toward an acceptance of conservative, white and middle-class gender roles, post-9/11 was not at all surprising. In fact, it is consistent with the postfeminist mediated representation produced prior to, during, and after the team's 1999 Women's World cup win. Individual players and the team as a whole were wrapped in postfeminist marketing strategies that tied empowerment to consumerism for a limited constituency – white, middle-class, heterosexual females – while restricting the authentic, but mediated subject formation of new and diverse players within the national team structure. Thus, in order to maintain this idealized perception of the team, the question of the utmost significance asked after Hamm's retirement was: Who will be the next Mia? While the media attempted to anoint the next Mia Hamm, her legacy continued to define the team, even as the women's national team program progressed into a post-Hamm future.

## Conclusion

As the American public embraced the 1999 Women's World Cup champions with open arms, acceptance of the men's national team and MLS remained on the sidelines. The success of the women's national team in the 1990s along with the cultural swing toward postfeminist marketing strategies, such as "girl power," solidified soccer in the U.S. as a female sport. Yet, around the world, soccer remained a male space that defined and demarcated the meaning of maleness and masculinity (Caudwell, 1999; Caudwell, 2002; Caudwell, 2003; Caudwell, 2007; Caudwell, 2011; Cox & Thompson, 2000; Jeanes, & Kay, 2007; Meân, 2001; Mennesson & Clément, 2003; Scranton, Fasting, & Pfister, 1999). The USSF could not afford to be marginalized outside of FIFA's cultural influence, and FIFA could not afford to be absent from the most lucrative sport market in the world. Therefore, the USSF launched two programs: Project 2010, a developmental program with the goal of winning the men's world cup in South Africa in 2010, and Project Gold, a similar developmental program with the goal for the women's national team to "win forever," two wildly different yet similarly ambitious goals for each program.

Although a postfeminist new millennium sold the American public fairy tales of gender inequity's end, instances of inequity remained ever present, and none more than in sport. The U.S. women's national team stood together in solidarity and fought the USSF for equal pay and the right to their own league, the WUSA. These two feminist wins should have ceded a large portion of the USSF's power to this team and its individual players – "girl power" seemed as if it was to carry on forever. However, the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001, jolted the American public from its postfeminist and post-racial

bubble and further altered the American consciousness back to the conservative right. Conservative elites named feminism and the feminization of culture as underlying factors for the attack on New York City and Washington, D.C, with calls for reestablishment of white, working class, masculinity as “the” way to shore up and protect American borders (Allen, 2002; Faludi, 2007; Kusz, 2007). Thus, post-9/11 the USSF called on its men’s program to bear arms and reassert and protect its rightful place as the kingpin of U.S. Soccer.

FIFA, the USSF, and MLS colluded in the reestablishment of U.S. soccer as a male space. Some of their actions seemed innocuous, such as planning a U.S. women’s national team friendly game on the same weekend as WUSA games or Bruce Arena, head coach of the men’s national team, stating that the Men’s World Cup is more meaningful than the women’s World Cup. But some of their actions seemed ostensibly strategic. For example, FIFA waiving its rule to bar World Cup hosts from repeating on any continent in a consecutive cycle, as it awarded the 2003 Women’s World Cup back to the U.S. in worries over a SARS outbreak in China. The fact that SUM, the marketing arm of MLS, owned the English-language rights to the 2003 Women’s World Cup and Chuck Blazer, a USSF executive, sat on the FIFA committee that decided to reward U.S. Soccer with its second Women’s World Cup in four years, is not merely a coincidence. The USSF, MLS, and MLS owners directly profited from this endeavor. The earnings from TV and advertising revenue along with ticket sales, leasing fees, and concession and parking fees bankrolled the future of the MLS, just the foothold FIFA needed to successfully enter the American sport market.

In a post-9/11 context, the team, specifically Mia Hamm, was mediated and marketed through a domesticated lens. Hero and savior narratives remained ever present in the lives of female athletes: even postfeminist superwoman, Mia Hamm, could not elude its ideological grasp. Hamm figured largely in this post-9/11 narrative as a vulnerable maiden who cocooned herself in a married lifestyle. Nomar Garciaparra, Hamm's fiancé – a famous MLB shortstop, but not her athletic equal – was constructed as her hero, a man who could teach her new ways to navigate stardom and “true” happiness. As a legendary text, Hamm represented the U.S. women's national team and instructed the American public on how to consume women's soccer. Thus, as the post-Hamm era began in early 2005, the media began its quest to find the next female player who fit into the Hamm mold – styming the potential subject formation(s) of new and diverse team and individual subjectivities.

## CHAPTER 5

### GOING SOLO: THE 2007 WOMEN'S WORLD CUP, HOPE SOLO, AND THE PRACTICE OF FREEDOM

In late 2005, Jack Bell, soccer columnist for the New York Times wrote, “In the six years since that World Cup triumph [in 1999], the pendulum has swung back...the W.U.S.A. no longer exists; the women’s national team played only nine international matches this year and did not draw more than 6,000 fans in five home games...it’s clear that time is marching on” (p. D6). The golden era of American women’s soccer was ostensibly over on a cool weeknight in 2004 when key foundational members of the 1999 team – Mia Hamm, Julie Foudy, Brandi Chastain, and Joy Fawcett – retired from active play on the U.S. women’s national team (Goff, 2006). The new team configuration lacked the popularity and name recognition of their predecessors, but young and talented, they rivaled the on-field success of the 1999ers.<sup>61</sup> But to the American public, wins did not equal interest. The team struggled to separate itself from its own storied past until the U.S. women’s soccer team experienced a public media controversy at the 2007 Women’s World Cup - the first in the 20-year history of the women’s soccer program.

For a majority of the 2007 Women’s World Cup semi-final game against Brazil, benched starting goalkeeper, Hope Solo, sat on the sidelines with her head down or she

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<sup>61</sup> After the retirement of foundational players Mia Hamm, Julie Foudy, Brandi Chastain, and Joy Fawcett, the U.S. women’s national team rode a dominating 51 game winning streak into the 2007 Women’s World Cup in China, an unprecedented number of wins that no other U.S. women’s team had accomplished. This streak came to an infamous end with a four to one loss to Brazil in the World Cup semi-final game and the post-game antics of benched starting goalkeeper, Hope Solo.

stared blankly onto the soccer field (Jackson, 2007). She had vowed to win the World Cup for her father, who had died of a sudden heart-attack two months earlier, and she spread his ashes in the goal prior to each game. Although Solo had a successful record of two wins and one tie in the preliminary rounds of the tournament, and had not ceded a goal in over 300 minutes of play, Greg Ryan, the U.S. women's national team head coach, benched Solo in favor of 1999 World Cup winning goalkeeper, Briana Scurry, who at the time had an impeccable 12 wins and zero losses against Brazil. However, when the ninetieth minute struck and the center referee raised her whistle to sound the end of the game, the U.S. was not victorious. Playing a man down, Brazil ran circles around the U.S. defenders scoring four goals while the U.S. was unable to capitalize on their chances. The 4-0 loss was an embarrassing defeat, for it was their worst loss in a World Cup. Solo left the field alone and headed to the locker room, so devastated she was unable to comfort her teammates.

On her way to the team bus, Solo, who was "clearly upset" had to walk through the media pit, where she passed ESPN, Fox Sports, ABC and CBS before Erin Paul, a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation sport reporter, quietly asked, "Hope, do you want to make a comment?" (Paul, 2007a, para. 12). Solo ignored her and continued her journey to the team bus until U.S. press relations manager, Aaron Heifetz indicated to Paul that she would only want to talk to the players who played in the game. Hearing Heifetz's comment, Solo quickly turned on her heels and declared to Paul that she wanted to speak. Solo verbalized her discontent about being benched:

It was the wrong decision, and I think anybody that knows anything about the game knows that. There's no doubt in my mind I would have made

those saves. And, fact of the matter is it's not 2004 anymore. It's not 2004. And it's 2007, and I think you have to live in the present. You can't live by big names. You can't live in the past. It doesn't matter what somebody did in an Olympic gold medal game in the Olympics three years ago. Now is what matters. And that's what I think (quoted in Solo Sounds Off, 2007, para. 1).

She quickly turned on her heels again and said to Heifetz, “Don't you ever tell me what interviews I can do” (quoted in Paul, 2007a, para. 13). In that thirty-second sound bite, Solo managed to break the most sacred unwritten team code of conduct – all players must deal with team issues privately (Goff, 2007c; Jackson, 2007; Longman, 2007b). In a team meeting Greg Ryan and the team voted to banish her from team practices, team meals, the stadium for the bronze medal game, and the team plane flight home (Bechtel, 2007b; Canales, 2007; Ford, 2007; Jackson, 2007; Ruibal & Lieber Steeg, 2007). In that moment, Solo did not present herself as a member of the lighthearted “girls of summer” who won the hearts of the American public in 1999 (Longman, 2000a); rather, she was and continues to be an outlier who challenges the dominant narrative.

Initially, the media and Solo's teammates treated her outburst as an act of defiance against the U.S. women's national team culture. While many identified Solo's conduct as reprehensible and another feeble attempt to gain notoriety by a spoiled athlete (Bechtel, 2007a; Hill, 2007; Lopresti, 2007; Ruibal & Lieber Steeg, 2007; Timmerman, 2007), I contend Solo's outburst was more meaningful than a random act of perceived jealousy. I argue her actions constituted a “practice of freedom” (Foucault, 1997, p. 281), through which she established herself as a subject involved in a relationship of power



with the U.S. women's national team culture and USSF structure. Solo claimed a moral authority by using her own sense of reason instead of surrendering to the historic cultural and structural authority of the team. According to Foucault (2010), Solo's verbal outburst is a form of truth telling. Solo meets all five criteria for which Foucault defines such an act: she expressed her own opinion directly, she knew she spoke the truth, she understood speaking out was a personal risk, she spoke out as a critique of another, and she spoke out as a duty to herself and others as an act of freedom.

After the retirement of four key foundational players in 2004, I argue that the mediated cultural memory of the 1999ers<sup>62</sup>, a foundational group of players who extended back to the 1991 championship, created a specter that followed the team into the future.

In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon (2008) argues that society is 'haunted' by historically raced, gendered, and classed narratives that serve to shape the present moment. A haunting itself does not produce oppression, exploitation, or trauma; rather it is constituted by and constitutive of these cultural processes. Gordon explains, 'What's distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely' (xvi). Hauntings construct specters that have a 'real presence [that]

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<sup>62</sup> The 1999ers references the 1999 Women's World Cup winning U.S. women's national team.

However, six foundational players, Mia Hamm, Julie Foudy, Kristine Lilly, Brandi Chastain, Michelle Akers, and Joy Fawcett, who were all present at the first U.S. World Cup win in 1991, are implied when discussing this 1999 reference. They were best friends, who grew up together on the soccer field, vacationed with each other, and planned to retire together. Besides Akers, who retired in 2001, these five players remained on the roster until 2004 when Hamm, Foudy, Chastain, and Fawcett retired. Lilly continued to play a pivotal role on the national team through 2007.

demands...your attention' (Gordon, 2008, xvi) – a constant reminder of containment and repression. Gordon associates specters with a sociopolitical – psychological state – one that recognizes the conjuncture of historically organized forces of power and the limitations placed upon a subject. Specifically, a specter pinpoints the ‘...consciousness of that meeting [between power and subject]...forcing a confrontation, forking the future and the past’ (xvii). This confrontation is a requirement to produce change and progress a discourse towards inclusivity.

The presence of Kristine Lilly, the last remaining foundational player to play on the U.S. team, gilded the team’s culture with images of the past. As a living soccer legend and captain of the U.S. team, Lilly helped to reproduce a cultural space of containment that reinforced a white, feminine, middle-class, and heterosexual subjectivity. Solo and the media controversy she ignited is a pivotal shifting point in the historical narrative and cultural characterization the US women’s national soccer team. I argue Solo’s outburst is a sign of difference from the team bond of sisterhood, in terms of her “unorthodox” family relationships and upbringing in working-class Richland, Washington. Her subsequent banishment by the team can be read as a cultural product of those disconnections. Her actions helped to loosen the limiting culture of sisterhood and postfeminist ideals strongly embedded within the culture of the team and facilitated through media narratives. The relaxing of these cultural mores has allowed for a more open and inclusive team culture.

## **Gilding the Lilly: The 1999ers, Kristine Lilly, and the Governance of a Dominated State**

Prior to the U.S. women's national team win in the 2015 Women's World Cup, when the American public heard the words "women's soccer," Mia Hamm, Brandi Chastain, Julie Foudy and images of the 1999 Women's World Cup flooded their memories. As sport historian Dan Nathan (2003) argues, sporting cultural moments warrant retelling because in the act of retelling, journalists, novelists, or filmmakers have engaged "in a dialogue between the past and the present that simultaneously debunks, romanticizes, and reconfigures our understanding of the historical event" (p. 7). And much like the 1919 Black Sox scandal that Nathan studies, when scandal struck women's soccer, it touched a national nerve. The victory in the 1999 Women's World Cup, marked a crucial moment of transformation in women's U.S. sociocultural and sporting history. In addition to fostering new perceptions of female athletes, the 1999 U.S. women's national team affected the way Americans perceived the game of soccer, women athletes, and even the nation. Still the narratives constructed these female athletes within the narrow and homogenized definition of postfeminist girl power. Selena Roberts (2004), a *New York Times* reporter, summarized the impact of the 1999 event:

The moment served as a transition point in the evolution of women's sports. Until the summer of 1999, women's visibility on the sports landscape had been largely catapulted through the images of adorable pixies, vixens and victims. The United States women became accidental feminists, pushing for change without the militant touch, revealing their

muscle without threatening men, playing passionately without giving into [sic] ego (p. D5).

The mediated cultural reproduction of the women's national team story and, in particular, the 1999ers (i.e. Hamm, Foudy, Chastain, Joy Fawcett, and Kristine Lilly) as “best friends” or even “family” were seared into the American consciousness (Brewer, 1999; Longman, 1999e; Smith, 2003; Vecsey, 1999d). Former head coach, Tony DiCicco believes the “carefully cultivated persona...of [a] culture of driven athletes who are concerned about passion, desire, and an ever-unified front ... ‘is why America is in love with this team’” (quoted in Davis, 2007, para. 15). These gendered ideals suited the second-wave, white, middle-class, liberal feminist notion of sisterhood that grounded the popular postfeminist marketing tactics used to market the team during the girl power infused context of the late 1990s (Cole & Hribar, 1995; LaFrance, 1998; McDonald, 2000) and further constrained the team's representation post-9/11.

Hamm, Foudy, Lilly, and Michelle Akers – foundational players and thus, the leaders of the team — were the voices most prominent in discussion of team culture with the media (Bell, 1999; Bushnell, 1999; Kuhns, 1999; Longman, 1999e; Longman, 1999f; Longman, 1999j; Trecker, 1999; Vecsey, 1999d). The result was a team culture of synecdoche, or the appearance that one individual could stand in for the whole team. While the media constructed this team as an open and inclusive site of women's empowerment, the players themselves produced a cultural space that limited individual expression and diverse experience (Narcotta-Welp, 2015). In her memoir, Hope Solo, who joined the U.S. women's team for the first time in 2001, noted the team's image, “...was of best friends who would have two fillings for each other, but I quickly learned

that there were cliques and jealousies. For the younger players, it felt like joining a sorority, as though we were going through some sort of initiation process” (Solo & Killion, 2012, p. 72). Yet, the American public loved this team. This infatuation along with the team’s on-field success provided an indelible barrier to public critique or defamation, and created a specter that would come back to haunt the post-1999 team in its bid to separate themselves from the past. This process helped to secure the reproduction of a limited team subjectivity and the production of a dominated state (Foucault, 2007).

Abby Wambach, who scored 31 goals in 30 games, had emerged as Mia Hamm's heir apparent and the leader for the next generation. Wambach, who had formed close relationships with Hamm, Foudy, and Lilly, felt beholden to the 1999ers and their long struggles with the USSF. Prior to 2004 Athens Olympics, Wambach stated,

...I am indebted to them for the opportunity that I’ve had...They’ve done an unbelievable job of being role models. I want to tell them, ‘Look at me, I’m the product that you created.’ We’ll be sitting there, doing sit-ups and push-ups, and Julie will be saying things like, ‘We’ve got to make sure that nobody forgets where women sports came from because we’re the last of the people who had to really endure a lot of hardship’...She reminds me that they never got paid and had to wash their own training gear and other things like that. I really listen to her when she talks about the things they fought for, because I will never forget and I know this team will never forget (quoted in Brennan, 2004, p. 10C).

The foundational players had fought for “her” right to play; thus, as an ostensible disciple figure, Wambach felt responsible to reproduce the messages and values of the foundational players. Wambach’s comment can be understood as a “product” of the neoliberal, postfeminist discourse that surrounded this team.

As the team lingered in the locker room after winning the gold medal at the 2004 Athens Olympics, the 1999ers told the younger generation that the line of succession was in place. To their minds, the new generation was gifted a guide to on-field and off-field success; all they had to do was follow the plan, step-by-step. The 1999ers literally and figuratively passed the feminist torch to the next generation of players (Kepner, 2004). Kate Markgraf, a defender for the U.S. team, stated ““They’re going to pass it down to us. They think it’s in good hands, and hopefully they’re right. But we’ve had the best leaders anybody could ever have, and its’ going to be tough to fill their shoes’” (quoted in Kepner, 2004, p. D1). It would be tough to fill their shoes because the 1999ers would have it no other way. The 1999ers expectations for this next generation to carry on their legacy loomed large over the team. Eight years removed, Markgraf commented on the state of the team post-2004:

In 2008 and 2007, those teams were always compared to that 1999 team. We were all tired of it. I was tired of being compared to that legend. There was so much mystique tied to that [’99] team, but that team wasn’t perfect, either. It wasn’t always unicorns and butterflies. But it worked. You knew your role...We were trying to play under an identity that the team wasn’t (brackets original) (as quoted in Foudy, 2015, para. 41).

This was the most critical time the national team had faced in their short history, but leaning on the team's historical notion of sisterhood Wambach felt that, "...whatever challenges we're going through, as long as we stick together, we'll be O.K.'" (as quoted in Wahl, 2005, p. 20). Regardless of their actual presence on the team or not, the 1999ers and their legacy remained a specter that shadowed the team and any future successes.

The specter of the 1999ers also enveloped the American public. Newspaper and sport magazines continued to reproduce images of the 1999ers and their success on the field as well as their legendary fight for gender equality (Bell, 2005; Boeck, 2005; Brennan, 2004; Brennan, 2007a; Goff, 2006; Roberts, 2004; Wahl, 2005; Whiteside, 2004a; Whiteside, 2004b). Most significant was a commercial Gatorade released in honor of superstar, Mia Hamm's retirement, titled "Thank You" (Gatorade-Mia Hamm, 2004). Against a dark background, individuals become recognizable under a single spotlight as they describe Hamm's significance to women's sport. From a nameless white girl thanking Hamm for, "opening the door;" to Hamm's parents, who thank her for "making us proud," to Billy Jean King, thanking her "for picking up the torch," to Anson Dorrance, thanking her for "being part of a great tradition," family and friends come together to celebrate her successes. Teammates Julie Foudy, Kristine Lilly, and Brandi Chastain are the last to speak. Hugging each other in their national team uniforms they thank Hamm for "being our sister. We love you Mia." The shot shifts to a dimly lit goal as a soccer ball slowly strikes the net, we are left with the sounds of those three players giggling, as "Thank You" is embossed across the goal. Most notable is the physical absence of Hamm. Her absence is compelling and effective as her personal and professional achievements stand alone while suggesting her legacy will remain a

phantom presence living within the next generation of soccer players, female athletes, and the American public.

In 2005, two documentaries on the U.S. women's national team were released, *A World at Their Feet: The Legendary Story of the U.S. Women's National Team* (Loth & Paulen, 2005) and *Dare to Dream: The Story of the U.S. Women's Football Team* (Greenburg & Bernstein, 2007). While *A World at Their Feet* focused on the team's journey from obscurity in the 1980s to greatness in 1999, *Dare to Dream* took a more pointed approach, which focused on the experience of five core players: Hamm, Chastain, Foudy, Fawcett, and Michelle Akers. Significantly, *Dare to Dream* captured a larger audience due to first-class marketing and its accessibility on the cable network, Home Box Office. But it was the personal experiences of key players which structured the documentary that resulted in entrenchment of the 1999 narrative and representation of the U.S. women's team firmly within the cultural memory of the American public.

The loss of Hamm, Foudy, Chastain, and Fawcett to retirement in 2004 seemingly sowed the seeds of change for the women's national team, but separating themselves from the past was a challenge (Goff, 2006). Pivotal legacy players from the 1999 team remained squarely in leadership positions on the team. Kate Markgraf and Christie Rampone, both starting defenders for the 1999 team, committed to play through the 2007 World Cup, while aging World Cup champion goalkeeper, Briana Scurry struggled to maintain her starting position. However, it was the enduring presence of 20-year veteran, Kristine Lilly, that continued to influence the future of the team.

Lilly, a shy and humble player from an upper-middle class neighborhood in Wilton, Conn., joined the national team during its infancy in 1987. In fact, she was so



young, she had to ask her parents for permission to compete in the first unofficial women's international tournament in China (Longman, 2000a). A permanent figure on the field, Lilly logged the most minutes and remains the most capped<sup>63</sup> player in international soccer history, appearing in 352 games for the U.S. women's national team. She played six-more years than her 1999 cohort, retiring after an international friendly with Mexico in 2010.

The winning goal in the 2004 Olympic gold medal game was symbolic. During the course of the second overtime against perennial foe, Brazil, the U.S. team earned a corner kick. At the corner, Lilly struck the ball with her left foot sending it to the far edges of the six-yard box where it connected with Abby Wambach's head. With a snap of Wambach's hips, she redirected the ball into the back of the net to put the U.S. team up, 2 – 1 – a goal that solidified the second gold medal in U.S. soccer history. The 1999ers retired as they had started 15 years earlier: number one in the world. While the 120-minutes of play in the gold medal game made Lilly think about retirement, she did not feel finished, she still enjoyed playing (Vecsey, 2004; Wahl, 2006). Thus Lilly became the bridge between past and present – an apparition of the precedent set and the embodiment of a governed future – as she was named captain upon the retirement of Foudy and Fawcett (Goff, 2006). Consequently, Lilly's presence as captain limited the team's ability to forge a new identity under Wambach's leadership. With an overwhelming sense of responsibility to maintain the legacy of the 1991ers, Wambach retreated into a secondary role, allowing for the gilding of Lilly, “[She] is our savior, she

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<sup>63</sup> A “cap” or “caps” refers to the number of international games in which at player has appeared.

is our legend, and she is the person we turn to in key moments of the game” (quoted in Flynn, 2007, para. 31).

Lilly remained a key influence in the construction of the U.S. women’s national team culture post-2004. She was always fit, a commitment she was steadfastly dedicated to as she never once missed a training session (Michaelis, 2006). She effortlessly transitioned from midfield to forward with such a quiet efficiency and a laborer’s work ethic that she was often overlooked for post-match interviews that usually featured her more extroverted teammates: Julie “Loudy” Foudy, Brandi “Hollywood” Chastain, and the soccer ideologue, Mia “Reluctant Superstar” Hamm (Vecsey, 2004). Lilly did not feel overshadowed, but rather, she led by example because ““That team had so many leaders that they didn’t need my voice to be loud”” (quoted in Starr, 2007, p. 43).

However, when she did speak with the media or in front of her team, head coach Greg Ryan said, ““...everybody stops and listens - I listen, the players listen, the assistant coaches listen. It’s something she really means”” (quoted in Bechtel, 2007a, p. 61).

At 36, Lilly was the matriarch of the U.S. women’s national team (Bell, 2007). Lovingly referred to as “Grandma” by her teammates, many of whom were at least a decade younger than she, she controlled the tempo of the team on and off the field (Mahoney, 2007a; Michaelis, 2006; Starr, 2007). Head coach, Greg Ryan said of Lilly, ““I really can’t see building this team back up without her. She’s the cornerstone we’ve built around...”” (quoted in Mahoney, 2007a, para. 5). The once soft-spoken, grind-it-out midfielder, became an outspoken, vocal leader on the team. The increase of her vocal presence was to instruct her teammates on how to build “...the karmic connections that once helped America win two World Cups and two Olympic golds” (Starr, 2007, p. 43).

On the field, she explained how to break down defenses and she supported teammates who were down on their play. New minted player, Leslie Osborne said of Lilly, “‘She’s going to tell us how she feels, which has helped us. She’s just honest with us’” (quoted in Michaelis, 2006, p. 10C). Off the field, Lilly became a mentor and took “‘under her wing’” those new players, such as Heather O’Reilly, who was also 16 years-old when she was called up to the national team, and who might be struggling with the transition to soccer as a full-time profession and the pressure to be the best in the world.

Lilly inspired her teammates with her vitality and longevity. But it was Lilly’s on-field play that was now becoming legendary. A change of position to forward allowed her to combine with Wambach which produced exponential dividends. She became a prolific finisher, scoring 26 goals – her best showing – between the 2006 and 2007 international season. Fellow teammates, Kate Markgraf believed Lilly was at her best, “‘I don’t think she has lost a step. She’s pulling out moves I’ve never seen before’” (Longman, 2007a, p. D1). Wambach took this sentiment further, “‘She should go down with *all* the Hall of Famers in every sport (emphasis mine)’” (Michaelis, 2006, p. 10C).

Lilly’s legendary longevity and undiminished skill made her a legendary figure, powerful enough to dominate the culture of the U.S. team. Prior to the 2007 Women’s World Cup, Lilly stated, “‘Any player coming into the team knows that we’re world champions, and that pushes them to kept the traditions of the older players alive. It’s never been easy. It wasn’t easy in ’91 and ’99, and this isn’t going to be easy, too’” (quoted in Ruibal, 2007a, p. 10C). Even USSF president Sunil Gulati contextualized Lilly’s influence, “‘[She] been an integral part of our women’s soccer history, a great ambassador for the game and a tremendous role model for young players in the United

States...her lasting legacy will be one of a player totally dedicated to the team and doing whatever it took on and off the field to produce success” (quoted in Kennedy, 2011, para. 7). Wambach was solidly in Lilly’s corner, ““I have the life I have because of Lil. I would literally run through a wall if you told me on the other side was a World Cup championship, because Lil deserves that,”” (quoted in Bechtel, 2007a, p. 65). With Wambach’s deep allegiance to the 1991’ers, the reproduction of a set of fixed power relations was easily maintained.

### **Teach that Girl Some Manners!: The Governing of a Dominated State and the Politics of Exclusion**

Growing up in the working-class town of Richland, Wash., Hope Solo’s childhood experiences marked her as different from her teammates. Richland nestled along the Columbia River, is best known as the location for a highly classified extension of the Manhattan Project and the first plutonium nuclear reactor. The logo of Solo’s high school – the nuclear mushroom cloud – could be seen as a metaphor for her childhood (Lieber Steeg, 2007a; Lieber Steeg, 2007b). Her home life was as volatile as her temper. Kidnapped by her biological father at the age of seven, Solo witnessed his arrest at a Seattle bank, and would not see him for another ten years. Her father’s whereabouts remained a mystery for most of her adolescence leaving her mother to raise Solo and her brother alone. A revolving door of homes and father-figures generated anger, tension, and violence in Solo’s early life. She fought with her brother, Marcus, and soon began fights with boys at school. Though sometimes her tormentor, Marcus was also her protector as he was the only one who understood the family trials they both had been through (Solo & Killion, 2012). At a young age, Solo felt as if she was an outsider. She

divided people into two camps: those who loved her and those who hated her; there was no in between.

She dreamed of being a professional soccer player well before the 1996 Olympics propelled Mia Hamm and the U.S. women's national team into America's sport consciousness. According to Solo, "I felt free and unburdened when I was on the soccer field" (Solo & Killion, 2012, p. 33). As a forward for most of her developmental career, Solo ran circles around defenders and racked up multiple goals in games, but her talents really lay in goal. She was recruited for the Washington Olympic Development team as a goalkeeper, but the middle-class, pay-to-play structure that organized youth sport almost precluded Solo from participation. While teammates relied on their parents to pay for costs of travel, uniforms, and training, Solo had to fund-raise the money, soliciting money at local tournaments and asking for financial aid from her soccer club, and state and regional Olympic development programs (Solo & Killion, 2012).

Ultimately, Solo's training continued and she was offered a full scholarship to the University of Washington. She flourished as the top goalkeeper in the college game and solidified the starting goalkeeper position on both the U-20 and U-23 U.S. women's national teams. While at Washington, she rekindled her relationship with her estranged father, who was now living in the woods surrounding Seattle. Jeffrey Solo would stand in the corner of the field as his daughter warmed up before every Huskies home game, and she brought macaroni and cheese to his tent in the woods. She was not embarrassed to claim the crumpled, foul smelling man as her father. According to her collegiate coach, Lesle Gallimore, "[Hope] has so much unconditional love for her family. It didn't

matter to her” (quoted in Merrill, 2008, para. 11). She considered her father her best friend.

By January of 2006, Solo had seemingly solidified the starting goalkeeper position for the U.S. women’s national team. Briana Scurry, the all-time U.S. team leader in wins and shutouts, and a hero in the 1999 Women’s World Cup, was left off Ryan’s roster for the Four Nations Tournament. But Scurry fought her way back onto the roster by mid-July. Scurry, like Kristine Lilly, was noted as “...the last links to a time when women's soccer was more pastime than career” (Michaelis, 2006, p. 10C). The specter of the old guard continued to influence the team culture. Although Solo started and played every game at the Four Nations Tournament and was named Goalkeeper of the Tournament, she sensed a lack of respect from the veterans:

I sensed that the veterans didn’t like the fact that Bri had been reduced to the role of back up. Every time Bri made a save, even in practice, they cheered like crazy for her. ‘Fuck yeah, Bri,’ [Wambach] would scream when Bri made a routine save. Maybe it was because they’d seen Bri make a comeback before. Or maybe they had a more personal stake in her success – if Bri was being phased out, didn’t that make them all expendable? (Solo & Killion, 2012, p. 128).

Solo focused on preparing for the 2007 Women’s World Cup and maintaining the starting goalkeeper spot. During preparation games for the World Cup, her father suddenly passed away from a heart attack. Scurry’s father also had unexpectedly passed away, and she had dedicated the 2004 Olympic Games to his memory. As competitors, Solo and Scurry had a cordial, but competitive relationship, but the media constructed this moment

as a connection between the past and present. With the death of their fathers, Solo and Scurry walked a similar path. *USA Today* sport reporter, Vicki Michaelis (2007), summarized their new kinship, “Whenever Solo returns to the team to continue preparing for the World Cup, she'll have Scurry there not just to push her, but to console and guide her” (p. 8C).

Prior to the U.S.’s first round game against North Korea in the 2007 Women’s World Cup, Solo sprinkled a touch of her father’s ashes into the goal, and she did so for every game she played thereafter. The U.S. team finished the preliminary round with two wins and one tie against Nigeria, Sweden, and North Korea, respectively, and sailed through the quarterfinals beating England handedly, 3 – 0. She did not, however, carry her father’s ashes onto the field for the semifinal game. Benched at the request of captain, Kristine Lilly and Abby Wambach, who thought “Bri [was] the better goalkeeper,” (Solo & Killion, 2012, p. 163) against Brazil, Solo was stunned: “I was very taken back. I didn’t see it coming” (quoted in Goff, 2007a, p. E07). Lilly, the matriarch, and Wambach, the disciple, reconstituted the insular 1999 team culture.

Solo did not fold, she didn’t cry as head coach Greg Ryan belittled her play against North Korea. She recalled, “Greg, sitting to my left, leaned forward and stuck a finger in my face, ‘You fucking look at me when I am talking to you. I am tired of you disrespecting me...I have gotten you this far’” (Solo & Killion, 2012, p. 159-160). She snapped back:

Greg, I have to respect your decision because you’re my coach...But I disagree with you. It doesn’t matter what Bri did three years ago. She hasn’t played a game for more than three months, she hasn’t been your

number one for three years, and I'm playing the best I've ever played. I will never agree with your decision. And if anyone asks me, I will tell them that this is the wrong decision...*I've* gotten myself this far. Plenty of people – well before you came along – have believed in me along the way (emphasis original) (Solo & Killion, 2012, p. 160).

With the decision made, Solo felt there was nothing more to discuss. As she stood to leave, Ryan leaned over and pushed her back down on the couch and yelled, ““You fucking leave when I say you can leave”” (Solo & Killion, 2012, p. 161). Ryan’s verbal and physical assault constructs Solo as disrespectful and thus a threat to the U.S. women’s national team, to the success of the team, to Ryan’s career, to team culture. Yet, “she was essentially a powerless player with an opinion” (Canales, 2007, para. 6).

The next day, the media was alerted of a change to the U.S. women’s national team lineup. Hope Solo, the No. 1 goalkeeper for the past two years, who had built a 51-game winning streak, was dropped in favor of 1999 World Cup winner, Briana Scurry. Immediately, soccer analysts opposed the goalkeeper switch, including former 1999 teammate Julie Foudy. An ESPN analyst for the 2007 Women’s World Cup, Foudy remarked on Ryan’s decision, “I respect Bri more than any other keeper in the world. I think this is the wrong decision to make, though, at this time going into a semi-final. You stay with your starting goalkeeper” (Hope Solo Controversy, 2007). Tony DiCicco, head coach of the winning 1999 Women’s World Cup U.S. team, agreed with Foudy, “Julie you are starting to think like coach. This is the *wrong* decision...if there isn’t a goalkeeper controversy, why make one? (emphasis original)” (Hope Solo Controversy,



2007). Both Foudy and DiCicco added that a goalkeeper change can negatively affect team chemistry, especially as the team attempted to move forward in the tournament.

The night prior, Solo had clearly stated her position about the benching to head coach Ryan, but she remained cordial to with the media, “I’m not happy with it. Not one bit. But it is the coach’s decision, and I have to deal with it” (Hope Solo Controversy, 2007). Ryan believed she should have been happy, for he had “given her four World Cup games” (Solo & Killion, 2012, p. 160), and that ultimately, Solo’s confidence if she was to play in the World Cup final was, “not of their concern” (quoted in Ruibal, 2007b, p. 14C). The next day millions of television viewers saw Solo fuming at the end of the bench as she watched her team break under the powerful Brazilian attack. She finally burst at the seams in the media zone, in what would become known as the “international incident” (Paul, 2007, para. 3).

Initially, Julie Foudy, an analyst with ESPN and former 1999er, treated Solo’s statement as a violation of the unwritten, unspoken code of conduct to deal with any team issues privately (Jackson, 2007). Ryan confirmed this sentiment, “...the one common code has always been the players supported one another. That strong bond between the players to support each other no matter what – whether they agree with me or not with me, playing style, performance decisions -- always, always backed one another” (quoted in Goff, 2007b, p. E03).

Ryan made the decision to banish Solo from the team and the third-place game after a late post-game meeting with team leaders: Lilly, Wambach, Christie Rampone, Kate Markgraf, and Shannon Boxx. Lilly felt Solo’s removal was justified, “We do what is best for the team, and what is best for the team is the 20 of us right now. With the

circumstances that happened and her going public has affected the whole group, and having her with us is still a distraction” (quoted in Goff, 2007c, p. D05). In fact, Wambach was proud of the team’s decision to banish Solo, ““I am so very proud of the way...we’ve handled this because [it was] not easy. This is uncharted territory for us”” (quoted in Goff, 2007c, D05).

The team’s decision to ban Solo from all team functions reproduces an historical middle-class and feminine set of values to contain difference (Chisholm, 2008; Cole & Giardina, 2013; Lenskyj, 1987; Mangan, 1989; Verbrugge, 1988; Vertinsky, 1987). Confronted by the five remaining 1999 veterans, Solo was told that she ruined the legacy of the 1999ers and the foundation they had built (Solo & Killion, 2012). But it was how this ostensible betrayal was conveyed to the media that publically constructed Solo as an outsider. Solo’s teammates used the language of professionalism, character, and family to castigate her actions as a violation of middle-class values. As Wambach remarked to the press, ““It just goes to show you have to be professional all the time and you have to watch what you say”” (quoted in Goff, 2007c, p. D05), while Lori Chalupny, defender for the U.S. team, spoke in “solidarity” pointing out Solo’s lack of character in that crucial moment, ““She was definitely upset. But I think it’s those times of adversity that I think show people’s character and she just didn’t, I think, show her best side that day”” (ESPN Staff, 2007, para. 3-4). These comments come close to essentializing Solo’s outburst as uncivilized; an act of loutish behavior, in which she rebelled against the middle-class values entrenched in the team’s culture.

Lilly demonstrated her adherence to the notion of women as moral figures and guardians of the family when the media compared Solo to Terrell Owens, the Dallas Cowboy football player who had a reputation as selfish and ostentatious:

I think Terrell Owens is wrong too... You want things to happen within the family, and in everyone's real families, everything is kept in, and that's what we tried to do. Obviously, we've learned from this and we have to move on and come together again, rebuild the team and get ready for the Olympics... She's probably realized that what went on went deeper than she imagined. We're dealing with it as a group. That's where it should have been from the start (quoted in Timmerman, 2007, October 13, p. B12).

Again, Chalupny walked the party line, “We kind of want to set this precedent that this isn’t going to be acceptable for this team, regardless of whether it happens on other teams or not” (quoted in ESPN Staff, 2007, para. 8-9). Lilly’s denouncement of Terrell Owens demonstrates her commitment to a particular moral code to dictate what actions are right and wrong, regardless of gender. As the matriarch of the U.S. team, her assuredness that “real families” do not air their dirty laundry out for all to witness and judge redraws the boundary around women’s soccer as unabashedly middle-class.<sup>64</sup> Thus, the team’s public

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<sup>64</sup> In Solo’s (2012) memoir, *Solo: A Memoir of Hope* she describes her childhood as full of clutter. She recalls a time when yard equipment, bikes, and an old rusted out car were permanent fixtures on the side lawn of her house. Neighbors complained, and her parents were forced to put up a fence “...to hide all our crap” (p. 7). However, as to not concede to the middle-class ethic of orderliness, her mother painted a yellow happy face as tall and as wide as the fence. Solo does not characterize the smiley face as “...a reflection of internal happiness.” Rather, she admits, “It was a big ‘Fuck you’ to our neighbors” (Solo & Killion, 2012, p. 8).

role as feminist athletes is shelved for the private role of guardians of white, middle-class family values.

While Paul (2007), the journalist who interviewed Solo in the media zone, felt “she was honest, fair, and to the point, and...quite brave” (para. 13), many sport reporters bolstered the classed narrative derived from the team. Solo’s actions were characterized as cheap and selfish behavior (Football: Axed Keeper, 2007; Ford, 2007; Hill, 2007; Kollars, 2007), and “classless” (Ford, 2007; Jones, 2007; Litke, 2007; Lopresti, 2007; Shelburne, 2007; Wolf, 2007). At first, Ryan sympathizers rallied to his side pointing to Solo’s disrespect for authority, “A moment of silence in sympathy, please, for Greg Ryan. He’s going to need it. And a lesson in team manners for Hope Solo. She certainly needs it” (Lopresti, 2007, p. 12C). Eventually though, support for Ryan dwindled, and his decision to bench Solo was soundly criticized (Canales, 2007; Ford, 2007; Killion, 2007a; Litke, 2007; Mahoney, 2007b; Shelburne, 2007). However, this did not derail the media’s condemnation of Solo:

We all can agree Ryan failed his team. But Solo attacking her teammate was cheap, not brave. We can only imagine what kind of emotional state the Americans are in heading into their third-place game against Norway on Sunday. After such a crushing loss to Brazil, the last thing the U.S. needed was a potentially combustible locker room situation. Who knows what kind of chill this will bring to Solo's relationship with Scurray (if there was one) or how this might impact the other members of the national team? (Hill, 2007, para. 15).

As the product of the same neoliberalized and postfeminist notions as Wambach and her teammates, Solo and this new generation of soccer players were expected to continue the legacy of sisterly empowerment. Solo's individual action, then, was a violation of these values. As Mike Lopresti (2007), sport reporter for the *USA Today* notes, "there is a delicate psyche to many teams, and especially women's teams...Among the last things a team needs before a crucial game are distractions and controversy" (p. 12C). Thus, the team's rather draconian reactions can be understood as an attempt to expel this divisive threat.

Amazingly, the team was able to rebound for the third place game against rival Norway. The banishment of Hope Solo served as the team's rallying cry to maintain order and governance of a white, middle-class ethos in the light of self-inflicted chaos. But one incident in the team's 4-1 victory over Norway in the bronze medal game served to justify the reproduction of the insular, but legendary culture of the 1999ers. In the waning moments of the game, Lilly was subbed out in order to receive recognition for her exceptional play on the field, and as captain, she was to hand the captain's armband to another player before stepping off the field. Lilly did not hand the arm band to her apparent Wambach; instead, she trotted over to her defending goal box, placed the armband around Scurry's left arm and hugged her (ESPN Staff, 2007; Ruibal & Lieber Steeg, 2007). By bestowing this honor on Scurry, Lilly clearly indicted Hope Solo's actions and firmly marked who could and who could not represent the team and thus, the nation.

### **“And That’s What I Think”: Hope Solo and the Practice of Freedom**

The morning after the U.S. team’s win over Norway, the team packed their bags and left China without Solo. As she arrived at the Shanghai airport, Solo realized she had been isolated in her hotel room for the last 96-hours and that she knew little of what the American public thought of the incident. Uncoupled from the pressure of the World Cup, Hope Solo was convinced of the rightness of her post-game actions even as the team attempted to bar her from participating in the celebration tour. Solo stated, “I’m going to be part of the celebration. Contractually it’s my right to be there” (quoted in Solo & Killion, 2012, p. 182). Ostensibly dismissed as selfish by her coaches and teammates, I argue Solo’s outburst should be seen as what Foucault (2010) calls a “care for the self,” a “practice of freedom,” an “act of liberty” that did not seek to dismantle the USSF, but rather to change the dominant discourse surrounding the U.S. women’s national team.

The care of self in ancient times was defined as a state of moral agency, a relationship of the self to itself (Foucault, 1997; Fernet-Betancourt, Becker, Gomez-Müller, & Gauthier, 1987; Markula & Pringle, 2003). This relationship was morally justified because the self takes ontological precedence over the care of others. While contemporary culture excludes and marks the care of self as selfish, egotistical, and narcissistic, Foucault notes in an interview with Fernet-Betancourt, et al. (1987) the care of self is a viability in modern culture for it aims to realize an ideal state of being, “...care of self can then be entirely centered on one's self, on what one does, on the place one occupies among others...It can be, at the same time, if not care for others, at least a care for one's self which will be beneficial to others” (p. 120). The care of self then, remains embedded in a “game of truth” as a relationship of power, complete with rules

and codes of conduct. While historical discourses can never be entirely erased, the rules, codes of conduct, or “even the totality of the game of truth,”<sup>65</sup> “the rules according to which the true and false are separated and specific effects of power are attached to the true,” can change (Fornet-Betancourt, et al, 1987, p. 128; Markula & Pringle, 2003). Thus, Solo’s actions must not be quickly judged as egotistical or just another selfish athlete acting out; rather, her actions require contextualization within the dominant and rigid rules, codes of conduct, and “games of truth” on the U.S. women’s national team.

The specter of the 1999ers, the presence of Kristine Lilly, along with the entrenchment of a white, middle-class suburban ethos, the women’s national soccer team program comprised a “game of truth” that resulted in a team culture steeped in the policing of the conduct of others. The care of the self is thus a practice of freedom or a “critical reflexion against the abusive techniques of government...which allows individual liberty to be found” (Fornet-Betancourt, 1987, p. 130). Critically testing societal limits may initially take the form of a transgressive act, which exemplifies “extreme attention to what is real”<sup>66</sup> but challenges it “...with the practice of a liberty that simultaneously respects this reality and violates it” (Foucault, 1984, p. 41; Markula & Pringle, 2006). Philosophically speaking, because practices of freedom always take place

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<sup>65</sup> Foucault’s conception of reality focuses on the “battle for truth.” He does not believe in an absolute truth that can be discovered and accepted; rather, it is a battle or a battle about “the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays” (as cited in Rabinow, 1984, p. 74).

<sup>66</sup> Because power is productive, power produces reality: “...it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (Foucault, 1995, p. 194).

within power relations, emphasis should be placed on changes and shifts in power rather than resistance to or transformations of power (Markula & Pringle, 2006).

Simply put, a practice of freedom is the ethical transformation of the self in light of the truth. Pirrko Markula and Richard Pringle (2006) use Foucault's "aesthetic of existence," to imagine breaking the limits of subjectivity, whether self-imposed or dictated by culture, in order to be in a constant state of becoming. Markula and Pringle (2006) use the concept of "mindful fitness" through Yoga, Tai Chi, and Pilates as examples of a practice of freedom for participants and instructors. I contend Solo employs an even more transgressive approach of truth-telling, a courageous act. Hope Solo learned from her tumultuous life that she had to challenge the limits of how society defined her, "I can speak for myself, that I can fight my own battles...If I had meekly accepted what others told me, my life would have been radically different...I would have viewed myself as a failure" (Solo & Killion, 2012, p. 5). Thus, after the semi-final game of the 2007 Women's World Cup, Solo's truth-telling moment was an ethical care of the self and a practice of freedom.

Truth-telling, the supreme act of self-legislation and autonomy, is a courageous act without exaggeration or suppression for the purpose of criticizing one self or another (Foucault, 2010). Solo's 30-second post-game sound bite exemplifies Foucault's (2010) five criteria of truth-telling. She knew she spoke the truth to power as she was the starting goalkeeper in over 75 percent of the 51 game winning streak between 2005 and 2007 whereas Scurry struggled to maintain a spot on the national team roster. Validation for her truth also came from an unlikely source, former U.S. national team player, Julie Foudy, and former U.S. national team head coach, Tony DiCicco. Their strong



disagreement with head coach Ryan's decision to bench Solo along with the final score in the semi-final game, a 4 – 1 loss, the worst loss in a World Cup for the U.S. women's national team, validated the opinion she expressed post-game, in the media zone: "It was the wrong decision, and I think anybody that knows anything about the game knows that...Now is what matters" (quoted in Solo Sounds Off, 2007, para. 1).

Solo has never wavered in her decision to speak out against Greg Ryan and his action. She contends that her remarks were aimed solely at Ryan and had nothing to do with Briana Scurry. Whether or not this sentiment is "true" remains debatable, but Foucault (2010) argues the act of truth-telling involves criticizing another regardless of whether it is considered morally good or bad. Thus, this tenet of truth-telling tends to get misconstrued in modern culture. The team and the media interpreted Solo's truth-telling as an attack on teammate Briana Scurry's abilities, not a commentary on Ryan's decision. Solo responded with a *Myspace* post to quell the cynicism that surrounded her:

I am not proud or happy the ways things have come out. In my eyes there is no justification for putting down a teammate. That is not what I was doing.

Although I stand strong in everything I said, the true disheartening moment for me was realizing it could look as though I was taking a direct shot at my own teammate. I would never throw such a low blow. Never.

I only wanted to speak of my own abilities yet also recognize that the past is in the past. Things were taken out of context or analyzed differently from my true meaning of my own words. For that I am sorry.

I hope everybody will come to know that I have a deep respect for this team and for Bri (Solo & Killion, 2007, p. 175).

Solo tested the societal limits of who and how one should act as a U.S. women's national team player. Through her practice of freedom, she simultaneously articulated a "deep respect" for the team and Scurry and violated the team culture she and the new generation of players were a "product" of. Speaking out was a courageous act that involved many dangers. Solo risked losing her starting position or her spot on the national team roster, and her dream of playing soccer as a profession. She gambled on friendships, team dynamics, and teammates. Initially, these risks took shape in Solo's suspension from the team and the third-place game against Norway along with her banishment from team meals, team meetings, and the team plane ride back to the U.S further testing her courage and commitment to the truth. Solo thus, had become a not only a pariah, but what Arendt (1944) labels a "conscious pariah," a rebel.

The conscious pariah's formidable commitment to the truth situated Solo in a "...confrontation not only with the forces that marginalise her but also with trends of assimilation and integration, the disappearance of difference and people's right to be different" (Arendt, 1944; Tamboukou, 2012, p. 856). Cast as a pariah, seemingly straddling the middle-class culture of the U.S. women's national team and her own lower-class upbringing, Solo felt part of both, but comfortable in neither. Thus, her ability to think beyond boundaries or borders allowed Solo to speak out as a duty to herself and others as an act of freedom (Arendt, 1944; Foucault, 2010; Sutcliffe, 2000). She identified the limitations of the harmony-first, sorority-like culture of the U.S. women's national team and demanded the acceptance for difference. She elucidated this

point on her now inactive *Myspace* page, “If you truly expect to realize your dreams, abandon the need for blanket approval. If conforming to everyone’s expectations is the number one goal, you have sacrificed your uniqueness, and therefore your excellence” (quoted in Wahl, 2008, p. 50).

### **Shifting the Discourse?**

In a St. Louis athletic locker room, in late October of 2007, each of Solo’s teammates had stood up and expressed their feelings for Solo’s World Cup outburst: “We don’t think you should be here. We think you should go home,” “You’re a bad friend,” “You threw us under the bus.” (quoted in Solo & Killion, 2012, p. 185). Unwanted by her teammates on the U.S. “celebration tour,” Solo found support from the media and the American public. While the media initially placed blame on Solo, some of the media began to break with taken for granted discourses that had pigeonholed the team from its beginnings. Melanie Jackson (2007), a former collegiate soccer player and sport reporter for *ESPN.com*, was the first to write a robust critique of the team’s actions toward Solo, only a few days after the incident:

So this is what happens when a woman speaks out? When she tells it like it is? When she speaks from the heart, uncensored instead of all those generic, fill-in-the-blank responses every other American athlete regurgitates and we roll our eyes at when controversy strikes?

She won’t start. Won’t play. And won’t even get to wear the uniform....

Still, Solo apologized Friday for the way her comments were interpreted as a direct slight at Scurry, but she held steadfast in

maintaining her criticism of Ryan's decision. That type of honest resolve is to be admired (para. 5-6; 9).

Initially alone in her stance, Jackson told the sport world to, "...leave Hope Solo alone" (2007, para. 18).

Other journalists waited until after the third-place win to wage their critiques. Some discussed Solo as the scapegoat for Ryan's mistake (Canales, 2007; Woitalla, 2007) while others criticized the light-hearted, sorority-like representation of the U.S. team:

There's a decidedly mixed message here. These women want you to believe they are warrior princesses, dripping Gatorade-flavored sweat, baring their teeth and competing with all their might. But then they also want you to believe they sit around on their off days singing show tunes and doing each other's hair -- one sorority, indivisible.

Give me a break (Ford, 2007, para. 13-14).

Steve Davis (2007) from *ESPN.com* reaffirmed this sentiment:

A happy, shiny impression is great. It helped build awareness in the 1990s. And, yes, it's wonderful that young ladies have worthy heroines to emulate. But there must be balance. Image doesn't win a match; that's about smartly selected personnel, organized, fit and determined. It's still soccer, ya know.

So the U.S program stands at a crossroads: Grow up and move forward, accepting the occasional real-world black eyes, understanding that it can't always be about positive girl-power messages. Or cling to the

collective pig-tailed youth, prioritizing the wholesome image, even at the expense of competitive matters.

Guarding that image can stifle constructive criticism (Davis, para. 7-9).

Solo's outburst thus opened a space for other practices of freedom. Tired of the old tropes of girl power and sisterhood as a replacement for feminist empowerment, journalists, through their denunciation of the U.S. team's actions, called for a new type of the female athlete.

In August 2007, Nike announced a new "ATHLETE" ad campaign that focused on the reinvention of the female athlete. Feeling as though women's sports, and even the U.S. women's national soccer team had plateaued in American culture, Nike began to explicitly market notions of sexism, racism, and ableism in sport. Ads were unscripted as many top female athletes (i.e. Diana Taurasi, Serena Williams, and even Mia Hamm) stepped in front of the camera to talk about their own struggles with inequality in sport. Beach volleyball player, Gabrielle Reece, "It's time to nudge the conversation. I've seen [a plateau] in beach volleyball; as a league, it's been in the same place for a long time" (Davis, 2007; quoted in Sandomir, 2007, para. 10). In 2006, Nike cast Maria Sharapova, a professional women's tennis player, in a TV ad in which she beats everyone on her way to the U.S. Open title while the song "I Feel Pretty" played in the background (Maria Sharapova, 2010), women's professional sport and its marketers were on the hunt for a new type of female athlete yet unable to break away from the limited gendered and racial representations of the past. Little did Nike and women's professional sports know, a new representation of the female athlete was on the horizon.

The American public jumped on the Hope Solo bandwagon. A week after the incident, the Yahoo! *buzz log* reported its “Hottest Numbers: Top 20 Jerseys List” in the US. Hope Solo, a relative unknown prior to her outburst, ranked eighth – twelve spots better than legendary Mia Hamm (Gunther, 2007). Although a relatively obscure statistic, jersey sales do indicate a willingness of the American public to identify with Solo and condone her actions.

The former WUSA was struggling, but Solo’s outburst drew the attention of ESPN and sports-talk radio, claiming “perhaps women’s soccer... had truly arrived” (Bell, 2008b, p. D1; Zengerle, 2009). Solo garnered endorsement deals from Nike and Vitamin water as ““She’s one of the few women in America that has marketing value right now. And a large part of it is because of her opinionated nature”” (quoted in Zengerle, 2009, p. 17). Thus, buying Solo’s jersey and the steep rise of her marketing value post-controversy signify an acceptance of her as a “new” athlete, shifting the discourse of the U.S. women’s national team away from the simplistic idealism of the “girls of summer.”

On the final day of their U.S. celebration tour, Solo, still suspended from play, watched her teammates tie Mexico, 1-1. After the game, Ryan asked Solo for a meeting. Sitting at opposite sides of a long conference table, Ryan slid Solo’s World Cup bronze medal to her in a Ziploc bag. This was her medal ceremony (Solo & Killion, 2012). The next morning, 25 days after Solo’s outburst, Greg Ryan was fired as head coach of the U.S. women’s national team. USSF president Sunil Gulati did not characterize Ryan’s decision to switch goalkeepers as either the ““right decision or wrong decision,”” but ““obviously the result of the game was not what Greg was looking for”” (quoted in

Longman, 2007b, p. D6). Rather, Gulati indirectly faulted the decision by Ryan and those players in leadership positions to ostracize Solo after her post-game comments, noting that “...a number of participants, if they could do it over again, would do things differently” (quoted in Bondy, 2007, p. 70).

A search for a new head coach commenced. The search committee consisted of Mia Hamm, USSF general secretary, Dan Flynn, and Gulati. Solo and the media thought Hamm would seek a coach who was a compound product of the Dorrance, DiCicco, Heinrichs, and Ryan coaching tree, and who would fully support the veterans, Kristine Lilly and Abby Wambach.<sup>67</sup> Instead, the committee chose an outsider, Pia Sundhage, a former Swedish soccer star, consummate free spirit, and soccer junkie, who stood in direct contrast to the practical and pragmatic approach preached by most American coaches. She became the first international coach to manage the future of the U.S. women’s soccer program (Mahoney, 2008).<sup>68</sup> Wambach noted the difference, “Her

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<sup>67</sup> Many journalists called for the hiring of Jerry Smith, women’s soccer coach at Santa Clara, and a prominent and stable figure in the youth national team program (Killion, 2007b; SCU Coach, 2007). However, former head coach Tony DiCicco and former WUSA Boston Breakers head coach, Dan Gabarra were included. Two women made the final cut as well (Brennan, 2007b). Jill Ellis, another product of the U.S. national team structure and head coach of the UCLA women’s soccer program, and outlier, Pia Sundhage, a Swedish international player, who had scouted for the WUSA and assisted the Chinese program in the 2007 Women’s World Cup (Bondy, 2007, Starks, 2007).

<sup>68</sup> As a player, Sundhage was an early star, Sweden’s equivalent to Michelle Akers-Stahl. She was intimidatingly competitive and played with a In fact, in 1988, Sundhage was so popular in her home country of Sweden, she was enshrined on a postage stamp (Goff, 2007d). As a coach, her care-free

approach and the way she's going about our practices is much different than anything we've ever done before. The two coaches before her, April and Greg, were virtually the same. They had very different styles, but they had the same ideas and the same mentality and the same philosophy of soccer” (Mahoney, 2008, para. 17).

During her first team meeting in early December, Sundhage addressed the team in song. She sang Bob Dylan's "The Times are a-Changing" signifying the dawning of a new age for the U.S. women's team (Mahoney, 2008; Solo & Killion, 2012, Wahl, 2008; Woitalla, 2008). Solo felt an immediate kinship to her new coach. Times were indeed a-changing. In the wake of Sundhage's hire came the quiet retreat by Kristine Lilly and the discharge of Briana Scurry. Lilly auspiciously stepped away from her captainship and the team to have a baby (Goff, 2008; Kennedy, 2008a), and Scurry's diminished skill set all but ended her international career (Bell, 2008a; Jones, 2008; Kennedy, 2008b).

Although the absence of Lilly and Scurry did not mend the still open wounds from the World Cup controversy, Sundhage's fresh perspective generated a new discourse that liberated the meaning of team. Sundhage asked the group in that first meeting "Do you want to win," and a resounding "Yes" came from the U.S. players. "Well, to win you need a goalkeeper. I don't expect you to forget. But I do expect you to forgive. The Olympics are right around the corner, so let's get to work" (Longman, 2008; quoted in Solo & Killion, 2012, p. 198; Wahl, 2008).

Sundhage brought in young players who, as Solo noted "didn't share our recent tortured history; they had fresh eyes and fresh attitudes" (Solo & Killion, 2012, p. 199),

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personality combined with her passion for soccer – she loved to play guitar and sing American songs, but her dog, Cruyff Pele Beckenbauer was named after her three favorite players (Mahoney, 2008).



and she encouraged the veterans to form working relationship on and off the field. Wambach detailed the difference in the team, ““The younger players have a little bit of that emotional attachment to each other, but less so than in the past. You don't have to like each other, but once you cross that line, if you can like each other for at least 90 minutes, then I think you can be successful”” (quoted in Wahl, 2008, p. 51). In the team’s last warm-up game for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, Wambach, the team’s greatest scoring threat, broke her leg as she and a Brazilian player went into a hard tackle. The team would have to compete without her.

While in a hospital bed in hometown Rochester, New York, Wambach penned letters to each player on the roster. As such, Wambach was able to recreate herself through her own practice of freedom, freeing herself from concern about the future or the past (Hadot, 1992). She wrote to Solo that as a goalkeeper she needed to have a strong sense of self, and that through the controversy she had learned to accept people for who they are. Wambach realized that she wrongly vilified Solo and her actions, ““That isn’t honest. That isn’t compassionate. That is controlling and manipulative. I am sorry that I was like that... You have a chance to show everyone who you really are”” (quoted in Solo & Killion, 2012, p. 207). Solo’s outburst at the 2007 Women’s World Cup thus, widen the limitations of the team’s dominated state. This newly created space allowed Wambach to confront her own “care of self.” After winning the 2015 World Cup, Wambach reflected on this time period at the *espnW: Women + Sport Summit*:

When the ‘99ers retired in 2004, and they kind of handed me the keys to the kingdom, so to speak. I was short-haired. I was gay... And I didn’t want to be this person that spoke for everybody... Especially because Mia

was such a big, marketable person for our team that I, at times struggled with really being out there, and truly being my authentic self. And I think over the course of the last ten...years you've seen people just truly become who they are... (Why Abby Wambach, 2015).

Prior to the 2015 Women's World Cup, Kate Markgraf echoed Wambach's sentiments. However, Markgraf expounded on Wambach's individualist notion of the authentic self and applied it to team culture:

I don't think Hope was the problem, I honestly don't...We were searching for an identity in '07. A lot of us old-timers were still working under the personality of the old team, but those personalities weren't there anymore. It was our fault as older players, we couldn't lead the same way...We had a crisis of identity (Foudy, 2015, para. 29, 31-32).

Solo's actions thus propelled the U.S. women's national team and its individual players into a space of self-reflection and critique about how female athletes and female teams are constructed. Only within this space were "sites of contestation over the meanings and contours of identity, and over the ways in which certain practices are mobilized" (Lloyd, 1996, p. 250) realized. As Shannon Boxx stated simply, "[We] had to learn to change" (quoted in Svrluga, 2008, p. E07).

## **Conclusion**

In sport, the credo is "never follow a legend" for the specter of the legend will always color your experience. After the retirement of foundational players Mia Hamm, Julie Foudy, Brandi Chastain, and Joy Fawcett in 2004, the U.S. women's national team seemed to enter into a new era. However, the cultural memory of the 1999ers,

reproduced through narratives and images of the 1999 winning World Cup team and two documentaries, casted a long shadow over the future of the team. More importantly Kristine Lilly, the last remaining 1999er on the team, remained a powerful presence both on and off the field. Gilded by teammates and the media for her longevity and undiminished skill, Lilly as a legendary figure was powerful enough to structure “games of truth” and govern team culture. As such the U.S. women’s national team was a dominated state governed by a specter of the past; one that contained the subjectivity of U.S. women’s soccer players to a limited version of white, feminine, middle-class, heterosexuality.

One player dared to challenge the strictly policed and tightly governed team culture of U.S. women’s soccer. Unwisely benched for the semi-final game of the 2007 Women’s World Cup, Hope Solo spoke to the media after the embarrassing 4-1 loss. She criticized head coach Greg Ryan for making the wrong decision, and seemingly condemned the play of Scurry as she pointed to Ryan’s leanings on past results to determine who would start. The media condemned Solo as another selfish athlete while her teammates voted to banish her from the team for the remainder of the tournament. Class, as a marker of difference remained invisible, but instructive as Solo, the product of a lower-class and a childhood burdened with violence, was understood to have violated middle-class codes of conduct. Her teammates explicitly indicted her actions through narratives that focused on Solo’s perceived a lack of professionalism, middle-class etiquette and character. Her outburst and the repercussions she faced thus, made a larger statement about how female athletes are confined into specific definitions of middle-class femininity, and the personal risk an athlete takes to violate it.

Quickly, however, the tides changed in favor of Solo. Journalists began to question the bullet-proof image of the U.S. women's national team and the culture that grounded it. Solo's outburst was more meaningful than a random act of perceived jealousy; rather, her action was a "practice of freedom." She claimed a moral authority through an ethic of care of self – an ontological precedent that benefits the self and can aid others. Marginalized by the "games of truth" in the dominated state of the U.S. women's national team, Solo employed the act of "truth-telling", a courageous act of self-legislation. She was able to challenge the societal limits of what it meant to be a U.S. women's national team player and a female athlete while simultaneously respecting the very structure she criticized. By doing this, Solo widened the space of limitation on the U.S. women's team allowing for others to confront and produce their own practices of freedom.

Hope Solo was not the problem; she was merely an agent of change. Solo, who felt haunted by specter of the 1999ers and governed by an unfair "game of truths" within the U.S. women's team culture, sought to speak the truth. As a friend and former teammate told Solo, "You're a truth-teller. People aren't comfortable with that" (quoted in Solo & Killion, 2012, p. 223). Her ethic of self-care, deemed selfish in modern culture, was in fact, altruistic. While the containment of femininity and the reproduction of postfeminist ideals remains ever present in the construction of female soccer players and teams, Solo's actions did loosen the strict adherence to these cultural mores allowing for a more open and inclusive process of subject formation and the incorporation of multiple and diverse subjectivities. As Wambach so aptly states, "...it always hasn't been easy. But I have found that the more authentic you can be in your own skin, that

just transcends, and people can see it. And that is why I think our team is so inspiring...[anybody] can literally look at somebody and find themselves [in] one, or two, or three players on the team” (Why Abby Wambach, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

### OVERTIME!

“Forget me,” says Abby Wambach, the most prolific goal scorer in USSF history.<sup>69</sup> The camera creeps toward Wambach sitting on a chair facing her locker for one final time. Dressed in street clothes, the light shines through a small window onto her back illuminating her significance to the women’s game and culmination of a memorable career. A close up shot exposes her conflicting emotions as she picks up her captain’s armband, a colorful hand-written letter from a fan, then grabs a game-worn jersey with a faded blood stain. With a wistful smile she tosses it all into a gym bag. “Forget me. Forget my number. Forget my name. Forget I ever existed.” She picks up a black dog tag adorned by a necklace and rubs it with her thumb. She looks up, her blue eyes filled with tears, then stands to slide out the “WAMBACH” nameplate from her locker. “Forget the medals won. The records broken. The sacrifices made. I want to leave a legacy where the ball keeps rolling forward. Where the next generation accomplishes things so great, that I am no longer remembered.” She slowly slides her name plate out of its frame, leaving a gaping hole in the team and the women’s game. As she walks out, she stops at a garbage can and looks at the name plate once more. After a deep breath, she tosses the name plate in the trash. “So, forget me.” Wambach no longer physically

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<sup>69</sup>. Abby Wambach holds the record for most goals scored in international play with 184 goals in 255 matches. She is a six-time winner of the USSF’s U.S. Soccer Athlete of the Year (2003, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2011, and 2013), and 2012 FIFA World Player of the year, the first U.S. player to receive the award since Mia Hamm in 2002 (United States Soccer, 2015). In 2015, Wambach was named to the Time 100 list of the most influential people in the world (Hamm, 2015).

appears in the frame, it is her voice that narrates the bright, and eclectic future of U.S. soccer – a young, black girl running stadium bleachers, a young, white boy wearing a Wambach jersey to practice, a young, Latina girl walking with soccer ball in hand from a dusty sandlot – what remains of Wambach is just a memory and an empty locker.

“Because the day I am forgotten; is the day we will succeed.”<sup>70</sup> (Gatorade TV Ad, 2015).

This Gatorade commercial is first and foremost, a commentary on Wambach and her legendary career, but it is also a tribute to the growth of women’s soccer and its mediated representation in the United States. U.S. sporting culture is defined by legendary winners – Michael Jordan, Billy Jean King, Tiger Woods, Serena Williams, or Tom Brady – and the media prints and circulates the legend narrative crystallizing an athletes’ image in the American consciousness. Wambach is no different; her legacy will follow the U.S. women’s team into the future, for she shaped its culture for 15 years. But unlike most legendary players, she asks to be forgotten. Forget her awards, forget her number, forget her enormous impact on the game of women’s soccer. She does not want to be a specter, looming over the next generation. She does not want future generations to be constructed in her image. Instead, she pleads for the media and the American public to abandon her legendary status in an effort to release the next generation from the burdens of extraordinary expectation and history. It is a commentary on her own experience as a national team player. She implores the next generation to let go of the

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<sup>70</sup>. This Gatorade commercial was aired on November 26, 2015, the day after Abby Wambach’s final game as a U.S. national team player. While my dissertation ends after the 2008 Olympics, textual materials like this commercial demonstrate the loosening of the seemingly finite and constructed image of the U.S. women’s national team after their historic 1999 Women’s World Cup win.

past in order for women's soccer, and more critically women's sport, to continue to succeed in the future.

Every time I watch this commercial, I get goose bumps. Yes, it could be because I was a former soccer player and coach that I empathize with the emotional and passionate connection Wambach has with the game. It could be that I, as a fan of the U.S. women's national team, have watched this player struggle, grow, and fight on the field for a World Cup championship that would take almost 15 years to achieve. But as a critical cultural studies scholar, I see this commercial as an instructive text on the evolution of women's sport – a simultaneous reflection on constraints that keep women's sport from advancing and the small sacrifices that work to continue to push the women's game forward.

This is the story of the U.S. women's national team that I wanted to tell – a complex narrative that intertwines the push and pull to gain acceptance in the American sporting consciousness; a narrative that moves beyond the confines of Title IX and the benevolent patriarchs who granted women and young girls the right to play the game; an analysis that goes beyond attributing the success of women's soccer to the failure of men's soccer as a spectator sport in the U.S. In this dissertation, I looked beyond the “safe” mediated reproduction of the U.S. women's national team as America's “girls of summer” and located them within a larger cultural context that included the rise of economic and cultural neoliberal policies, the adoption of postfeminist and post-racial marketing strategies, and the policing of heterosexuality. Within this context, through a critical analysis of the narratives that surrounded U.S. national team players of Michelle Akers, Mia Hamm, Briana Scurry, Kristine Lilly, Hope Solo, and Abby Wambach, I



illuminate the struggle over control of women's soccer, women's sport, and women's corporeality.

In her time, as U.S. women's soccer was just getting started, Michelle Akers was a defining figure of masculinity. Akers embodied the qualities of the best male players in the world, and was therefore identified as U.S. soccer's top player, per soccer's comparatively "weaker" masculine perception within U.S. sport. Her genius play on the field and impressive international reputation, however, did not exempt her or the U.S. women's national team from having to navigate the gendered limitations found within the philosophy of their head coach, Anson Dorrance, and the financial structure of the USSF as it attempted to strategically position the Federation under the guidance of FIFA. Yet, it was Nike's emergence as a global soccer leader and its focus on women's sport that pushed women's soccer into the U.S. cultural limelight.

Although the soccer community had raved about Akers since the 1991 World Championship, the general public took notice only after Nike promoted the team, and its upcoming, young star, Mia Hamm. Hamm's blend of femininity off the field combined with her "acceptable" masculinity on the field gave corporations the first widely marketable female athlete who played a team sport. Thus, it is Hamm – not Akers – who is heralded after the 1996 gold medal win in the Atlanta Olympic Games. Hamm was thrust into the spotlight as the USSF and the Women's World Cup Organizing Committee prepared for the 1999 Women's World Cup. Seen as role models for young girls, Hamm and her teammates were immersed in an American sport context constructed upon a façade of gender equity and a marketing campaign steeped in the consumption of "girl power," an ironic form of depoliticized feminism.

On a beautiful sun-filled day in July 1999, the U.S. women's national team captured the hearts of a nation with an epic shoot-out victory in the Women's World Cup final. The U.S. women's team's on-field success expanded the U.S. sport space to incorporate women as a niche market – an important aspect of an ever-expanding neoliberal economy (Harvey, 2008). The turn of the millennium was characterized by a booming neoliberal marketplace, a context rich in consumer confidence, but steeped in problematic tropes of female empowerment and 'girl power' (McDonald, 2000). This expression of rugged individualism and the authentic self inspired young girls and teens to strive for their dreams while gender inequities and economic disparities in sport continue to expand both nationally and globally (Cole & Hribar, 1995, LaFrance, 1998; McRobbie, 2007; McDonald, 2000). Young girls and women could not perceive these inequitable disparities for the postfeminist dream promises them a lifestyle in which they can "have it all" (Butler, 2013; Gay, 2012; McRobbie, 2007; Projansky, 2001; Rosen, 2012).

Individual self-fulfillment was to be a result of structural and ideological changes within culture, not the sole purpose of the varied feminist movements (Rosen, 2012). Still, individual subjectivity remains ever present in the feminist vernacular of liberated womanhood, denying a space for complex and varied subjectivities. Instead, this denial produces and circulates a culture of homogeneity – a culture that subtly constructs, but vehemently protects the limits of acceptable womanhood – disallowing bodies marked as "other" whom represent the complex nature of feminism(s) (Birrell & McDonald, 2000; Cole & Hribar, 1995; Foucault, 1995; LaFrance, 1998). Therefore, in a postfeminist

context, “having it all” is effectively limited to those who fit neatly into narrowly constructed subjectivities – white, middle-class, and heterosexual.

Briana Scurry was an integral part of both the 1999 Women’s World Cup victory and the marketing of women’s soccer to middle America. Media representations had constructed women’s soccer as a white, suburban, feminine sport while leaving space for the inclusion of racial difference. Nevertheless, mediated depictions of the U.S. team, as a group and as individuals, include an implicit, but omnipresent racist and sexist bias, Scurry’s black body is central to these cultural constructions (Butler, 2013; Cole & Hribar, 1995; Lafrance, 1998; Projansky, 2001). Therefore, an additional post-racial analysis is necessary in order to examine the complexity of Scurry’s position on this seemingly “all-white” team.

The 1999 Women’s World cup produced depoliticized narratives of racialized postfeminism, in which Scurry conformed to normative conceptions of race, class, gender, and sexuality. This compliance did not, however, thwart sexist or racist notions. Instead, Scurry’s black body was both exoticized and commodified, and her political identity as a black woman was suppressed through a form of ‘new racism;’ a racism reproduced implicitly through language and images. Yet, it was not her black body that inflamed a racist discourse; rather, it was her questionable ethics during the World Cup final when she supposedly violated the laws of the game by stepping forward off the goal line before a Chinese player struck the ball during the penalty kick shootout. Scurry’s violation of morality, and thus, American suburban womanhood pinned her as deviant and placed her on the outside of the white suburban imaginary.

As the American public embraced the 1999 Women's World Cup champions with open arms, acceptance of the men's national team and Major League Soccer (MLS) remained on the sidelines. The success of the women's national team in the 1990s along with the cultural swing toward postfeminist marketing strategies molded soccer in the minds of U.S. fans as a female sport. Yet, around the world, soccer remained a male space that defined the meaning of masculinity (Caudwell, 1999; Caudwell, 2003; Caudwell, 2011; Hong & Mangan, 2004; Sugden, 1994). The USSF could not afford to be marginalized outside of FIFA's cultural influence, and FIFA could not afford to be absent from the most lucrative sport market in the world. Thus, FIFA, the USSF, and MLS colluded to reestablish U.S. soccer as a male space. An unlikely source aided in this collusion: the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001, which pushed the American consciousness further back to the conservative right. Conservative elites named feminism and the feminization of culture as underlying factors for the attack on New York City and Washington, D.C, with calls to reinvigorate white, working class, masculinity as "the" way to shore up and protect American borders (Allen, 2002; Faludi, 2007; Kusz, 2007). Thus, post-9/11 the USSF called on its men's program to bear arms and reassert its rightful place as the cornerstone of U.S. Soccer.

At the same time, the U.S. women's national team, and specifically Mia Hamm, was mediated and marketed through hero and savior narratives. Yet, even postfeminist superwoman, Mia Hamm, could not elude the ideological grasp of domestication. Her marriage to baseball player, Nomar Garciaparra, made headlines not because of their star-status, but because of his instructive guidance on how to deal with fame, an issue she struggled with most of her legendary career. As arguably the most significant female

athlete in the U.S. at the time, this domestication of her image further limited her inclusion as a role model, and thus, who could consume or imagine themselves within the women's soccer imaginary – preventing the potential subject formation(s) of new and diverse team and individual subjectivities.

The cultural memory of Mia Hamm and the 1999ers reproduced through narratives and images, cast a long shadow over the future of the team. As the post-Hamm era began in early 2005, the media began its quest to find the next female player who fit into the Hamm mold, in terms of her talent and marketability. Kristine Lilly, the last remaining link to the culture of the 1999er, remained a significant presence both on and off the field who was powerful enough to structure and govern team culture. But another player, Hope Solo, dared to challenge the strictly policed and tightly governed middle-class culture of U.S. women's soccer. The media initially condemned Solo's post-game outburst as selfish and her teammates voted to banish her from the team for the remainder of the tournament, indicting her actions as a lack of professionalism, etiquette, and character. Her outburst and the severe repercussions she faced reveal how female athletes are confined by specific definitions of middle-class femininity, and the personal risk an athlete takes when she violates them.

I argue that Solo's outburst should be understood as more than a random act of perceived jealousy; rather, her action can be considered a "practice of freedom" (Foucault, 1984; Foucault, 2010). Solo employed the act of "truth-telling," a courageous act of self-legislation. She challenged the societal limits of what it meant to be a U.S. women's national team player and a female athlete. By doing so, she allowed for others to confront and produce their own practices of freedom. Narratives of containment along

with the reproduction of postfeminist ideals remains ever present in the contemporary construction of female soccer players and teams. Solo's actions are significant. She helped to loosen the strict adherence to a limited set of cultural values that allowed for a more open and inclusive process of individual and team subject formation.

Abby Wambach can thus be understood as a symbol of an important stage the evolution of women's soccer in the United States; the struggle over control of women's sport, women's soccer, and women's corporeality. A sizeable physical presence that could not be matched, akin to Michelle Akers, Wambach dominated the field of play. She also embodied the qualities of the best male players in the world, and was recognized as a leader for the future of U.S. women's soccer. With the retirement of a majority of the 1999ers in 2004, the media had pursued the next manifestation of 'Mia Hamm.' Yet, much like Akers, Wambach style of play and gender performance on the field limited her full acceptance into the postfeminist soccer imaginary, and thus, she was not marketed in the same way. Moreover, Wambach's rise occurred during a particular period of feminist backlash and retrenchment narratives of domesticity that resulted in the demise of the Women's United Soccer Association and dwindling attendance at national team friendlies. In a South East Conference documentary on Wambach, she discussed the U.S. women's national team and their diminishing popularity and revealed, "guess who thought it was her fault – me" (SEC Storied, 2015). Without a leader who embodied the postfeminist contradiction of femininity off the field and "acceptable" masculinity on the field, the U.S. team fell back into obscurity.

The 2007 Women's World Cup put U.S. women's soccer back on the cultural map and into the public eye. When the highly visible controversy over Hope Solo struck

the U.S. women's national team for the first time, Wambach remained instrumental in how it unfolded. Her enduring allegiance to uphold and protect the very team culture and mediated representation of the 1999ers that had limited her own subject formation as a gay female athlete seems contradictory and insincere, for it was she and captain, Kristine Lilly who held judgment over Solo's post-game actions and her subsequent banishment from the team. However, Solo's actions as a "practice of freedom" challenged and confronted this seemingly fixed narrative. Her testing of societal limitations opened a space for Wambach to critically reflect upon her individual actions, the team culture, and how, as the heir apparent, she would like to shape and mold the game for future generations. Evidence of this evolution never comes quickly for it took almost eight years and a World Cup win in 2015 for Wambach to reveal in her own words, her "authentic self" (Why Abby Wambach, 2015). Thus, "Forget Me" is her Gatorade-described soliloquy, freeing future generations from the ideological and structural constraints of the past and the present in order for the potential of the U.S. women's program to be fully realized.

The soccer field has been promoted as a space of gender and racial inclusion as well as while subtly reinforcing the exact opposite. Wambach's message then, focuses on striving for the acceptance of difference, and although she pleads with us to "forget me," we must never forget the context of her athletic journey.

The U.S. women's national team is a production of a particular historical cultural formation; thus, it can not exist outside of the neoliberal, postfeminist, and post-racial context that created it. But power is essentially productive, and the combined effort of academics to critique the structure of sport, and women sport advocates to champion new

models of sport into the future, will open the potential for women to control their own bodies and mediated representations. While there is much work to do, this dissertation is a first step in critiquing a seemingly unassailable cultural icon, recognizing that the most normative of spaces sometimes need the most interrogation and examination. For it is only when these spaces are challenged, that we can “succeed” through the production of a more authentic and inclusive sporting culture for all.



## APPENDIX

### LIST OF HYPER-LINKS TO INTERNET VIDEOS

#### CHAPTER ONE

Gatorade: Michael vs. Mia <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zV12k6k9W4Q>

#### CHAPTER TWO

Bud Light – Foudy and Chastain <http://adland.tv/commercials/bud-light-foudy-and-chastain-2001-030-usa>

Mattel Soccer Barbie Commercial <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nkjla75mZKQ>

#### CHAPTER THREE

And 1 Commercial <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6DYYh5f2sg>

Nike Commercial (Dentist Office) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Eifa8oqCRU>

Nike Commercial (Date) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kFuPTnJ9ABc>

#### CHAPTER FIVE

Mia Hamm Retirement <http://adland.tv/commercials/gatorade-mia-hamm-thank-you-2004-030-usa>

Hope Solo Controversy (ESPN) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akwNXLYqvWA>

*espnW: Women + Sport Summit* <http://espn.go.com/espnw/w-in-action/2015-summit/article/13891437/why-abby-wambach-ali-krieger-think-women-soccer-long-way-go>

Maria Sharapova – I Feel Pretty <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yi2zOdHVI24>

#### CONCLUSION

Abby Wambach Retirement <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akwNXLYqvWA>

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